



THESE HOMES

elha.com
east lothian housing association



Guide to applying for a home
with East Lothian Housing Association or
Homes for Life Housing Partnership

Welcome to These Homes

This Guide contains important information which you must read carefully so that you understand how These Homes works and maximise your chances of getting a new home. If there is anything you don't understand or you need more advice or information, please contact us.

The These Homes Register is shared by several Scottish landlords. You only need to register once then you can choose to be considered by one, a few or all of them depending on where you want to live. Once you have registered with These Homes, you can apply for all suitable homes advertised provided you have chosen to register with the landlord the home belongs to. There will usually be a lot of people applying for the same home and so there are some simple rules to decide as fairly as possible who will be offered the home. East Lothian Housing Association's rules are explained in this booklet – other landlords will have different rules. Because rented accommodation is in very short supply in East Lothian, we strongly recommend that you also apply to other housing providers such as East Lothian Council or other Housing Associations.

While Homes for Life Housing Partnership isn't a full These Homes member, we have partnered with them, and anyone registered with us, can also apply for any Homes for Life properties advertised through These Homes. For more information about Homes for Life, please see their Landlord page:

www.thesehomes.com/landlord/1/homes-for-life



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1 - What is These Homes?

These Homes is a digital lettings service used by several landlords operating in different areas throughout Scotland. You can register with any of these landlords, allowing you to apply for new homes in lots of different areas. The advantage of a digital lettings service is that you can see what homes are available at any time and can choose to apply for the ones that are suitable for your needs and are in areas where you would like to live.

2 - Registering

You need to register with us before you can apply for one of our homes or one of Homes for Life's homes. Anyone aged 16 or over can register. The easiest way to register is online at www.thesehomes.com. When you complete the registration process, you choose which area(s) you want to live in, and you will be given a list of the These Homes landlords who have homes in your area(s) to choose from. The Landlords that you choose to register with will be the only ones able to access your personal information. If you need support to complete the registration process, please contact us; we are here to help. You can also complete a paper application form if this is what you prefer.

Once you have completed the registration process, you will be given a registration number. You need this number (or your email) and password to log in to your registration details and apply for available homes. You will also need your registration number if you need to phone or write to us.

If your circumstances change at any time it is very important that you update your registration online because if you successfully apply for a home, then we find that the information we have about you is incorrect you may not be offered it.

3. Connection to East Lothian

There are not enough affordable rented houses for people who want them, and the shortage is particularly bad in East Lothian. We are required by law to allow anyone over the age of 16 to apply to us and have their Housing Need assessed, however, when we allocate our homes, we are allowed to prioritise people with a connection to East Lothian. You have a connection to East Lothian if you;

- Already live here

- Work, or have been offered or are looking for a permanent job here
- Need to move here to be near a relative or carer
- Have special social or medical reasons for needing to be housed here
- Want to move here to get away from harassment or domestic abuse

4 - Priority Passes

We want to make sure that we allocate the homes we have available to the people who need them most. So, if you have a “Significant Housing Need” you may qualify for a Priority Pass. You may be in Housing Need for one of the following reasons:

- You are homeless or threatened with homelessness
- You are experiencing harassment or anti-social behaviour
- You or a household member are suffering domestic abuse
- Your health is affected by your current housing situation
- You are overcrowded as you do not have enough bedrooms for your family
- Your home is too big, and you need a smaller home
- Your home is unsuitable because of its condition or lack of amenities
- You need to move to a particular area for work or family reasons
- You live with your parents and have never had a social rented tenancy
- You have lived in a flat for more than two years and would like to move to a house

If any of these situations apply to you, you will be asked for further information during the registration process which has been designed to collect the information we need to accurately assess your Housing Need in line with our These Homes (Allocations) Policy. Our These Homes (Allocations) Policy has more information about the criteria you need to meet to qualify for each Priority Pass and can be downloaded from thesehomes.com.

If you are eligible for more than one Priority Pass, we will issue you whichever one gives you the highest priority.

Homeless Priority Passes are only awarded where East Lothian Council has completed a homeless assessment and accepted a duty to rehouse you. If you are homeless you must contact East Lothian Council as soon as possible, unless you live in another local authority area. We will not award you with a Homeless Priority Pass if you have been assessed as homeless and live out with East Lothian unless East Lothian Council have also accepted a duty to rehouse you. Please note that we do not provide any temporary accommodation.

5 - How do we assess Priority Passes?

Priority Passes are awarded on five levels; Platinum, Gold Plus, Gold, Silver and Bronze, as indicated in the table on the next page. If you are eligible for a Priority Pass you will be issued one of the following Pass types:

Priority Type	Platinum	Gold Plus	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Homelessness	✓				
Harassment				✓	✓
Domestic Abuse			✓		
Medical			✓	✓	
Unsuitable Housing			✓		✓
Overcrowding			✓	✓	✓
Under-occupation			✓	✓	
Need to be in a Community				✓	✓
First Affordable Home					✓
Transfer		✓	✓	✓	✓

We will assess what level of priority you are entitled to based on the information you have provided during the registration process so it's important you give us enough information to make a decision. Sometimes we may need more information, for example, we may ask for a letter from your doctor to clarify your medical needs, or a letter from your employer confirming where you work. If we need further information, we will contact you to let you know.

Once we have assessed your registration, we will confirm this and let you know if you have been awarded a Priority Pass. If you are awarded a Priority Pass it will be taken into consideration every time you apply for a house that falls within any limits set on your Pass (see Section 6 below).

Priority Passes are only awarded for a significant Housing Need. If you are not awarded a Priority Pass you think you are entitled to, or if you believe you have been awarded the wrong level of priority, you can appeal. Information on how to appeal a decision is set out at Section 13.

Where we consider that an applicant has knowingly or carelessly worsened their housing circumstances (for example, by moving from a house that was large enough for their household to one that is too small, causing overcrowding), their entitlement

to a Priority Pass will be suspended for an initial period of twelve months with discretion to extend this suspension period to a maximum of two years. The suspension period will begin on the date the applicant worsened his/her circumstances. The applicant will still be able to apply for available homes but will have to re-apply for a Priority Pass at the end of the suspension period.

6 - Limiting Priority Passes

When you apply for a Priority Pass, there may be times when we set limits on your Pass to a particular type of house or flat, property feature or area. For example, if:

- Following an assessment, you need ground floor accommodation or an adaptation such as a wet floor shower, a wheelchair accessible home or a fully wheelchair adapted home
- You have been awarded a Transfer Pass for living in a flat, your Pass will be limited to houses only
- You have been awarded priority to live in a specific community, your Pass will be limited to a specific town/village

If we limit your Pass it means that it is only recognised for available homes that meet the 'limited' criteria. You can still apply for available homes that do not meet the 'limited' criteria, but your Pass will not be recognised, and you will be applying as a registered applicant with no Priority Pass.

There are situations where we can withdraw a Priority Pass. If you are offered a new home due to having a Priority Pass and you refuse the offer, we will remove your Priority Pass from your registration. If you have a Homeless Priority Pass and refuse an offer you may also risk losing your homeless priority with East Lothian Council. If your Pass is removed because you refused an offer of housing, but you think you had good reasons to refuse, you can appeal.

7 - How long does my Priority Pass last?

Your Priority Pass will last indefinitely unless your circumstances change. However, if you use a Priority Pass to apply for an advertised home then refuse the offer without having reasonable cause for refusing, your Priority Pass will be withdrawn for a period of twelve months. It is your responsibility to re-apply for priority at the end of this period. If you do lose your Pass, you are entitled to appeal if you wish. Even if you lose your Priority Pass you can still apply for houses as a registered applicant.

8 - Applying for a home

Once you have completed your registration you can apply for any home that we or Homes for Life Housing Partnership advertise, provided it is suitable for you (for example, we wouldn't allow you to apply for a house that was too small for your family). Our adverts appear weekly on thesehomes.com, on our Facebook page and in our Head Office windows. We send a copy of our advert to agencies such as East Lothian Council, Citizens Advice Bureaux and local libraries. You can request to receive weekly emails detailing available homes being advertised which match your choices and choose what day of the week you want to receive this. Or can phone 01620 828415 to hear a list of available homes available each week.

When you see an advert for a home you are interested in you can apply online by logging in to your registration (remember you will need your registration number or email address, and your password). Alternatively, you can apply over the phone, in writing or in person at our office. Our available homes are only advertised for a limited period, so it is important that you apply before the closing date and time specified in the advert.

It is important that you only apply for homes that you would accept if you were offered them, so before you apply it is a good idea to check Google Maps 'Explore this Area' for information about the area (<https://www.google.co.uk/maps>). If public transport links are an important consideration, you should also look at <http://www.traveline.info> for information about buses and trains.

You can apply for as many advertised homes as you wish at any one time. If you qualify for more than one offer at the same time, we will assume that the one you applied for first is your first choice, and so on, in the order you chose to apply. You can only be made one offer at any one time, so the order in which you apply could be important to you.

If you do not want to apply for advertised homes each week, you do not have to. Each year we will check whether you still wish to remain registered with These Homes.

9 - Offers

Once the closing date and time for the advert has been reached, we look at all the applicants who have applied for advertised homes. We will normally consider an applicant for housing according to the following steps:

1. Who would make 'best use' of the home – for example, by using all the available bedrooms or by using disabled adaptations

2. If more than one applicant would make 'best use', we will offer it to the person with the highest level of Priority Pass (see the explanation of Priority Passes in Sections 4-5)
3. If more than one person has the same level of Priority Pass, the offer will go to the person who has held their Priority Pass the longest, unless one of these applicants is a transfer applicant, in which case the home will be allocated to the transfer applicant first regardless of the date of Priority Pass award (if there is more than one transfer applicant with the same level of Priority Pass, the offer will go to the applicant that has held their Priority Pass the longest)
4. If there are no applicants with Priority Passes, the offer will go to the applicant who first registered with These Homes, unless any of our existing tenants have applied, in which case, they will be considered first

There are some exceptional circumstances when this may not apply. If you would like more information about this, you can download our These Homes (Allocations) Policy from thesehomes.com.

If you are successful in applying for one of our homes, you will be notified within one week of the closing date of the advert.

Please note that if you refuse an offer of a home you have applied for, your Priority Pass will be withdrawn, and you will not be able to re-apply for the same Priority Pass for twelve months. Because of this, it is really important that you think about whether or not a home will suit you before you apply for it.

10 - Reporting Allocations

We will publish regular reports on thesehomes.com and our P365 microsite on elha.com, to give everyone some idea of the demand for different areas and types of home. This can help you make reasonable choices about where you want to live. For example, is it more important to have a home sooner and go for ones that are in lower demand, or can you wait longer for the 'perfect' one to come along?

11 - Who is not eligible for housing?

In certain circumstances, registrations can be suspended. This means you will not be able to apply for any of our homes until the suspended status is removed.

As part of the registration process, you will be asked to answer several questions and to confirm this information is correct. The answers you give show whether you meet the criteria to apply for housing with us (see Section 12 - False Information). If any criteria are not met, your registration will not be made 'live' until such time as you

can demonstrate to us that you can now meet the criteria to apply for housing. Examples of when registrations are suspended include:

- You have outstanding rent arrears or other tenancy debt, either with ELHA or another landlord, and you have not maintained an agreement to pay them off
- You have a history of anti-social behaviour or criminal activity (subject to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act) when action has been taken (or is pending) by Police, local authority, landlord etc.
- You supply false or misleading information – see Section 12 below
- We have asked you for more information and have not yet received it

If you would like more information about whether you are eligible, you can download our These Homes (Allocations Policy) on thesehomes.com or call us for details. If you are not eligible, we will advise you what you need to do to be able to apply for available homes.

12 - False Information

If you give false or misleading information in an attempt to secure an offer of a new home, we will immediately withdraw any Priority Pass you have, and your registration will be suspended for a minimum period of twelve months, which may be extended up to two years. If a tenancy has started, we will immediately take steps to repossess your home.

13 - How to Make a Complaint or Appeal a Decision

We always aim to provide an excellent service but accept that we do not always get it right, and hope that you will tell us to give us the opportunity to correct any mistakes. If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of our service, we have a Complaints Procedure that you, or anyone acting for you, can use. You can download a copy of our Complaints Procedure from thesehomes.com or we will provide you with full information and a copy of the Complaints Procedure if you contact us.

You may appeal against a decision made about your application for housing if you are dissatisfied, for example if:

- You have not been awarded a Priority Pass and think that you should have been
- You believe an offer of housing you receive from us is not reasonable
- Your application has been suspended
- You have been offered a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy

First Stage

The details of your appeal will be recorded and passed to the appropriate person to deal with. This will normally be the Senior Housing Assistant or Housing Manager. This person may contact you to check that they properly understand your appeal and will aim to respond to you within 10 working days.

Second Stage

If you are unhappy with the outcome of your First Stage appeal, you can submit a further appeal within 14 days of receiving the decision. You should provide full details about why you disagree with our decision. Your appeal will be considered by someone who has had no previous involvement in your case, who will aim to respond to you within 20 working days.

If you are a Homes for Life Housing Partnership tenant, your appeal will be passed to your landlord to review

Third Stage

If you remain unhappy with our decision you can make a Third Stage appeal which will be handled at Stage Two of our Complaints Handling Procedure. If you still do not agree with our decision, you can appeal to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

You can send your 3rd stage appeal to the Housing Manager, East Lothian Housing Association, 18-20 Market Street, Haddington, East Lothian EH41 3JL or by emailing thesehomes@elha.com

14 - Contacting Us

If you need any help or advice or you have any comments you would like to make, you can contact us at:

www.thesehomes.com – all information, forms and documents are there

www.elha.com - just click on the 'Live Help' Button

www.homesforlife.co.uk

Visit or write to us at:

East Lothian Housing Association Ltd
18-20 Market Street
Haddington
East Lothian
EH41 3JL

These Homes Line: 01620 828415
Main switchboard: 01620 825032

Email: thesehomes@elha.com

Homes for Life Housing Partnership
Tolbooth Gate
57 Market Street
HADDINGTON
East Lothian
EH41 3JG

Tel: 01620 829300

Email: info@homesforlife.co.uk

15 - Information in Alternative Formats

If you need this leaflet or any other publication translated into another language, we will provide this on request.

On request, we will arrange for an interpreter to be present where necessary, for example at interviews. This includes sign language interpreters.

We will provide material in formats such as large print, CD or audio file, on request.

We will provide these additional services at no cost to you.

16 - Data Protection

East Lothian Housing Association Ltd, a Scottish Charity (Scottish Charity Number SCO28900, a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 with Registered Number 2266R(S) and having their Registered Office at 18-20 Market Street, Haddington, East Lothian EH41 3JL take the issue of security and data protection very seriously and strictly adhere to guidelines published in the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulations applicable from May 2018, together with any domestic laws subsequently enacted.

The information that you provide us as part of your registration and any additional information that you provide us, together with any information we obtain about you from a third-party will be held and used in accordance with our These Homes (Allocations) Policy and our Fair Processing Notice which explains your privacy rights and how we gather, use and share information about you, Full copies of these policies are available on elha.com or by contacting us.

When you register online, or you sign and return a paper registration form to us, you consent to our processing your personal data, including any sensitive personal data. Sensitive personal data includes any information that we collect about your racial or ethnic origin, health, committed or alleged offences including Court Proceedings and sentencing. This data will only be processed where necessary. Please inform us as soon as possible of any change in your personal information by logging onto thesehomes.com and updating your registration to keep them complete and accurate.