



Homesearch membership: Your guide to our lettings service

Homes with
positive impact

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What you need to know

Vico Homes let their homes through Homesearch.

Homesearch gives applicants more say in where they want to live. Vico Homes homes that are available will be widely advertised on a weekly basis on www.vicohomesearch.co.uk and at Vico Homes Hubs.

Applicants need to become members of Homesearch before they can start applying for homes.

All members will be put into a specific group, known as a band, based on their housing needs. Members will be sent a letter with a membership number and their band.

Members can express an interest in up to three different homes a week where they meet the advertised local lettings conditions. However, there are guidelines which may mean that some people will not be able to participate in Homesearch. For example, if they are subject to enforcement action for their current home. We will write and advise them of this and what needs to be done before they can take part.

This leaflet is intended to be a simple guide to Homesearch. The policy can be found on www.vicohomesearch.co.uk

This guide will explain the steps to finding a home through Homesearch.

Contacting Homesearch

For more information you can visit our website or contact us directly:

- www.vicohomesearch.co.uk
- 0344 9 020202
- homesearch@vicohomes.co.uk

Finding a home of your choice with us

The Homesearch scheme is easy to use. By following these steps you can look for a home.

1 Apply to join Homesearch

Complete an application form. You will become a member of Homesearch from the date your completed form is received by Homesearch.

2 Search for homes

Every week we will advertise all available homes. The advertisement will include details of each home and who is eligible to apply for it (Letting Conditions).

You can see our available homes:

On our website

www.vicohomesearch.co.uk

At one of our Hubs

Vico Homes Hub - Wakefield

**2 Bull Ring,
Wakefield,
West Yorkshire,
WF1 1HA**

Vico Homes Hub - Pontefract

**1 Horsefair,
Pontefract,
West Yorkshire,
WF8 1PE**

At Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Service

Queens House, Queen Street, Wakefield, WF1 1JR

The weekly advertising cycle for homes will begin on Wednesday at 10.05 am and will end at 9.55 am the following Wednesday. Additional homes may be added to the cycle up to 4.30 pm on Fridays.

3 Express an interest in renting a home

You can express an interest in up to three of the advertised homes that you are eligible for in each weekly cycle. You need to do this before the cycle closes on the following Wednesday.

There are several ways in which you can express an interest in a home:

On our website

www.vicohomesearch.co.uk

Click on 'search for a home'.
Follow the instructions on screen and login.

In person by talking to us at one of our Hubs

Vico Homes Hub - Wakefield

**2 Bull Ring,
Wakefield,
West Yorkshire,
WF1 1HA**

Vico Homes Hub - Pontefract

**1 Horsefair,
Pontefract,
West Yorkshire,
WF8 1PE**

By phone

0344 9 020202

Make sure that you have the following information ready as you will need it to complete your expression of interest:

- Your Homesearch membership number
- Your date of birth
- The advert reference and address of the home you are interested in

4 After you've applied for a home

We will contact you as soon as possible after the current advertising cycle closes if you have been successful and we will help you with the next stages. If you do not hear from us then you have unfortunately not been successful and will need to apply for other homes during the next cycle.

Once you have accepted a home your Homesearch membership will be closed and you will become a Vico Homes customer.

If you accept a home from another registered provider of social housing your Homesearch membership will be cancelled.

You should make sure they only express an interest in home you would like to live in. Your Homesearch membership may be suspended if you turn down two reasonable offers of homes within a 12 month period.



Your questions answered

About Homesearch membership

What is Homesearch?

Homesearch is how homes, owned and managed by Vico Homes, are let in the Vico Homes areas. Other housing providers also advertise some of their homes through Homesearch.

Is everyone allowed to join Homesearch?

To be eligible to join you must be either:

- Over 16 and requiring family type accommodation
- Over 17
- Single and 16 or over who are looked after or are owed a statutory duty by Wakefield Council
- Deemed to be eligible or qualifying person as set out in Section 12 of the Homesearch Policy

You must complete a membership form, which will enable us to assess if you are eligible to join Homesearch.

It is important that you let us know if you are related to any Board member, or Vico Homes employee on your application form.

If eligible, you will be sent a membership number and you will be able to view and express an interest for any advertised homes where you meet the required letting conditions.

There are guidelines which may mean that some people will not be able to join or participate in Homesearch, please read pages 14-15 for more information.

What if I have difficulty completing the membership form?

We can provide assistance to people who need help completing the form or who have language or literacy difficulties. A home visit may also be arranged for people with a disability or severe medical condition.

Do I need to be a Homesearch member to express an interest in a home?

Yes, applications for advertised homes are only open to members.

Will I have to renew my membership?

If you have not expressed an interest in any homes for six months we will contact you to ask if you still want to be a member of Homesearch. If you do not contact us after a further three months, we will cancel your membership. You will be sent an email, to your last known email address, advising you of this.

How long will it take me to find a home?

Once a Vico Homes tenancy has been accepted the results will be published. We also publish the average waiting times. This will give you an idea of how popular an area is and how long you may have to wait. This information will help you decide how to use your expressions of interest in future advertising cycles.

What if my circumstances change?

If your circumstances change you should inform us straight away. You must contact your nearest Hub or the Homesearch Team immediately, as this may affect the band you are in. If you do not tell Vico Homes of any changes, it may result in your Homesearch application being cancelled.

If the change of circumstances means that you move into a priority band (A,B or C), your new band start date will change to become the date the priority was awarded. If the change means that you move out of a priority band, your membership start date will return to the date you originally joined Homesearch.

What if I give false information?

If you knowingly or recklessly give false information, or withhold information in connection with your application for housing, you could be fined up to £5,000 and / or your application could be cancelled. If Vico Homes give you a tenancy because of this information we can also take you to court to take the tenancy away from you.

What if I'm homeless or threatened with homelessness?

If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness you can contact Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Service on 01924 304360 or 01924 304362.

What if I'm disabled or have health problems which mean I need to be re-housed?

A person or household can apply for a priority move on grounds of Special Needs Rehousing if they have a disability or a long-term medical condition that prevents them from performing everyday tasks such as bathing and climbing the stairs and if a different home more suited to their needs will help the problem. If you wish to apply please contact Vico Homes for an application for Special Needs Rehousing.

Full details of the criteria and procedure for special needs rehousing are available at www.vicohomes.co.uk in our publications library or from any of our Hubs (see page 4).

Available homes

Where will Homesearch advertise available homes?

Available homes can be found during in the advertising cycle at:

- On our website: www.vicohomesearch.co.uk
- In our Hubs and other local outlets (see page 4)

What is the advertising cycle?

It is the period of time when homes are advertised and members can submit their expressions of interest. The advertising cycle will begin on Wednesday at 10.05 am when the homes have been advertised and will end at 10 am the following Wednesday. Additional homes may be added to the cycle up to 4.30 pm on Fridays.

Will all of your available homes be let through Homesearch?

Occasionally there may be reasons where we need to do a direct let on other homes, but the majority of our homes will be advertised through Homesearch.

What is a direct let?

This is when a home is not let through Homesearch because it is required for one of the following reasons:

- Emergency accommodation
- Transit / decant accommodation
- A Vico Homes tenant who is in a home in a redevelopment or regeneration area
- To meet the partnership working arrangements agreed with Wakefield Council
- To resolve a management issue
- To meet a special housing need

Applying for an advertised home

How will members who express an interest be placed in order?

Our simple banding system reflects the housing needs of the members in each band. Within the band, members will be placed in date order of membership. If your circumstances change and you move up into a higher priority, your band date will be the date that your higher priority was awarded. Any preference to certain members is then applied, as set out in the home advert and LLS.

Detailed information on the bands can be found on pages 16-23.

Can I be considered for any homes that are advertised?

Once you become a member you will be placed in a band based on your housing need, which, along with the Local Lettings Strategy (LLS), tells you which homes you can apply for.

What other restrictions are there?

Other restrictions used are the Letting Conditions. They will let members know who will be able to express an interest in the home. The Letting Conditions are based on the LLS, which have been developed locally to make the best use of the housing stock for their communities. When a home becomes available the LLS will be used to set the Letting Conditions for the advert. This will include the band, the type and size of family who can apply and any preferences. There may be other restrictions depending on the type of home such as age restriction.

What if I see more than one home I'm interested in?

As a member you will be able to make up to three expressions of interest in each advertising cycle for homes, but you must meet the letting conditions. You will need to place them in order of preference - first, second and third choice.

After you apply for a home

What rent will I pay?

In our advertisements we include the rent for the home which is the target or affordable rent. If you are a Vico Homes Assured Protected Tenant and are successful in your expression of interest in another Vico Homes home, any target rent may be reduced. Rents can change from those originally advertised.

How does the Homesearch Team decide who has been successful?

Once the advertising cycle has closed, a list will be prepared for each home which will show details of all the members who expressed an interest in it. The list will place members initially in band order and then date order, starting with the earliest membership start date or priority award date. For further details on priority awards see page 16-17. Any preference set out in the home advert and LLS will then be applied.

Next to each member will be their order of preference for that home. If you are the successful member on more than one home then we will use your order of preference to decide which home to allocate to you.

How will I know if I have been successful?

If you have been successful, a member of the Homesearch Team will contact you as soon as possible after the advertising cycle has closed. You should continue making expressions of interest for homes you are interested in during the following advertising cycles if you are not contacted. Before we offer you a home, certain checks will need to be carried out.

What checks will be carried out?

Before any offer of accommodation is made, applicants and their partners will be checked to make sure that they are considered eligible, that they still qualify to be a member of the Homesearch, and that they meet Vico Homes' charitable objectives. Before any offer of a home is made checks will be carried out on your:

- Conduct in your present and previous accommodation
- Housing history
- Ability to sustain a tenancy
- Potential support requirements
- Ability to afford a home on the open market (this will depend on your situation)

A home visit may also be made. Where a home visit is not practical, references, information, or an office based interview may be requested. You will be asked to verify information contained in your Homesearch application. If a member does not meet the requirements of these checks they will not be considered for allocation of a home.

Will I be able to view the home before making up my mind?

Yes, as soon as the keys are available for Vico Homes homes we will arrange for a Vico Homes employee to show you around the home. If you wish to accept it then we will arrange for you to sign the Tenancy Agreement.

What if I don't like the home once I've been to view it?

If you consider the home unsuitable once you have seen it, just let the landlord know and they will withdraw the offer. You will then be able to make expressions of interest on other homes you are eligible for, provided your membership is not suspended due to refusing two reasonable offers in a 12 month period.

Homesearch membership restrictions

Who will not be allowed to join Homesearch?

There are certain groups of people who will not be eligible to join Homesearch. These are people defined by the government as ineligible due to their immigration status or habitual residence in the UK.

We also have the discretion to disqualify other people from becoming members of Homesearch if, for example, they have a history of antisocial behaviour.

Homesearch may class the following issues (amongst others) as preventing someone qualifying to be a member of Homesearch:

- Anyone evicted for breach of tenancy by a council, housing association or other registered housing provider
- If we feel someone could be a threat to a local community because they could re-offend or have been convicted of offences like:
 - Dealing in illegal substances
 - Using Vico Homes' homes for storing stolen goods
 - Burglary
 - Violent behaviour
 - Racial or other hate crime attacks

In some circumstances applicants may be allowed to join Homesearch but restrictions may be placed on what homes they can be considered for.

Other housing providers have their own conditions of who is eligible for allocation of their homes.

Financial eligibility

Vico Homes is a registered charity so we are normally only able to help people who are in the greatest need. Some people who have the financial means to obtain suitable accommodation for themselves may not be eligible for accommodation with Vico Homes. Therefore a financial assessment based on the member's (and their partner's income) may take place before an offer of a home is made and if the member could financially afford to purchase or rent similar homes in the area then we may not be able to make them an offer. A financial assessment will not be needed for members who are aged 60 or over and needing accommodation on one level, or who are disabled or chronically sick and are being offered accommodation to meet their needs.

Can I become a member if I owe money to Vico Homes?

If you apply and you or your partner owe current rent arrears or other debts to Vico Homes you can become a member of Homesearch but you will need to make a debt agreement for any outstanding debts. Unless there are exceptional circumstances your application will be bypassed at the allocation stage until the debt agreement has been complied with in full.

Are there any other instances where my application can be suspended?

Memberships may also be suspended for other reasons such as:

- Refusal of two reasonable offers within a 12 month period
- While we are investigating a member's (or anyone moving with the member) eligibility or qualification to join or remain a member of Homesearch
- A change in housing circumstances where a new form advising us of the change has not been received and processed

Independent living homes

Vico Homes advertise homes that are for people who need some extra support to help them manage their daily tasks or just need some additional support or contact. To be considered for a home that has been advertised as independent living a member must pass the Independent Living Assessment.

Homesearch bandings

Band A

Statutory homeless

This will be awarded to members who are nominated by Wakefield Council.

See Homesearch Policy for homeless definition.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Key worker status

Members who live outside of the Wakefield district and have obtained permanent employment, which is classed as conferring key worker status, and have been nominated by Wakefield Council.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Urgent social need

The awarding of the urgent social need priority is intended to help those applicants who are in 'genuine urgent need' as quickly as possible. This priority can be awarded in-line with the scheme of delegation in two ways:

- To resolve local lettings issues
- To resolve urgent housing needs by an appropriate Vico Homes employee or Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Panel

Under occupation

This priority will be awarded to Vico Homes tenants or social housing tenants, who reside in the district who are under-occupying a house and are requesting a move to a home which has at least two fewer bedrooms than their current home, when the bedroom standard is applied.

Welfare and medical needs

This recognises urgent medical need for members and is awarded by Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Panel or Vico Homes' Health and Medical Rehousing Panel to:

- Members (with a local connection to the Wakefield district or are Vico Homes tenants) with disabilities whose current home is not suitable, or not able to be adapted to meet their needs, or it is inappropriate to do so and is resulting in extreme personal hardship for the disabled member
- Serving, or former members, of HM Armed Forces or Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service, who have a local connection to Wakefield

HM forces personnel

This priority will be awarded:

- To HM forces personnel in service quarters that are 12 weeks or less before their date of discharge as shown in their cessation documents
- To former members of HM regular armed forces who also meet the criteria for any of the following Band Bs, temporary accommodation, medical, rough sleeper, statutorily unfit homes, homeless prevention
- Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of the regular armed forces who are leaving or have recently left services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner, whose death is attributable (wholly or partly) to that service; and either
- They or their immediate close family lived in the Wakefield district immediately before joining the forces
- They have a local connection to the Wakefield district due to close family associations, paid employment or other special circumstances

Band B

Medical priority

This priority recognises medical needs for members with a local connection or who are Vico Homes tenants and is awarded by the Vico Homes Health and Medical Panel or Wakefield Council's Housing Needs Panel. This priority is also awarded to serving or former members of HM Armed or Reserve Forces who do not have a local connection with the Wakefield district but who need to move because of a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to their service.

Members who are still seeking accommodation 12 months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further 12 months.

Redevelopment and regeneration

Awarded once Vico Homes' Board has agreed to a renewal or redevelopment scheme in a district which requires the tenants to move out into permanent accommodation to facilitate the work.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo a review to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Homeless prevention

This priority may be awarded following nomination from Wakefield Council to members:

- Where Wakefield Council have triggered either:
 - Prevention Duty and the applicant's household do not fall into one of the household category outlined in Statutory Homeless duties Band A
 - Relief Duty but the applicant is not in priority need.
- Homeless households who are owed an Intentionally Homeless duty.
- Homeless households who are in temporary accommodation accommodated under a Statutory Homeless Duty.
- Patients with a local connection who are expected to be an in-patient in hospital for more than 28 days and it has been identified by the hospital and verified by Wakefield Council that the applicant will be homeless on discharge.
- Who are tenants and due to financial hardship are in receipt of discretionary housing payment.
- Who are owner occupiers and have been assessed as being unable to sustain their mortgage payments due to financial hardship and where there is little or no equity once the mortgage obligation and any charges have been discharged.

If after three months the member has not been successful in securing accommodation, Vico Homes will seek the decision of Wakefield Council to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Families in lodgings or rough sleepers

Families in lodgings

This priority will be awarded to members with a local connection to the Wakefield district and are sharing someone else's home. Members who fit this criteria and can be classified as lodgers are as follows:

- Families with children with or without the use of a bedroom
- Women who are pregnant and are 12 weeks before their confirmed due date

Rough sleepers

This priority will be awarded following a nomination from Wakefield Council.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Unfit homes and overcrowding

Statutory unfit properties

This priority will be awarded following a nomination from Wakefield Council where a member who is a tenant occupying a home in the Wakefield district where Wakefield Council finds a Category One hazard, in accordance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and the tenant is assisting them with enforcement action against an uncooperative landlord.

Members who are still seeking accommodation three months after the priority is awarded will undergo an assessment to determine whether the priority should be removed or extended for a further three months.

Overcrowding

This priority may be awarded to (tenants or owners) who are members with a local connection to the Wakefield district (or who are Vico Homes tenants) and are overcrowded in their current home when the bedroom standard is applied or those who are statutorily overcrowded in accordance with the Housing Act 1985.

The bedroom standard

This is based on the ages and composition of the family. A notional number of bedrooms are allocated to each household in accordance with its composition by age, sex and marital status and relationships of family members.

A separate bedroom is allocated to each of the following:

- Married or cohabiting couple
- Adult aged 21 years or over
- Pair of adolescents aged 10 to 20 years of the same sex
- Pair of children aged under 10 years regardless of sex

Any unpaired person age 10 to 20 is paired, if possible with a child aged under 10 years of the same sex or, if this is not possible given a separate bedroom. The same applies to any child under 10 years. This means:

- Two people under 21 of the same sex will be expected to share a bedroom
- Two children under 10 will be expected to share a bedroom regardless of sex
- Any single person 21 or over will not be expected to share a bedroom
- Married or co-habiting couples will not be expected to share a bedroom with another member of their household

All Homesearch applications are assessed against both the size of the current home and the family composition to determine application banding.

Vico Homes will not allocate a home to an applicant that exceeds the bedroom standard unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Service tenants and armed forces

This priority will be awarded to service tenants who live in the Wakefield district and are:

- 12 weeks before their date of retirement or leaving date as shown in their termination of employment letter
- Have at least three years continuous service and must leave their present address when employment ends

This priority will also be awarded to members who do not have a local connection with the Wakefield district but are:

- Former members of HM regular armed forces who would also meet the qualifying criteria for any of the following Band Bs, temporary accommodation, rough sleeper, statutory unfit properties, homeless prevention
- Bereaved spouses and civil partners of members of HM regular armed forces leaving or have recently left services family accommodation following the death of their spouse or partner, whose death is attributable (wholly or partly) to that service

Under occupation

This priority will be awarded to Vico Homes tenants or social housing tenants, who reside in the Wakefield district, who when the bedroom standard is applied, are under-occupying a house and requesting to move to a home with one fewer bedroom than their current home.

Social need

The awarding of the social need priority is intended to assist those applicants who are in 'genuine need' as quickly as possible.

This priority can be awarded in accordance with the scheme of delegation to resolve housing needs by an appropriate Vico Homes employee or the Housing Needs Panel.

This would relate to circumstances that are not deemed as urgent as those set out in Band A urgent social housing need.

Band C

Under occupation

This priority will be awarded to Vico Homes tenants or social housing tenants, who reside in the district, who when the bedroom standard is applied, are under-occupying a home other than a house and are requesting to move to a home with fewer bedrooms than their current home.

All other applicants who do not meet any of the criteria in Bands A, B and D.

Band D

No local connection

This priority will be awarded to members who have no local connection with the Wakefield district (and do not meet any of the other Bands).

Social housing tenants with no housing need

This priority will be awarded to members who are an existing tenant of a registered housing provider of social housing (including Vico Homes) and do not meet any of the specific criteria set out in Bands A, B, or C.

What is a 'local connection'?

To qualify as having a local connection with the Wakefield district a member must meet one of the following definitions:

- The member is, or was in the past, normally resident in the district, and the residence was of their own choice. Normal residence is residence for at least six months in the area during the previous 12 months, or for not less than three years during the previous five year period
- The member is presently employed in the district and the employment is paid and not of a casual nature
- The member has family associations with the district
- There are special circumstances which Vico Homes considers as constituting a local connection

Further information on these definitions can be found in the Choice Based Lettings Policy.

Vico Homes



Vico Homes, Merefield House,
Whistler Drive, Castleford, WF10 5HX



This document is also available
electronically at vicohomes.co.uk



This document is also available in
other formats on request.



0345 8 507 507 - Text Relay calls welcome.
Calls may be recorded for training purposes.



Struggling to read this information? Let us know if you would like this document in another format, size or language. Please call us on 0345 8 507 507 or email contact@vicohomes.co.uk