

Scheme guide

Your guide to helping you
find a home of your choice.

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www.compassch



pointing you to affordable housing in the Tees Valley



What is Compass?

Compass is a choice based lettings scheme made up of the following partner organisations, which operate in the Tees Valley sub region:

- Darlington Borough Council
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Middlesbrough Borough Council
- Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- Stockton Borough Council
- Coast & Country
- Home Group
- North Star
- Thirteen

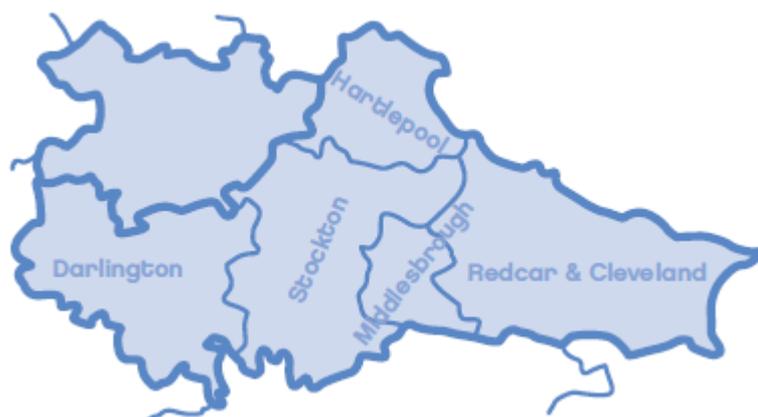
Choice based lettings (CBL) gives applicants more choice about where they live. You can use the Compass scheme to choose the right home from a list of available properties in the area you would like to live in.

You can also use the scheme to look at other housing options that may be more suited to you and your family, which include properties owned by traditional registered providers, private rented accommodation, low cost home ownership options and mutual exchanges.

We advertise our vacant properties every week. You can look at the list of adverts in our weekly newsletter, which is available on request from your housing options centre or housing office or you can search for properties on the Compass website:

www.compasscbl.org.uk

Photos and descriptions of vacancies will also be displayed in the offices of each of the partner organisations in a similar way to which estate agents advertise their properties.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How do I apply to register with Compass?

- You can go to our website at www.compasscbl.org.uk and complete an online registration form.
- You can call into any of the partners' offices and ask a member of staff to help you register online.
- You or an advocate e.g. relative, friend, support worker can call in or telephone to arrange an appointment.

See the section titled 'How to use the scheme' for further information.

How is my application assessed?

When you register on the scheme, the partner organisation you apply to will assess your application and you will be placed in one of five bands. A band is a way of describing the priority group in which you have been placed. The band you are placed in depends on your level of housing need. Most people are placed in band 4 when they first register. If you are later assessed as having high or urgent needs, you will be placed in a higher band e.g. if you are assessed as having a serious illness and need to be rehoused quickly, you will be given a priority and placed in band 1.

Applications are placed in date order within each band with the oldest date having more priority.

We will tell you your priority band date, which is the date you entered your particular band. If you are moved into bands 1+, 1 or 2, your band date will be the date you entered that band. If you are moved into bands 3 or 4, your original registration date will be used.

If your circumstances change at any time, you must tell us about this as it may affect the band in which you are placed and the type of properties you are eligible to bid for.

Band	Qualifying groups
Band 1+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>People losing their home due to a recognised regeneration scheme within one of the local authorities in the sub region.</i>
Band 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>People assessed as statutorily homeless and in priority need.</i> — <i>People threatened with homelessness within 90 days and in priority need.</i> — <i>People at risk of domestic abuse.</i> — <i>People leaving HM Armed Forces community*</i> — <i>People who need to move on urgent medical grounds.</i> — <i>People who need to move on welfare grounds.</i> — <i>People living in unsafe or unsanitary housing conditions.</i> — <i>People who are under-occupying their accommodation by 2 or more bedrooms (this only applies to social housing tenants of the partner landlords).</i> — <i>People leaving prison</i> <p><i>* People leaving HM Armed Forces community include: a member of the Armed Forces (serving, or has formerly served in the regular forces; serving, or has formerly served in the reserved forces; a bereaved spouse or civil partner)</i></p>
Band 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>People assessed as non priority homeless or no longer owed the main homeless duty.</i> — <i>People assessed as intentionally homeless or no longer owed the main homeless duty.</i> — <i>People who need to move due to a high medical need.</i> — <i>People living in overcrowded conditions and are 3 or more bed spaces short of requirements.</i> — <i>People who are under-occupying their accommodation by 1 bedroom (this only applies to social housing tenants of the partner landlords).</i> — <i>People who need to move on hardship grounds.</i> — <i>People sharing facilities with persons not of the same household i.e. houses in multiple occupation or bed & breakfast.</i>
Band 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>People leaving ‘tied’ accommodation within the sub region.</i> — <i>People continuing to co-habit following a relationship breakdown.</i> — <i>People who are 1 or 2 bed spaces short of requirements.</i>
Band 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>People who have no or a low level housing need.</i>

How do you decide which people go in each band?

The law helps us decide as it says we must give priority to people with certain housing needs and those with the greatest needs must receive the highest priority on the scheme.

Do I get a priority if my home is to be demolished as part of a regeneration scheme?

Yes. You will be placed in the band that meets your assessed need, but will only be given additional priority (Band 1+) for the local authority area in which you live and not for the other local authority areas in the Tees Valley. We will write to tell you if you are to be given additional priority.

What happens if I am assessed as homeless and in priority need?

You will be placed in Band 1 and will have to bid for suitable properties. If you do not bid, an officer will contact you to find out the reasons why and to establish if you need any help or support. If you have not bid for suitable properties within an 8 week period, an officer will place bids on your behalf. The homeless duty will be discharged if an offer is made as a result of a successful bid.

What do I do if I have a serious medical condition?

You need to tell us about this when you apply to register on the scheme or when your condition is diagnosed by a medical professional. We may ask you for further details and an assessment will be carried out. We may also arrange a visit from an occupational therapist to assess the suitability of your current home and your future needs. We will also discuss all the options available to help you make the right decision about moving. If you do decide to move from your current home because it is assessed as unsuitable for your needs, you will be given a priority on the scheme and we will support you in bidding for suitable properties.

Where appropriate, an approach by medical professionals may be sought directly.

By signing the declaration on the Compass application form, this acts as your authority for us to contact any relevant agency or organisation to obtain information for dealing with your application for housing.

What help and support will I receive?

Our staff can help you access the scheme until you are familiar with bidding for properties. If you are particularly vulnerable and are unable to call into the housing office or access the website, we can arrange to have your bids placed automatically. We will discuss this with you first so we are clear about your areas of choice and the type of properties that meet your needs.

What happens if I have breached my tenancy conditions or if I have criminal convictions?

This depends on the circumstances when you apply to join the scheme. We will deny you access to the scheme for a specified period if we think your behaviour is serious enough to make you unsuitable to be a tenant. Our decision will be sent to you in writing and you will have the right to request a review of our decision.

If for example, you have low level rent arrears and have not made any effort to clear them, you will be allowed to join the scheme and bid for properties; however you will be given reduced preference if your bid is successful and you have not made any effort to clear your arrears. We will write to you if we decide to overlook you for offers and to tell you what you can do to put things right.

You will have the right to request a review of our decision.

Will you advertise all your properties?

The majority of properties owned or managed by the partner organisations will be advertised; however a small number will not be advertised and instead will be let directly to certain groups of applicants e.g. to people who need housing in an emergency situation, such as fire or flood victims or where a person faces an imminent risk of violence.

How long will the advertising cycle last?

The cycle opens on a Thursday morning at 00.01hrs and closes the following Tuesday at midnight. You cannot place bids on a Wednesday as this is when all the bids are sorted and verified. The bidding cycle may be extended in some circumstances such as over the Christmas period, when properties will be advertised for a fortnight. See 'Fast Track' information.

What information will be included in the advert?

We will include the property features, such as the number of bedrooms and the weekly rent. We will also show a breakdown of the rent i.e. service charges, water and sewerage and any other charges. You can contact the landlord advertising the property for further information about what services are included in these charges. The adverts will also contain local neighbourhood information and the types of household that can bid. A photograph will usually be included in the adverts.

Will you advertise properties that are suitable for people with disabilities?

Yes. This is to ensure that people assessed as needing this type of accommodation are given the widest possible choice of accommodation. Priority will be given to people with an assessed need for this type of accommodation. On occasion we may have to offer the property to somebody

further down the shortlist if it is particularly suitable for a person with a specific disability.

What is a bid?

A bid means you are interested in a particular property and would like to be considered for it. It does not mean you will have to part with any money.

How many bids can I place?

You can place as many bids per advertising cycle as you like on properties that meet the needs of your household. You should think carefully before placing a bid, to make sure that the property is right for you i.e. the type of property and location are what you are looking for and that it meets the needs of your household. Please note the Compass one offer policy detailed below.

Can I bid for properties outside my local authority area?

Yes. However there is a local connection rule, which means that people living within a local authority boundary will generally get priority for a property over people living outside of that local authority.

Will I be offered the property if I am the first person to place a bid?

Not necessarily. The time of your bid has no bearing on whether or not you will be offered the property. See the section titled Step 2 – Bidding.

Will I be told if my bid is unsuccessful?

If you try to bid on a property that does not suit your needs, you will be told that you are not eligible to bid for it. We will only contact you if your bid is successful and you qualify for the offer of the property.

What if I am successful in qualifying for more than one property?

You will be contacted and asked to make a decision about which property you want to accept. The property you refuse will then be offered to the next qualifying person on the shortlist.

Will I be penalised for refusing a property?

If you are in a priority band and you refuse one reasonable offer of accommodation for unreasonable reasons*, your priority will be removed and you will be placed in Band 4 (low or no housing need) for six months. You may approach us for a reassessment after this period but further information may be requested.

If you are assessed as statutorily homeless, you will need to speak to your officer before refusing a property you have been offered or you could lose your

priority on the scheme.

* This does not apply to people living in Hartlepool, they are able to refuse three offers of accommodation before any priority is removed.

Can I view the property I am offered before deciding to accept it?

Yes. We would encourage you to view the property before making your decision. If the property is being repaired, you may have to wait until the repairs are complete before viewing it. However you will be asked to confirm if you are still interested in the property.

How will I find out about which properties have been let?

You can see how properties in previous advertising cycles were let by accessing the Compass website, selecting 'Recent lets' or by collecting a newsletter from your housing office (available upon request).

The information provided will tell you the bands in which the successful people were placed and how long they waited to be housed. You will also see how many bids were placed against the properties advertised. This feedback will give you a better idea of how popular a particular property or area is and how long you would generally have to wait. You can then decide whether to choose other types of properties or areas where you may not have to wait as long.

What if I disagree with a decision you have made about my application?

You have a right to request a review if you are unhappy about a decision we have made e.g. if we deny you access to the scheme because of your unacceptable behaviour. To find out more about your right to a review, please contact the partner organisation that assessed your application.

How to use the scheme

Step 1 – Register

How to register

You will need to register with Compass to use the scheme.

Compass has a common housing register for all the partner organisations. This means that by completing one application, you can express your interest or 'bid' on suitable vacancies across all the local authorities in the Tees Valley. This can be done on-line by accessing the website www.compasscbl.org.uk

Advice and support in completing the application can be provided on request,

particularly for those who would have difficulty in completing the application because of a disability or a low level of literacy.

You must provide 1 form of identification, including confirmation of your National Insurance Number and address. This also applies to joint applicants.

We may also ask you to provide a reference from your landlord (where applicable) and proof of address for every person listed on your application.

If you are unable to provide a reference from your landlord, you will be asked to supply a character reference from a professional person who has known you for at least 2 years e.g. employer, community worker, probation officer or support worker.

Note: You will be unable to bid for properties until you have provided all the information we have requested.

Acceptable forms of proof of identity:

- National Insurance card
- Birth certificate
- Passport
- Driving licence
- Medical card
- Immigration papers
- Benefit book or payment letter

Acceptable forms of proof of address:

- Tenancy agreement
- Rent book
- Wage slip
- Bank statement
- Utility bill (gas/electric/water)
- Council tax bill
- Child benefit book or letter
- Housing benefit letter

What happens once I have registered?

Once you have supplied all the information we have requested, we will write to tell you:

- Your registration number
- Your date of registration

- The band your application has been placed in and your band date (effective date)
- Your Unique reference number and PIN – keep this in a safe place!

Step 2 – Bidding

How are properties advertised?

Properties are advertised each week on the Compass website at www.compasscbl.org.uk and in the various housing options centres and housing offices located across the local authority areas in the Tees Valley.

The advertising cycle opens at 00.01hrs every Thursday morning and closes on the following Tuesday at midnight. You cannot bid for properties on a Wednesday. The length of the cycle may be extended during the holiday periods, such as Easter and Christmas.

The adverts

The adverts tell you the name of the landlord, location and property type, number of bedrooms, weekly rent and other features to help you decide which properties are right for you.

The advert also tells you if there are any special requirements that you must meet, such as the band that will be given preference or if there are any age restrictions. A photograph of the property or a similar house type will usually be included with the advert.

Some properties will be advertised during the notice period. However the current tenant will have the right to withdraw the notice at any time meaning the property will no longer be available to let.

We will also advertise properties that are being repaired. If your bid is successful and you are offered a property, you will usually have to wait until the repairs are complete before viewing it.

Expressing your interest

If you want to be considered for a property you must 'bid' for it. This is your way of telling us that you would like to live in the property. You can bid for as many properties in each advertising cycle as you would like to that meet the needs of your household and we will tell you of your position at that particular time. **Please note that your position may change as other people bid on the properties you are interested in throughout the bidding cycle.**

You should also think carefully before placing a bid to make sure that the property is right for you i.e. the type of property and location are what you are

looking for and that it meets the needs of your household. Please note the Compass one offer policy detailed below.

We do not want you to waste your time bidding for properties that are not ideally suited to you!

If you are unable to bid on a particular property, you will be given the reason why. For example, some properties may be restricted by age or household type.

The Compass one offer policy

The Compass Common Allocation Policy states that we will make **one reasonable** offer of accommodation to our applicants in Band 1, 2 or 3*.

If, after an assessment of your housing need you are placed in a priority band (Band 1, 2 or 3) and refuse a **reasonable offer** of accommodation, any priority for housing awarded will be removed and you will be placed in Band 4 for low or no housing need.

You may approach Compass to review your priority following a six month period; however, we may need to request further information or evidence.

*Applicants in Hartlepool will have three reasonable offers before any priority is removed.

How to bid and bidding methods

There are a number of ways in which bids can be placed.

What information you need to bid

- **your unique reference number**
- **your memorable date**

Bidding on the website

The website address to use when placing a bid is:

www.compasscbl.org.uk

Through the website you can find full details about the scheme. You can search for properties and view the details on the property adverts to help you decide which properties meet your needs. You can also place a bid, withdraw a bid, find out if you are eligible and what your current queue position is.

5 easy steps

- 1 Type www.compasscbl.org.uk into the address bar of your internet browser.
- 2 Click the **Login** option at the top of the home page then enter your Unique Reference Number and memorable date which can be found on your registration letter then the login button.
- 3 Click the **property search** option. Select any search criteria that you require e.g. you may wish to search for a particular size of property then click search.
- 4 A list of properties matching your search criteria will be displayed. If you are eligible for a property, the **apply** button will be displayed. Your current queue position will be shown, should you bid on this property, but this can change as other people bid. If you are not eligible then the reason you are not eligible will be displayed.
- 5 For a property that you are eligible for click the **apply** button. You will be shown the property details and asked to confirm your bid. When you confirm your bid you will be told that your bid has been successfully placed.

By Telephone

Contact details for all Compass partners are listed at the end of this guide but they will also help you to bid on properties advertised by other housing associations (Non-Compass partners).

By Completing a Bidding coupon

Available from your housing options centre or housing office.

Automatic bids

People assessed as vulnerable and in need of additional support may have bids placed automatically on their behalf. Automatic bids will be placed after the bidding cycle closes. **Please be aware that this may affect your queue position.**

Introduction of 'Fast Track' adverts

We have recently completed a review of the Compass Sub-Regional Common Allocation scheme with the aim to improve the way we advertise properties that are available on the web based system.

We are delighted to report that we received an overwhelming response from both our customers and internal and external partners, with the majority of

people being in favour of these amendments. Details of responses can be found on the website.

Following this positive feedback the following amendments have now been made;

Property Adverts

- Properties can now be advertised from any day of the week for a full week advertising cycle
- Properties can now be advertised for longer than a week, on a continuous cycle if there has been no “bids” (expressions of interest) until a bid has been received.
- After a week of advertising, the landlord has the facility to end and allocate the property if there is a customer interested for an immediate offer of accommodation, meeting the policy and property criteria.
- Allow customers to make unlimited bids for available properties to maximise their chance of qualifying for a property, removing the previous 3 bid restrictions.

Auto Bid Facility

In specific circumstances some available properties may be advertised on the system allowing for immediate allocation by triggering an auto bid facility. This means that anyone registered on the system requesting this area and property type will be put forward for the property within a priority order without having to make a bid themselves. However before we can implement this change we need to ensure that we have details of customer’s areas of choice to enable the auto bid function.

Note: The advertising cycle is closed on a Wednesday for traditional CBL adverts which do not fall into the ‘Fast Track’ criteria.

You can only bid for properties where you match what the advert asks for. For example, if the advert states that the property is suitable for a couple over the age of 60 years, only people that meet that description can bid for it. You will be told that you are not eligible to bid for the property if you do not meet the description on the advert.

Don’t worry about the word ‘bid’. It doesn’t mean you will have to part with any money. It just means you are interested in a particular property and would like to be considered for it.

Note: Bids are not sorted on a first come, first served basis. All bids are sorted in order of their priority bandings and dates after the bidding cycle closes. However, automatic bids are placed after the bidding cycle closes and may affect your queue position.

What do the symbols on property adverts mean?

The property adverts in the newsletter and on the website show a set of symbols, which describe some of the property features. We have listed the symbols below with an explanation of what they mean.



Lift - The property has a lift



No Pets – The landlord does not allow pets in the property



Parking



Wheelchair Access – The property is suitable for a person in a wheelchair



Garden



Adapted property – The property has been fitted with some special features which makes it suitable for a person with disabilities

Please contact your housing options centre or housing office for further information.

Step 3 – Shortlist and offer

The advertising cycle closes at midnight on a Tuesday.

All the bids received are sorted in order of their priority and a shortlist of eligible applicants is produced for each property advertised.

If more than one person has bid for a property, it will usually be offered to the person in the preferred band with the greatest level of need who has been waiting the longest period of time.

If you are successful in bidding for a property, your details will be checked before the offer is made to make sure the property meets your needs.

The property will not be offered if for example, you have rent arrears outstanding and no effort has been made to clear them.

Step 4 – Feedback

We publish information about properties that have been successfully let. We tell you the number of applicants that bid for the property, the band, band date (where applicable) and the registration date of the successful applicants.

This information will give you a better idea of how popular a particular property is and how long you would normally have to wait. You can then decide whether to look for other types of areas where you may not have to wait as long.

The landlord has the option to give you reduced preference and offer the property to the next person on the list if it is felt you would not make a suitable tenant because there is evidence of your poor behaviour.

If you are offered a property you will be invited to view it before deciding if it is suitable. Some of the partner organisations may arrange viewings with more than one person, but this depends on the circumstances.

If you decide to refuse the property it will be offered to the next person on the shortlist.

Contact us

You can find out more about how to join the Common Register and how to bid for properties by contacting your housing office. If you live outside of the Tees Valley you should contact the housing office in the area you want to live.

Beyond Housing

14 Ennis Square, Redcar, TS10 5JR
T: 0345 065 5656
E: enquiries@beyondhousing.co.uk
W: www.beyondhousing.co.uk

Thirteen

Rivers House, 63 North Ormesby Road,
Middlesbrough, TS4 2AF
T: 0300 111 1000
E: customerservices@thirteengroup.co.uk
W: www.erimushousing.org.uk

North Star Housing

Endeavour House, St Marks Court,
Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 6QN
T: 0300 011 0011
E: customer.services@northstarhg.co.uk
W: www.northstarhg.co.uk

Darlington Borough Council

Town Hall, Feethams, Darlington, DL1
5QT
T: 01325 405333
E: housing@darlington.gov.uk
W: www.darlington.gov.uk

Home Group

Halifax House, Falcon Court, Preston
Farm Business Park, Stockton-on-Tees,
TS18 3TS
T: 0345 1414663
W: www.homegroup.org.uk