

Homelessness

The Housing Options team provides information and advice about housing to everyone, including people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The team will always offer advice and assistance to help you stay in your home or to find another property.

If this is not possible, some people may be entitled to temporary accommodation leading to a permanent home if they have a 'priority need' under the homelessness legislation.

Homelessness

In some cases, if you are homeless or about to be homeless, we may have a duty to find you temporary accommodation (under the Housing Act 1996, Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). This guide gives you basic information about our homelessness policy, and what happens if we are able to give you help.

Am I eligible for help?

Some people are not eligible for our help because they do not usually live in the UK or are subject to some form of immigration control. You are usually eligible if you satisfy the immigration laws. This is a very complicated area and if you need further advice, please talk to the Housing Options Team.

Am I homeless?

We will consider you to be homeless if:

- You have nowhere to live.
- You have been living somewhere, but have no legal right to stay there and have been told to leave.
- You have somewhere to live, but cannot get into it.
- You have somewhere to live but another resident there has been, or is likely to be, violent towards you.
- Your home is a caravan or houseboat and you have nowhere to legally park it or moor it.
- You have somewhere to live but you cannot house the people who normally live with you.
- You have been made homeless as a result of an emergency, such as fire, flood or some other disaster.

Do I have a priority need?

You may be a priority homeless person or household if you are eligible and:

- You have dependent children living with you who are under 16, or under 19 if they are in full time education.
- You, or any member of your household is pregnant.
- You have been made homeless as a result of fire, flood or some other disaster.
- We think you may be 'vulnerable' because of old age, mental or physical illness, disability, because of fleeing violence, because you have been in the armed forces, serving a prison sentence or have a background of being 'in care', or other special reasons.

- You are 16 or 17 years old.

Local connection?

We have to find out if you have a local connection with North Hertfordshire, which could be if:

- You have lived in this council area for 6 out of the last 12 months.
- You have lived in this council area for 3 out of the last 5 years.
- You have permanent employment in this council area.
- You have a close relative who has lived in this council area for the last 5 years (for example, mother, father, sister, brother, adult son or daughter).

If you do not have a local connection with North Hertfordshire council area, we will work with other local authorities in England, Scotland or Wales to decide if you have a local connection with them. We have to make sure that the other council has agreed to help you before sending you there (we cannot assist with travel costs). Whilst arrangements are being made, we will offer you a temporary home if needed. If you have no connection with any area, we may still have a duty to find a home for you, or help you find your own home.

Am I intentionally homeless?

We may consider you to be intentionally homeless if you have nowhere to live because of something you have deliberately done or not done. As this is a complicated area, each application is treated on an individual basis. The Homelessness Officer who is dealing with your application will tell you if this applies to your situation and what action you can take next.

Where can I get help?

Contact the Housing Options Team on 01462 474000

Appointments

You do not need to make an appointment in an emergency as we can usually give you an appointment that day. However, it is better to ring first so we can make sure an officer is available to see you.

Housing advice is normally available over the phone, but you can also ask for an appointment to discuss your case in further detail.

Visits outside the office

If you cannot come to see us because you are unwell, in hospital or have mobility problems, we may be able to come to where you are staying or another location such as a hospital or community centre.

Outside office hours

In an emergency, if you think you are a priority need and homeless you can contact us on 01462 420600. The out of hours service should only be used in a real emergency that cannot wait until the office re-opens.

What will happen next?

You will be interviewed by a Homelessness Officer who will ask you some questions to find out about your situation. This is so we can decide what help we may be able to offer you and to make sure people do not abuse the service by making false claims.

The same Officer will usually deal with your case until a decision has been made, and will be able to answer any questions you may have.

If they are not available and you have an urgent issue, then someone else will try to help you.

All interviews take place in private and any information you give to the Officer is treated as confidential. They will not pass on any information to anyone without your permission.

Documents to support your case

The following list is for guidance only:

Proof of homelessness - for example:

- A Notice letter from your landlord
- A letter from a friend or relative asking you to leave
- A Court Order or Bailiff's Warrant

Proof of identification for everyone in your household (any of the following):

- Birth Certificate
- Passport
- Proof of Age ID Card
- Employment identification (including HM Forces identification)
- EU Identification card
- Approved Immigration Status document
- Certificate of Adoption
- Photocard driving licence

Proof of residence

You will need at least three documents two recent items and one six months old, the three documents must be from different sources

- Household bills
- Tenancy Agreement
- DSS Benefit Book
- Driving Licence
- Bank Statement

Priority Need

- Child benefit award letter showing the names of the children claimed for.
- Proof of pregnancy
- a completed medical assessment form, support letters, copies of prescriptions plus proof of your income i.e. benefit award letters.

Important

We will accept photocopies but please bring the original documents in which can be copied at the council offices.

If you are on the Housing Register and have already brought in documents you will not need to bring them again, but we may ask to see other documents.

If you are asked to bring in documents, it is important that you do so as soon as possible or there will be a delay in making a decision on your case.

How do you make your decision?

The Officer will look at the statement you have made on the application form and case notes taken together with the documents you have given us, and information we have gathered as a result of our enquiries. They will then make a final decision based on these facts.

What happens if my application is accepted?

If we have a duty to help you under the law, one of the following can happen:

- We will help you find your own home in the private sector
- You will remain in the temporary accommodation until permanently housed or
- We will refer your case to another council for help

The Officer working on your case will give you details about the type of help you will be offered. We can help you find a home in the private sector, possibly help with a deposit and if you are on low income, you may get help with the rent via the housing benefit system.

What happens if I refuse the help offered?

If you refuse the offer of a temporary home we may no longer have a duty to help you. If you are thinking of refusing an offer, please discuss the situation with the Officer working on your case urgently.

Appeals

If you are unhappy with our final decision, you can appeal against it, in writing, within 21 days of the original decision.

The review process is to enable the Council to obtain any new information which you may have in relation to your homelessness or to re-examine the existing information to see if the correct decision was made.

You will be notified of the outcome of the review within 56 days. We may write to you and ask you for more information or to ask you to explain more about the information you have provided. It is important that you answer any request for information from the Council as soon as you can. If we do not get a response from you and we can't obtain the information from other sources the review decision will be made on the information the Council has available. So if you know something that you think may help your review then let us know as soon as possible.