

Homelessness

The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force on 3 April 2018 and means that the Council has changed the way it helps people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The main focus is to prevent homelessness by placing greater emphasis on working together with you to resolve your housing problem.

It is important that you seek help from the Council as soon as you know you may have a housing problem. The sooner you do this the better chance we have of helping you. You will be considered threatened with homelessness if you have to leave your accommodation anytime within 56 days.

Assessments and Personalised Housing Plans

If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days we will organise a Housing Options interview for you. In this interview, if you are an eligible applicant, we will carry out an assessment to identify;

- the circumstances that caused you to become homeless or threatened with homelessness
- what your housing needs are and what accommodation would be suitable, and
- whether you need support to remain in or find alternative accommodation.

Following this assessment, we will work with you to develop and agree a Personalised Housing Plan (PHP).

The assessment and personalised housing plan will take about 1.30 hours. It is an opportunity for you to explain to us your housing situation so that we can assess how we can help you to resolve your housing problem.

The Personalised Housing Plan will set out the actions (or 'reasonable steps') to be taken by us and you so you can remain in your current accommodation or find alternative accommodation.

This means that it isn't only the Council that is responsible for sorting out your housing problem or finding you accommodation - you will have a much greater role to play.

You will be given a written copy of the Personalised Housing Plan. This plan will be reviewed regularly and if necessary the plan and actions will change. Your agreement will be sought for these changes.

It is important that you follow the actions in the plan as we can take certain actions that will affect your future housing if you do not cooperate.

Council will be working with you to help resolve your housing problem and we will explore the options that are appropriate to you and your household. However due to the severe shortage of social housing you will most likely be offered help to find private rented accommodation rather than be offered social housing. Please do not expect that a homeless application will lead to an offer of temporary or social housing. The council is able to end its homeless duty to you with an offer of private rented accommodation and if you refuse or do not cooperate with looking for private rented accommodation the help the council will offer can be limited.

Prevention duty

If you are an eligible applicant who is threatened with homelessness, (regardless of priority need, intentionality and local connection), we will owe you a prevention duty, in which case we must take 'reasonable steps' or actions to help you avoid losing your existing accommodation or becoming homeless. This means either trying to help you stay in your current accommodation or trying to help you to find a new place to live before you actually become homeless.

Helping you to try to find accommodation does not necessary mean social housing, it is most likely to be accommodation in the private rented sector or, if appropriate, hostels or supported accommodation.

The prevention duty stage continues for 56 days unless it is ended before because accommodation has been found, or by you becoming homeless.

Relief duty

If you are already homeless, or become homeless despite any actions taken during the prevention duty stage, the reasonable steps will then be focused on trying to help you to find alternative accommodation. This is known as the “relief duty” and lasts for 56 days unless ended in another way.

At this stage if we have reason to believe you are an eligible applicant who is homeless and has a priority need we may have a duty to provide you with interim accommodation.

If you do not have a local connection with us, and it’s safe to do so, we will now refer you to a Council where you do have a connection.

During both stages we will give you decision or notification letters explaining what is happening.

Homeless enquires and main duty

We are also required to carry out enquiries and assess what duty, if any, may be owed to you under the homelessness legislation. There are five main areas that we need to assess:

- **Homelessness** - if you do not have a home in the UK or abroad where you have a legal right to live or your current home is not reasonable for you to live in.
- **Eligibility** - this depends on the permission you have to be in the UK - Some people from abroad may not be entitled to housing.
- **Priority need** - e.g. if you are pregnant or have dependent children, or you are considered to be significantly vulnerable due to old age, illness or disability.
- **Intentional homelessness** - if we believe that you have deliberately done (or failed to do) something which has caused you to be homeless, you may not be entitled to housing.
- **Local connection** - e.g. if you have lived in the borough for 6 months out of the last 12 months, or 3 years out of the last 5 years, you have permanent employment in the borough, or you have immediate family who have lived in the borough for the last 5 years.

You will be given a written decision of this assessment. You can request reviews on certain decisions we make if you do not agree with them. Please see the Review and Appeals factsheet.

If you are considered ineligible for assistance you will not be provided with accommodation but you will be given general advice and information.

If you are considered to be homeless, but not in priority need, you will not be provided with accommodation but you will be given advice and assistance on alternative housing options.

If you are considered to be priority need but intentionally homeless, you will be given advice and assistance on alternative housing. If the Council has provided interim accommodation the Council will ensure that this accommodation is available for a reasonable time (usually 28 days) to allow you to find your own accommodation. If you have dependent children the Council will ask you if you would like us to refer you to Social Services for help and assistance.

If you are accepted for a main duty we must ensure that suitable temporary accommodation is available for you and your household until this duty is brought to an end, usually by the offer of type of settled accommodation.

However, this doesn’t mean we have a duty to offer homeless people a council or housing association home. If we have a duty to provide you with settled housing this will most likely be an offer of private rented accommodation.

The duty can also be brought to an end for other reasons, such as you turning down a suitable offer of temporary or settled accommodation or because they are no longer eligible for assistance.

16-17 year olds

If you are aged 16-17 and are homeless or threatened with homeless, contact Surrey County Council on 0300 470 9100 or csmash@surreycc.gov.uk.

Out of Hours service

If you have a homeless emergency in the evening or at the weekend, phone 01372 732000. An out of hours duty officer will speak to you.