

A Shelter guide

Updated July 2013

Homeless? Read this

The rules on how and when the council has to help you

Shelter

Homeless? Read this

You can ask your local council's housing department for help if you have nowhere to stay or are likely to lose your home in the next 28 days. The council is legally required to give you advice and help you to find a place to live. Depending on your situation, you might also be entitled to accommodation.

Even if the council has already told you that it doesn't have to help you, or that it can't provide you with a home, you can use this guide to check whether the reasons it has given you are legally correct. If they're not, you may be able to take action.

This guide only offers an introduction to the law in England. If you need more detailed information, you should get advice from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau, or call Shelter's free housing advice helpline **0808 800 4444** (open 8am to 8pm Mon to Fri and 8am to 5pm on weekends. Calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks).

Shelter's free online housing information

[shelter.org.uk/advice](https://www.shelter.org.uk/advice)

If you live in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland the law may be different and you should contact Shelter Cymru, Shelter Scotland or the Housing Rights Service (see page 28).

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Where can I get help?

Most people who don't have anywhere to live, or who are about to lose their home, can get help from their local council. Some people are also entitled to accommodation. If you are homeless, or likely to become homeless within the next 28 days, contact your local council and tell them that you want to make a homelessness application. If you are about to become homeless, try to do this before leaving your current home. (See page 29 for an example of a Homelessness application letter that you can use.)

If there is time, it may help if you go to a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau before you apply (see pages 27–28). An adviser can give you an idea of what you might be entitled to. Alternatively, s/he may be able to help you keep your current home, even if you are behind with your rent or mortgage, or if you've been told you have to leave.

If the council has already told you it doesn't have to help, read the relevant sections of this guide, or visit shelter.org.uk/advice to check whether the reasons the council has given are legally correct. If they're not, you may be able to take action (see page 24).

If you are certain that you are not entitled to help from the council, or you want information on your housing options, see Shelter's free guide *Finding a place to live*.

If you need to speak to an adviser immediately, call Shelter's free housing advice helpline on **0808 800 4444**.

What will happen if I apply as homeless?

The flowchart on page 19 gives an overview of the rules on how the council has to help. If you can show you are within the legal definitions of 'homeless' (see page 7), 'eligible for assistance' (see page 8) and 'priority need' (see page 10), the council must:

- make sure you have somewhere to stay while it looks into your situation
- find somewhere for you to live longer term, unless it decides you made yourself homeless intentionally (see page 15).

If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance but not in priority need and not intentionally homeless, the council must assess your housing needs before giving you advice and assistance to help you find somewhere to live.

Applying as homeless

To apply as homeless, go to your local council's homeless persons section or housing options team, which is usually part of the housing department. It may help to take a friend or adviser with you.

It is very important to make it clear that you are homeless or soon will be. One way to do this is to fill in the letter on page 29 and give it to the council. Date the letter and keep a copy. Make a note of the name of the person you speak to at the council because you may need to speak to them again. You should also take:

- ID (eg passport, birth certificate)
- proof of your income (eg wage slips, child benefit book)
- your tenancy agreement (if you have one)
- if you are being evicted, any letters you have received from your landlord/lender, or the court.

If the council office is closed there should be an emergency service you can call. Ring the town hall number or ask at a police station. If you need help with this, contact a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau (see pages 27–28).

Applying as a homeless person is not the same as being on the waiting list for permanent council housing or another council housing scheme. You may want to apply to join these waiting lists as well, so you have a better chance of getting permanent accommodation. Ask the council about the waiting list and any other schemes in the area. See Shelter's free guide *Council tenancies* for more information.

Housing options

Many councils have housing option or homelessness prevention schemes. The council can help you to find alternative accommodation, usually a private tenancy, or help you keep your current home, but it must not refuse to accept an application from you if you are homeless or threatened with becoming homeless. If it does refuse, get advice from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau (see pages 27–28).

Who can apply?

If you are homeless or likely to become homeless during the next four weeks, the council must allow you to apply. But it only has to help you if you are 'eligible for assistance'. A number of people from abroad are not eligible for assistance – for more information see page 8.

What must the council do?

The council has a legal responsibility to help people who are, or soon will be, homeless. How much help it has to give you depends on your situation. The flowchart on page 19 gives an overview of the rules.

While it is looking into your situation, the council may have to provide you with somewhere to live. Sometimes it will make a decision on the same day as you apply.

First, the council will check three things:

- that you are, or soon will be, homeless (see page 7)
- that you are 'eligible for assistance' (see page 8)
- that you are in one of the 'priority need' groups (see page 10).

The council will then check:

- whether you are intentionally homeless (see page 15)
- if you have a local connection in the area (see page 17).

These terms have special legal meanings. The council will ask for details about your situation so take any important papers with you, such as a court eviction order, notice from your landlord or your rent

book. The council may ask to see your passport to check whether you are eligible for assistance.

If the council thinks you are homeless and eligible for assistance and in priority need, you must be given temporary accommodation while the council looks into your situation. However, this does not necessarily mean that the council will have to find you long-term accommodation.

Make sure the details you give to the council are correct. If you aren't sure, say so. Giving false information could be a criminal offence.

Am I legally homeless?

The legal definition of 'homelessness' covers more than being out on the streets. You should be considered homeless if:

- you have nowhere to live in the UK or anywhere else in the world
- you can't stay in your home because of violence or threats of violence
- you have nowhere you can live together with your family or anyone else who lives or could reasonably be expected to live with you, for example your children, partner or carer
- you don't have permission to stay where you are, for example if you're a squatter
- you've been locked out of your home and are not allowed back
- your home is a boat, mobile home or caravan and there is nowhere you are allowed to put it
- you have somewhere to live but it isn't reasonable for you to stay there. This may be due to serious overcrowding, very bad conditions affecting your health, or because you cannot afford your housing costs.

You can also apply to the council **if you are likely to become homeless within 28 days**. This includes circumstances where:

- you've been taken to court by your landlord and the court has said you must leave within 28 days

- you've been living with friends or relatives and they've asked you to leave within 28 days.

If you have more than four weeks before you have to leave where you are living, you should still contact the council who may be able to help you find somewhere else to live, or to stay in your home longer. You can also go to an advice service – if you can't find one in your area, search Shelter's 'Advice services directory' at shelter.org.uk/advice or call our free housing advice helpline on **0808 800 4444**.

If you are leaving care, hospital, or prison, you can ask your personal adviser, social worker or probation officer to help you apply to the council. You may be in 'priority need' (see page 10).

Am I eligible for assistance?

Most people are eligible for assistance. However, some people from abroad are **not** eligible. You are probably not eligible for assistance if:

- you are an asylum seeker. Most asylum seekers get temporary housing arranged by the UK Border Agency, a part of the Home Office (see page 28 and Shelter's free guide *Asylum seekers and refugees* for more information)
- you are from abroad and have limited rights to remain in the UK, or you have stayed longer than the time you were allowed
- you are from abroad and you aren't entitled to claim 'public funds'
- you are in the UK illegally (the council can investigate your immigration status and inform the Home Office if it thinks you came to the UK illegally).

If you are unsure of your immigration status, you may need to get help from an immigration adviser (see page 28).

Habitually resident

If you are not habitually resident in the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or the Irish Republic you will not be eligible for assistance.

If you have come to, or recently returned to the UK after living abroad, even if you are a British citizen, the council will check whether you are habitually resident. The check looks into where you normally live.

The length of time you have to have been living in the UK to be habitually resident will depend on your individual circumstances. If you had been habitually resident before, moved abroad and then returned to the UK, you should be habitually resident straight away.

If you are an EU or EEA worker or self-employed person you are automatically treated as habitually resident.

Help if you are not eligible

If you are not eligible for assistance, the council doesn't have a duty to you under homelessness law. But you may be entitled to help from social services. The homeless persons section of the council should assist you to get help from social services if they think you will qualify. The law in this area is complicated so get advice as soon as you can from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau (see pages 27–28).

European nationals

You will be eligible for assistance if you are from an European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA) country and you are working or self-employed in the UK. Your family members may also be eligible for assistance. If you are a worker from Croatia, Bulgaria or Romania you may also have to have obtained a **worker authorisation certificate** to be eligible. (If you are from Bulgaria or Romania, restrictions are due to end on 31 December 2013.) See the table on page 10 for information on which countries are EU and EEA countries.

European Union countries

Austria	Italy
Belgium	Latvia
Bulgaria (joined in January 2007)	Lithuania
Croatia (joined in July 2013)	Luxembourg
Cyprus	Malta
Czech Republic	Netherlands
Denmark	Poland
Estonia	Portugal
Finland	Romania (joined in January 2007)
France	Slovenia
Germany	Slovakia
Greece	Spain
Hungary	Sweden
Ireland	the UK

European Economic Area countries

The EU countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

Am I in priority need?

The rules below about priority need applies to **England**. If you live in Wales, contact Shelter Cymru or visit sheltercymru.org.uk (see page 27). In England, you are in priority need if you:

- or someone you live with, is pregnant
- are responsible for dependent children
- are homeless as a result of flood, fire or other disaster
- are a 'vulnerable' person (see below)

- are aged 16 or 17, unless social services has a responsibility for you (see page 12)
- are aged 18–20 and were ‘looked after’ by social services (even for one day) when you were aged 16 or 17 (unless you are a student in full-time higher or further education whose accommodation is not available during the holidays, in which case social services has to help you until you are 24).

Vulnerable people

When deciding whether you are in priority need because you are vulnerable, the council should look at your situation as a whole and decide whether your circumstances mean that you are more likely to suffer injury or harm if you had to sleep on the streets than other people would in the same situation.

For example, the council may decide you, or someone you live with, is vulnerable because:

- of old age
- you have a physical or mental illness or disability
- you are over 20 and are vulnerable because you were in care
- you were in the armed forces or prison, custody or detention in the past
- you can no longer stay in your home because someone has been violent or abusive towards you or has threatened you with violence. This includes anyone facing harassment due to her/his gender, ethnic origin or religion.

It may help if a doctor, social worker, health visitor or probation officer supports your application. Take any medical evidence you have with you to the council.

Children

If your relationship has broken down and your children live with you, the council shouldn’t insist upon you having a court order to prove the

children's residence. If it does, get advice from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau.

You may still be in priority need if:

- you share looking after your children with your ex-spouse or partner
- your children can't live with you but would do if it were not for your housing problem
- your children are in care because of your housing problems.

16- and 17-year-olds

You are in priority need if you are aged 16 or 17 unless social services is responsible for you (see below).

If you are homeless because you left home, the council may check whether there is a possibility of reconciliation with your family. But it cannot make you return to a family home, particularly if it is not safe for you to do so.

Social services will be responsible for you if:

- you are a 'relevant child'. This means that at some time from the age of 14 you were 'looked after' by social services for at least 13 weeks and you have been looked after at some time while you were 16 or 17
- social services says you are a 'child in need' to whom it has to provide accommodation.

Most homeless 16- and 17-year-olds will be a child in need, and this means that social services will usually have the duty to accommodate you – and to provide you with any other support you need.

However, if you are homeless today you should get immediate help with temporary accommodation from the council's homeless persons section. It should then make sure you get further help from social services.

Care leavers aged 18 to 20

The housing department has a responsibility towards young people aged between 18 and 20, if after the age of 16, they have:

- lived in a hostel or voluntary housing scheme
- been in residential care
- been in foster care
- been housed by social services.

Care leavers aged over 20 may be vulnerable (for more information, see page 11).

Will I get temporary accommodation?

If the council believes you are homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need, it must make sure that you have somewhere to live while it makes its inquiries into your application. This may mean that it will arrange somewhere for you – a bed and breakfast hotel, hostel, flat or house. If you have children or are pregnant, you can only be placed in a bed and breakfast if it's an emergency and nothing else is available. Even then, the council can only house you there for a maximum of six weeks.

What if the accommodation is unsuitable?

If what you are offered is unsuitable you should tell the council why. Don't refuse the offer without speaking to an independent adviser first, as the council may not offer you anywhere else. You can move into the property and still ask the council to review its offer, it may then move you elsewhere. If the council doesn't change its decision, get advice to check whether there is anything you can do to get more suitable accommodation.

The council may agree to you staying with friends or relatives, but you should check with a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau how this will affect your rights before you decide to do so (see pages 27–28).

The council also has a duty to look after your possessions but can make a reasonable charge for this.

When the council finishes its inquiries, it must write to tell you what its decision is and give reasons if it decides not to provide you with longer-term accommodation.

Paying for short-term accommodation

You may have to pay towards the cost of the short-term accommodation you have been given. The charges must be reasonable. If you feel they are not, contact a Shelter advice service or citizens advice (see pages 27–28). If you are on benefits or a low income, you should be entitled to get housing benefit to help pay the rent (for more information about housing benefit see Shelter’s free guide *Housing benefit*).

The council won’t help

The council is legally required to consider all applications properly. Always make a note of the name of the person you speak to. If you’re not happy with the way you are being treated, ask to speak to a more senior person.

Most people have a legal right to be given advice and help, even if they’re not entitled to housing. The council should not turn you away without considering your application. If it decides it cannot help you or asks another council to help you instead, the council must tell you why in writing.

Once you have received a written decision letter, get advice if you think it’s wrong or unfair. Doing this can make a big difference. An adviser can check whether the council’s decision has been made correctly. If it hasn’t, s/he may be able to help you request a review or appeal to the county court (see page 24).

You may have rights that are protected by law, and an adviser may be able to help you get what you’re entitled to. Contact a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau or law centre (see pages 27–28), or visit **shelter.org.uk/advice**; or call Shelter’s free housing advice helpline on **0808 800 4444**;

If the council says you are intentionally homeless, see page 15.

If it says another council has to help you because you have no 'local connection', see page 17.

I'm not in priority need

Even if you aren't in 'priority need' (see page 10), the council must look at your housing situation. It must then advise and help you find somewhere else to live or help you to keep your home. It should give you information about accommodation that suits you and should tell you about places that you could try, for example housing associations, hostels or private landlords. The council can offer you accommodation if there is any available, but this is unlikely to happen in areas, like London, where there is not enough housing.

You should also be allowed to apply to go on the waiting list for permanent council housing, or other schemes the council has. If you are told you can't do this, ask the council to put it in writing and then get advice. For information on your housing options see Shelter's free guide *Finding a place to live*.

Am I intentionally homeless?

The council will look into why you became homeless. If it finds that becoming homeless was your fault, it can decide you made yourself intentionally homeless. It may decide this if it believes that:

- you chose to leave a home you could have stayed in
- you did not pay the rent or mortgage when you could have afforded to
- you arranged to be made homeless to take advantage of the system.

The council should **not** say you are intentionally homeless if:

- you could not afford to live in your home unless you went without food or heating
- you left home because of violence or fear of violence
- your home went with your job and you lost your job through no fault of your own

- you lost your home because of rent or mortgage arrears, which built up because of circumstances beyond your control, for example job loss, wage cut or problems with benefits
- you sold your home because you got into mortgage arrears through financial difficulties and you were going to lose your home if you didn't sell
- someone else's actions made you lose your home and you didn't know what they were doing, or didn't agree with what they were doing but couldn't stop them
- you lost your home because you didn't know your rights, for example you didn't know that your landlord needed a court order to get you out, or that you could get housing benefit to help pay your rent
- it wasn't reasonable for you to remain in your home because it was seriously affecting your health.

If the council says you are intentionally homeless and you are in priority need, it must still house you temporarily.

If you have children, the housing department must, if you agree, refer you to social services for help. Social services can help you find somewhere to live. They may pay for your accommodation for a short time while you look for somewhere to live, and/or they may give you money to give to a landlord for a deposit on a property.

Sometimes social services will say that they can only house your children. If this happens, get advice from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau (see pages 27–28).

If you don't want the council's housing department to ask social services to help you or if you don't have any children, the housing department must give you some help finding somewhere else to live. It should give you accommodation for a long enough period for you to find somewhere, although depending on your circumstances this may only be 28 days. You should be able to put your name on the council waiting list for housing. The council may have other housing schemes you can apply for as well.

What is a local connection?

Most people will apply for help from the local council in the area they live if they become homeless. However, you can apply to any council you wish. It is unlawful for a council to turn you away or tell you to apply to another council because you do not have a local connection with their area.

If the council decides you are homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless, it can then check to see if you have a local connection in the area.

You have a local connection with an area if you (or someone in your household):

- have a job in the area
- live, or have lived, in the area for at least six months in the last year or three of the last five years
- have a close relative who has lived in the area at least five years – this is usually restricted to a parent, adult child, brother or sister you wish to live near to
- need to live in the area for a special reason, such as to receive specialist health care or because you had lived in the area for a long time in the past.

Time you spent in an institution such as a prison or hospital, will not usually count as a local connection. If you've been living in one of these places and the council says you don't have a local connection, get advice from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau (see pages 27–28).

If you claimed asylum and have now been granted leave to remain or refugee status, and you had accommodation provided by the UK Border Agency, you will have a local connection with the area in which that accommodation is situated. If you were housed in more than one area, you have a local connection with the most recent area.

I don't have a local connection

If the council decides that you are homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless but don't have a local connection with its area, it can ask another council to help you. But there are steps that must be taken when one council is going to ask another council to house you.

If the council says that you have a connection elsewhere and you don't want to move to that area or you don't agree with the decision, get advice from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau (see pages 27–28). You can't be sent there until the proper steps have been followed or before the other council has agreed to help you.

I have ties with more than one area

If you have a local connection with the council you applied to, it can't ask another council to house you because you have stronger ties with the other council's area. If you have no local connection with the council you first went to but have ties with more than one other council, you should be asked which of the areas you'd prefer to live in before one of those councils is asked to house you.

I've left because of violence

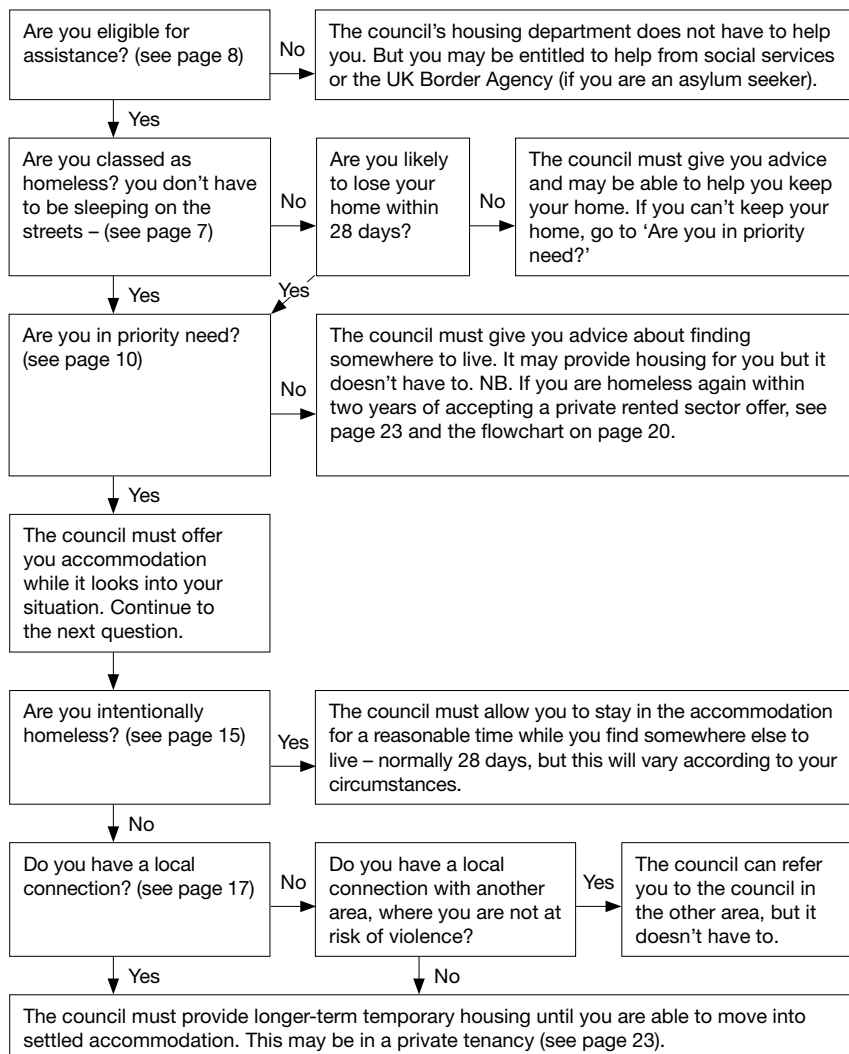
Even if you have no local connection with the council you applied to, it cannot send you back to an area where you would be at risk of violence or threats of violence.

I don't have a local connection anywhere

If you don't have a local connection anywhere, the council cannot refer you to another council for housing.

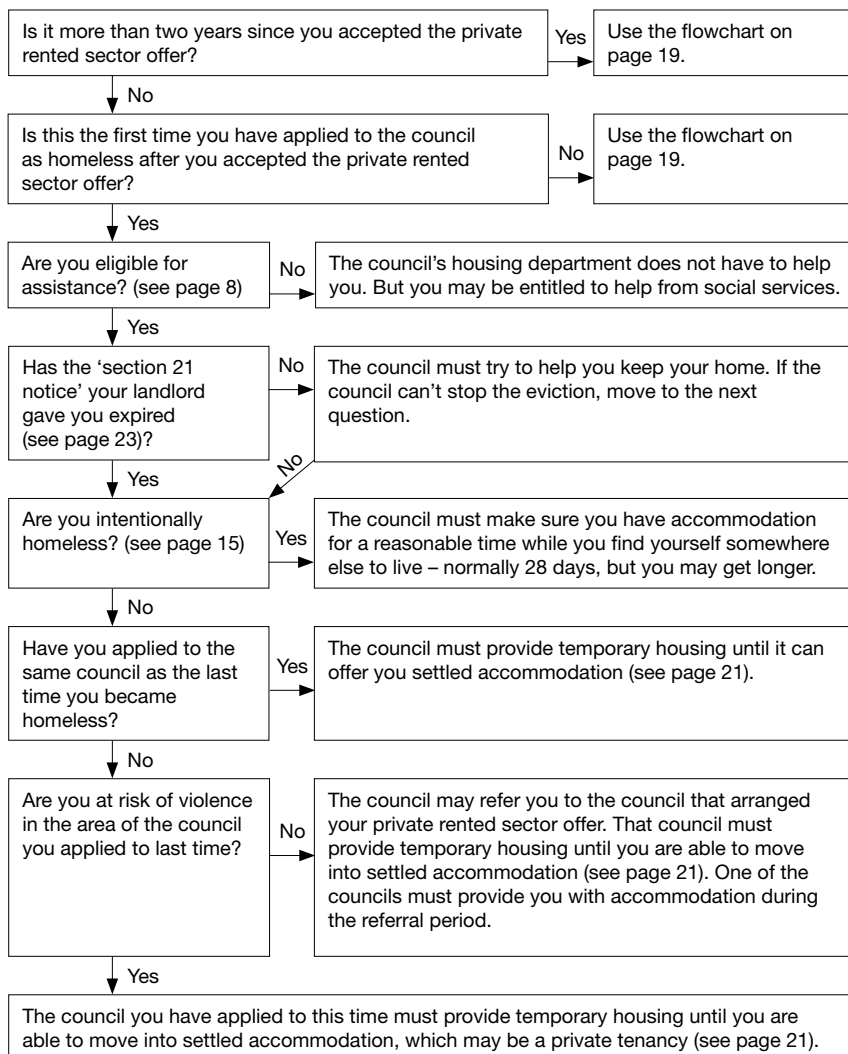
Flowchart: Steps to a homelessness decision

A council has to ask certain questions and follow certain steps to decide if and how to help you if you are homeless.



Flowchart: After a private rented sector offer

This set of rules apply if you are homeless again after accepting settled accommodation in a private rented tenancy (see page 23).



How must the council help?

If the council has decided you are homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need, not intentionally homeless and it is not referring you to another council, it has an ongoing duty to provide you with accommodation.

Depending on where you live, you may have to stay in temporary accommodation until the council finds you longer-term accommodation. If you have children or are pregnant, you can only be placed in a bed and breakfast if it's an emergency and nothing else is available. Even then, the council can only house you in a bed and breakfast for a **maximum of six weeks**.

If you are homeless because it is not reasonable for you to remain in your home, the council may be able to expect you to remain there until it finds suitable accommodation for you.

You may have to wait a long time before you are offered settled accommodation.

Settled accommodation

As long as there are no problems in the temporary accommodation, there is no limit to the amount of time you can stay. You can normally stay until the council offers you either:

- a council tenancy
- a 'final offer' of an assured tenancy with a private rented landlord or housing association
- a 'private rented sector offer' (see page 23).

The council must be satisfied that the accommodation you are offered is suitable for you and must also inform you that:

- you have the right to ask the council to review the offer if you think the accommodation is unsuitable
- if you refuse the offer, the council won't have to help you any more and you will have to move out of your temporary accommodation.

If you are not given this information when the offer is made, then it doesn't count as a final offer.

You may have a reason for thinking the offer is unsuitable, perhaps because of your health, the size of the accommodation, or the location. You are allowed to ask the council to review the offer and tell it why you think the accommodation is unsuitable. However, if the accommodation is found to be suitable and you did not accept the offer, then the council does not have to offer you another property. For this reason, **it is strongly advisable to accept the offer even if you don't think it's suitable.**

If you move out of your temporary accommodation before you have been offered another property, or are evicted from the temporary accommodation (perhaps because you did not pay the rent or you caused a nuisance), then the council may not have a duty to find you somewhere else. If you are in this situation, get advice from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau to check whether you are entitled to any more help (see pages 27–28).

Council tenancy

The council may offer you a council tenancy. You may be offered a choice of more than one council property but this is unusual. Many councils now run choice-based lettings schemes where you have to bid for vacant properties. For more information see Shelter's free guide *Council tenancies*.

A council tenancy may be an introductory tenancy (a type of trial tenancy) for the first 12 months. After that, the tenancy will automatically become a secure or flexible tenancy, although the trial period can be extended if the council is worried about your behaviour. Secure and flexible tenants have very strong rights.

Assured tenancies

You may be offered a tenancy from a housing association or an assured tenancy from a private landlord. Or you may be able to bid for a housing association tenancy through the council's choice-based lettings schemes. Assured tenants have strong rights. If you accept

an offer of an assured tenancy, the council will not have a responsibility to continue to provide temporary accommodation.

Private rented sector offer

If you applied for help because you were homeless **on or after** 9 November 2012 the council may offer you a 'private rented sector offer' as settled accommodation. This is an assured shorthold tenancy with a private landlord, that has a minimum fixed-term of 12 months.

If you applied to the council because you were homeless **before** 9 November 2012, the council can offer you an assured shorthold tenancy with a private landlord as settled accommodation, but you have the choice about whether you accept such an offer. If you do not, the council may offer you the same accommodation as temporary accommodation instead. It will then have to offer you settled accommodation at a later date.

Homeless again after a private rented sector offer?

If you are an assured shorthold tenant you have fewer rights than assured and secure tenants. Landlords can evict you quite easily by using a **section 21 notice** to end your tenancy. For more information see Shelter's free guide *Private tenancies*.

Because of this, special rules apply if you become homeless again within two years. The two-year period runs from the time you accepted the private rented sector offer (not the date your tenancy started or the date you moved in). You are treated as homeless from the date a section 21 notice expires. If you apply before the section 21 notice expires the council must try to help you keep your home.

The flowchart on page 19 gives an overview how the council has to help if you reapply as homeless.

For your new application, if the council believes that you are homeless, eligible for assistance (see page 8) and not intentionally homeless (see page 15), it must make sure you have somewhere to live while it makes inquiries into your new application. It does not matter if you are still in priority need or not (see page 10).

You can apply to any council you wish. If you apply to another council (not to the council that made you the private rented sector offer), and it decides you are homeless, eligible for assistance and not intentionally homeless, it can refer you back to the original council, which then becomes responsible once more for finding you further accommodation. However, another council cannot refer you back if you, or someone in your household, would be at risk of violence in the original council's area.

If you are made homeless again after a second private rented sector offer, the normal rules will apply if you again ask for help from a council (see page 5).

The rules about reapplying after a private rented sector offer do not apply if you are a 'restricted case' applicant. A 'restricted case' means you are only in priority need (see page 10) through someone in your household who is not eligible for assistance (see page 8), for example, you are British national but your child is a South Korean national.

I disagree with the council's decision

If the council says it doesn't have to help, read the relevant sections of this guide to check if the reasons it has given are legally correct. If they're not, you may be able to take action. Specialist help from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau will increase your chances of getting the decision changed (see page 27–28).

Reviews

If the council has made a decision you disagree with or you think is wrong, you can ask it to review it. You must make this request within 21 days from when you are told about the decision. You can only make a request after 21 days if you have a good reason for not doing so sooner (for example a serious illness). If you are seeking a review of the suitability of accommodation you have been offered see pages 21–22 for further advice.

Appeals

If you disagree with the council's review decision, you may be able to appeal to the county court. You must do this within 21 days of when you are told the outcome of the review. You can also appeal to the county court if the council doesn't make a decision within eight weeks.

Accommodation

The council does not have to provide you with accommodation while you are waiting for the outcome of the review or the appeal. If you ask for accommodation and the council refuses, you should get advice from a Shelter advice service or citizens advice bureau, or see a solicitor immediately (see pages 27–28).

Change of circumstances

If your circumstances change after you get a negative decision, you can apply as homeless all over again. The council must go through the same checks as before. However, if there hasn't been any real change, the council does not have to accept your application.

Where to get further advice

This guide is only an introduction to the law in England. If your situation isn't covered or fully explained, you can contact an adviser to discuss your situation.

An adviser may be able to help by:

- explaining the rights you have if you apply as homeless
- helping you challenge a decision you are unhappy with
- explaining complicated legal matters.

You can get advice from a Shelter advice service, or citizens advice bureau, or by contacting Shelter's free housing advice helpline on **0808 800 4444**, or by visiting **[shelter.org.uk/advice](https://www.shelter.org.uk/advice)**

Help from a solicitor

If you decide to see a solicitor, you may be entitled to public funding, often referred to as legal help and legal aid. Not all problems qualify for legal help, but if your issue does, you will qualify for legal help if you are on certain benefits or you have a low income. There is a 'means test'. To qualify for legal aid you must also have a good chance of success in court. Your solicitor will be able to advise you about this. To check if you are eligible visit **www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid**

Under legal aid, the solicitor can represent you in court proceedings and her/his fees are paid by the Government. If your income is above a certain level you may have to pay a contribution.

Not all solicitors do legal aid work. You can get details of those who do from Civil Legal Advice (see page 28). If you do not qualify for legal aid, a solicitor may be willing to do a first interview with you for a fixed fee, but following that, the fees can get expensive.

Contact Shelter

You can call our free housing advice helpline. Calls to Shelter and Shelter Scotland are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks. We can provide minicom or interpreting services.

The cost of calling Shelter Cymru will depend on your landline and mobile provider and your contract with them.

Shelter

 **0808 800 4444**

Mondays–Fridays: 8am–8pm
Weekends: 8am–5pm

Shelter Cymru

 **0845 075 5005**

Mondays–Fridays: 9am–5pm

Shelter Scotland

 **0808 800 4444**

Mondays–Fridays: 9am–5pm

For online information about your housing rights and details of local advice services, visit:

- shelter.org.uk/advice
- sheltercymru.org.uk
- shelterscotland.org

Useful organisations

Advice UK

☎ 0300 777 0107
www.adviceuk.org.uk

Citizens Advice

☎ 08454 04 05 06
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Civil Legal Advice

☎ 0845 345 4345
<https://claonlineadvice.justice.gov.uk>

Department for Work and Pensions

www.dwp.gov.uk

Equality Advisory Support Service

☎ 0808 800 0082
www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Gov.uk (the Government's public services website)

www.gov.uk
Find a legal adviser:
www.gov.uk/find-a-legal-adviser
Eligibility for legal aid:
www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid

Housing Rights Service (NI)

☎ 028 9024 5640
www.housingadviceni.org

Immigration Advisory Service

www.iasuk.org

Jobcentre Plus

To make a claim for benefits:
☎ 0800 055 6688
www.gov.uk/browse/benefits

To apply for a national insurance number:

☎ 0300 200 3505
www.gov.uk/national-insurance

Law Centres Network

info@lawcentres.org.uk
www.lawcentres.org.uk

Law Society

www.lawsociety.org.uk/find-a-solicitor

Migrant Helpline

☎ 01304 203 977
www.migranthehelp.org

National Debtline

☎ 0808 808 4000
www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

National Domestic Violence Helpline

☎ 0808 2000 247
www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Refugee Council

☎ 020 7346 6700
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

The Money Advice Service

☎ 0300 500 5000
www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk

UK Border Agency (UKBA)

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum

Homeless application letter

To:

*Homelessness/Housing Options
Team*

From:

My address:

Phone:

Email:

Date:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I wish to apply as homeless under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. I have provided some basic details below, but I would like an urgent appointment to see a homelessness officer.

I will be homeless/became homeless on:

Insert date

I will be homeless because:

Your reasons

The following people live with me (or would do so if I had a home for us all):

List people you want included in your application

Yours faithfully,

Signature:

Send or take this letter to the homeless persons or housing options team of your local council. Contact details can be found on the council's website. Visit www.gov.uk to find local council homeless or housing options teams.

We help over a million people a year struggling with bad housing or homelessness – and we campaign to prevent it in the first place.

We're here so no-one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at **shelter.org.uk**

Until there's a home for everyone

88 Old Street
London
EC1V 9HU
Tel: 0300 330 1234
shelter.org.uk

Registered charity in England and Wales (263710)
and in Scotland (SC002327). SH033
Last update: July 2013

The logo for Shelter, featuring the word "Shelter" in a red, sans-serif font.