If you are homeless, you can apply for help to the council. How much help you will get depends on your circumstances. If you don’t meet immigration and residence conditions, the council only has to provide general advice and information.

**How to apply**
It’s usually best to contact the council by phone first. They may make you an appointment or arrange a home visit. But go to the council office in person if you have nowhere to stay tonight. You don’t need an appointment. Get there as early as you can.

You can apply to any council. Any help you are offered will usually be in an area where you live or have a connection, unless you will be at risk of violence there.

If the council office is closed there should be an emergency number to ring. See the factsheet Out-of-hours emergencies.

**When you can apply**
You can make an application if you:

- are homeless
- will be homeless within eight weeks
- have received a ‘section 21 notice’ asking you to leave your home within eight weeks.

Get advice if the council turns you away before giving you the chance to explain your situation fully.

**Who can be treated as homeless**
Legally, you will be homeless if you are:

- about to be evicted
- at risk of violence in your home
- in ‘crisis accommodation’ such as a nightshelter or women’s refuge
- living somewhere where you have no legal right to stay (eg a squat)
- forced to live apart from your family
- unable to park your mobile home or moor your houseboat
- sleeping rough.

You may be legally homeless if you are sofa-surfing, living in very poor or overcrowded conditions or cannot afford your accommodation. In these circumstances, it’s not enough for it to be difficult for you – the council will want to check that it is unreasonable for you to stay.

**Documents to take with you**
It will help if you take proof of your and your family’s identity and situation, such as:

- birth certificate(s) or passport(s)
- proof of pregnancy
- tenancy agreement
- court possession papers
- a letter or notice from anyone who has asked you to move out (eg your parents or landlord)
- letters from a doctor about your health
- proof of income (including benefits).

**What the council must do**
The council must assess your housing and support needs after it gets your application. It must then draw up a personal housing plan. This plan sets out the steps that you and the council should take to:

- prevent you from becoming homeless, or
- try to find housing if you’ve already lost your home.

**Emergency accommodation**
The council must provide emergency accommodation immediately if it’s likely that you are homeless, meet immigration and residence conditions and are in priority need. See other factsheets in the series ‘Applying as homeless’ for details of these conditions.

The council will continue to make inquiries while you are in emergency accommodation.

**Challenging the decision**
If the council decides you are not homeless, it should give you a written decision. You have the right to ask the council to review its decision within 21 days. If you are offered accommodation that you don’t think is suitable, you may be able to challenge this. You may qualify for legal aid if you are on a low income.

**Further advice**
You can get further advice from Shelter’s free* housing advice helpline (0808 800 4444), a local Shelter advice service or local Citizens Advice office, or by visiting england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice

*Calls are free from UK landlines and main mobile networks.