

Applying as homeless: suitable accommodation

This factsheet looks at the meaning of 'suitable' accommodation.

Any accommodation the council offers you after you make a homeless application must be suitable.

You can apply to the council for help if you're homeless. The council must offer you emergency accommodation if it has reason to believe you:

- are homeless
- meet immigration and residence conditions
- have a priority need.

The council will also have to find you longer-term housing if you:

- are homeless through no fault of your own
- (usually) have a connection with its area.

Other factsheets in this series give details of these conditions.

Any accommodation the council offers you must be 'suitable'. Accommodation can be suitable even if you don't like it.

Assessing what you need

The council must look at your needs and those of your household before offering you accommodation. This includes:

- how many bedrooms you need
- any special needs relating to disability or ill health.

Location

The council must consider whether the location of any accommodation offered would, for example:

- make it difficult to get to work
- disrupt your child's education
- make it hard to get to your GP or hospital
- put you at risk of violence or harassment.

When possible, accommodation should be in the council's own area. If this isn't possible, the council should try to find you somewhere nearby. But you could be offered accommodation anywhere in England.

How long will you have to live there?

Accommodation that would not be suitable to live in for a long time might be suitable if you're only expected to live in it for a short time. So, it might be suitable for a family to share a bathroom for a few weeks but not for a number of months.

Cost

The council must take into account what you can afford to pay. If you have to go without essentials like food or heating in order to pay the rent, the accommodation will not be suitable. Tell the council if you have extra essential expenses, such as higher travel costs for a disabled child.

Housing conditions

Any accommodation offered should be in reasonable condition. Some offers of a tenancy with a private landlord must meet specific requirements, such as:

- electrical equipment is safe
- there is a current gas safety record
- fire safety precautions have been taken.

Bed and breakfast

Bed and breakfast (B&B) should only be used as emergency housing if nothing else is available. If you're pregnant or have children, the council mustn't keep you in B&B for more than 6 weeks.

Challenging an unsuitable offer

Unless it's emergency accommodation, the council must give you a letter that explains what happens if you refuse an offer.

If you turn down an offer you may not get another, so even if you think it is unsuitable, it's nearly always best to accept it and challenge it after. It can be very difficult to argue that accommodation is not suitable. Ask the council to review its decision within 21 days of the offer. If you succeed, the council must offer you somewhere else.

Court action is the only way to challenge the suitability of emergency housing if the council won't agree to move you. You'll need a solicitor to help you.

You may qualify for [legal aid](#) to help you challenge an offer if you're 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.



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Note

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