

How we deal with homeless applications

Havant
BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Public Service Plaza, Civic Centre Road,
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The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 came into force on 3 April 2018 and requires councils to offer a more comprehensive service to all eligible applicants and introduces two new duties that housing services need to meet.

The “prevention duty” requires housing teams to work with people if they are threatened with homelessness within 56 days. This is an extension of the timeframe under previous legislation which will give customers and housing services longer to work together to resolve any issues that are impacting on a person’s housing situation.

If people come into the housing service and they are already homeless the council will work with them under the “relief duty” for 56 days.

If homelessness has not been relieved within 56 days then consideration will be given as to whether the main housing duty is owed and long term assistance with housing is required.

The Housing Services team will:

- Conduct a Housing Needs Assessment of a customer’s situation, including their housing need and other support needs.
- Work with the applicant to agree a set of actions to prevent homelessness. This is called a Personal Housing Plan
- Provide interim temporary accommodation where appropriate
- Work together with customers to agree actions to resolve their housing need in the longer term, including addressing issues that will help prevent future homelessness.

Personal Housing Plans

The Housing Services team will meet with customers and carry out a Housing Needs Assessment. In most cases, we will work with customers to develop a Personal Housing Plan (PHP). This PHP is an important document to help the housing officer and the customer plan actions that will prevent or relieve homelessness. It may focus on areas that are not directly about housing such as managing finances and dealing with relevant health issues, and actions will be discussed and agreed by both parties.

Both the housing officer and the customer will usually have actions to complete and these will be monitored on an ongoing basis. There will also be an agreement made as to the desired outcomes and an understanding that resolution of these outcomes may end Housing Service’s duty to the customer.

By taking this approach, we intend to help customers to take responsibility for either preventing or relieving their housing need and helping them to stay in accommodation in the future.

The law allows councils to take certain actions if a customer deliberately and unreasonably refuses to co-operate with the actions agreed in the PHP, including ending any further help of assistance with housing.

Enquiries the council will make

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 states how the council must deal with homelessness and for whom the council must find temporary accommodation. Unfortunately, this is not for everyone who is homeless.

If you meet the criteria, the council will ensure you have temporary accommodation. This is most likely to be Bed & Breakfast accommodation or hostel accommodation for single applicants.

The council may make enquiries into your eligibility for assistance; whether you are homeless or threatened with homelessness; whether you are granted priority need status and whether you are homeless intentionally.

Priority need

The law is very specific. Being without a home is not sufficient to grant you priority need status. The council must investigate and decide whether to grant priority need status by considering if you are vulnerable by meeting any of the defined priority need categories as set out in law.

Intentionally homeless

You would be considered to have become intentionally homeless if you are, as a result of something you have done or failed to do, responsible for your own homelessness. If you are found to be intentionally homeless, and the council has a duty to provide you with temporary accommodation then this can only be provided for a reasonable period, to give you time to find your own accommodation.

Local connection

The council will also investigate whether you have a local connection to the borough. In order to have a local connection to the borough you must:

- Normally reside within the Havant Borough Council boundaries and have done so for six of the last 12 months or three of the last five years or,
- Have full-time, permanent employment within the borough boundaries or,
- Have close family members resident in the borough or,
- Have other special circumstances that exist

If you do not have a local connection with the Havant Borough Council, but do with another area, you may be referred there.

Housing options when homeless

Being considered as homeless is not a quick route into permanent, social housing. Any such allocations are made through the Hampshire Home Choice housing register for which there is often a wait of several years before an offer can be made. This is because the number of people waiting for housing far out ways the number of properties becoming available for allocation.

People will therefore need to consider alternative housing options to be able to resolve their housing situation. This might include looking for and taking up private rented accommodation while they continue to wait for social housing.

Some people may benefit from supported housing accommodation which can be accessed via a referral from a housing officer or other professionals such as social care or mental health teams.

Where appropriate people may be in a position to consider low cost home ownerships schemes which can be accessed via Help to Buy South at <https://www.helptobuysouth.co.uk>