

# EFFECTIVE ACTION

## PROVIDING ADVICE & ASSISTANCE TO SINGLE HOMELESS PEOPLE

...Council has considered a homelessness...  
...that it is not under a duty to accommodate...  
...homelessness legislation and I would refer you to our letter that...  
...the Council outlined the reasons for its decision. The letter in...  
...request a review of the decision.

**Option 2:** Based on our initial assessment, we advised you that an application for homelessness assistance under the provisions of homelessness legislation was not the most appropriate way to resolve your housing situation because {insert reason}. You are still entitled to make a formal application for homelessness assistance.

### 3. Meeting your immediate housing need

Having discussed your current circumstances with you, the table below sets out the actions that need to be taken to resolve your immediate housing issue (including remaining with your current accommodation if appropriate) and other related needs:

Action to be taken	Date of action	By whom	Other Agency actions
	Immediate	Housing Options	

# CONFIRMATION OF ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE GUIDANCE ON COMPLETING THE LETTER

## INTRODUCTION

**The purpose of the advice and assistance letter is to confirm in writing the advice and assistance that has been given to an individual approaching the Council. The objective of the letter is to achieve transparency, with the individual having a written record of the adviser's understanding of his/her circumstances, the advice provided and the further actions and support offered by the Council and other relevant agencies.**

Housing options services are often the first services to which people turn when they are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Regardless of whether the main homelessness duty is owed, local authorities still have a duty to provide homeless people with advice and assistance to help them find accommodation for themselves. This should include a full and comprehensive assessment of their housing needs. Such advice and assistance has considerable potential to prevent homelessness including rough sleeping<sup>1</sup>.

The provision of advice and information to those at risk of homelessness needs to be wide-ranging and comprehensive in its coverage and may require a full multi-disciplinary assessment<sup>2</sup>. The information provided should be up to date and must be tailored to an individual's needs.

This guidance note is intended to support the completion of the advice and assistance letter. The following guidance corresponds to the relevant sections of the letter.

## SECTION 1: YOUR SITUATION

You should include a brief summary about the individual's situation to include information from the following list, and other relevant details:

- Age and other relevant demographic information
- Background housing history and current housing situation
- Details of any dependents.
- Income
- Health needs
- Relevant support needs and agencies the individual is currently receiving support from

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<sup>1</sup> In 2009-2010 Local Authorities for the first time recorded the numbers of cases prevented from becoming homeless through advice; an estimated total of 165,200 cases of prevention of homelessness or relief were recorded outside the statutory homeless framework.

<sup>2</sup> Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, 2006

## SECTION 2: HOMELESSNESS APPLICATION

You need to delete option 1 or 2 based on whether a Homelessness Application has been considered. If you decide that option 2 is applicable, you must explain why you consider that it is not appropriate for the individual to make a homelessness application.

## SECTION 3: MEETING YOUR IMMEDIATE HOUSING NEED

You need to consider the individual's short and medium term housing and related support needs, including support to enable people to stay in their home. The personalised action plan needs to be completed with this in mind. It should contain actions to be undertaken by you as the Local Authority and by any other agency. It can also include suggested actions to be taken by the individual, although failure to undertake such actions should not be used as a reason to refuse further non-statutory or statutory advice and assistance. It should be written as SMART objectives with dates included. Section 5 requires input about longer term housing and other support needs and prevention of future homelessness.

The type of assistance offered by the Council could include, but should not be limited to:

- Assistance to obtain accommodation in the private rented sector (e.g. referral into local private rented sector scheme, up to date details of accredited landlords, or a referral to other social lettings services)
- Information about the Local Housing Allowance, including whether they are eligible for an exemption to the shared accommodation rate<sup>3</sup>, explaining direct payment options with the landlord
- Access provided to internet / telephone to contact agencies and private landlords
- Exercising your S. 192(3) power to accommodate households if appropriate not deemed in 'priority need'
- Referral to legal advice or mediation with the landlord to enable remaining in or returning to current or previous accommodation
- Referral to the Tenancy Relations Service or Environmental Health Service to resolve landlord and tenant problems (if not dealt with in housing options)
- Support to make an application for an allocation of social housing accommodation through a social housing waiting list or choice-based lettings scheme
- Referral made to mediation and reconciliation services to return to friends or family
- Referral to or advice on applying to another social landlord/hostel/emergency accommodation provider
- Action on benefit maximisation e.g. support to apply for a crisis loan, community care grant

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<sup>3</sup> This might be an exemption to the new age extension to SAR which applies to 25-34 year olds from January 2012 (see <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/a12-2011.pdf> for exemptions to this); or eligibility to one of the existing exemptions (for care leavers, those in receipt of the severe disability premium and those with a non-resident carer)

- Referral for debt/money advice
- Discretionary Housing Benefit payments
- Referral to a substance misuse agency
- Referral to the Community Mental Health Team/other mental health service
- Liaison with Probation Service/Youth offending service
- Advocating on behalf of the homeless person with e.g. Council departments (such as housing benefit) or other agencies or individuals
- Local Authority prevention fund options
- Referral for specialist support ie Domestic violence
- Referral for vulnerable adults to the safe guarding team
- Joint assessment for young people between housing options and children's services
- Reconnection to another area in the longer term, if this is the preference of the individual and liaison is undertaken with the 'receiving' authority – please refer to Homeless Link's reconnection protocol for further details

For more comprehensive guidance on what actions could be included in the table, you may wish to refer to the National Homelessness Advice Service (NHAS) website where the Specialist Advisors' Housing Options Toolkit is hosted ([http://www.nhas.org.uk/nhas\\_members\\_lau/nhas\\_members\\_lau-newpage-5/toolkit\\_part\\_b.htm](http://www.nhas.org.uk/nhas_members_lau/nhas_members_lau-newpage-5/toolkit_part_b.htm) - found within the Members Pages).

Please note that support to overcome any identified obstacles to the homeless person carrying out these actions (such as language barrier, learning disability, lacking funds for travel or health issues) should be recorded in the Action Table.

#### **SECTION 4: PREVENTING ROUGH SLEEPING**

The actions you outline in Section 3 will address housing need both in the short and medium term and if followed should ensure that an individual does not have to sleep rough.

Insert the actual place where the individual has told you they will be staying that night, however temporary the arrangement. This may include such options as:

- A temporary shelter or hostel
- Family member
- Friend
- Bed and breakfast accommodation
- Temporary accommodation through the Council.

If the individual has nowhere to stay, and if you have made a decision that they do not have a priority need or you do not have reason to believe that they may have a priority need, you should consider how to accommodate them including exercising your 192(3) power to accommodate households not deemed in 'priority need'. If you are choosing not to exercise this power and the individual has no other accommodation available and is likely to sleep rough, you should explain why you have chosen not to exercise this power.

## SECTION 5: LONGER TERM HOUSING NEEDS

In order to address an individual's longer term housing needs and to prevent future homelessness further steps may need to be taken, including looking at wider support needs. The personalised action plan needs to be completed with this in mind. It should contain actions to be undertaken by you as the Local Authority and by any other agency. It can also include suggested actions to be taken by the individual, although failure to undertake such actions should not be used as a reason to refuse further advice and assistance. It should be written as SMART objectives with dates included.

Key areas to consider include: **Please refer to point 3 above**

## SECTION 6: ON-GOING SUPPORT AND ADVICE

You should include a named contact, with details in case the individual wants to discuss their case further. This should include the days and times that the named contact is generally available.

Include details of the complaints procedure in case people are not happy with the advice they have received.

A copy of this letter should be kept by the local authority. We suggest that this is linked to a database of applicants, so that the authority has a record of local approaches for homelessness assistance, causes of homelessness, household size and need. This is a useful source of data for both local housing and planning strategies. For example, it can be used as a data source for Homelessness Strategies, Housing Strategies and Local Housing Needs Assessments for planning purposes.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

- The National Homelessness Advice Service (NHAS) website hosts the Specialist Advisors' Housing Options Toolkit ([http://www.nhas.org.uk/nhas\\_members\\_lau/nhas\\_members\\_-\\_lau-newpage-5/toolkit\\_part\\_b.htm](http://www.nhas.org.uk/nhas_members_lau/nhas_members_-_lau-newpage-5/toolkit_part_b.htm) - found within the Members Pages).
- The Homeless Code of Guidance which sets out the requirements of Advice and Assistance can be found here: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/homelessnesscode>
- Crisis holds a store of online advice and resources about accessing the private rented sector: [www.privaterentedsector.org.uk/goodpracticeandresources.asp](http://www.privaterentedsector.org.uk/goodpracticeandresources.asp). This includes a comprehensive toolkit [www.privaterentedsector.org.uk/toolkit.asp](http://www.privaterentedsector.org.uk/toolkit.asp).
- Shelter provide information about all types of advice for homeless people: [http://england.shelter.org.uk/get\\_advice](http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice)

- Information produced by the Department of Communities and Local Government on preventing homelessness is here:  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/>
- Homeless UK allows you to search for all types of services relevant to homeless people in a across a local area: <http://www.homelessuk.org>
- Good practice case studies of Housing Options provision can be found here:  
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/housing-options>