



Homelessness

Housing Services

Homelessness

What does being homeless mean?

If you do not have anywhere to live, or if the place you are living in is unsuitable, temporary or unsafe, then you could be considered homeless.

In the past, councils would routinely take a homeless application from people who were in housing need to determine whether they had a duty to house them or not. This was considered a very basic process, and it did not effectively prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. It also placed limits on the groups of people that the council could help, and the type of assistance that could be given.

Following the Homelessness Act 2002 housing authorities are now able to assist anyone who has a housing need, and in a variety of ways. Prevention of homelessness is the key objective, providing a wide range of housing options that can be tailored to suit the individual customer.

What are housing options, and are they available for me?

We still have to take some information from you about your situation, and there are still some limitations on the level of help that we can offer you. But the housing options process is much more customer-friendly and it is about helping you to choose the right option for your own circumstances.

Using the information you have provided, your adviser will explain the best options available to you and the reasons why. In some cases it may be necessary to refer you to a specialist caseworker, or another agency designed to support your particular circumstances.

The options we can offer you do depend to some extent on whether we consider you are in 'priority need'. Priority need is a legal term that means you may need additional help because you have children, are elderly, have left an institution or form of care, have physical or mental health problems, or any other reason that means you might be vulnerable.

We also have to consider whether you are eligible for housing (for persons from abroad), whether you have become homeless intentionally, and whether you have a local connection to Central Bedfordshire.

For detailed information about housing options, please pick up our leaflet called 'Summary of Housing Options in Central Bedfordshire' from the Customer Services team, or download it from our website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

What happens if I want to make a homeless application?

Everyone is entitled to make a homeless application.

The purpose of the housing options interview beforehand is to establish the facts of your housing situation, and provide advice about the best housing options available to you. Your Housing Options adviser will always look for ways to prevent homelessness occurring. Because of this, they will only suggest that you make a homeless application if there is no other way of resolving your housing problem.

If you do decide to make a homeless application, please be aware that this does not give you a fast route into social housing.

The law says that we must give reasonable preference to people who we have accepted through the homelessness route. However it also allows us to give similar, or greater, preference to people with medical conditions, people needing adapted or ground floor housing, and people living in overcrowded or unsatisfactory housing conditions.

Therefore it does not necessarily mean that applying as homeless will enable you to be rehoused more quickly. Those in greatest housing need, whatever their situation, will have the most priority.

What if I am already homeless and need emergency accommodation?

In the immediate term (if your accommodation is no longer available), your adviser will ask you if there are any family or friends you can stay with whilst we are resolving your housing need.

This does not make any difference to the way we will help you, and it does not mean it will take any longer. If you do have someone to stay with, this is normally much less disruptive for you and other household members - especially children.

If you are not able to make arrangements, then your adviser will give you a list of local hostels, agencies or refuges as emergency accommodation. If the council has a statutory duty to provide accommodation to you, this will be arranged by your Housing Options adviser. At this point, it would be necessary to make a homeless application.

What does being intentionally homeless mean?

When someone applies as homeless, the council has to make enquiries into the reasons you became homeless and will need to investigate the following four areas:

HOUSING OPTIONS ADVICE LEAFLET

Did you deliberately do (or not do) something that caused you to leave accommodation which you could otherwise have stayed in, and it would have been reasonable for you to stay there?

We will look at the whole of your circumstances in deciding whether you deliberately did or didn't do something. It may be decided that you deliberately did or didn't do something that caused you to become homeless if:

- you didn't pay the rent or mortgage when you could have afforded to
- you were evicted for antisocial behaviour
- you left accommodation that you could have stayed in

Did you agree to or know about what happened?

We are unlikely to decide that you are intentionally homeless if you acted in good faith or if something you weren't aware of had an important impact upon you becoming homeless. This might be the case if:

- you gave up your home because you didn't know you had a right to stay. However we would expect you to have sought advice first
- you were given bad or misleading advice which caused you to leave your home when you didn't have to
- someone you live with did something without your knowledge

If you became homeless because of rent arrears and you thought your partner was paying the rent, we may consider your partner to be intentionally homeless, but not you. This only applies if you can show that you were unaware of the other person's actions, did not agree to their actions, or couldn't stop them.

Why did you leave the accommodation you were in?

For us to make a decision that you are intentionally homeless, you must have been asked to leave your accommodation as a result of what you deliberately did or didn't do. We are unlikely to find you intentionally homeless if it wasn't reasonable for you to stay in the accommodation you left. This could be because:

- you (or someone in your household) was experiencing violence or threats that were likely to be carried out
- you couldn't afford to live there unless you went without basic necessities such as food or heating
- it was seriously affecting your health

Have you refused reasonable accommodation?

We may find you intentionally homeless if you refuse a suitable offer of temporary or permanent accommodation that is suitable for your needs.

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If we do decide that you might be considered intentionally homeless, then we will try and resolve your housing situation before you need to make a homeless application. However we are unlikely to be able to provide you with financial assistance such as a rent deposit to help you secure further accommodation. If you are likely to become homeless and cannot find somewhere to live yourself, we would refer you to Social Services if you have dependant children as part of your household. This is because they might be able to assist you under the powers of The Childrens Act.

**If you think you are, or might become, homeless,
please contact the Housing Options team immediately
on 0300 300 8000.**

