

Shelter

Local know-how:
a good practice guide
to compiling a housing
directory for young people



Written by Jane Murphy

First published in 2005 by Shelter, 88 Old Street, London EC1V 9HU

© Shelter 2005

Cover photograph by Nick David

Registered charity number 263710

No part of this report may be reproduced without prior permission
except for the purposes of review or referral.

ISBN 1 903595 38 X

Contents

Foreword	2	What are my housing options?	29
Introduction	3	Introduction	
How to use this guide		Template 4a Introduction	
Read this first	5	Template 4b Housing associations	
Introduction		Template 4c Hostels and supported housing	
Template 1		Template 4d Lodgings schemes	
Will the council help me?	7	Template 4e Women's refuges	
Introduction		Template 4f Advice services	
Template 2a Will the local authority help me? What the law says		Template 4g Index of advice and accommodation agencies	
Template 2b Am I homeless? What the law says		Renting privately: money and the law	41
Template 2c How do I contact the council to make a homelessness application?		Introduction	
Template 2d FAQs about how the council works		Template 5	
Will social services help me?	17	List of organisations and sources of information	47
Introduction			
Template 3a Will social services help me?			
Template 3b I'm leaving care. What help is available?			
Template 3c Community care			
Template 3d How to contact social services			
Template 3e FAQs about how social services works			

Foreword

Shelter is committed to developing and promoting innovative practice with homeless young people, and to sharing this knowledge with other organisations. Since the Homelessness Act 2002 came into force, we've seen a significant shift away from crisis-driven services, towards an emphasis on homelessness prevention.

Knowledge of, and access to, local services is a vital tool in this approach, particularly for young people. For local authorities, building a clear picture of what help is available to young people who are homeless, or fear that they may be without a home in the future, is a key aspect of good practice.

Local know-how is intended to help housing advisers and other housing professionals to put together a directory of housing information for young people. The guide is aimed primarily at the people that

young people may turn to for advice, but is written in such a way that a young person could also understand it.

The Vodafone UK Foundation is supporting Shelter's work with and for young people, enabling Shelter to provide young people with the information they need, when they need it. The Vodafone UK Foundation and Shelter are working together to tackle youth homelessness and social exclusion in the long term.

This guide is an example of Shelter's work in supporting local authorities and organisations with policy ideas, examples of good practice, and campaigns to support local initiatives.

It aims to be clear, practical, and easy to use. We hope you will find it an invaluable resource.



Adam Sampson
Director, Shelter

Introduction

This good practice guide is one in a series aimed at housing professionals. It takes readers through the steps for producing a comprehensive directory of housing information for young people, a cornerstone of any youth homelessness prevention strategy.

What is a directory of housing information?

Many directories are little more than lists of organisations with their addresses and phone numbers. Shelter recommends that directories go a step further and include information about the policies and procedures followed by local organisations. This will enable young people and their advisers to understand not only who does what locally, but also how the system works.

Why produce a directory for young people?

The idea is to produce a local directory of housing and support services that young people, and those they approach for help or advice, can understand. It should be written in plain English, with a clear and simple layout. Because housing can be so complicated, we suggest that young people use the directory with someone they trust – another adult, teacher or youth worker, for example. By making the directory as straightforward as possible, we can help young people to stay in control and to make well-informed decisions about their situation.

How to use this guide

We suggest that you work through this guide from beginning to end, compiling your own directory as you go. This guide

follows the same structure as the directory you are aiming to produce, which is split into five sections.

When you start a new section, first read the *Purpose of this section*.

This is aimed at anyone compiling a directory and tells you the purpose of the section, what information to collect, and tips for presenting it.

Next go to the template pages. These are customisable pages to go in your directory, and are aimed at the advisers and the young people who will read it. Work through the template pages, filling in the gaps with local information. The template pages are included for reference in this guide, and are also available as downloads for you to customise with your local information at www.shelter.org.uk/localknowhow

Each template is made up of:

- text that is already written for you
- text boxes that you need to fill in with local information.

We suggest five sections for your directory

- Read this first
- Will the council help me?
- Will social services help me?
- What are my housing options?
- Renting privately: money and the law

Downloading the templates

Go to www.shelter.org.uk/localknowhow to download the templates to your computer. Open the templates, enter your local information, save your completed

templates, and print. In addition to the templates for the five sections, you can also download a contents page.

Getting your directory right

Here are three tips to get you started:

- cut it out: don't use jargon, use plain English
- test it: ask local young people and colleagues to try using the directory
- check it: don't use second-hand information, check everything.

Important note

There is often a great deal of cynicism among young people about the kinds of assistance available to them, and the difficult process of obtaining it, from the council, social services, and other government departments.

For this reason, it's crucial to address this by setting out the young person's rights and the authority's procedures, clearly and helpfully, both in the template, and when talking through it.

1. Read this first

Purpose of this section

This is the first page of your directory and should be very simple, easy to navigate, and written in plain English. The purpose is to explain how to use the directory and to give a quick reference list of emergency contact numbers for urgent housing assistance.

How to write this section

You will need to gather information on which agencies a young person could contact if they had nowhere to go that night or on other housing-related problems.

This needs to include out-of-hours and all-night services. Depending on what services are available in your area, this may need to include national helplines or services in the nearest major city. You should include:

- daytime and out-of-hours contact details for council homelessness department
- daytime and out-of-hours contact details for social services
- daytime and out-of-hours contact details for women's refuges
- Samaritans' contact details
- contact details for specialist support organisations (eg for young lesbian and gay people, black and ethnic minorities, care-leavers, runaways); again, these need to be 24 hours or at least available into the evenings, so you may need to include a national helpline.

To compile this page go to:

- Template 1

1 Read this first

Who is this directory for?

If you are a young person facing homelessness, are worried that you may become homeless, or need to find a new place to live for other reasons – this directory is for you.

How to use this directory

We suggest that you use this directory with someone you trust – another adult, maybe a youth worker or teacher. This directory sets out all the options available to young people in your area and explains how each of the main organisations works and how to contact them.

We suggest you read the sections of this directory in order. **Sections 2 and 3** tell you whether you are likely to get help from the council or social services. **Section 4** is the directory of your local organisations. Finally, look at **Sections 5 and 6** to learn more about your legal rights and the benefits you may be able to claim.

But first, please read this:

If you have nowhere safe to sleep tonight you can contact the numbers below for help:

- *daytime/out-of-hours contact for council homelessness department*
- *daytime/out-of-hours contact for social services*
- *daytime/out-of-hours contact for women's refuge*
- *Samaritans' contact details*
- *daytime/out-of-hours contact for young lesbian/gay support organisation.*

If you have a housing problem, you may find it useful to talk to a housing adviser. Some housing advice and welfare rights organisations that will help you with housing problems are listed below. It's important to know your rights, and these organisations will tell you what help you're entitled to. Full details of each agency are given in Section 4:

- *local housing advice centre if available*
- *local Citizens Advice or other welfare rights organisation*
- *local authority housing advice.*

2. Will the council help me?

Purpose of this section

This section explains the local housing authority's duties under the homelessness legislation. It takes young people and their advisers through the steps of making an application, and if necessary, challenging a council's decision. The information should enable young people and their advisers to decide whether or not to proceed with an application.

How to write this section

For Section 2, you need to complete templates 2a, 2b, and 2c. Remember that each template will include sections that we have written for you and other sections where you will need to fill in local information.

Template 2a

Will the local authority help me? What the law says

Information in this template has been provided for you. Should the law change, this would need to be updated.

Template 2b

Am I homeless? What the law says

We have provided this information for you. Should there be a change in the law, this would need to be updated.

Template 2c

How do I contact the council to make a homelessness application?

Fill in the gaps to give names, addresses, and contact phone numbers. Take care that you provide the right contacts for young people because the process for making an application for young people may differ from, for example, families.

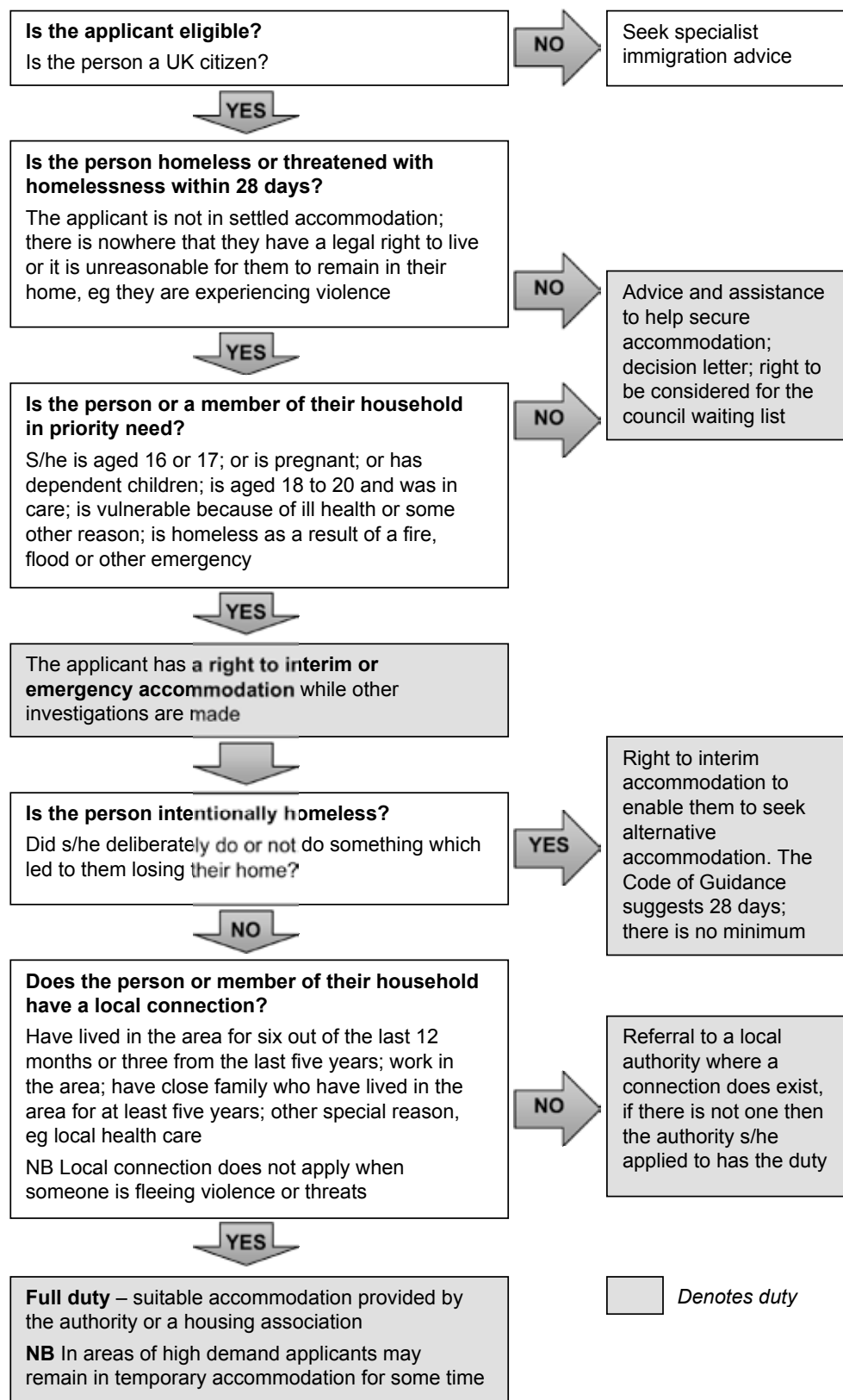
Template 2d

FAQs about how the council works

This part of the directory provides valuable information about the council's policies and procedures. The template sets out a series of 'FAQs' (frequently asked questions) that will help young people and their advisers understand how the council operates.

You will need to contact the housing department and arrange an informal interview with a senior homelessness officer. If necessary, this could be done over the phone. However, if you are an advice or support agency that has frequent contact with homelessness officers, it's a good idea to meet face-to-face and use this opportunity to build stronger understanding between your respective agencies.

2a Will the local authority help me? What the law says



2b Am I homeless? What the law says

This section explains what the council must do by law if you are homeless or are likely to become homeless. It takes you through the steps of making a homelessness application to the council. Please read it carefully with someone who can help you think about whether you want to apply to the council as homeless.

Important note: this guide to the law can help you work out whether you want to make a homelessness application. But it is just a guide, and we advise that you also ask an advice agency for more specific help.

Key points

- If you are homeless, the council has to help you.
- Advice agencies are there to help you get the help you are entitled to. If you're not sure what your rights are, or if you're having problems getting assistance, get advice.
- The council you apply to cannot refuse to help, even if you're not from its area, but it can ask another council to consider your application.
- If the council decides that you are homeless, entitled to help, and in 'priority need' (see *Am I in 'priority need'?* below), it must find you somewhere to stay while looking into the situation.
- The housing department must give you its decision in writing, and give reasons if it decides not to find you somewhere to live.
- You have the right to ask the council to review its decision, and, if you're still unhappy, to appeal to the county court or complain to the Ombudsman (see the end of this template).

The law says you are homeless if the following statements apply to you:

- You have nowhere to live in the UK or anywhere abroad. You're still classed as having nowhere to live if you're sleeping on the streets, staying with friends and family on a temporary basis, or living in emergency accommodation such as a hostel or refuge.
- You have no legal right to be living where you are (for example, if you're squatting or temporarily staying with friends).
- You are being forced to live apart from your family, or someone you would normally live with, because your accommodation isn't suitable.
- It's not safe for you to continue living in your present accommodation. This could be because you're at risk of violence or abuse, because of a lack of security, or because your health could suffer.
- You can't access somewhere you have a right to live. This could include accommodation from which you have been illegally evicted.

- You live in a caravan, mobile home, or houseboat, and there is nowhere for you to legally put it and live in it.

You can also apply to the council as homeless if:

- your landlord has taken you to court and the court has said you must leave within 28 days
- you have been living with friends or relatives who have asked you to leave within 28 days.

What will the council do if I apply as homeless?

If you are homeless, or likely to become homeless within the next 28 days, the housing authority must help you. How much help it gives will depend on whether it decides that you:

- are eligible for assistance
- have a particular need that makes you a priority for assistance
- are unintentionally homeless.

If the council decides that you are homeless, eligible for assistance, and have a priority need, it must make sure that you have somewhere to stay until it makes a decision about your application for a permanent place to live. It will also need to make sure that your family, or anyone who normally lives with you, can stay with you too.

Am I eligible for assistance?

If you are a UK citizen who normally lives here, you're probably eligible for assistance. However, the law about this is complex. If you're not a UK citizen but have lived here for a long time or have refugee status, you may also be eligible for help, so make sure you get advice about your specific situation.

Am I in 'priority need'?

If you fall into one of the groups below, the council must accept that you are in 'priority need' for housing.

- You are pregnant or live with a pregnant woman.
- You have dependent children who normally live with you.
- You are 16 or 17 years old. (Except if you've been in care. If this is the case, see Section 3 *Will social services help me?*)
- You are 18 to 20 years old, and have been in care. (See Section 3 *Will social services help me?*)
- You lost your accommodation because of an emergency, such as flood, fire, or other disaster.

If you can prove that you are 'vulnerable', the local authority may accept that you are in priority need. The law sets out a lot of different ways in which a young person can be described as vulnerable. Read the following list

carefully to work out whether you fall into one of the following vulnerable categories.

- Do you have a mental illness or disability, a physical disability, or live with someone who does?
- Are you aged 18 to 25, and had to leave home because of violence or sexual abuse?
- Have you been in care, or fostered, and are aged 21 or over?
- Have you been in the army, navy, or air force?
- Have you been held in custody or on remand?
- Have you had to leave accommodation because of violence or threats of violence?
- Have you had to sleep on the streets (where you could be at risk of abuse or prostitution)?

If you answer 'yes' to any of these questions, you *could* be in priority need.

Are you 'intentionally homeless'?

This part of the law gives councils the responsibility for checking that you have not made yourself homeless 'intentionally'.

For the council to decide that you are homeless intentionally, it must be certain that you could have stayed where you were before you became homeless; that you made yourself homeless by doing or not doing something; and that you were aware of the consequences of doing or not doing something.

If it isn't sure that this is the case, it must give you the benefit of the doubt.

Do I have a 'local connection' with the council that I've applied to?

If the council decides that you have a right to housing under the law, it may want to check whether you have any local connection with the area. The law says that you have a local connection if you or someone in your household:

- has normal residence in the area, now or in the past, where the residence was of their choice (for six out of the past 12 months, or three from the past five years)
- has work in the area (not casual work)
- has family in the area
- needs to live in the area for a special reason such as being near specialist medical care.

What will the council do if it agrees that I am homeless?

If the authority has decided that you are homeless and entitled to housing in the local area, it must find somewhere for you to live. If you're more than 18 years old, this will probably be a council or housing association tenancy. See *FAQs about how the council works* for more information.

What will the council do if it *does not* agree that I am homeless?

The council does not have to find you anywhere to live, but it must still make sure that you are given advice about your housing options. It will do this itself or refer you to a local advice agency.

What if I disagree with the council's decision?

You have the right to ask the council to review its decision. You must appeal within 21 days of receiving the letter telling you of the decision. While it reviews your application, it can (but may not) continue to provide temporary accommodation. The council has eight weeks to complete the review (longer if it's investigating whether you have a local connection).

If the council doesn't complete its review within eight weeks, or if you disagree with the council's review, you can appeal to the county court within 21 days, or complain to the Ombudsman.

To make a complaint to the Ombudsman, you must fill in a complaint form which you can find in a free booklet called *Complaint about the council? – How to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman* available by writing to:

Commission for Local Administration in England
21 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9BU

Telephone: 020 7915 3210

2c How do I contact the council to make a homelessness application?

You can make an application at the office(s) listed below

Name of local authority	<i>Name of the local authority and area served by the office.</i>
Client group and/or area served	<i>Some local authorities have different access points for applying as homeless depending on who lives in your household (ie, whether you're a single man/woman, or have a dependent family).</i>
Address	
Postcode	
Phone	
Fax	
Opening hours	<i>The office may only allow telephone enquiries at certain times, and appointments may need to be booked in advance.</i>
Emergency contact	<i>Out of office hours.</i>

I want to make an appointment with a council Homelessness Officer

Here is a sample letter that you can fill in and send to your local council asking for an appointment. Remember to date the letter and keep a copy of it for reference.

Date

To: Homeless Persons' Unit

My address for writing is:

Dear Sir/Madam

I wish to apply as homeless under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. I provide some basic details below, but I would like an appointment to see a homelessness officer urgently.

I will be homeless/I became homeless on:

because:

The following people also live with me (or would live with me if I had a home for us all):

Yours faithfully

2d FAQs about how the council works

1. The council agrees that I am homeless and in priority need. What happens now?

Detail the steps taken by the homelessness section (temporary accommodation, advice services, types of tenancies available).

eg, 'The council will continue to provide appropriate temporary accommodation while investigating an application. If it finds you to be intentionally homeless, it will not provide you with accommodation, but will give you advice and help you to secure your own accommodation.'

2. Does the council have a written policy about homeless young people in priority need?

Following changes in legislation, every local authority should have a written policy towards 16- and 17-year-olds and 18- to 20-year-old care leavers. Does it use bed and breakfast accommodation?

eg, 'The authority has a joint housing and social services accommodation policy for 16- and 17-year-olds and care leavers.'

3. Will the council help me even if I'm not in priority need?

Try to obtain any policies towards 18- to 25-year-olds that have not been in care. Does it use bed and breakfast accommodation?

eg, 'If you're between 18 and 25, the help the council will give you depends on your needs and circumstances. Bed and breakfast would be used if out-of-borough hostels were unable to help you.'

4. How long will the council take to make a decision about my homelessness application? How will I find out what it has decided?

Find out the average time for your area and ask about common reasons for a decision taking longer. The maximum recommendation is 30 days (Code of Guidance).

eg, 'The average is eight days, but depends on how many enquiries the council has to make into your application. It tries to follow government guidance and will send you a letter within 30 days at the most, letting you know of its decision.'

5. Does the service keep written statements of its reasons and decisions on file?

eg, 'Yes. If you, your adviser, or anyone you choose to represent you wishes to see them, they are available on request.'

6. What type of emergency accommodation can I get while the local authority considers my homelessness application?

Details of the range and type of accommodation used for young people, and where these are located.

eg, 'Social services has a range of accommodation for 16-year-olds. The council runs hostels for men and women as well as family centres. It can also refer you to local hostels and refuges run by other agencies.'

7. How long am I likely to stay in temporary accommodation before the council offers me a more settled home?

eg, 'Time spent in any kind of temporary accommodation is kept to a minimum, and is unlikely to exceed 12 weeks.'

8. How will I know about the progress of my application?

Letters, identified homelessness officer, frequency of contact.

eg, 'The council will contact you by telephone or personal visits, typically once a week. The homelessness officer visits several times a week to update the hostel warden. When it has made its decision, it will let you know in writing.'

9. How many offers of permanent accommodation am I allowed to turn down before it regards me as making myself intentionally homeless?

eg, 'The authority will make a maximum of four offers of secure accommodation. The majority of offers are likely to be in the west of the borough due to the location of stock. If you refuse a final offer in writing of permanent accommodation, the council will no longer have a responsibility to find you somewhere to live, provided it has told you that this is the case. It cannot make a final offer unless it is satisfied that the accommodation is suitable for you and that it would be unreasonable for you to refuse it.'

10. How can I appeal against the council's decision if I am unhappy with it?

Details of the appeals procedure. Name of advice agency that can undertake advocacy on behalf of the homeless person.

eg, 'Housing advice workers will tell you what your rights are. A panel of senior officers will be responsible for reviewing your case. A leaflet is available explaining how the review process works.'

3. Will social services help me?

Purpose of this section

This section explains what help a young person can expect to receive from social services. Like Section 2, this sets out the authority's statutory duties and gives details of how these are implemented locally.

How to write this section

There are five templates for this section, labelled Template 3a to 3e. Remember that we have written some of the content for you, but you will need to do some research and filling-in yourself.

Template 3a

Will social services help me?

We have provided this information for you. Should there be a change in the law, this would need to be updated.

Template 3b

I'm leaving care. What help is available?

This section should provide details of where to go, and the type of help and support that should be provided to a child in need or someone that has left care and not yet reached their twenty-first birthday (twenty-fourth birthday if in full-time education).

Template 3c

Community care

This section is for people with support needs who require housing advice or assistance. We have provided this information for you. Should there be a change in the law, this would need to be updated.

Template 3d

How to contact social services

Fill in the gaps to give names, addresses and contact phone numbers. Take care to provide the right contacts for young people in different circumstances, such as those who are homeless, leaving care, vulnerable or need support.

Template 3e

FAQs about how social services works

This part of the directory provides valuable information about social services' policies and procedures. The template sets out a series of FAQs which will help young people and their advisers understand how the authority operates.

To complete this template, you'll need to contact social services and arrange an informal interview with a senior social worker.

3a Will social services help me?

If you are assessed as being a 'child in need', or need particular support, the local authority must provide you with help, including accommodation.

Read this section carefully to find out whether you could get help from social services and how to go about it.

Key points

- Social services have a duty to assess whether you are a 'child in need'.
- If it decides that you are, under the Children Act 1989 you should be offered a choice of appropriate accommodation and services.
- Before contacting social services, think about what you need and what help you hope to get.
- Be realistic and try to be flexible. Think about what you might accept if what you want is not available.
- You can complain if you are not treated fairly, so make sure you know your rights and get advice before you approach social services.

You may be able to get help if you are homeless, or about to become homeless, and any of the following:

- you are 16 or 17 years old
- you are leaving (or have left) care
- you have physical or mental health problems
- you have problems with drug or alcohol dependency
- you are disabled
- you are an asylum seeker under 18 years old and with no one to look after you
- you are an asylum seeker, or someone who has overstayed their visa, who is destitute and has additional health problems.

To get help from social services, you will first need to be identified as being a **child in need**.

A child in need is someone under the age of 18, who has been assessed as needing special assistance from the local authority. This could be because you have a physical disability, or because, without help from social services, your physical or mental health could worsen, or risk your emotional, intellectual, physical or social development. A homeless child – estranged or abandoned – is clearly a child in need. However, you are unlikely to get help from social services unless you have an additional need, such as mental health problems.

Homelessness can endanger your health and well-being in many ways, and it's important to raise these points when you contact social services for an assessment. Depending on your circumstances, these may help to prove that you are a child in need and eligible for help. Here are a few examples.

- If you are forced to sleep out of doors your physical health will be affected and you are at greater risk of sexual assault and violence.
- If you already have problems such as drug dependency or ill health, these are likely to be worsened by homelessness.
- If you are seeking a place on a training scheme or looking for work, this will be made much harder to achieve because of the disruption and stress of homelessness.

Social services and 16- to 17-year-old homeless people

Social services does not have to help all young homeless people who are 16 or 17, but it does have to look into your situation to check what help you are entitled to. It cannot just turn you away or tell you to go to the housing department. It must assess your situation, including your accommodation needs.

What kind of help could I get under the Children Act 1989?

Section 17 – I need assistance

If it decides that you are a child in need (see *Section 20 – I need accommodation*), social services can provide accommodation or assistance under Section 17 of the Children Act.

In exceptional circumstances, it can also provide money; for instance, if you are waiting for a social fund payment and don't have any money at all. The funds could also be used to help with a deposit and/or rent in advance, to secure private rented accommodation. Unlike social fund payments, you wouldn't have to repay this money.

If you can't live in your family's home, either permanently or temporarily, and are staying with other family or friends, you could also be entitled to assistance under Section 17. The relatives or friends you're staying with could get some financial help with providing furniture or bedding, for example, and some monetary assistance. If you'll be living with them permanently, by making it formal as private foster care, you could be able to get more help now and when you leave their care later on (see *I'm leaving care. What help is available?*).

If you need accommodation, although it is possible under Section 17, you're more likely to get it under Section 20.

Section 20 – I need accommodation

Your local authority must provide accommodation for any child in need in their area. Under this section, if you're a child in need, the local authority can provide temporary or emergency accommodation for you without taking you into care.

The local authority will check that:

- no one is legally responsible for you

- there is no one who could take legal responsibility for you
- the person who has been caring for you cannot continue to do so.

If social services does need to offer you accommodation, there are no rules about what kind of place it needs to be. It just needs to seem appropriate to social services. If you have other needs, such as extra support, you may also be able to apply for money or other help through Section 17 (see *Section 17 – I need assistance*, above).

Get expert advice from a welfare or housing rights organisation. An adviser could request that social services provides suitable accommodation as soon as possible, if not straight away.

How can I apply for help from social services?

The authority that has to carry out the assessment is the one responsible for where you are physically. This is usually where you are currently living, even if it's not where you usually live. It could also be the area where you attend school.

How long will an assessment take?

If you urgently need help, time-scales can be brief, and it is possible to press social services to assess your situation quickly.

In other cases, guidance suggests¹ the following time-scales.

- Within one working day of the referral, social services will give its initial response. This could be to gather more information, or to take no further action.
- Within seven working days, social services should complete an initial assessment if this is thought to be necessary. This includes seeing you to discuss your needs and deciding whether a more in-depth assessment (sometimes called a 'core' assessment) is required.
- Within 35 working days of the initial assessment being completed, the authority should complete a core assessment.

Do I get a say in what happens?

By law, your views should be properly listened to and taken into account when your needs are being assessed. Social services must also take your ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious background into account when deciding on the best services for you.

What if I disagree with the decision?

There are a number of ways that you can challenge an assessment or decision made by your local authority. Each social services department should publish its own complaints procedure, which should be freely available to the public and to agencies. You may wish to use this if, for example, you have been provided with accommodation but you are not happy with it. However, it is unlikely to be of use if you have been denied a service, since the whole process can take more than three months.

¹ These time-scales appear in guidance to social services authorities. They are not included in the Children Act 1989 itself.

For complaints about the way your application has been handled, it is best to approach the local authority Ombudsman (see the last page of Template 2a).

In an emergency, the only way that you can quickly challenge a decision is by judicial review in the administrative court. You can seek an emergency injunction to be given somewhere to stay in the meantime, before your case is heard.

3b I'm leaving care. What help is available?

If you have been in care, the local authority has certain duties to help you with accommodation. Read this section to find out more about the law and what help you can expect from social services.

What is the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000?

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 aims to improve your prospects in life if you're leaving care, by assessing what kind of support you need and making sure that you get it. The level of care and support you could get is dependent on how long you have spent in care, your age, and the date you left care.

Most care leavers can get assistance under the Act. If you were in care after you turned 16, and are under 21, you will be able to get advice and assistance. Social services can provide help in kind or, if your circumstances are exceptional, in cash. This money can be used to help you find somewhere to live, by paying the deposit and rent in advance, or to make up any difference between your Housing Benefit and your rent.

I'm leaving care. Will social services help me?

You are entitled to help if you fall into one of the following groups:

- Are you 16 or 17 years old, still in care, and have you spent at least 13 weeks in care since you were 14? If you answered yes, you are an **eligible child**.
- Are you 16 or 17 years old, were in care on or after your sixteenth birthday but are no longer in care, and have spent at least 13 weeks in care since you were 14? If you answered yes, you are a **relevant child**.
- Are you aged between 18 and 21, and have previously been either an eligible or relevant child? If you answered yes, you are a **former relevant child**.

What kind of help could I get?

Pathway plans and personal advisers

All young people covered by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, and aged 16 to 21, must have a pathway plan that maps out the immediate and long-term support that they should get. The pathway plan should cover personal support, accommodation, education and training, employment, family and social relationships, practical and life skills, financial support, and health needs; as well as what you should do if anything goes wrong with your pathway plan. Your personal adviser will provide advice and support, coordinate services with other agencies, and help you to draft the plan.

Financial support

For as long as you are a relevant child, social services will normally be the primary source of your income.

The financial support it gives you should be enough to cover the costs of your needs as identified in your pathway plan. This includes the cost of your

accommodation, food and bills, pocket money, transport costs for education and training, and clothing.

This support from social services effectively replaces Income Support or Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Housing Benefit. You should receive at least as much money from social services as you would if you were claiming these benefits.

If you are a lone parent aged 16 or 17, or unable to work due to ill health or disability, you will still be able to claim Income Support or income-based JSA, while you are still in care.

Accommodation

If you are a relevant child, your local authority must find and pay for somewhere for you to live that's suitable for your needs. The only exception to this is if it assesses that it's not necessary for your welfare.

A variety of accommodation types could be used:

- supported lodgings
- foyers
- specialist accommodation for those with particular support needs
- hostels
- self-contained accommodation with floating support
- independent tenancies.

How will I be assessed to decide if I am eligible for help?

A local authority must assess your needs if you are an eligible, and/or relevant, child. The last local authority to look after you is the authority responsible for meeting duties under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, wherever you are in England or Wales. If your local authority loses touch with you, it must take reasonable steps to re-establish contact with you as soon as possible.

What if I'm a student?

If you're a care leaver aged between 18 and 20 years old, social services may give you assistance with the costs of training and education until you are 24.

Further education must be provided on a residential basis, which social services has a duty to pay for. Social services must provide you with accommodation during term time and vacations. If your term time accommodation is not available during vacations, social services must pay you enough so you can find yourself somewhere to live during these breaks. This would enable you to continue in education and not become homeless during a vacation. These obligations apply to all care leavers.

3c Community care

Some people need some special support as well as help with their housing. If that sounds like you, read this section to find out what you can expect from local social services.

Read this

The most important law for community care is the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.¹ This is a complicated law, so you should get advice and advocacy from a specialist agency. Refer to the *Read this first* section to find out how you can contact them.

Am I eligible for help?

Social services must assess your needs if you may be in need of community care services. If you are assessed as having special support needs, it must arrange for you to receive this support from a specialist agency.

What kind of help could I get?

Social services may offer to provide you with support services temporarily while it assesses your needs. But this should not lead to a delay in its making a decision about your community care needs.

Social services has a duty to accommodate you if you are aged 18 or over, and, because of your age, illness, disability, or any other circumstances, you need care and attention that is not otherwise available to you¹.

Social services should involve you in the assessment process and give you a copy of your care plan. This outlines what services you will receive.

Community care accommodation and support agencies

There are a variety of accommodation and support services available to you, much through the voluntary and private sectors. Some of the types of accommodation that may be available include:

- long-stay residential care – if you have received long-term care in psychiatric hospitals
- floating support schemes – if you are able to live in your own tenancy, usually in local authority or housing association accommodation, with some support
- group homes – for individuals to learn new skills with the support of staff and other residents, some of whom will work towards more independent living
- halfway houses – if you need independence training prior to getting your own tenancy
- rehabilitation schemes.

¹ (Section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948 and Local Authority Circular (93) 10 Appendix 1).

In the vast majority of cases, you will need to contact social services, or health authority departments, to gain access to accommodation.

How do I apply for an assessment?

Social services has different teams for people with different kinds of support needs. Most young people will have to contact the *[INSERT NAME OF TEAM]* for an assessment. See *3d How to contact social services*.

What should I do if I disagree with their decision?

There are a number of ways to challenge community care decisions, including if social services didn't make a decision at all. You can make a complaint using the local authority's own complaints procedure, which it should publish details of. If you are unhappy with its response, you should request a Health Care Commission leaflet and complaints application form from the local authority. The Commission will then try to resolve your complaint. If you are still unhappy with the response you receive from the Commission, contact the Health Service Ombudsman on 0845 015 4033.

3d How to contact social services

You can find out how to contact social services by looking through the list of contacts below. The list includes who to speak to whether you are leaving care, need extra support or are homeless already.

Read this

Before you get in touch with social services, make sure you have read through the information in this directory and know what you can ask for. Whether young and homeless, leaving care or in need of extra support, you have the right to ask social services to assess your needs.

Name of social services team	<i>Eg, learning disabilities.</i>
Address	
Daytime phone number	
Emergency duty team number	

Name of social services team	
Address	
Daytime phone number	
Emergency duty team number	

3e FAQs about how social services works

1. I am 16 or 17 years old and homeless but have not been accommodated by social services in the past. What is the procedure for getting an assessment?

How does a young person make contact with the social services department? Contact address and telephone details. Out-of-hours contact details.

eg, 'The young person should go to their nearest social services area office and ask to speak to the Duty Officer. They will assess the young person's situation and the manager will make a final decision.'

2. What happens if I am assessed as being a child in need?

Contact with their family?

eg, 'If a young person were assessed as a child in need and family reconciliation was not possible, the duty social worker and team manager together with the homelessness section would arrange temporary accommodation.'

3. What happens after I have been placed in emergency accommodation?

Any further investigations in accordance with a child-in-need assessment and timetable, allocation of a social worker, longer-term accommodation.

eg, 'Anyone aged 16 or above who is accommodated may be allocated a social worker depending on his or her vulnerability. They will be helped to find long-term accommodation in the area they are from or have the most connections with.'

4. What are the department's guidelines and policies for housing young people leaving care?

Leaving care team, pathway plans, leaving care personal adviser.

eg, 'All young people being looked after will have a needs-led assessment and a pathway plan by their sixteenth birthday. The need for services will be planned for while the young person is looked after. There will be an emphasis on practical and life skills training in order to equip them for independent living. Opportunities for young people to learn practical and social skills will be provided in all care settings, be this in foster care or residential care.'

5. I am going to be leaving care soon. What are my options for accommodation and support?

Detail types of accommodation and levels of support. Financial support available, partnerships with other agencies.

eg, 'The service accesses a range of medium- and long-term options that young people could move on to depending on individual needs and wishes: semi-independent units; supportive hostel accommodation; outreach support. Young people leaving care are usually entitled to financial assistance to set

up home, and a leaving care service will be offered to the young person that could last until their twenty-fourth birthday.'

6. What information is published on services available to young people?

Leaflets, websites, etc.

eg, 'The authority publishes a children's services plan, and information on the new leaving care act. This will provide more details for young people on services available.'

7. What information can I get about social services' appeals or complaints procedures?

Published procedure, contact details for officers responsible, young-person-friendly version of documents.

eg, 'The authority publishes its complaints procedure, leaving care policy and children's services plan. The authority is currently developing a leaflet about its young persons' team.'

4. What are my housing options?

Purpose of this section

Young people and their advisers can find out about different kinds of accommodation and how to access them. This section provides general information about each type of accommodation (for example, hostels) and then lists all the services of that kind that are available locally (for example, all hostels for young people). In addition, the directory lists relevant advice agencies. The section covers the following:

- housing associations
- hostels and supported housing
- lodgings schemes
- women's refuges
- advice agencies.

How to write this section

- You need to identify all relevant local agencies that fall into the categories listed above. Start by working through other old or existing directories and picking out the services that work with young people. Get other professionals working in the field to check your lists of agencies and suggest other organisations to add to the lists.
- Once you are satisfied that your lists of agencies are complete, you need to

collect information about each agency. The information you need includes basic details such as phone numbers and opening times as well as some more complex information about the services each offers. Templates 4c to 4g set out the information you need to collect for each type of agency.

- Check the information. It is good practice to invite each agency that appears in the directory to check its entry – they should each make sure the information is correct and also approve the way you have described the service. Allow plenty of time for this stage in the process and ideally enlist some extra administrative support.

What are the nine templates?

4a Introduction

4b Housing associations that offer accommodation to young people

4c Hostels and supported housing

4d Lodgings schemes

4e Women's refuges

4f Advice services

4g Index of agencies listed in the directory (list these in alphabetical order)

4a Introduction

This section of the directory gives you information about different kinds of accommodation in your area, and details of how to access it. It will help you to decide which housing options may be best for you.

Read this

If you need somewhere to stay tonight, please see the *Read this first* section at the front of this directory for details of emergency accommodation.

A range of housing options is available locally. Some may be more suitable for you than others. The types of accommodation available include:

- council housing
- housing associations
- hostels
- supported housing
- lodgings schemes
- women's refuges
- privately rented housing (see *Renting privately: money and the law*).

When choosing which type of accommodation is most suitable for you, bear the following in mind.

- **Money:** Will you need to provide a deposit before moving in? Are you sure that you'll be able to afford the rent?
- **Support:** Do you have any special support needs, and if so, will these be met? Would you benefit from living somewhere with links to education, training, and life skills support? What kinds of assistance are available to you?
- **Rules and restrictions:** Are there any rules that you would need to abide by? Are these suitable for you?
- **Family situation:** If you have children, are they permitted in this kind of accommodation? Would your partner be able to stay with you?
- **Time frame:** Is the accommodation short-term, long-term, or flexible? Is there a waiting list?

Choosing which kind of accommodation you are looking for is a crucial decision, and if in doubt, get advice.

4b Housing associations

Housing associations provide affordable housing for people on low incomes and are an important source of housing for young people. All associations follow strict procedures for who they can offer accommodation to. The information below explains some of the key points that you should consider and tells you about the different associations that have housing in your area.

Key points

- Housing associations do not provide emergency accommodation.
- Very few housing associations will give a tenancy to anyone under 18.
- Some associations will be part of a local housing register, together with the local area's housing department and other housing associations, and operate a common waiting list. You need to join this list before you can access their housing.
- Make sure you answer all the questions on the application form and give them all the relevant information about your present housing position and conditions, bearing in mind the association's selection criteria.
- If you are unsure of how to fill in the form, or need further explanations of any other point, get advice.
- If you are unhappy with the outcome of your application, most associations have some form of appeals procedure.
- Associations that do take under-18s will need a third party (eg, social services, probation or other) to act as guarantor. Alternatively, they may ask for a litigation friend should there be any tenancy problems. This means that the guarantor holds the tenancy on trust until the person is 18, when they then take over the tenancy themselves. This arrangement tends to be used for people leaving care in a planned way, but this should not put you off applying in your own right.

Housing associations – sample entry in directory

Name and address	<i>Include opening hours.</i>
Telephone number	
Fax number	
Age limits	<i>Does it only accommodate 18-year-olds and above or is it willing to offer licences to 16- and 17-year-olds?</i>
Accommodation for people with disabilities	<i>Does it have adapted properties, and/or management agreements with support agencies?</i>
Areas	<i>Details of towns, villages, postcode areas.</i>
Type of accommodation	<i>Bedsits, 1-bed, 2-bed, flats, houses. What type of tenancy agreement? Assured, assured shorthold, introductory tenancies?</i>
Application procedure	<i>How to apply. How long would you normally wait to be rehoused?</i>
Lettings policy/selections criteria	<i>Is it part of local housing register/common waiting lists? Does it operate choice-based lettings? How does it determine priority?</i>
Support for vulnerable tenants	<i>Does it provide any extra services for tenants with support needs?</i>
General comments	

4c Hostels and supported housing

Hostels vary enormously in terms of the kind of accommodation they offer, the amount of support they can provide, and whether it is for emergency stays only or for longer periods. Some will offer places to anyone who is homeless, while others may be targeted at a particular group such as women, young people, or a specific ethnic minority. The key points below and the list of hostels that follows can help you work out whether this is the best option for you.

Key points

- Support services are often provided in hostels, to enable you to maintain the accommodation, become involved in education/training, and to prepare you for more independent living.
- Supported accommodation can be offered by housing associations, local authorities, or charities, and offers longer-term accommodation linked to a support package.
- Foyers provide accommodation linked to training and employment. They are not suitable if you have multiple or high-support needs.
- Most hostels and foyers have access to move-on accommodation in order to meet your long-term housing needs.
- Night shelters usually have limited numbers of bed spaces and are available in an emergency. They would be your first point of contact if you had nowhere to spend the night. At a night shelter, you can have your needs assessed and get advice on your options.

Hostels and supported housing – sample entry

Name and address	
Telephone number	
Fax number	
Contact	
Specific client group	<i>If applicable, which client group does the project cater for? Does the project target specific groups?</i>
Age	<i>Details of minimum and maximum age.</i>
Will not accept	<i>Any particular client groups it is unable to accept.</i>
User profile	<i>General make-up of the resident population (ie, ethnicity, sex, age).</i>
Referral procedure	<i>Details of how to access the project (eg, application form, interview, is self-referral possible, or is direct access available in an emergency?).</i>
Referring agreements with other bodies	<i>Some providers will only accept referrals from named agencies.</i>
Referral times	<i>Can referrals be made 24 hours a day or do they only accept new clients during office hours?</i>
Vacancy details	<i>Frequency at which vacancies arise, length of waiting list, average length of stay for residents.</i>
Total number of bed spaces	<i>Single rooms or shared rooms.</i>
Cost per week	<i>Breakdown of costs, including any service charge.</i>
Charge to resident	<i>What proportion of the cost is not covered by Housing Benefit?</i>
Baths/showers/kitchen facilities	<i>How many residents have to share each facility?</i>
Laundry facilities	<i>Is this a free facility, subsidised or pay-by-meter service?</i>

Other communal facilities	<i>Is there a television lounge or games room?</i>
Disabled facilities	<i>How many rooms are accessible to disabled people, what other facilities, aids, and adaptations are provided?</i>
Tenure	<i>Type of tenancy or licence agreement given. Eviction procedure – especially notice periods.</i>
House rules	<i>Main rules and regulations particular to each accommodation provider (eg, curfew, no alcohol, etc).</i>
Resident access	<i>Do residents have access to their room during the day? Do residents have their own key?</i>
Visitors	<i>Are visitors allowed, only at certain times of the day, only to communal rooms, overnight guests?</i>
Staffing	<i>The type of assistance and support available to residents. Total number of staff, and if it provides 24-hour cover.</i>
Resettlement/support	<i>Details of formal and informal support programmes, and whether participation is expected as part of the accommodation package. Does it provide a resettlement programme to facilitate independent living?</i>
Rehousing	<i>Nomination rights to longer-term housing. Support in finding accommodation.</i>
Activities	<i>Details of other activities that may be available at the project.</i>
Health care	<i>Any special arrangements with a local GP or clinic.</i>

4d Lodgings schemes

Lodging schemes enable young people, usually aged 16 to 18, to live in a home as part of a family. Support should be available, both for the lodger and the landlord. Nightstop schemes also operate from family homes, but are intended for emergency use only and stays of one or two nights.

Lodgings schemes – sample entry

Name and address	
Telephone number	
Fax number	
Contact	
Target group	<i>If applicable, which client group does the project cater for? Is it only for 16- and 17-year-olds?</i>
Does it provide emergency accommodation?	<i>Does it have emergency accommodation available for direct access? Does it have to be by referral by another body?</i>
Entrance requirements	<i>Self-referral, or will they only accept referrals from named agencies?</i>
Type of accommodation	<i>Is it supported lodgings within a family home? What meals are provided?</i>
Other services	<i>Are support, befriending, advice, and counselling provided?</i>
House rules	<i>Main rules and regulations particular to each accommodation provider.</i>
Resettlement and rehousing services	<i>Details of formal and informal support programmes. Does it provide a resettlement programme to facilitate independent living? Support in finding accommodation?</i>

4e Women's refuges

Young women who have to leave home because of violence or threats may want to stay at a refuge. They do not have to go to a refuge in their own area, and the address is kept secret to protect women from violent partners.

If you are fleeing violence you may be considered to be vulnerable and therefore in priority need, and may be able to get help from the local authority. You may also be in priority need for other reasons, such as having a dependent child.

Women's refuge – sample entry

Name of organisation	
Correspondence address	<i>Usually a PO box.</i>
Telephone number/emergency number	<i>Is there an answerphone in operation at certain times?</i>
Fax number	
Other information	
Services provided	<i>Support for victims of domestic violence and counselling for perpetrators of domestic violence.</i>
Target group	<i>Does the service target a particular client group?</i>
Age range of children accepted	<i>Ages for both boys and girls. Does it only accept boys under the age of 16?</i>
Rehousing services	<i>Nominations to local authorities or housing associations. Support in finding accommodation.</i>
Children's services	<i>Support for children, any child workers/children's development workers.</i>

4f Advice services

Housing law can be very complicated and difficult to understand. If you have a housing problem you are likely to need some expert housing advice at some stage. This section lists the agencies in your area that offer housing advice. Many will provide other related services, and all are free. See *key points* below.

Read this first

Before you contact or visit an advice agency, check their opening times and whether it is okay to call in for advice or if you'll need an appointment. Also check if there's anything you should bring to the interview, such as identification or proof of address or tenancy.

Key points

The services available from an advice agency will vary, but may include some of the following.

- Expert advice about housing and homelessness problems.
- Information about housing options that can help you make informed choices.
- An advocacy service to help you think through your options, and represent you to other organisations. If your housing problem has gone to court or a tribunal, the service will prepare the case and represent you.
- Support, including counselling.
- A mediation service, for example, to enable family members to discuss problems in a neutral space.
- Information and support for Housing Benefit applications.

Advice agency – sample entry

Address	
Telephone number	
Fax number	
Target group	<i>Is there a specific client group the agency targets?</i>
Area covered	
Services available	<i>Drop-in services, advice, advocacy, tenancy support, rent deposit schemes.</i>
Opening hours	
Disabled access	<i>Or are home visits an alternative?</i>

4g Index of advice and accommodation agencies

Advice service	Women's refuges	Local lodgings schemes	Hostels/supported housing	Housing associations	See page	
Sample entry						
Ashon Housing Association				✓	8	

5. Renting privately: money and the law

Purpose of this section

Many young people will look for accommodation in the private rented sector. This section sets out as simply as possible what they need to know about their legal rights, the benefits they may be able to claim, and the way accommodation agencies should operate by law.

How to write this section

Virtually all of this section has been written for you, in Template 5. If the law changes it will need to be updated. Otherwise, the only information you need to add in is a list of accommodation agencies. We have provided a template for this.

5 Renting privately: money and the law

The private rented sector often provides young people with their first step to independent housing. This is particularly the case when in further and higher education, and when taking a job away from home. Private renting can offer easily accessible accommodation, although financial barriers can make it difficult to both find and keep this sort of housing. Conditions can also be less than ideal, especially in Houses in Multiple Occupation, where several tenants are sharing a home and facilities.

This section should help you understand more about

- your rights as a private tenant
- benefits and other financial help
- private accommodation agencies.

Read this

It is important to remember that the law relating to landlords and tenants is complicated. If you are not sure of your legal status or have any doubts, or if your landlord tells you to leave – get advice.

Key points

- You are legally entitled to a rent book, recording the details of your tenancy and rent payments, if you pay your rent weekly.
- You have the right to live in your home free from harassment from your landlord.
- If you are an assured or assured shorthold tenant, your landlord can only increase your rent once a year (unless your tenancy agreement says otherwise).
- Deposits are returnable when you leave your tenancy (unless you damage something).
- Always make a list of fixtures, fittings, and furniture when you move in and note their state of repair – get this agreed by your landlord.
- Never hand over any money/a cheque for deposit, or rent in advance, without receiving a receipt stating what it is for.
- Your rights will be limited if you share accommodation with your landlord.
- Most types of tenancy can only be ended with a court order.
- If you are in doubt about who your landlord is – seek advice.

Your rights as a private tenant

Assured shorthold

This is now the most common type of new tenancy for tenants of private landlords. There is no longer any requirement for your landlord to give you prior notice stating that the tenancy will be an assured shorthold tenancy. Most new private sector tenancies will be assumed to be an assured shorthold tenancy, whether this is stated in writing or not.

As an assured shorthold tenant, you have a right to request (in writing) that the landlord provides you with a written statement of the terms of your tenancy, including: the date the tenancy began, the amount of rent payable, the date rent is due, when the rent can be increased and, if fixed term, the length of the fixed term. The landlord must respond to your request within 28 days or could face a fine.

The landlord can, at any time, give you notice to end your tenancy, and apply to the courts for a possession order. However, unless you haven't paid your rent or you have broken other terms in your tenancy agreement, you cannot be evicted before the six-month period has ended and the court has awarded possession to your landlord. There is also a new reason for which a landlord could seek a possession order from the courts: if you (or a person acting on your instigation) makes a false statement 'knowingly or recklessly' to obtain a tenancy.

Assured

As an assured tenant, you have more rights than an assured shorthold tenant. At the beginning of your tenancy, terms will be agreed (eg, rent). You will have long-term security of tenure, and do not have to leave unless the landlord can prove grounds for possession in the court (eg, eight weeks' or two months' rent arrears). You are an assured tenant if your tenancy started on or after 28 February 1997 and your landlord notified you in writing, or in your written agreement, that it was not an assured shorthold tenancy. You are also an assured tenant if your tenancy started between 15 January 1989 and 27 February 1997, and you were not given a written notice in a special legal form saying that the tenancy was an assured shorthold tenancy.

Other licences and tenancies

Your landlord *may* be able to get you to leave without a court order if you are what is known as an 'excluded licensee' or 'excluded tenant'. You fall into this category if you share accommodation with your landlord or a member of your landlord's family; you have a holiday let; your accommodation is rent free; you are staying in a hostel provided by (for example) the council; or you have been granted a temporary tenancy after you entered the premises as a trespasser.

The law protects people living in residential property against harassment and illegal eviction. It gives you the right to live in your home without interference, and makes harassment and/or illegal eviction a criminal offence. You may also be able to claim damages through the courts if you have been harassed or illegally evicted.

Local authorities are given the power to prosecute those landlords who harass or illegally evict tenants.¹ They can take steps to prevent someone losing their home and assist a harassed or illegally evicted tenant by trying to settle the dispute between landlord and tenant.

Benefits and other financial help

Single Room Rent restrictions

In January 1996, the maximum eligible Housing Benefit payable for single young people under the age of 25 living in the private rented sector was restricted to the cost of rent for a single room in a shared property.

This can lead to difficulties if you are looking to rent a flat, as most one-bedroom flats have higher rents than the single room rent level, and you will have to pay the difference from your training allowance or benefits. In addition, some private landlords are no longer willing to house under-25s. Although minor adjustments to the restrictions were made in July 2001, the basic situation remains the same.

However, if you are a care leaver before your twenty-second birthday, a disabled young person, have dependants living with you, and/or are a living in local authority or housing association accommodation, you may be exempt from this restriction.

The Social Security Act 1988 abolished benefits for most 16- and 17-year-olds unless they were deemed to be in 'severe hardship'. This legislation was linked to a guarantee of a training placement for all 16- and 17-year-olds. However, there were problems with the supply of suitable training courses. Lower benefit rates were also introduced for under-25s.

In 1989 an amendment to the Act allowed 16- and 17-year-olds to claim the 18- to 24-year-old rate of income support if they had 'good reason' to live away from home.

If you are under 18 you may also be able to claim JSA if suffering 'severe hardship'. The most common reason for claiming is if you live away from home for a 'good reason' and have little or no money, or live at home but cannot be supported by your family.

Social fund and crisis loans

A social fund payment could help you to buy essential things, such as furniture or a cooker, which you would otherwise be unable to afford on your regular income. You can apply for a loan (which you have to pay back) or a grant (which you don't). Most loans and grants are discretionary, and not for any standard amount. Each council has a limited amount of money available for the social fund, which can make it difficult to get a payment.

In a few circumstances there is a right to a social fund grant. These are maternity grants for people on some benefits, funeral expenses, cold weather and winter fuel payments, available in some limited circumstances.

¹ Under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977 (strengthened by the Housing Act 1985).

Bond or rent deposit schemes

Most landlords and lettings agents of private rented accommodation require a deposit from tenants, which acts as security against any damage that may be caused to the property, and against non-payment of rent. Although there is no limit on the amount that can be charged, it is usual to request the equivalent of one month's rent.

Because landlords can be difficult about returning deposits, deposit guarantee schemes hold your deposit on behalf of the landlord, and independently settle any disagreement over how much deposit should be returned. This prevents landlords illegally keeping your deposit, while valid claims by the landlord of damage or arrears would be paid by the scheme.

Deposit guarantee schemes are available in some parts of the country, and are usually run by the local council or an advice centre. Although these schemes can provide information and advice about deposits, they cannot give you any monetary assistance for the deposit itself.

Private accommodation agencies

Many people go to accommodation agencies for help finding somewhere to live in the private rented sector. If you decide to do this then it is very important that you understand a little about the law that governs the way they work.

It is illegal for agencies to charge for registering you. You shouldn't pay anything to go on their books or for information from them.² If an agency asks for cash, before they've found you a home, get advice before paying. However, it is not an offence for an agency to charge an agreed sum once they have found you accommodation. Agencies sometimes charge for services such as drawing up a tenancy agreement or doing inventories, but they can only charge these fees once they have found you accommodation.

Accommodation agencies often act on behalf of a landlord, and will deal with any problems and disputes as they occur. If you sign a tenancy agreement believing the agent to be the landlord, then, in the event of a dispute, that agent will be personally liable. However, landlords cannot avoid their liabilities, and they are bound by the actions carried out by agents working under their authority.

² These rules are laid out in the Accommodation Agencies Act 1953.

Accommodation agency – sample entry

Name of landlord	
Contact details	
Rental and other charges	<i>What are average weekly/monthly rents? What deposit and rent in advance is required? Is the agency a member of a rent deposit scheme?</i>
Type of property	<i>Number of bedrooms, property type.</i>
Tenancy type	<i>Assured shorthold or other private tenancy type. Does the landlord also live in the property? Length of agreement.</i>
Location of property	<i>Street name, town or postcode area.</i>

List of organisations and sources of information

Purpose of this section

This section lists a wide range of organisations and sources of information that you may find helpful when compiling your local directory.

Shelter

This guide has been produced by Shelter's Young Persons Team. Shelter believes everyone should have a home. We help people find and keep a home. We campaign for decent housing for all.

The following information may be useful.

- Shelter has more than 30 Housing Aid Centres throughout the UK delivering free, expert advice and advocacy for homeless and badly housed people.
- Shelter's housing advice helpline (0808 800 4444) provides free housing advice from 8am to midnight, seven days a week. It offers initial advice, signposting, and referrals to specialist agencies and services, and can also advocate with local authority housing and social services departments.
- Shelter's online advice service specifically for young people, www.shelter.org.uk/knowyourrights, includes information for people aged 16 to 24, students, and those leaving care; and advice about money matters, getting a place of your own, leaving home in a hurry, and more. It also includes an email advice service, for tailored advice about your situation.

Citizens Advice

- Citizens Advice offers advice and advocacy on a wide range of issues, including housing, debt counselling, immigration, and benefits (advisers may be able to calculate Housing Benefit amounts).
- Branch offices cover the whole of England with many local branches and surgeries. Details of local branches, as well as some advice, is available at www.adviceguide.org.uk

Other sources of advice

Law centres (www.lawcentres.org.uk)

May belong to the Law Centres Federation. Details can be found online or in the phone book. They usually offer advice on a range of issues and often have access to solicitors who specialise in housing.

Resource Information Service (www.ris.org.uk)

A very comprehensive database of advice agencies, hostels, and other organisations, available on subscription. Its Hostels On Line Project (HOLP) provides extensive details of hostels across the UK.

Women's Aid Federation England

For women and their children experiencing domestic violence. PO Box 391, Bristol BS99 7WS. Tel: 08457 023 468.

Message Home Helpline

For people who have left home, or run away, to send a message to their families or carers. Roebuck House, 284–286 Richmond Road West, London SW14 7JE. Tel: 0800 700 740.

MIND InfoLine

For users of mental health services, carers or friends and relatives, professionals, general public. Granter House, 15–19 Broadway, London E15 4BQ. Tel: 0845 766 0163.

**National Rent Deposit Forum
(www.nrdf.org.uk)**

An umbrella organisation that assists people to access private rented accommodation by providing a bond or deposit. The website also includes contact details for local schemes. Tel: 0121 616 5067.

Homeless Link (www.homeless.org.uk)

A membership organisation, supporting and representing more than 700 agencies working with homeless people across England and Wales.

Jobcentre Plus or Benefits Agency offices

Will be able to help with applications for social fund payments, to help with advance rent. Find your local office at www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Housing associations

These are overseen by the Housing Corporation. The following site will provide details of local housing associations: www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Housing associations can also be found in phone directories.

Local authority services and departments

These can be found in the phone book, and the website www.open.gov.uk provides a directory of local authorities.

Foyers

The Foyer Federation website is www.foyer.net/mpn/ and contains a directory of member schemes. Tel: 020 7833 8616.

Night Stop (www.nightstop-uk.org)

The Night Stop website has details of local schemes. Tel: 01274 53300.

**The Children's Legal Centre
(www2.essex.ac.uk/clc/)**

Offers a range of publications and also advice on legal issues relating to children, including the duties of social services. Tel: 01206 872466.

Books and publications***Housing Rights Guide***

**Geoffrey Randall, Shelter 2005
(updated annually)**

A comprehensive yet brief introduction to housing rights and the law, aimed at the non-specialist and general public.

***Homelessness and Allocations*
6th edition**

**Andrew Arden and Caroline Hunter,
LAG Books 2002**

Often referred to as 'the Bible' by caseworkers. Technical, but invaluable if an adviser is doing casework around homelessness and council housing allocations.

Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits

**Pamela Fitzpatrick, et al,
CPAG 2005 (updated annually)**

Comprehensive and very useable, on all benefits, but covers Housing Benefit particularly well.

A Guide to Grants for Individuals in Need
Alan French et al,
Directory of Social Change 2002

A directory of more than 2,500 national and local charitable trusts concerned with individual poverty. May be a source of help for young people setting up home.

Student Housing Rights Guide
Martin Davis and Graham Robson,
Shelter 2002

Covers private rented and shared accommodation.

Housing Aid Update, published monthly by Shelter, covers developments in housing law; suitable for specialists and housing caseworkers.

Shelter Guides are a series of booklets for the general public that cover a range of housing issues, including *Young people and Homeless? Read this*. Details of these and other guides can be found at www.shelter.org.uk

Other useful websites and publications

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) – www.odpm.gov.uk – is the repository for government policy and developments in housing. You will find a PDF on the Code of Guidance for local authority housing departments when considering homelessness applications and council housing allocations at www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/pdf/odpm_house_pdf_609062.pdf

The Code of Guidance on the Children Act 1989 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 can be found at www.doh.gov.uk/pub/docs/doh/carelea1.pdf and www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects/work_pro/regs2000.pdf

Bad housing wrecks lives

We are the fourth richest country in the world, and yet millions of people in Britain wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded or dangerous. Many others have lost their home altogether. Bad housing robs us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

Shelter believes everyone should have a home.

We help 100,000 people a year fight for their rights, get back on their feet, and find and keep a home. We also tackle the root causes of bad housing by campaigning for new laws, policies, and solutions.

We can only do this with your help. Please support us.

88 Old Street
London
EC1V 9HU

Telephone 0845 458 4590
or visit www.shelter.org.uk

£12.50

1 903595 38 X

supported by



Shelter