



St. Helens Council

Urban Regeneration & Housing

The Housing Options and Advice Service
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St. Helens
Council

Housing Options and Advice Service

Preventing Homelessness



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Council

Housing Options & Advice Service





...making it easier for you to contact your Council

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For a translation of this document, please provide your name and address and the name of the language you require to the Contact Centre, quoting reference 0601039G.

如您需要以您的語言編寫的文件翻譯本，請向Contact Centre提供您的姓名和地址，並附上參考號 0601039G

Para sa saling-wika ng dokumentong ito sa inyong wika, kung maaari ilagay ang inyong pangalan at tirahan sa Sentro ng Pakikipag-ugnayan, banggitin ang reperensya 0601039

ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਲਈ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਆਪਣਾ ਨਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਪਤਾ ਕਾਨਟੈਕਟ ਸੈਂਟਰ ਨੂੰ ਮੁਹੱਈਆ ਕਰੋ, ਨਾਲ ਹਵਾਲਾ ਨੰਬਰ 0601039G ਦਿਉ।

इस दस्तावेज़ का अपनी भाषा में अनुवाद पाने के लिए कृपया अपना नाम तथा पता कॉन्टैक्ट सेंटर में उपलब्ध कराएं, साथ में संदर्भ नम्बर 0601039G दें।

এই পত্রিকাটি নিজের ভাষায় অনুবাদ করার জন্য অনুগ্রহ করে নিজের নাম ঠিকানা কন্টাক্ট সেন্টারে জানিয়ে দিন, সাথে যোগাযোগ নম্বর 0601039G দিবেন।

اس دستاویز کا اپنی زبان میں ترجمہ حاصل کرنے کے لیے براہ کرم اپنا نام اور پتہ کانٹیکٹ سنٹر میں دستیاب کرائیں، ساتھ میں حوالہ نمبر 0601039G دیں

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Where do I go for more help/information?

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Preventing homelessness

Our services are geared to do all we can to prevent you from becoming homeless. Homelessness has severe effects on those who experience it and has been proven to have profound effects on people's health, education, and employment opportunities. Living in temporary hostel or bed & breakfast accommodation also has an impact on people's lives. It is neither in the Council's interests nor your own for you to become homeless.

This leaflet has been designed to inform you of how you can prevent homelessness and the services the Council can provide.

How we can help you avoid becoming homeless

The Council has a legal duty to prevent homelessness. We do this in a variety of ways. Each person's situation is different and the responses and the actions that we take will depend on your circumstances.

If you have a housing problem, the Housing Options and Advice Service can assist you. You can either telephone or call in person. Our trained officers will listen carefully to your problems and discuss the appropriate solutions. The advice that we give to you will be confidential and impartial. We will only use the information you provide to help solve your problem.

How you can help

The earlier you let us know about your housing problem, the more we can do to help. Please help us to help you by allowing us to investigate your situation thoroughly and go through all the options open to you.

The Housing Options and Advice Service deals with various housing 'problems' - here are some of the situations that can occur and our advice on preventing homelessness.

Are you living with friends / family and have been asked to leave?

In this situation we will listen to you and then speak to your friend / family member about their reasons for asking you to leave. We will also visit you to confirm the position and try to resolve the problem by negotiating to help you stay in the property. If you cannot stay at the property we will assist you in obtaining alternative housing. Dependent on your circumstances this could be in either the housing association or private rented sector or hostel accommodation. It is important that if you are thinking of moving out, that you have time to plan where you will move to and how you will manage with a tenancy of your own. If you can, and it is safe for you to do so, it is better to remain living with friends / family until you have your new home ready to move into. We can also offer mediation to try and resolve conflict within the family to prevent homelessness.

Are you having problems with your landlord or in your tenancy?

If you are a tenant and experiencing problems in your tenancy we can help to prevent your homelessness in a number of ways.

Problems in the tenancy can be due to many factors

- rent arrears
 - rent increases you can't afford
 - housing benefit problems
 - family breakdown
 - your behaviour - e.g excessive noise or other anti – social behaviour amounting to a breach of tenancy
 - personal problems or a life crisis arising - this could be anything from the onset of a serious illness, a bereavement in the family, mental health problems, substance abuse etc.
 - poor condition of property - this may be due to a lack of repairs
 - the landlord wishing to sell the property or to return to live there
-

Working together to prevent homelessness

The Housing Options and Advice Service is often the first place that people come to when they have a housing problem. However, there are usually many agencies involved in solving housing problems. Many of these agencies provide services which will contribute to preventing you from becoming homeless. These may relate to support services for particular groups e.g. drug and alcohol services, mental health services etc. or general support services to enable you to live independently. These will look to support and sustain you in your current accommodation wherever possible and if you are waiting rehousing to prepare you for your new home so that you can settle in and manage your tenancy.

What if I still become homeless?

This leaflet has been designed to provide you with information on the range of ways that homelessness can be prevented. The key message is to **contact us at the earliest opportunity when a housing problem starts to occur.**

If you do become homeless the Council will help you in accordance with its procedures for homeless people. These are set out in a legal framework. The type of help we can offer you will depend on your circumstances.

Are you experiencing domestic violence?

Domestic violence includes all kinds of physical, sexual and emotional abuse within relationships and can affect anyone. If this is happening to you please get advice about your housing and support options from the Housing Options and Advice Service at the earliest opportunity.

We can advise you on legal options you might want to consider. Amongst other things legal orders can be obtained which order the violent person to leave your home or allow you to stay or enter the home. An order can also be obtained to prevent someone from being violent to you or any member of your household.

We may be able to help you with some temporary accommodation – to give you a period of time to work out your problems and consider the options carefully.

If you require a safe place to stay we will provide this. This could be a women's refuge or hostel. If you require it we will also help you access alternative housing in the public or the private rented sector.

We will link you in with other agencies that can help you deal with your problems e.g. Women's Aid and Merseyside Police.

Are you experiencing violence / harassment from outside your home?

The Housing Options and Advice Service will liaise with Merseyside Police and your landlord and any other relevant agencies to establish evidence of violence / harassment.

Depending on the nature of the violence / harassment, we will discuss the most appropriate and safest approach to take.

Wherever possible we will try to enable you to stay in your home. If temporary accommodation is judged to be necessary we will arrange it. If it is safe to do so, we will work with you to return home. However, if it is not safe to return, we will assist you in finding alternative accommodation. If you are a tenant, we will work with your landlord to find you alternative accommodation.

Any of these factors may lead you to becoming homeless.

The Housing Options and Advice service can speak direct to your landlord and will seek to actively solve your problem and advise you on your rights as a tenant. If you are or have become vulnerable and require particular support for some reason we may be able to link you in with a relevant support agency. If we are not able to keep you in the home they will help you look for alternative housing through UnderOneRoof or again within the private rented sector.

As well as you having rights as a tenant, you also have responsibilities (e.g. paying the rent on time, looking after the property). If you break the terms of your tenancy (e.g. failing to pay your rent or committing anti – social behaviour) then you may become homeless. If you are found to have acted in a manner that has caused your homelessness, then this will limit the amount of assistance available to you.

Are you living in a property that is in a poor condition?

You should not become homeless for this reason. There are legal obligations on landlords concerning health and safety and the condition of their properties. The Housing Options and Advice Service can liaise with Environmental Health and their Enforcement Teams to prompt landlords to ensure that their properties are of a decent standard.

Have you been given notice to leave a property?

The Housing Options and Advice Service can advise you on your rights. Your rights will depend on the type of tenancy you have and the terms of the tenancy agreement. You cannot be evicted without receiving the appropriate notice and a court order being obtained.

If you are a private tenant with an assured shorthold tenancy, the landlord should have a reason for asking you to leave, but can give you two months notice to leave towards the end of your tenancy. We will normally visit the property you occupy and discuss the situation with your landlord and may be able to reach an arrangement that allows you to stay on.

If you are required to leave or you want to move elsewhere we can help you obtain alternative housing. If you seek another private rented property we can assist you to find another property and in certain circumstances may be able to help you with a rent guarantee or deposit.

It may be that the landlord has made his mind up to sell and in this situation our efforts would be directed at negotiating with the landlord to give you a reasonable period of time so we can help you find alternative housing. This will save the owner in legal, court, and eviction fees. It may also be that the landlord or his estate agent has other properties that he is willing to let to you.

If the landlord is asking you to leave because you have not paid your rent we will carry out a financial assessment of your circumstances to see if the rent is affordable for you and whether we can arrange to come to some agreement with the landlord to meet any repayments to allow you to stay. Some rent problems may have arisen due to a problem with housing benefit. If your circumstances have changed (e.g. you now work part time) this can cause a change in the benefit you are entitled to. It is your responsibility to keep housing benefit informed of any changes in your circumstances and to provide any information requested. Failing to do this can cause rent arrears to build up.

Are you struggling financially to meet the costs of your home?

It is possible in some circumstances to get extra help with housing costs by way of a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). This covers short term payments in special circumstance for those entitled to housing benefit. The Housing Options and Advice

Service are able to advise if DHP is appropriate in your circumstances.

If you are struggling with debts (either housing debts and/or other debts) and can't cope we can direct you to trained money advisors in the Citizens Advice Bureau. They can work with you to develop repayment plans and may be able to negotiate with lenders on your behalf.

If you are in mortgage arrears or rent arrears and the lender / landlord begins court proceedings, the Housing Options and Advice Service can attend and support you in court hearings. They will put your case forward in order to prevent you becoming homeless. Even where they are not able to prevent the court granting possession they will usually be able to delay the date when you have to leave. This will give you time to find alternative accommodation.

Is your relationship with your partner breaking down?

If your relationship is breaking down or you are thinking about leaving your partner you will be worried about housing issues and your legal rights to remain in the home. We would encourage you to contact us at the earliest opportunity if you have any concerns about housing. We will ensure you are aware of all the housing options available to you.

What rights you have depend on what type of accommodation you are living in. This is a complex area of law and everyone will have slightly different circumstances. We will do our best to help you find a solution to your individual housing problems. If you are an owner occupier or a joint tenant, you will have rights to remain within the property.

We will be sensitive to your needs and discuss with you in confidence whether you are able to stay in the property or whether you wish to move to more suitable housing.