



<https://www.housingrights.org.uk/professionals/advice-and-information/homelessness-advice-professionals/applying-help-homeless-person>

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# **Applying for help as a homeless person**

This information is for professionals working in housing and homelessness.

## **Out of hours homeless help**

Contact the out-of-hours homeless service by calling [03448 920 908](tel:03448920908).

The out-of-hours service can arrange temporary accommodation if there is reason to believe the person is homeless and that person has priority need.

## **Making a homeless application**

A homeless application does not have to be in a particular form.

A person should call the Housing Executive on [03448 920 908](tel:03448920908) to ask for help. The Housing Executive will appoint a housing officer to the case. This adviser must establish if there is reason to believe the applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness, and open a homelessness assessment.

The Housing Executive must make further inquiries where they have reason to believe that an applicant is homeless or is threatened with homelessness.[1](#)

## **Reason to believe and gatekeeping**

Not everyone is entitled to a homelessness assessment. But the Housing Executive is expected to make inquiries if they have reason to believe that a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Courts have held that “...in the vast majority of cases, the making of the application will mean that it is difficult if not impossible for the Council not to believe that the applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness.”<sup>2</sup>

The NIHE Homelessness Guidance Manual stresses that staff should not deter someone from making a homeless application or fail to open an assessment where there is reason to believe the person may be homeless or threatened with homelessness.<sup>3</sup>

An applicant can challenge a decision not to open a homelessness assessment by taking a judicial review.

## **The homelessness assessment**

A Housing Executive housing officer will open a homelessness assessment for a person if there is reason to believe they may be homeless.

This assessment will determine what, if any, responsibility the Housing Executive has towards the person.

The Housing Executive will investigate whether the applicant passes the 4 homelessness test. These are sometimes referred to as the "homeless hurdles". The four homelessness tests assess whether an applicant is:

- eligible for assistance
- homeless or threatened with homelessness
- in priority need
- unintentionally homeless

An applicant who meets all these requirements is a full duty applicant. This means the Housing Executive accepts a responsibility to provide the applicant with housing.

The applicant should bring information to support their case. This may include:-

- notice to quit from a landlord
- proof of any disabilities or serious medical issues
- passport or other proof of their right to reside in Northern Ireland.

The Housing Executive uses a housing solutions and support approach with applicants. This approach aims to find the most appropriate solution to housing issues.

A housing solutions approach should not interfere with or delay the Housing Executive's statutory duty to make inquiries where a person appears to be homeless.

## **The housing solutions interview**

The objective of a housing solutions interview is to get a full understanding of the applicant's circumstances, needs and housing issues. The applicant should get an opportunity to explain any housing and support needs they have.

Before the housing solutions interview, the housing officer will check if the applicant has:-

- an existing homeless or housing application
- a previous homeless or housing application
- any history of antisocial behaviour
- any history of rent arrears

The housing officer must open a homelessness assessment if there is any reason to believe the applicant may be homeless or threatened with homelessness. The housing officer must simply have reason to believe there may be a risk of homelessness, rather than having to be satisfied of this fact.

### **Adviser decides not to assess a person for homelessness**

The Housing Solutions Handbook encourages the housing officer to explain why they are not opening a homelessness assessment if it seems appropriate to do so, for example, if the person thinks they should be assessed for homelessness.

The applicant should ask for this decision in writing and get advice about challenging the decision.

## **Getting help with a homeless application**

Some people may need help to make a homeless application.

A person should not be stopped from having a friend, family member or professional attend with them when they present as homeless to the Housing Executive.

## Footnotes

- [\[1\]](#) Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, Article 7.
- [\[2\]](http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2007/52.html) //www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2007/52.html.
- [\[3\]](#) Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Homelessness Guidance Manual, Chapter 1.3.1.