



## **Are you Homeless or do you have a threat of Homelessness? A Guide to what you can expect from NK Housing Options Team**

### **How to Contact & Get Help**

You can contact Housing Options either in person Monday –Thursday 9am – 5pm, Friday 9am – 4.30pm , via email [housingoptions@n-kesteven.gov.uk](mailto:housingoptions@n-kesteven.gov.uk) or by telephone T: 01529 414155.

When you contact the Housing Options Team you will be offered an 'Options Interview' to establish exactly what your housing issue is and to establish what the best options are available to you to either prevent your threat of homelessness or, in cases where this cannot be achieved, what options are available to provide you with a suitable, alternative home.

From 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has been introduced which has included new duties for the Housing Options Team to provide to everyone who is either homeless or with a threat of homelessness within 56 days. Every applicant who approaches will have an individual housing assessment to establish

- **What the housing problem is?**
- **Why & how the situation has occurred?**
- **Can the situation be prevented**
- **The individual support need of the applicant or any family members**
- **The best way forward to resolve the situation.**

### **Prevention Duty**

If it appears that the threat of homelessness can be resolved and action put in place by the Housing Options Team that would enable you to remain within your present home, a 'Prevention Duty' will be offered to you and we will draw up a plan of action which will be agreed between Housing Options & yourself and confirmed in a Personalised Housing Plan (PHP). This Prevention Duty will last for a 56 day period and if we achieve a positive outcome & you are able to remain within your accommodation for a minimum of at least 6 months, the duty will end.

## Relief Duty

If we are not able to prevent the threat of homelessness, Housing Options will then work to relieve your homelessness & find you suitable, alternative accommodation. In this situation you will be offered a 'Relief Duty' which will initially run for 56 days whilst action is taken to secure you an alternative home.

Certain criteria will need to be met in order for a relief duty to be offered to you & you will need to be:

- **Eligible for assistance**
- **Homeless or with a threat of homelessness within 56 days**
- **Have a local connection to North Kesteven**

## Information about you

Housing Options will carry out detailed and thorough enquiries. Every case is looked at individually and may involve contact with other agencies and people involved with you & your situation.

We will need you to provide all necessary information to enable us to enable us to assist you effectively. Required Information will include:

- **Your name and address;**
- **Names and ages of the people who normally live with you;**  
(birth certificates should be provided for proof);
- **Proof that your children live with you (benefit award letters would confirm this);**
- **Details of any medical condition (a copy of your prescription would really help);**
- **All previous addresses and type of tenure eg: private rented, sharing with family**
- **All income and capital, (wage slips, bank statements, benefit award letters ;)**
- **Employment details;**
- **All outgoing financial commitments (rent books, mortgage statements, loans, etc);**
- **Where violence is alleged, a report from police, solicitor and/or doctors would help;**
- **Where relevant, Home Office information if you are subject to immigration control, passport and visa documents.**

## Enquiries we will make

- **Eligibility - are you entitled to assistance, as prescribed by law?**
- **Homelessness – is there anywhere you are entitled to live that is both reasonable and suitable for you to occupy?**
- **Priority need – are you considered to be in a “priority” group, as prescribed by law?**

- **Intentionality – did you deliberately do or fail to do something that led to you losing your home?**
- **Local Connection – do you have a local connection to this Council area, if not, where do you have one?**

## Providing accommodation & The Council's duty to assist you

### Interim Accommodation

If you have nowhere to stay and we have reason to believe you are in priority need, we have a duty to provide you with temporary accommodation whilst our enquiries are completed.

Not everyone will be provided with temporary accommodation as the criteria only applies to certain groups of individuals:

- **Pregnant or with dependent children resident with you on a permanent basis**
- **Care Leavers**
- **Homeless through emergency fire/flood etc..**
- **Any person determined as vulnerable through old age, physical or learning disability, mental health problems, fleeing violence or domestic abuse, time in care, prison or HM forces**

You are not automatically vulnerable if you fit into one of these groups and further assessment of your needs and limitations will be assessed by Housing options before temporary accommodation may be provided for you.

Temporary accommodation can be provided in the form of hostels, shared accommodation, bed & breakfast or Council's own properties (furnished or unfurnished). If you are on a low income this accommodation may be eligible for Housing Benefit, if not you are responsible for the cost. You should complete a housing benefit claim immediately. The location of this accommodation can be anywhere within the North Kesteven District, occasionally we have placed households in neighbouring areas. We will ensure the accommodation is suitable and reasonable for your taking into account your household needs ie: location, facilities, size & type of property and any specific support or medical needs,

You will also be provided with a Housing Support Worker to help you maintain your temporary tenancy and other advocacy/signposting assistance.

If you are not considered to be in "Priority Need", the Council does not have to provide you with accommodation whilst we support you to resolve your housing issue.

We will however, provide you with information on emergency accommodation options that are available such as hostels. Due to the rural nature of our district it is unlikely that this will be available locally, but we will establish the best options available in the area/surrounding areas.

We will also provide you with information and assistance to access other accommodation providers this may involve making referrals and applying to waiting lists.

Please note that Social housing is only one of the options available to those seeking alternative accommodation and may NOT be an option for everyone. The Duties to **PREVENT & RELIEVE** your homelessness are separate to the Lincs Homefinder housing register and the Housing Options Team will determine if this is a possible solution for you.

You must be aware that we are able to discharge our duty to you if we are successful in securing you accommodation that is considered suitable for your needs. This could be a private tenancy, supported accommodation or even accommodation with friends or relatives if negotiated for a minimum 6 month period.

### **Intentionally Homeless**

During a Relief Duty you will be provided with support regardless of whether your situation was caused or contributed to by your own deliberate actions. However, such factors may have a bearing on the options available to you and you may not be entitled to any preference through the housing register if intentionality applies to you.

Once the 56 day Relief Duty ends, if we have been unsuccessful in resolving your accommodation needs and are unlikely to be successful in doing so, a full duty homeless application can be offered to you.

### **Full Housing Duty**

A Full Housing Duty is accepted by the Council, once we have decided that you are:

- Eligible for assistance
- Homeless but not intentionally
- In priority need
- You have a local connection to the North Kesteven area.

A full Duty homeless application is only considered once all other options have been exhausted & are only offered in exceptional circumstances where efforts to resolve your housing needs through Relief Duties have been unsuccessful. This means we will ensure accommodation is available to you but might mean you have to stay in temporary accommodation longer until a suitable property comes available.

If at any time you refuse an offer of suitable accommodation, the Council may discharge their duty to you. This means that you will not be offered another property and will have to make your own arrangements and find alternative accommodation.

The Council's duty to secure you accommodation will end if the following circumstances occur :

- You refuse an offer of alternative suitable temporary accommodation.
- You refuse an offer of suitable accommodation from the housing register.
- You accept an offer of an assured tenancy.
- You accept an offer of a qualifying assured short hold tenancy (Rent Assist Scheme).
- You cease to be eligible for assistance.
- You become homeless intentionally from your current accommodation.
- You voluntarily leave your current accommodation.

***Never refuse an offer of accommodation without getting advice first. You can ask for a review about an offer of accommodation if you are not happy, which the Housing Options Team will explain to you.***

### **No Housing Duty but Assistance to help you find your own**

If the Council does not have to provide you with accommodation, it does not mean we will not help you at all. We will provide you with information, advice and assistance to help you find your own accommodation, please see Section "Other Assistance"

### **Other Assistance**

The Council has a range of advice and practical assistance to help people either secure alternative accommodation or help them stay in their existing homes this includes but is not limited to:

- Information on other housing providers
- Arranging applications and interviews with other housing providers
- Information on renting in the private sector
- Paying rent in advance or providing a guarantee for deposits
- Paying administration or credit check fees for letting agents
- Arranging transport to access accommodation
- Referral to a Housing Support Worker
- Carry out security works recommended by the Police
- Negotiating with landlords, mortgage lenders, family and friends
- Referrals to Money Advice Service to help with debts and agreeing payments to lenders

## Reviews & Complaints

If you disagree with the decision made in relation to your case, you have a right to request a review.

This request must be made in writing within 21 days of the date on the decision letter. The Council may specify in writing a longer period of time. The Council must then complete a review and notify you of that decision under the review within 56 days of your written request.

If you are still not satisfied with the original decision, you have a further right to appeal to the County Court on any point of law arising from the decision. The appeal **MUST** be brought within 21 days of you receiving your notification of the review decision, you will probably need assistance to do this, please see who can help below.

## Independent advice & assistance

You should read all your letters and paperwork carefully, make sure you understand the contents. If you are not clear about anything you should contact the Housing Options Officer dealing with your case.

You may want to also take independent advice either through the Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter, another agency or from a Solicitor. (Please note, a solicitor may charge you for their advice).

Shelter  
Tel: 0808 800 4444

Citizens Advice Bureau  
Carre Street  
Sleaford  
NG34 7TW  
0844 499 4199

Or  
Beaumont Fee  
Lincoln  
LN1 1UW  
01522 828601