Housing Helpsheet

Making a homelessness application in Bristol

HOUSING MATTERS
Advice • Support • Advocacy

What is a homelessness application and when should I make one?

A homelessness application involves getting in touch with Bristol City Council to declare that you're homeless or at risk of homelessness and therefore in need of their support.

The council have a duty to provide emergency (also known as interim) accommodation for people who meet ALL THREE of the following criteria:

- Homeless or threatened with homelessness (please note this also includes living in very unsuitable/unsafe housing);
- In priority need (e.g., if you are physically disabled, have a severe mental illness, are pregnant, or have children), and;
- Eligible for assistance (depending on your immigration status, your connection to Bristol etc.). You may not be eligible for emergency accommodation if the Council finds that you are intentionally homeless (see below for more details).

If you're experiencing or at risk of homelessness, you need to make a homelessness application. You should do this even if you don't think you meet all of the above criteria.

The council will assess you, either in person or over the phone, to work out whether they have a duty to provide emergency accommodation for you.

Contact the council as soon as you know you could be homeless, as it can take time to get an appointment, and they may be able to help you stay in your current accommodation.



Intentional homelessness

The Council may find that you are intentionally homeless and therefore not eligible for Council accommodation if you are homeless because of your own deliberate acts or omissions, for example failing to pay your rent or mortgage or being evicted due to your anti-social behaviour.

The Renters Rights Act came into for on 1 May 2026, so Section 21 notices are no longer valid in the private rented sector. If you

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have a section 21 or a section 8 notice you are entitled to stay in your accommodation until you are evicted by a court order. If you voluntarily leave before this, the Council may find that you are intentionally homeless and therefore ineligible for emergency accommodation.

To read more about the changes made by the Renters Rights Act please see the Shelter website

Local connection

In order to qualify for help with homelessness you are also required to have a local connection to the area where you apply for help. This usually means that either:

- You live in or have recently lived in the area; or
- You have close family (e.g. parents, adult children, siblings) living in the area; or
- The area is your normal place of work (this includes self-employment and part-time work but not very casual work).
- You get care leavers' support in the area.
- You lived in asylum supported housing in the area.

There may also be other special reasons which qualify as a local connection in some circumstances, for example very important social connections or specialist health care.

If you have a qualifying local connection in more than one area, you should ask for help in the area you want to live in. If a council determines that you do not have a local connection in that area, they may refer you to a different council for homelessness help.

If you're ineligible or not in priority need

The council also has a duty to give advice to people who may be at risk of homelessness, even if they're not in priority need or eligible for assistance. This may include signposting you to another agency for support.

What if I urgently need accommodation?

Nowhere to sleep tonight

If you have nowhere to sleep tonight, you may be temporarily given a bed in a night shelter or a hostel.

Most night shelters and hostels only accept people who've been referred to them by another agency e.g., the council or someone from the St Mungo's outreach team.

With our partner, Caring in Bristol, we've put together the Caring Handbook. Here, you can find details of night shelters, hostels and other services around Bristol.

Fleeing domestic violence/abuse

If you're experiencing or at risk of domestic violence/abuse, the council must provide emergency accommodation if you need it, whether or not you have children.

You don't have to leave your home before you ask for help. Bristol offers many different services for people experiencing domestic violence/abuse. Next Link can help women and children find refuges and domestic abuse services in the area.

How can I make a homelessness application?

In-person (the best option if your situation is urgent)

If your situation is an emergency and/or you are homeless on the day, the quickest way to get an assessment is to go in-person to the Citizen Service Point.

Address: 100 Temple Street
Bristol
BS1 6AG

Opening hours for homelessness applications:

- Mon/Tues/Thurs/Fri: 9am-5pm
- Wednesday: 10am-5pm

By telephone or email

You can call the council on 0117 352 6800 - open Monday to Friday, 8.30am – 6pm (closed Wednesday 12-1.30pm).

Email: homelessnessadvice@bristol.gov.uk

Out of hours help

If you need urgent help when the council office is closed (at weekends, on public holidays, and after 6pm on weekdays), you should:

- Go to your nearest police station, or;
- Call the 'Emergency Duty Team' on 01454 615 165.



If you can't make the application yourself

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If you can't make the application yourself for some reason, the application can be made on your behalf by a third party (for example, a social worker, support worker or housing adviser).

What can I expect from the assessment?

Wait time

If you go in person to the Citizens Service Point:

- The council will try to get you an appointment to assess you on the same day you get in touch with them. If you are homeless with nowhere to sleep tonight, make that clear to the team and they should prioritise assessing you the same day;
- The earlier in the day you arrive, the more likely it is you will be seen by an adviser that day.
- Try to avoid going on a Friday, as Fridays can be particularly busy.

You might first have a 'Housing Help Interview', this is not the same as a homelessness assessment, so make sure you ask for a homelessness assessment and ask for any information/decisions to be confirmed in writing (this allows you to refer back at a later date and can help us, or another adviser, to understand the progress of your application if you later seek advice).

If you contact the council by telephone:

- When you call, they'll take your details and arrange an assessment over the phone.
- It can take up to 2 weeks to get an appointment, but they will try and arrange one as quickly as possible.

What to take to your appointment

You should bring (where relevant):

- Proof of identity and immigration status (e.g., a passport or ID card);
- Eviction notice and tenancy agreement (if you have been asked to leave by your landlord);
- Proof of income (e.g. wage-slips or proof of benefits);
- Proof of relevant medical conditions or pregnancy (e.g., a letter from your doctor or midwife);
- Proof of children you're responsible for (e.g. birth certificates, adoption certificates).

Length of assessment



The assessment should take 1-2 hours.

The council's housing advisor will ask you about:

- Yourself
- Your family
- Your address history
- Your health
- Your housing situation

Personal Housing Plan

If the Council determines that you are homeless/at risk of homelessness, in priority need and eligible for assistance, the housing adviser will prepare and agree a Personal Housing Plan with you.

Your Personal Housing Plan will include the steps you and your housing adviser will each take to either stop you becoming homeless or to find housing for you if you are already homeless.

You should answer any reasonable questions from the council openly and honestly.

It is a criminal offence to make a false statement, or withhold information which the council reasonably requires, with the intent to make the council believe you are entitled to assistance.

Help with private renting

If you need to find private rented accommodation but cannot afford the upfront costs of a deposit or 1st month's rent, you can ask the council's Private Renting Team for assistance. You can email them private.renting@bristol.gov.uk. They may be able to help with:

- Offering financial help with a deposit bond scheme, an interest free loan with repayment terms of up to five years
- Help with rent in advance and deposit
- Help to buy furniture essentials

Emergency accommodation

The council may have a legal duty to house you in emergency (also known as interim) accommodation whilst they consider whether they have a duty to house you on a longer-term basis.

Both are more likely to happen if:

- they think that you might be homeless, and/or;

- you're in priority need (for example if you have children living with you or are vulnerable due to a medical condition)

Emergency accommodation is short-term and often basic, for example a bed and breakfast, hostel, or a private rented room. You will probably have to share kitchen or bathroom facilities.

You may be moved to different emergency accommodation at short notice, depending on demand and availability.

During this period, the council will investigate whether they have a duty to provide you with longer-term housing support until you find permanent housing.

Long-term housing support

The council may determine that they have a duty to support you in accessing more permanent housing.

This could be:

- Providing you with a property from their social housing stock (usually this involves a long wait time);
- Providing financial support so you can afford to live in a private rented home, or;
- Providing advice until you have secured somewhere suitable and more permanent to live.

The council's decision on whether they owe you a duty to find permanent housing will depend on things like:

- Your physical and mental vulnerability;
- Your immigration status;
- Your connection to Bristol (to determine your need to remain in Bristol);
- Whether or not you're responsible for children.

If the council decide they owe you a duty to support you in accessing more permanent housing, you should be offered temporary accommodation until this happens.

Temporary accommodation

If the council decide they have a legal duty to support you in finding permanent accommodation, you may qualify for temporary accommodation while you wait for this to become available.

Temporary accommodation is slightly different from emergency accommodation and is covered by a different legal duty.

Some people automatically qualify for temporary accommodation e.g., if you are:

- Responsible for children;
- Pregnant;
- A young care leaver;
- Escaping domestic abuse, and/or;
- Otherwise vulnerable e.g., because of disability, age or health issues.

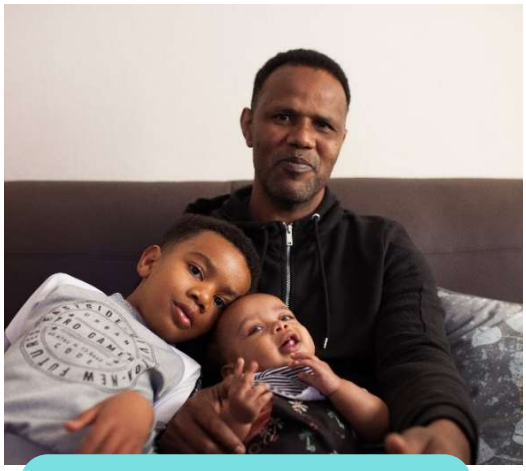
If the council decides it has a duty to house you, you should – in theory – be moved from your emergency accommodation to a more suitable and settled place for your temporary accommodation.

However, due to a shortage of suitable temporary accommodation in Bristol, in practice, you might just end up remaining at the same place, even though the council's legal duty to you has changed.

Although temporary accommodation is intended to be short term, many people can end up living here for several months or years because of a shortage of permanent social housing in Bristol.

Summary of process

The diagram below summarises the process that could be triggered once you submit a homelessness application. Please see the rest of this Housing Helpsheet for details on each step.



Make homelessness application.

Council assesses your need and eligibility for emergency accommodation.

Council may offer you emergency accommodation (depending on their assessment).

Council decides whether they have a duty to find you permanent housing.

Council may offer you temporary accommodation (depending on their assessment). You'll live here until something more permanent becomes available to you.

Eviction from emergency or temporary accommodation

When you move into emergency/temporary accommodation, you will have to sign a 'license agreement'. The agreement will cover things like how you should behave, and how much you're expected to pay.

Read the agreement very carefully – you could be evicted for breaking the terms of the agreement.

Once you're living in emergency/temporary accommodation, the council may offer you permanent housing that they believe is suitable for you. If you refuse this offer, you could be evicted from your current emergency/temporary accommodation. It is almost always best to accept an offer. If you don't think the property is suitable, you can challenge this within 21 days of accepting it.

If you are offered permanent housing and are considering refusing the offer, seek independent specialist housing advice from an organisation such as Housing Matters or Shelter Bristol before doing so.

If you're evicted from emergency/temporary accommodation for whatever reason, the council may decide they no longer have a duty to provide you with any more emergency/temporary accommodation or permanent housing. If this happens, seek independent specialist housing advice from an organisation such as Housing Matters or Shelter Bristol.

Pets

Most of the temporary accommodation the council provides won't accept pets. In these cases, you would need to arrange for your pets to be looked after by family, friends, or an animal charity (e.g., Dogs Trust).

If you receive benefits

If you are claiming universal credit or housing benefit, you will need to notify the council of any change of address - even if this is only temporary.

For **Housing Benefit**, you can do this:

- online, or;
- by telephone: 0117 922 2300

For **Universal Credit**, you can do this:

- online, by logging in or;
- by telephone: 0800 328 5644

Your benefits could be stopped or reduced if you do not report a change in circumstances as soon as you can.