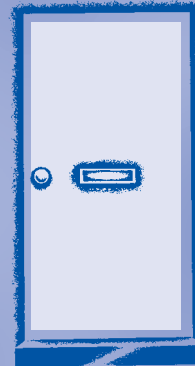




# Homelessness

HOUSING SERVICES



You should read this leaflet if you are homeless, or if you are likely to become homeless in the near future. There are laws which decide how homeless people may be assisted and these are briefly explained in this leaflet. The Council's Housing Needs Section must work within the law. While some homeless people may be given accommodation, others do not qualify for assistance except a right to be given housing advice. Other agencies may be able to help and there is a list of these starting on page 9.

### What does homelessness mean?

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Under the Housing Act 1996, Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, homelessness means that:

- you have no accommodation, anywhere, that is available for occupation and that you are legally entitled to occupy; or
- you have accommodation but cannot gain entry to it, or it is a mobile home and there is nowhere to park it; or
- you have accommodation but it is not reasonable for you to live there; for example if you have been in hospital with a serious health problem and would no longer be able to cope in that property, even with support.

You are considered threatened with homelessness if it is likely that you will become homeless within 28 days.

You are considered homeless if a lack of accommodation forces you to be separated from members of your family who would normally live with you.

### The Council's duty

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If you are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, the Council may have a duty to provide 'interim accommodation' for you and other members of your family. This means we will find somewhere for you to stay while a homeless enquiry is carried out on your behalf. If necessary, your furniture and some personal effects can be stored while you are in interim accommodation. The cost of storage is free but you will be charged for removals, if arranged by the Council.

You will need to make a homeless application to us. A Housing Needs Officer will explain this to you. We will then look carefully at your situation to decide whether you are actually homeless and have a right to assistance. We will also decide if you:

- have a **Priority Need** for accommodation
- have a **Connection with the District**, and
- are not **Intentionally Homeless**

These are legal terms which are explained in more detail on pages 4 and 5.

Your 'interim accommodation' will become 'temporary accommodation' if we decide that you are homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need, and not intentionally homeless. You can read more about **temporary accommodation** on page 6.

Normally you can only stay in your 'interim accommodation' for a month if we decide you are intentionally homeless. A Housing Needs Officer will assist by giving advice to help you find other accommodation, but will not arrange it for you.

If we cannot accept you as homeless, we can still give you housing advice. If you are a single person please ask for our booklet "Housing for Single People".

## Priority need

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You will generally be considered to be in priority need if:

- you are pregnant
- you have dependent children living with you
- you are vulnerable because of mental illness or a disability
- you are vulnerable for other special reasons, for example:
  - you have been looked after, accommodated or fostered within the meaning of the Children Act section 24
  - you have been a member of the forces
  - you have served a custodial sentence, or been committed for contempt of court, or have been remanded in custody
  - you have left your home because of violence, or threats of violence that are likely to be carried out
- you have been made homeless by a fire or other disaster.

Young people may also be considered vulnerable. If you are 16 or 17 years old, and you are actually homeless, you will be in need of support. Family relationships do sometimes break down, but this could be a temporary problem. The situation may be improved through reconciliation between family members.

We would need to look at your situation to decide who is responsible for helping you, either the Child and Family Support Team (formerly Social Services), or Epping Forest District Council (Housing Services).

## Connection with the District

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A local connection means that you, or close members of your family, usually live in the Epping Forest District by choice or that you are employed in the district. If you have no such connection you will be referred to an area where you do have a local connection. If you have no connection with any other Council you will be treated as if your connection is with this Council.



## Intentionally homeless

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If you are homeless through no fault of your own, you are not 'intentionally homeless'.

Intentionally homeless means either:

- 1) You have deliberately done something, or not done something, which has resulted in you becoming homeless. This includes any failure to act on advice that has been given to you.
- 2) You have colluded with your family or landlord to lose your accommodation.
- 3) You have not taken up accommodation which was available to you following your homelessness assessment.
- 4) You have not taken up an offer of long-term accommodation through the Housing Register after being accepted as homeless, and you are applying again without a change in your circumstances.

## Temporary accommodation

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If you are accepted as homeless you will qualify for temporary accommodation. Special arrangements may be made for applicants who have been subjected to domestic violence but, generally, the Council uses four types of temporary accommodation:

- Hemnall House, Epping - This is owned by the Council and whilst there you can continue to receive support from the housing team that looked after you in interim accommodation. Hemnall House is mainly for families.
- The Cygnet Scheme - This is made up of bed-sit and one bedroom properties owned by the Council and leased to a housing association. Staff from the housing association provide you with support. This scheme is for single people.
- The New Start Scheme - This is made up of privately owned properties in the Epping Forest area, rented to a housing association. Tenants are expected to live independently. The properties are different sizes. The scheme is suitable for families and single people.
- Non-secure Council tenancies - These are ordinary Council properties, rented on a short-term basis. For most cases support will not be available.

The type of temporary accommodation offered will depend on availability, the size of your household and your needs. Whichever it is, it will be better in terms of facilities than your interim accommodation. But as it is temporary it may not be as large as you would like and it may not be in the area in which you want to live eventually.

## Long term accommodation

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By law, you can apply for long-term accommodation to as many local housing authorities and housing associations as you wish. If you want Epping Forest District Council to consider you for long-term accommodation you must join the 'Housing Register'. This contains lists of people who have applied for social housing in the area.

You will be given reasonable preference on the Housing Register if you are in temporary accommodation arranged by this Council but you are still likely to wait between 6 months and 2 years for long-term accommodation, due to lack of vacancies. Usually, when an offer of accommodation has been made to you through the Housing Register, your temporary accommodation is withdrawn.

If you are homeless but not in accommodation arranged by Epping Forest Council you will also be given reasonable preference on the Housing Register but you are likely to wait longer than those in temporary accommodation.

Please note: You will not be allowed to join the Housing Register if we think you would be unsuitable as a tenant. We are most likely to make this decision if you have been evicted by a Council or housing association or if you are subject to an Anti Social Behaviour Order or Contract.

For more information on the Housing Register, please read our leaflet 'Moving home with the Council'.



## How the Council deals with homeless applicants

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It is vital if you are having housing problems for you to notify the Housing Needs Section at the earliest opportunity. If you are homeless or likely to become so, you must make contact with the homelessness team within the Housing Needs Section. A preliminary assessment of your circumstances will be made straight away. Arrangements will then be made for you to see a Homelessness Officer or a Homelessness Prevention Officer.

## Homelessness Prevention Service

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Most first appointments are with a Homelessness Prevention Officer. It is important that you bring with you evidence of your identity – either a birth certificate or a current passport – and any documentation you have concerning your accommodation. Please also bring any other information you feel is relevant.

The Homelessness Prevention Officer will consider all the facts of your case and discuss with you your options. They will consider, for instance, looking at maintaining your current accommodation by negotiating with your landlord. In some cases they may suggest a referral to a family mediation service.

Should you be advised to make a homelessness application, Epping Forest District Council will ensure that the full provisions of the Housing Act 1996 (Part VII), as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, are applied.

After interview with a Homelessness Officer, your situation will be fully assessed and a decision made as to whether the Council should arrange accommodation for you. In some cases advice may be sought from one of the Council's Medical Advisors or another source. Following the assessment, you will receive a written notification of the decision on your case. If the decision is that the Council has no duty to secure accommodation for you, advice will be given to help you find somewhere to live.

## Rent deposit guarantee scheme

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A rent deposit guarantee scheme is operated through a voluntary organisation called Epping Forest Housing Aid. This helps non-priority need applicants who are looking for private rented accommodation, but cannot afford the damage deposits required by private landlords.

## If you do not agree with our decision...

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If you are unhappy about a decision that related to homelessness, you have the right to a review. Please ask for our leaflet 'Housing Appeals and Complaints' which gives the full details on how to seek a review.

Please note: some people from abroad are not eligible for any housing assistance, other than advice.

## Who to contact

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### Epping Forest District Council

#### Housing Needs Section

- General advice on homelessness
- Assessment for temporary accommodation
- Homelessness Prevention
- Housing Register applications

#### Housing Benefit Division (Finance Services)

- Housing benefit to help with rent payments for people on low incomes

#### Environmental Services

- Advice and assistance relating to illegal evictions and harassment by private landlords

Epping Forest District Council, Civic Offices,  
High Street, Epping CM16 4BZ  
Phone: 01992 564000



## **Department of Social Security (DSS)**

### **Benefits Agency**

- Crisis Loans, Community Care Grants and Budgeting Loans

Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell & Loughton areas:

Wentworth House, 350 Eastern Avenue, Ilford, Essex

Phone: 020 8532 4200

Waltham Abbey area:

23 St George's Chambers, South Mall, Edmonton N9 0BW

Phone: 020 8535 8000

For rest of the district

Beaufort House, Crown Gate, Harlow, Essex CM20 1NA

Phone: 01279 693000

### **Employment Service/Benefit Agency**

- Job Seekers Allowance and Income support

284 High Road, Loughton IG10 1RH

Phone: 020 8258 4740

or

Beaufort House, Crown Gate, Harlow, Essex CM20 1NA

Phone: 01279 696300

### **Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB)**

- Information, advice and assistance on housing, benefits and legal rights

St Mary's Parish Church, High Road, Loughton

Tel: 020 8502 0031

50a Hemnall Street, Epping

Phone: 01992 574989

Waltham Abbey Town Hall (side entrance)

Phone: 01992 710353

All CABs open Monday to Friday 10am -1pm (Epping 10am-2pm). Telephone for information on other opening times.

### **Domestic Violence Unit**

Violence Liaison Officer

Harlow Police Station

The High, Harlow CM20 1HG

Phone: 01279 641212

Social Care

Emergencies out of office hours

Phone: 0845 606 1212

During normal working hours contact:

Older People's Team:

Croft House, Goldings Hill, Loughton

Phone: 020 8508 9311

Children and Families Team:

Library Building, St. Johns Road, Epping CM16 5EB

Phone: 01992 565100

### **Connexions**

- Information and advice on housing and other issues for young single people

Loughton Connexions Centre, Loughton Central Library,

Traps Hill, Loughton, Essex, IG10 1HD

Phone: 020 8532 5120

Email: [loughton@estconnexions.co.uk](mailto:loughton@estconnexions.co.uk)

Website: [www.estconnexions.co.uk](http://www.estconnexions.co.uk)

Opening hours: Monday & Friday 9.30am to 5pm, Tuesday & Wednesday 10am to 5pm, Thursday 9.30am to 1pm

For homelessness emergencies out of office hours contact Social Services or your local Police. They will contact the Council's stand-by officer.

Contact information can sometimes change. Please check your phone directory for up to date details.

For a large print copy of this  
leaflet please phone 01992 564292

Epping Forest District Council  
Housing Services, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex CM16 4BZ  
phone: Epping (01992) 564000 [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing)

April 2005



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

