

## **A One Minute Guide to Housing Advice**

### **What is Housing Advice?**

Housing advice teams are located in every district across the country and work to prevent people from becoming homeless, support people to resolve any difficulties people may have with their housing situation and work with those who are currently homeless or rough sleeping to support them to find accommodation.

### **What kind of issues could Housing Advice help with?**

Housing Advice officers can give advice on guidance on a multitude of housing related queries. Issues that Housing Advice support people with frequently include:

- Rent arrears and affordability issues
- Households who have received notice to leave their home
- Households involved with or subject to anti-social behaviour
- Persons living in a accommodation that is not suitable for them – examples include; overcrowding, accessibility issues, disrepair or environmental health issues
- Relationship breakdowns
- 16/17yr olds at risk of becoming homeless or being asked to leave the family home
- Landlord disputes or harassment issues

This is not an exhaustive list and we would encourage anyone with a housing related query to contact us.

### **What type of support could be offered?**

We offer a range of services designed to support households to maintain their current accommodation or, where necessary, move to alternate accommodation. Social Housing is in very short supply and high demand across Devon and, as a result, the primary source of housing across the county will come from the private rented sector. Households approaching a Local Authority who are in housing need will be assessed by a housing officer. This assessment will inform the support and assistance that will be made available to help to resolve those housing needs. Examples could include:

- Landlord liaison to resolve disputes
- Financial and budgeting advice to support households to resolve affordability issues or rent arrears
- Financial assistance by way of loan or grant to help to clear or reduce rent arrears (Subject to Local connection and individual LA policies)
- Assistance to resolve issues with Housing benefit or universal Credit payments
- Financial assistance with rent in advance or deposit to enable households to access alternate housing in the private rented sector or housing association properties. (Subject to Local connection and individual LA policies)
- Referrals to partner agencies to access additional support with housing related issues.
- Provision of emergency accommodation should someone require it (subject to local connection)
- Support to access the housing register – [www.devonhomechoice.com](http://www.devonhomechoice.com)
- Referrals to environmental health to support with disrepair or substandard housing issues
- Support with the application process for essential adaptations to properties to ensure they are safe and suitable for tenants or home owners with additional needs.

This is not an exhaustive list and services can vary between districts. The options offered will be dependent on a household's individual circumstances and will be discussed following a full assessment of a households needs.

## **Common misconceptions and FAQ's**

- **My client already has a housing officer because they are in social housing**
  - Housing associations have 'Housing Officers' who manage the tenancies and properties belonging to that housing association. They do a very different job to a Local Authority Housing Officer who is able to provide independent advice and advocacy for a tenant in housing need. Local Authorities have a legal duty to provide advice and assistance to those threatened with homelessness or homeless. Housing Associations do not.

- **If my client approaches the Local Authority and is homeless they will automatically get a social housing property.**
  - Social housing is in very short supply. It is very unusual for social housing to be considered the only suitable housing option for someone approaching in need of accommodation. It is most likely that households in need of alternate housing will be supported to access the private rented sector. Were a family allowed to wait for social housing and not consider any other housing option it is highly likely it could take many months, in some cases years, before an offer of accommodation could be made.
- **My client has children therefore the Local Authority cannot evict them from temporary accommodation.**
  - Once a Local Authority has concluded that it has no legal duty to provide accommodation for a household – regardless of the household make up - their duty to provide accommodation will cease and the accommodation provided to them will be withdrawn. Once a Housing Officer has reached this decision and issued notice to the household that officer will also advise Children’s Services in any cases where there is a risk of a child becoming street homeless. Local Authority Housing Officers work hard to avoid making people homeless and will work with families to try to resolve their housing needs. However, in some cases it is necessary for the Local Authority to end an accommodation placement.
- **My client has a very chaotic tenancy history with several evictions for rent arrears. The best type of housing for them will be social housing and they should be prioritised for this type of housing.**
  - Households with a poor tenancy history will normally not be accepted by a housing association. Households found to be guilty of certain anti-social behaviours may be excluded from the housing register for a period of time. Households with rent arrears of over £500 will not be able to access a higher banding than a band D on Devon Home Choice. For further information on this the Devon Home Choice policy is available online at [www.devonhomechoice.com](http://www.devonhomechoice.com)
- **I do not believe that it would be appropriate for the family I am working with to go into emergency accommodation. The local authority should move them straight into a housing association property before their notice period ends.**
  - As previously outlined, social housing is in very short supply and it is very unusual for a housing officer to be able to access social housing quickly. Housing officers will work hard to prevent any household from needing to access temporary accommodation, however it is sometimes unavoidable.

Should you wish to view more comprehensive guidance on the subject please follow this link to the Homeless Code of Guidance - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

**Contact email addresses for the local districts**

South Hams & West Devon – [sw-housing@swdevon.gov.uk](mailto:sw-housing@swdevon.gov.uk)

Teignbridge – [housing@teignbridge.gov.uk](mailto:housing@teignbridge.gov.uk)

East Devon – [housingoptions@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:housingoptions@eastdevon.gov.uk)

Exeter – [Housing.advice@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:Housing.advice@exeter.gov.uk)

North Devon – [Housingoptions@northdevon.gov.uk](mailto:Housingoptions@northdevon.gov.uk)

Mid Devon – [housingoptions@middevon.gov.uk](mailto:housingoptions@middevon.gov.uk)

Torrige - [housing.options@torridge.gov.uk](mailto:housing.options@torridge.gov.uk)