



The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Overview for local services in Nottingham

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 came into force on 3rd April 2018. It is the first major piece of homelessness legislation in 15 years and embeds a preventative approach to help reduce the number of households who are at risk of homelessness. The legislation introduces new duties for Councils in delivering assistance to homeless households or those threatened with homelessness. The Act also includes a new “Duty to Refer” for named public authorities. The Act has far reaching implications for services both nationally and locally. This short guide covers the key changes for local authorities and impact upon local services brought about by the Act.

New Duties for Local Authorities

1. Prevention Duty for households “threatened with homelessness”. The period that a household is threatened with homelessness has doubled from 28 days (until expected date of homelessness) to 56 days and Nottingham City Council’s Housing Aid service is duty bound to provide assistance to help prevent homelessness for such households if they present, regardless of their local connection. The Council will take reasonable steps to applicants owed this duty to help them to secure suitable accommodation that remains available for at least 6 months.

A household is classed as threatened with homelessness if they are considered *likely to* become homeless in the next 56 days and covers all valid Section 21 notices that have been issued to tenants of the private rented sector (and that are due to expire within 56 days).

2. Duty to provide Advisory Services. Housing Aid must provide free information and advice on preventing and relieving homelessness. The local authority must also ensure that homeless people (or those threatened with homelessness) are provided with advice on their rights and are able to access support.

3. Duty to Assess and Personalised Plans. If a household presents at Housing Aid and are found to be eligible and homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, Housing Aid will provide a full assessment of the needs of the household and produce a Personalised Plan in cooperation with the applicant. The Plan sets out reasonable and achievable actions both parties will take to ensure the applicant is able to retain suitable accommodation. Both the Housing Advisor and the applicant must agree the actions and take responsibility for implementing them. Plans should be updated as circumstances change and progress is made. Housing Aid have invested a new system called Housing Jigsaw (PRAH) where all personalised plans are uploaded and are looking into how the system can be updated and inputted to by applicants and other linked services.

4. Duty to Relieve Homelessness. The relief duty is owed upon where a household presents as already homeless or where prevention work has been unsuccessful. The duty is owed for 56 days regardless of whether they have a priority need. The Council will take reasonable steps to applicants owed this duty to *help them* to secure suitable accommodation that remains available for at least 6 months. Housing Aid will house

Priority Need households owed the duty in temporary accommodation until it has carried out the reasonable steps outlined in the Plan.

Duty to Refer (Public Bodies)

From 1st October 2018 named public bodies in England will have a duty to notify their local housing authority of any service users they believe to either be homeless or at risk of homelessness within the next 56 days. A [government factsheet](#) includes the list of public authorities subject to the Duty to Refer.

The referrals through the duty should be made directly to Housing Aid and may only be made with the agreement of the service user. The Council is currently working with partners and the National Practitioner Support Service to pilot software that will enable the referrals to be made through one IT system. Further guidance and training will be issued in due course.

Advising Service Users

It is important that homelessness services in Nottingham help their service users to understand the impact of the new legislation in order to clarify and manage their expectation around the support and advice available to them and the new processes. The following key messages should therefore be embedded within any local agencies offering homelessness advice, support or advocacy services or involved in making homelessness referrals:

- **Early engagement is key to avoiding homelessness.** The earlier a service user engages with Housing Aid, the more help and advice can be provided and the greater the chance of preventing homelessness. One of the key aims of the Act is to reduce the amount of households presenting at crisis stage, hence the doubling of the Prevention Duty to 56 days.
- **Anyone can get (free) advice from Housing Aid** within the local authority area. Households don't need to be homeless or threatened with homelessness to obtain this and it is part of the Council's new duties. Housing Aid are there to help and will offer advice tailored to circumstances e.g. survivors of domestic abuse, prison leavers etc.
- **Applicants must take a proactive role in overcoming homelessness.** All eligible applicants will have to complete a Personalised Plan with their Housing Aid Advisor and agree steps to resolve their homelessness/threat of homelessness. The Plan will also set out how the Council will help them to do this. The Council's duties may be relieved if an applicant is found to be deliberately unreasonable and non-cooperative.

For more information or to refer your services users threatened with homelessness or at the point of homelessness please contact:

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