

Policy Fact Sheet: Relief

What is relief?

Homelessness relief is action taken to help resolve homelessness. Where, for example, an eligible applicant has sought help from the local housing authority (LHA) when they are already homeless or if homelessness prevention¹ work has not been successful, they will be owed the relief duty (clause 5).

The relief duty requires LHAs to take reasonable steps to help secure accommodation for any eligible person who is homeless. This help could be, for example, the provision of a rent deposit or debt advice.

The duty lasts for up to 56 days, and would be available to all those who are homeless and eligible² regardless of whether they have a priority need. Those who have a priority need (for example they have dependent children or are vulnerable in some way) will be provided with interim accommodation whilst the LHA carries out the reasonable steps.

What will the measure achieve and why is the Government supporting this?

The relief duty means that many more people will get the help and assistance they need to resolve a homelessness crisis if prevention does not work, or if they seek help when they are already homeless. It will require LHAs to take reasonable steps to help resolve a person's homelessness.

This measure strengthens the existing homelessness safety net, providing the LHA and a wider range of applicants another opportunity to give and receive help after the new prevention duty, and before some applicants move on to the main homelessness duty.

Why is legislation needed?

Under existing legislation, if a homeless applicant does not have a priority need, they may receive very limited help. If they do have a priority need and are homeless through no fault of their own, they would move to the main homelessness duty as soon as it was established they were owed it. The relief duty means that the LHA and the applicant work together to find a solution tailored to the applicant's circumstances, regardless of whether the applicant is in priority need.

How do we see this working in practice?

¹ See separate factsheet "Policy Fact Sheet: Homelessness prevention duty" for further detail of this measure

² Broadly speaking certain applicants who are persons from abroad are not eligible for assistance under Part 7.

LHAs are required to take reasonable steps for 56 days to help to relieve homelessness by helping the applicant to secure suitable accommodation. The reasonable steps would be similar to those provided at prevention stage, for example provision of a rent deposit for new accommodation or help with family mediation.

Key questions and answers

What is the minimum expectation for length of accommodation?

- The LHA must be satisfied that any accommodation they help to secure would be available for at least 6 months. It is, of course, open to LHAs to help to secure longer tenancies when possible and the Secretary of State has a power to extend this minimum period beyond 6 months up to a maximum of 12 months.

When does the duty end?

- The relief duty can be ended in a number of specific ways and a few of these are set out here. First and foremost is through successful relief action where the LHA is satisfied that suitable accommodation has been secured and is expected to be available for at least six months.
- It can also come to an end where the LHA has taken reasonable steps for 56 days to help the applicant to secure accommodation. If the action has not been successful and if the person is in priority need and homeless through no fault of their own, they may then proceed to the main homelessness duty.
- If the person refuses an offer of suitable accommodation expected to be available for at least 6 months, or unreasonably and deliberately refuses to co-operate with the steps set out in their personalised plan, the duty can be brought to an end.
- If the duty is brought to an end because of unreasonable and deliberate refusal to co-operate and the applicant is in priority need and not homeless intentionally, they will be made a final offer of a tenancy lasting at least 6 months.

What is the requirement for interim accommodation for those in priority need?

- Where the LHA has reason to believe that a person may be homeless, eligible and have a priority need, the LHA must provide interim accommodation. Following conclusion of the LHA's inquiries into whether the applicant does or does not, in fact, have a priority need, the duty to provide interim accommodation can come to an end in a number of ways depending on the circumstances. Where the LHA is satisfied that a person does have a priority need, the duty to provide interim accommodation must continue until the later of the relief duty coming to an end or notification that no relief duty is owed, and notification of what (if any) other duty is owed once the relief duty ends.

Does this mean a local housing authority has to find accommodation?

- Helping to secure means that an LHA needs to take steps to help an applicant secure their own accommodation³ and only applies to the prevention and relief duties. It is different to the current approach where the LHA is required to secure accommodation for eligible applicants where a duty to accommodate is owed. It is still open to the LHA to actually secure accommodation for the applicant under the prevention and relief duties where appropriate.
- This change makes sense as many households will want choice over where they live rather than having the LHA choose for them. This would be the case if the LHA were required to secure accommodation in each instance.

³ See separate factsheet “Policy Fact Sheet: Help to secure and suitability” for further detail of this measure.