

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: A new name, a new act and a new way of working

The Homelessness Reduction Act - What does it mean to you

Hart's Engagement and Support Service

The Engagement and Support Service is the new name for our Housing Options team. This new name reflects the way we work with customers in the Housing Service to support them to address their housing need. The Engagement and Support team will support people with any issue that puts their accommodation at risk, which may include discussing employment opportunities, health and wellbeing issues and looking at a customer's ability to sustain their accommodation. We aim to work with people as early as possible and put them in touch with agencies that can support their wider needs. In short, we aim to engage people earlier and offer ongoing support to prevent homelessness by working in a holistic way.

The Homeless Reduction Act

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 comes into force on 3 April 2018 and supports this approach. The new act requires local authorities to offer a more comprehensive service to all eligible applicants and introduces two new duties that housing services need to meet.

The **“prevention duty”** requires housing teams to work with people if they are threatened with homelessness within 56 days. This is an extension of the timeframe under existing legislation which will give customers and housing services longer to work together to resolve any issues that are impacting on a person's housing situation.

If customer comes into the housing service and they are already facing homelessness the Engagement and Support team will work with them under the **“relief duty”**.

Our Engagement and Support team will:

- Conduct an assessment of a customer's situation, including their housing need and other support needs.
- Work with the applicant to agree a set of actions to prevent homelessness. This is called a Personal Housing Plan
- Provide interim temporary accommodation where appropriate
- Work together with customers to agree actions to resolve their housing need in the longer term, including addressing issues that will help prevent future homelessness.

Personal Housing Plans

The Engagement and Support team will meet with customers and carry out an assessment. In most cases, we will work with customers to develop a Personal Housing Plan (PHP). This PHP is an important document to help the Engagement and Support Officer and the customer plan actions that will prevent or relieve homelessness. It may focus on areas that are not directly about housing such as managing finances and dealing with relevant health issues, and actions will be discussed and agreed by both parties. Both the Engagement and Support Officer and the customer will usually have actions to complete and these will be monitored on an ongoing basis.

There will also be an agreement made as to the desired outcomes and an understanding that resolution of these outcomes may end the Engagement and Support team's duty to the customer. By taking this approach, we intend to empower customers to take responsibility for either preventing or relieving their housing need. The new legislation allows councils to take certain actions if a customer deliberately and unreasonably refuses to cooperate with the actions agreed in the PHP.

Duty to refer for some public bodies

The new legislation introduces a duty for some public bodies to refer customers into the Housing Service if they believe they are at risk of homelessness. This duty is not due to come into force until October 2018, but we have already been working with partners to encourage referrals as early as possible. This new duty supports the approach being used by our Engagement and Support team as it reflects the fact that a customer's housing need is often dependent on other issues that need addressing. Hart has been developing strong partnerships with these public bodies as well as with other statutory and non-statutory services to ensure that referral processes, pathways and effective signposting are in place to support customers at the earliest opportunity.

The key things to know

- Early intervention is key
- Focus is on prevention of homelessness
- PHPs will be a useful tool to lay out and monitor agreed actions
- Engagement and Support Officers will offer a holistic service
- Duty to refer by some statutory services
- Pathways and partnership working

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www.hart.gov.uk/housing