

Homeless Reduction Act: Duty to Refer

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What is this Duty?

Specified public authorities are required to notify a housing authority of service users they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness (for example; it is likely they will become homeless within 56 days).

Public authorities are not expected to conduct housing needs assessments.

Which public authorities are subject to the duty to refer?

Internal Council Services:

- youth offending teams
- social service authorities (Adult and Children's services)

External Services:

- prisons
- youth offender institutions
- secure training centres
- secure colleges
- probation services (including community rehabilitation companies)
- JobCentre Plus
- The Secretary of State for Defence in relation to members of the regular forces.

Health Services:

- emergency departments such as accident and emergency services provided in a hospital
- urgent treatment centres
- hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care.

Other public services:

For example; Early Help for families, adult and children's mental health services, voluntary organisations and education services should also notify a housing authority of service users they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness.

How do you know if a service user is homeless or threatened with being homeless?

There are many causes of homelessness.

One of the more common causes is where a client has a rented tenancy and the Landlord has issued a legal notice seeking to repossess the property, which could lead to eviction of the client.

If a service user hasn't got a home to go to and are at risk of *Rough Sleeping* it is important to make a referral, but you may also contact Sefton's rough sleeper service by Phoning the *Rough Sleeper Outreach Team*, Light for Life, on 01704 501256 (or 0791 874 6042 outside normal office hours and weekends), or alternatively you can use the StreetLink website <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/> to report your concerns about someone you have seen sleeping rough.

Identifying people at risk of homelessness as early as possible and making a referral will help to maximise the opportunities to prevent homelessness.

Before making a referral

You need to:

- have consent to the referral from the individual
- ask the individual if they would like the referral to be made to Sefton's housing service, or another Local Authority (LA). Usually clients should be referred to LAs where they have a 'local connection'. (If the client chooses another LA you will need to contact that LA and make a referral using their process)
- have consent from the individual that their contact details can be supplied so the housing authority can contact them.

How do you make a referral?

The 'housing authority' is the Housing Options Team, part of Sefton's Localities team. This Team are the 'single point of contact' for Sefton.

Referrals should be submitted using the 'ALERT' system, which is available by accessing the following link or on the Council's web-site live.housingjigsaw.co.uk/alert/duty-to-refer. There is a 5-step process to making a referral:

1. Sign up to ALERT using the above link
2. Enter the details of your agency
3. Provide details of the household being referred
4. Complete a consent to share declaration
5. Submit

Once submitted you will receive an automated confirmation email along with a unique referral code; where appropriate a copy of the referral can also be sent to the customer for their reference.

Once a referral has been made, a user account is automatically created. This not only increases efficiency for future referrals but enables you to track your referral online and receive update notifications.

You should be mindful that for certain individuals, rather than making a referral, it may be more appropriate to help them to approach the Housing Options Team directly for assistance. This might apply, for example; for clients with specific support needs.

What information do you need to provide?

The web-link will provide a referral form, which will ask you to provide information including:

- the individual's name and contact details
- the reason you believe the individual is homeless or at risk of homelessness
- whether an individual is already homeless, and if not when they are likely to become homeless
- whether the individual is at risk of rough sleeping on the date the referral is made and if so whether this is imminent
- risk assessment information, considering risks to the individual and to others, and,
- key medical information where relevant.

What will happen with a referral?

Housing Options Team will always respond to any referral received and contact the individual by phone, email or letter using the contact details provided in the referral.

If this subsequent contact confirms that the client might be homeless or threatened with homelessness, and the individual indicates they would like assistance, it will trigger a formal homeless application for assistance.

It is possible that Housing Options Team may receive multiple and repeat referrals for the same clients. There may be circumstances when an individual has made a recent homeless application and this has been 'closed' and a new referral is received shortly after. The Housing Options Team will respond to the referral and contact the individual to evaluate if there has been any relevant change in circumstances since the last application, which would warrant inquiries being made.