

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

Frequently Asked Questions

Why has the Act been passed by Parliament?

Statistics show that homelessness is on the increase. Nationally rough sleeping increased 134% between 2010 and 2016 whilst homelessness acceptances increased 33% during the same period.

What is the purpose of the Act?

The homelessness charity Crisis highlighted a number of issues with the way the current law was working in practice:

- A lack of meaningful advice and assistance which in some areas was not tailored to the individual's needs.
- Some local authorities were only helping at crisis point.
- Prevention work was being done but it was outside of the legal framework.
- There is little protection for single people who do not have priority need.

The Act is designed to address these issues. It encourages early action by Bradford Council¹ and ensures people can access help before they become homeless.

What will the Act mean?

It places a new duty on Bradford Council and other public authorities to reduce homelessness. It aims to reduce homelessness by:

- Improving the quality of the advice provided.
- Refocusing local authorities on prevention work.
- Increasing protection for single people.
- Joining up services to provide better support for people especially those leaving prison/hospital.

When was the Act passed and when will it come in force?

The Act was passed on 27th April 2017. The Government has decided it will come into operation on Tuesday 3rd April 2018.

Where can I find out more information?

The Government has published a new Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities. This can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

¹ This document aims to provide a fact sheet about changes impacting Bradford but the same duties will apply to all Local Housing Authorities

Who will be covered by the Act?

You will qualify for assistance if you are homeless or going to be homeless. Going to be homeless means you will have nowhere to live or it is not reasonable to stay in your existing accommodation at some point in the next 56 days. The hope is that people will ask for help early but failing to get early help will not prevent support being provided.

What are the key provisions of the Act?

Improving Advice

The Act requires Bradford Council to give free information and advice on:

- Preventing homelessness and securing accommodation when homeless.
- The rights of people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- How to access the help if you need it from Bradford Council or others in the District.

The duty to provide advice applies to everyone and there is no requirement to meet eligibility criteria.

The kinds of issues the Council is required to give advice on includes tenants' rights, rights to benefits, advice on debt, rent and mortgage arrears, help for people at risk of violence and abuse and how to obtain accommodation in the social sector and private rented sector.

Prevention duty to stop people becoming homeless.

The Act requires the Council to work proactively with anyone who is threatened with homelessness within 56 days. This new duty – 'the prevention duty' - is designed to ensure that the barriers that people face in resolving their housing issues are removed so that they can:

- Stay in current accommodation or;
- Secure new places to live.

This prevention duty will mean the Council will assess each applicant's needs fully, and identify reasonable steps to be taken by both the Council and the applicant to try and resolve their housing situation. These steps will be set out in a personalised housing plan and will be tailored to applicants' individual circumstances.

This duty, along with the Relief Duty, will only apply to those who are eligible – i.e. the applicant must be eligible for recourse to public funds.

Relief duty to help those who become homeless.

Bradford Council must take reasonable steps to secure accommodation for anyone who is homeless. This is not a guarantee to get an individual accommodation. Fifty six days of support are provided and will end when a person gets housed or if all reasonable steps have been taken to secure accommodation.

The kind of support that will be offered will include things like referring you to housing providers, helping you to find private rented accommodation through the Council's private rented team or supporting you to access mediation and/or debt advice.

The aim is to be innovative and use a broad range of tools. Any housing solution must provide accommodation for at least six months.

Personalised Housing Plan

There is a duty on Bradford Council to assess all cases and develop a personalised housing plan. The plan must be agreed with the individual and must aim to ensure that the person can stay in their current accommodation or secure new suitable accommodation.

This plan will be tailored to the individual's housing and support needs and its actions must be reasonable and achievable. When producing the plan the wishes and preferences of individuals should be considered, along with an assessment of whether there is a reasonable prospect of accommodation being available to meet those wishes and preferences.

If an individual does not co-operate once the plan has been developed and actions are not met then the individual will lose their entitlement to support from Bradford Council.

Duty to refer by public bodies

Under the Act certain public authorities have a duty to notify Bradford Council of those who are homeless or may become homeless. This is to ensure that wider public services consider individuals' housing situation. Consent from the individual for a referral to be made must be secured. How these pathways work will be decided within Bradford. Local agreements will be put in place with organisations. One example would be establishing notifications for people who are being released from prison. This part of the Act will come into force on Monday 1st October 2018.

The public services that this Duty to refer will apply to includes prisons, young offender institutions, probation services, social services, Jobcentre Plus, NHS A&E and other emergency / in-patient services and the Armed Forces.

How will you make sure that the key steps set out in the personalised housing plan are things an applicant can achieve?

As part of the applicant's assessment, Bradford Council will have to look at the particular circumstances and needs of the applicant including the reasons for their homelessness or threatened homelessness and the support they need to be able to find and retain suitable accommodation. Following this assessment Bradford Council must work with the applicant to agree the actions to be taken by both parties.

When does the prevention work with an applicant end?

The prevention duty can only be ended in a number of ways:

- Successful prevention (accommodation sourced for 6 months)
- It can be brought to an end if the applicant unreasonably and deliberately refuses to co-operate with Bradford Council after a warning letter.
- If the prevention has not been successful and the person loses their home they will be owed a relief duty, ensuring they receive continuous help.

- It can also come to an end where Bradford Council has taken reasonable steps for 56 days to help the applicant to secure accommodation.
- If they cease to be eligible (i.e. lose their right to have recourse to public funds).
- If the applicant withdraws their application for support.
- If the applicant refuses an offer of suitable accommodation.
- If the applicant becomes intentionally homeless from the accommodation made available to them.

When does the relief duty end?

The relief duty can be ended in a number of specific ways:

- 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 Bradford Council has taken reasonable steps for 56 days to help the applicant to secure accommodation.
- If the applicant refuses an offer of suitable accommodation.
- It can be brought to an end if the applicant unreasonably and deliberately refuses to co-operate with Bradford Council after a warning letter.
- If they cease to be eligible (i.e. lose their right to have recourse to public funds).
- If the applicant withdraws their application for support.
- If the applicant becomes intentionally homeless from the accommodation made available to them.

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

Where Bradford Council has reason to believe that a person is homeless, eligible and has a priority need, they must provide interim accommodation. The duty to provide interim / temporary accommodation remains unchanged from the 1996 Housing Act. Priority need and intentionality will remain part of the assessment process for the Council when dealing with full homelessness applications if the new Prevention and Relief duties fail to resolve an applicant's homelessness.

Does the Act mean that the Council will provide interim / temporary accommodation for more people?

It is not necessarily the case that Bradford Council will provide accommodation for more customers once the Act is operational. One of the focuses of the Act is to ensure that more people get help earlier on therefore the hope is that fewer people will end up requiring temporary accommodation.

How can I access advice and if necessary homeless prevention or relief support?

By contacting the Housing Options Service on 01274 435999 or by sending an email to housingoptions@bradford.gov.uk

Or in person at Britannia House, Hall Ings, Bradford BD1 1HX, or Keighley Town Hall, Bow Street, Keighley, BD21 3PB

If you are homeless and have nowhere to sleep, outside of office hours please phone: 01274 381999

What has Bradford Council done so far?

An implementation group has been formed and has drafted an action plan, including a communication plan. Training of staff has started and will continue after the Act comes in. New staff posts have been added to the Housing Options team. A pilot project has been undertaken whereby a number of cases have been taken through the Homelessness Reduction Act process. Bradford Council has reviewed its Allocations Policy for social housing and will be introducing new bands to provide greater homeless prevention within the District.

Will Bradford receive extra funding to do this work?

The Government are providing £72.7 million 'new burdens' funding across all local authorities to help them implement the Act.

Has this homelessness prevention approach been piloted before implementation?

The prevention duty has already been implemented in Wales. Homeless charity Shelter has reviewed this approach and found that:

- 65 % of people had homelessness prevented.
- 9% less people were placed in temporary accommodation.
- There was a significant increase in housing authorities' workload.
- There was a 45 % reduction in the use of B&B by local housing authorities.

The key to success was taking a person-centred approach to homelessness or threats of homelessness. The Shelter report recommended that local authorities focus on increasing the use of money advice and mediation services, and that time is also spent on ensuring co-ordination and joining up of services. The Government released some funding to a few 'trailblazer' Councils in England in 2016. Information is just starting to come through from their experience of piloting the new ways of working.

What happens if the provisions of the Act are not followed by the Council?

Any negative decisions taken by the Council can be reviewed under the new Act. This will extend what already exists to enable applicants to request a review of

decisions under existing homelessness legislation. An applicant has a maximum of 21 days to request a review from the date they were notified of a decision made by Bradford Council.

The applicant must be informed in writing of the right to request a review. If an applicant isn't happy with the outcome of the review an appeal to the County Court must be brought within 21 days.

How you can find out more information?

You can contact the implementation group by emailing Sarah.Holmes@bradford.gov.uk

Version dated 1 March 2018