

Housing Advice and Homelessness

ECDC has a team of three housing advisers who can give advice to anyone on housing related matters. We give advice to:

- People who are having difficulty maintaining rent or mortgage payments
- People who are at risk of losing their home
- Private tenants
- Private landlords
- Housing Association tenants
- People moving to the area who want somewhere to live
- People who have been evicted or are facing eviction
- People who wish to move to another area
- People who are fleeing violence or harassment

This service is available:

- Monday – Thursday 8.45am –5pm and Friday 8.45am-4.30pm

The service is free and confidential. You can call in to the Council office at The Grange or telephone 01353 665555 to book an appointment or contact us by e-mail to housing@eastcambs.gov.uk. Initially you should contact the homelessness prevention officers, either Marion Freeman-Smith or Natasha Phillips.

If you become homeless when the office is not open, we have an emergency out of hours number, which will enable you to speak to a Housing Adviser. The emergency out of hours number is: 07710 978900. **YOU SHOULD ONLY CALL THIS NUMBER IN AN EMERGENCY THAT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE OFFICE RE-OPENS**

Homelessness

The Housing Advisers are responsible for the Council's obligations under the Housing Act 1996 Part VII (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002). The legislation sets out the local authorities duties towards homeless people.

The duty the Council may have towards a homeless person will vary dependant upon the circumstances of the homeless person.

If you are homeless or threatened with homelessness it is important that you make contact with a Housing Adviser quickly so that you can be advised on your legal rights, what action can be taken to prevent you becoming homeless if appropriate and what legal duty the Council may have towards you. **Don't wait until its too late to do anything except be evicted. The earlier you seek help the more likely it is that the problem can be solved.**

If you are eligible for assistance, homeless (or threatened with homelessness within 28 days) and have a priority need for accommodation, arrangements will be made to take a formal homeless application from you. You may be provided with temporary accommodation if necessary and the Housing Adviser will endeavour to make a decision on your application within 33 working days where possible after having completed investigations into your claim.

The following booklet gives more detailed information on:

- Who is eligible for assistance
- Who is considered to be homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Who has a priority need
- Who may be intentionally homeless
- Who may have a local connection
- What investigations will be carried out
- Which documents you will need to supply
- How a homeless decision is made
- What happens when an application is approved
- Offers of accommodation
- What happens if an application fails
- Appeals and complaints
- Contact addresses

[View leaflet 'HOMELESS OR ABOUT TO BE HOMELESS?'](#)

Non priority homeless

If the Council does not have a duty to provide accommodation for a homeless person because they have no priority, the Housing Adviser will give advice on finding accommodation. It is always better if a person is able to stay with friends or family in the short term because accommodation may be difficult to access or there may be waiting lists.

There is no emergency accommodation available in the East Cambridgeshire area for those who do not have a priority need. The only direct access hostel is in Cambridge. All other hostels have a referral process and waiting lists. ECDC is not able to make referrals to all hostels; a homeless person may have to be referred to another organisation for a referral

[View leaflet 'HOMELESS? INFORMATION AND USEFUL CONTACT ADDRESSES'](#)

In the long term, a homeless person can be given advice on how to access lodgings or privately rented accommodation. They may be able to move into a more urgent band in the Home-Link system because of their circumstances.

Renting in the private sector

There is a high demand for privately rented accommodation in the district and we understand that some people struggle to find suitable accommodation that is affordable. There are a number of issues, which may affect you finding privately rented accommodation particularly if you are on a low wage or unemployed:

- If you are single and under 25 a 'single room rent' restriction will apply to housing benefit claims
- If you take on accommodation too large to suit your needs you will have housing benefit restricted
- You will normally have to supply a deposit equal to one month's rent plus the month's rent in advance
- You will often need to provide references such as previous landlord, bank reference, employment and/or personal references

If you think you may qualify for housing benefit, it is advisable to complete a 'pre tenancy determination form', which should be obtained from the housing benefit office you would submit your claim to. When complete it should be handed in at the benefit office, it will be sent to the Rent Officer Service in Cambridge who will make a written response to you, the benefit office and the landlord of the property you want to rent telling you the maximum rent that would qualify for benefit.

The council has a rent deposit scheme available which can help some categories of people to get a private sector tenancy. This scheme is restricted. If you want to know if you qualify you need to discuss your case in detail with a housing advisor.

The following leaflets are useful

[DO YOU RENT OR ARE YOU THINKING OF RENTING FROM A PRIVATE LANDLORD](#)
[ASSURED AND ASSURED SHORTHOLD TENANCIES – A GUIDE FOR TENANTS](#)
[A GUIDE TO SECURITY IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR](#)

Preventing Homelessness

People often seek advice when their landlord has asked them to leave, either verbally or by serving a notice to quit or notice of seeking possession. The Housing Advisers can tell you what your legal rights are and if the notice you have been given is correct. It is useful if you can bring any written notice to an interview along with the last tenancy agreement you were issued with.

[View leaflet - 'HAVING PROBLEMS WITH YOUR LANDLORD'](#)

We may also liaise with your landlord and negotiate with them on your behalf. This may be particularly important if you have rent arrears.

You may also be referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau for debt advice and welfare

benefits advice.

It is important that you follow the advice you are given, if you fail to do so and subsequently become homeless and make a formal homeless application, you may be found to have made yourself intentionally homeless.

Facing eviction due to arrears

If you are already a tenant of a social landlord or own your own home and are threatened with eviction because of arrears, you should make an appointment to see a Housing Adviser at the earliest opportunity.

The Housing Adviser will be able to advise you on your legal rights, what course of action should be taken, if they feel you should be referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau for debt advice and if you should become homeless, what further responsibility the Council may have to provide you with accommodation on a temporary basis.

If you are having problems with debt and affording repayments, you should visit the Citizens Advice Bureau; collect a debt pack and request an appointment with the debt adviser.

Selling your home

If you are planning to sell your home for any reason and know that you will have nowhere to live afterwards, you should always have an appointment with a Housing Adviser to discuss what options you may have preferably before placing the house on the market for sale.