

# Southwark Housing Solutions Customer Journey

# Contents

## **What you can expect to find in this document:**

- Services offered by the Housing Solutions Service
- How customers can access our services
- What can customers expect when they attend the Housing Solutions Centre?
- The Homelessness application process
- What can customers do if they disagree with the decision?
- Reviews
- Your experience of our service

# Services offered by the Housing Solutions Service

The Housing Solutions Service works in partnership to provide a range of services for our customers to aid them to resolve their housing issues. These teams and organisations, contact details can be found in our Housing Solutions Information Pack; a copy of this document can be provided on request (see next page).

This ranges from internal teams such as:

- The Procurement Team which provides assistance to customers to try to secure accommodation in the private sector.
- The Financial Inclusion Team provides customers income maximisation advice, advice about securing employment as well as manages and administer the Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme.
- The Private Tenancies Team provides advice and assistance to tenants, landlords and letting agents in the private rented sector regarding matters such as illegal eviction, harassment, disrepair issues and demands for increased rental payments, negotiate extensions etc.
- The No First Night Out Team has also been recently established to assist those customers who may be exposed to sleeping rough for the first time.
- Housing advice and assistance to support customers to prevent and relieve their homelessness.
- The Housing Solutions service works in partnership with other organisations including Solace and Shelter. Both of these are co-located at our Homesearch Centre in Peckham Rye.

Solace is a domestic abuse support organisation, they provide independent support and assistance to our customers who may be experiencing such issues. Identified customers are referred to Solace officers who will attempt to contact the customer discretely due to the nature of their circumstances.

Shelter is an independent housing organisation and specialise in providing customers independent housing advice, information and advocacy services.

# How customers can access our services

Customers can access our services directly in a number of ways



**housing.options@southwark  
.gov.uk**

Customers are welcome to email us any general queries that they may have relating to their housing issue or if they need further information. We will aim to respond within 24 hours.



**0207 525 5950**

Our Telephone Advice Line operates from 9 am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 10 am to 5pm on Wednesdays.

There is a 24 hour service (outside of office hours) available for any person or household who is homeless and this can be accessed out of hours by dialling **0207 525 5000**.



**Housing Solutions  
Centre,  
25 Bournemouth  
Road, Peckham,  
London, SE15 4UJ.**

If the customer has special or additional needs We would request that the customer or anyone acting on their behalf informs us if they have any additional needs as soon as possible

# What can customers expect when they attend the Housing Solutions Centre?



# The Homelessness application process

Once it has been established that a customer may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, they will be booked an appointment to undertake a homelessness application, this can take place in the Homesearch Centre, over the telephone or at home if the applicant is housebound.

## **The Housing Reduction Act 2017**

It is also very important to mention that from the 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018, the Housing Act 1996 has been amended to include the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. Southwark Council is proud to have been selected as a 'trailblazer' for the implementation of the Housing Reduction Act 2017 from October 2016 by the Department for Communities and Government. The Council has been extremely successful in providing early learning and dissemination of information to support all local authorities in their preparations for implementing new prevention focused homelessness legislation.

The new Act places duties on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness and is designed to extend entitlements to assistance, emphasis on a more customer-focused journey and personalised statutory homelessness service. The Act also places a renewed focus on the prevention of homelessness and local joint working with partner agencies.

# The Homelessness application process

## **The Housing Reduction Act 2017**

In light of the Housing Reduction Act 2017, homelessness applications are categorised in stages and as a result the processing and completion of a homeless application will take longer; Prevention Stage, Relief Stage and the Main Duty Stage. For example if a customer is threatened with homelessness within 56 days, once their application is taken, they will be placed in the Prevention Stage and advice and assistance will be given to them to prevent their homelessness, they will remain in this Stage until the 56<sup>th</sup> Day expires (this period can be extended further). If within the agreed Prevention Stage, homelessness has not been prevented, then the customer will be transferred to the Relief Stage, where the support to relieve homelessness will continue for a further 56 days (or longer if extended). The Customer will be notified in writing when their Prevention and Relief Stages come to an end and they will have a right to request a review against these decisions.

If, after the expiration of the Relief Stage, the customer's homelessness has not been prevented or relieved for at least 6 months, the application will progress to the Main Duty Stage and the Council will confirm within 48 hours of the expiration the decision on their homeless application, by way of the s184 decision letter. This will depend on the outcome of enquiries into the customer's application and may conclude that it has a duty to house the customer permanently or the customer is not in priority need or they are intentionally homeless or they do not have local connection to the borough of Southwark. It is important to note that the local connection aspect will also be considered at the Relief Stage and duty may be referred to the area that the customer has a local connection to. This again will be notified to the customer in writing and they will have a right to request a review against this decision.

# The Homelessness application process

## Homelessness application interview

A Housing Solutions Officer (HSO) will complete an application and a more detailed focus is undertaken of the customer's eligibility for housing assistance, their housing circumstances (for consideration of assistance) and priority need for housing (for consideration of the provision of temporary accommodation). Therefore, customers are advised to bring along all requested documents. In due course, local connection to Southwark and intentionality will also be further considered.

The application process can take up to an hour and half. Customers can expect a courteous, sensitive and professional service. The HSO will also give their full name and contact details as well as advice about the application process and the time scales of the completion of the application.

During the application appointment, customers will agree plans of reasonable actions that they will undertake to prevent or relieve their homelessness. This can include seeking private rented accommodation, seeking financial advice to maximise income and consolidate debt, negotiating with the landlord/excluder etc. The HSO will also confirm the actions that the Council will take to assist, such as by referring the customer to the Prevention Hub incorporating the Procurement and Financial Inclusion Teams as well as Private Tenancies Relations Service etc. The agreement will be confirmed in writing in the customer's personalised **PHP** and this may be reviewed on a regular basis.

Single homeless customers who have been assessed as vulnerable or having some form of support need such as drug/alcohol or mental health conditions. They will also be referred to the Housing Reablement Team for possible assistance with supported accommodation. If accepted for support, customers work with keyworkers to develop and maintain their day to day living skills to enable that individual to eventually manage a tenancy. As well as being able to maintain a tenancy, the Team also assists customers in enhancing their independent living skills

# The Homelessness application process

## Homelessness application interview

Once the homeless application is taken, the HSO will and the Council expects you to also remain in regular contact with the Housing Solutions Service until the matter is concluded.

During the assessment process the Council will carry out additional enquiries whether the actions agreed in the PHP's are being actioned and into the circumstances that led the customer being homeless or threatened with homeless and may also request further information and documentation.

The Council will also write to the customer, notifying them in writing of issues and the stage that their application is at, i.e. being transferred from Prevention to Relief Stage, failure to cooperate with the steps agreed in the PHP's , etc.

Customers are reminded to pay attention to any letters that they may receive as they will inform them about whether they are able to request a review against the notification/decision. This is very important as there is a strict time period in which a review must be requested by.

## What can the customer do if they do not agree with a decision?

Customers can request a review against a negative decision that they receive, such as s184 decisions informing them:

- That they are not eligible for housing assistance or that they are not homeless or
- They are deemed not to be in priority need for housing or
- They are intentionally homeless or
- Referral to another housing district (if the decision is to refer the customer's case to another council or that the conditions for a referral have been met)
- In addition, if a duty has been accepted by the Council to house a customer permanently, they can request a review of the suitability of their temporary accommodation or
- The customer is successful in securing permanent accommodation, however considers this to be unsuitable.
- Restricted duty (if a member of the customer's household is a 'restricted person')
- Discharge of duty (where the Council concludes that it no longer owes the customer a housing duty due to a change in their circumstances).

# What can the customer do if they do not agree with a decision?

The introduction of The Housing Reduction Act 2017 has seen additional processes and stages included into the processing of a homelessness application. Therefore, some of these processes and stages also have a right of review:

The reasonable steps, or any changes to those steps, set out in the customer's PHP to prevent or relieve homelessness. An applicant's reason for homelessness will depend on the reasonable steps set in their PHP. The content of the PHP must include:

- The circumstances that caused the customer to become homeless or threatened with homelessness.

- The housing needs of the customer including, in particular, what accommodation would be suitable for the applicant and any persons with whom the applicant resides or might reasonably be expected to reside.

- What support would be necessary for the customer and any other relevant persons to be able to have and retain suitable accommodation.

The steps vary depending on circumstances of customer and the appropriate action(s) for the applicant will be agreed with them and put in writing.

The Prevention Duty has been brought to an end (in writing). S195

Customers who approach that are eligible and are threatened with homelessness within 56 days are owed this duty. As part of the duty the Council can prevent

homelessness by way of an offer (which cannot be less than 6 months) of alternative accommodation which would bring this duty to an end. Customers will have a right to request a review of this duty being brought to an end.

If homelessness is prevented for at least six months under the Prevention Duty and the customer is issued with a not homeless decision as a result they have a right to request a review of the decision.

# What can the customer do if they do not agree with a decision?

The introduction of The Housing Reduction Act 2017 has seen additional processes and stages included into the processing of a homelessness application. Therefore, some of these processes and stages also have a right of review:

**The Relief Duty (S189B) has been brought to an end (which will last for 56 days if it has not been successful). It will also come to and end when:**

- The customer has suitable accommodation available for occupation for at least six months.
- The customer has been given an offer of accommodation.
- The customer has refused an offer of suitable accommodation which would have been available for at least six months and no longer than 12 months.

- The customer has become intentionally homeless from any accommodation that has been made available to them.
- The customer is no longer eligible for assistance.
- The customer has withdrawn the application.

**Duty to refer the Relief Duty** – enables a housing authority to refer customers who do not have a local connection to their district to another housing authority in England where they do have such a connection.

Before making a referral, the notifying authority must be satisfied that the customer is homeless and eligible for assistance and therefore owed the (section 189B) Relief Duty and that the conditions for referral are met.

The Council makes a decision to give the customer notice that they have deliberately and unreasonably failed to cooperate with the Council.

The Council makes a decision to give notice that the Council will bring the duty to help secure accommodation to an end.

The Council accepts that the customer may have multiple review requests being considered simultaneously.

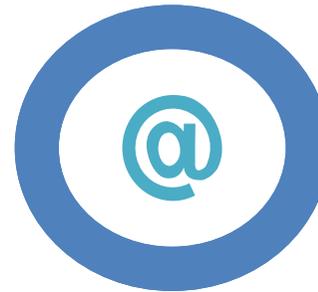
# Reviews

## Time scales to request reviews

There is a strict time scale that a review must be requested by, this is within 21 days of the receipt of notification of the decision and details will also be confirmed in the customer's written decision letter/notification.

It is noted that for each decision, separate requests within this time limit must be requested.

## How to request a review



[Review.Team@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:Review.Team@southwark.gov.uk)



**0207 525 5950**  
FAX **0207 525 4158**



**Review Team,  
Community  
Housing Services,  
PO Box 64529,  
London, SE1P 5LX**

# Reviews

## **Who will process the review request(s)**

Reviews are conducted by Officers based in the Review Team who have not been involved in the original decision making process. They will objectively scrutinize the decisions in line with relevant legislations. Once a valid review request is received, the customer is notified of the process, the allocated Review Officer's direct contact details and time scales of when the review is expected to be completed as well as deadline for further representation to be made by way of the Regulation 5 letter.

The outcome of the review will be communicated to the customer or their representative in writing by way of the s203 decision letter.

## **How long does it take to complete a review?**

Reviews are normally completed within 56 days (8 weeks) of the date of the request. However the time frame to complete some reviews are 21 days (3 weeks), they include reasonable steps included in the PHP.

## **What can the customer do if they are unhappy with their review decision?**

Where a customer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review, they have the right to appeal on a point of law to the County Court. The appeal must be submitted to the local County Court within 21 days of receipt of the s203 review decision.

# Your experience of our service

The Housing Solutions Service understands that customers often contact the Service in the unfortunate circumstance when they may be facing the challenging situation of losing their homes. We strive to provide customers with an effective service in a sensitive manner to resolve and ease some of the stressors involved in the process.

However, we do accept that on occasions we can get things wrong and value customer feedback. We actively encourage our customers to provide feedback on the service that they received whether negative or positive, raise any complaints that they may wish to if they feel that we have underperformed and also give suggestions for improvement.

All matters raised will be addressed and complaints registered for further investigation and response.

## **How can customers raise complaints, compliments and suggestions for improvement or general feedback:**

By telephone: 0207 525 5950

By email at: [housing.options@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:housing.options@southwark.gov.uk) or [complaints@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@southwark.gov.uk)

Or by completing the following form online, this can be accessed by following this link: [Housing Solutions Survey](#)