

Who gets priority for council housing?

Councils need to take different factors into account when they decide who gets priority for council housing. Certain groups will always be given priority - this is called 'reasonable preference'.

If you need accommodation immediately, you may have to make a homelessness application.

Key advice

Your council can tell you about housing priorities and how long you'll wait

If you urgently need housing, ask your council about a homelessness application

Information from the council

Ask the council for information about how it decides who gets priority for council housing. Most councils produce a leaflet that explains how things work. Your chances of getting a place, and how long it takes, depend on:

- how much council housing or housing association housing there is in your area
- how much priority you've been awarded
- how many other applicants have more priority than you.

Most councils use a points or a banding system, and give extra priority to those people who have lived in their area for a certain length of time. The law also says that certain groups should get priority for council housing.

- If you are homeless or about to lose your home
- If you are homeless or facing eviction, the council may have a legal responsibility to help you. If you are entitled to help in this way, the council must also give you extra priority on the waiting list.

How much priority you get for council housing may depend on the reasons why you had to leave your last home and whether you are classed as being in.

- If you are living in very poor conditions
- You may be entitled to reasonable preference if your home is:
 - in serious disrepair
 - officially overcrowded
 - unsanitary (ie it doesn't have proper drainage and sewerage), or
 - lacks basic washing and cooking facilities.

The council will need to visit your home to inspect it and assess how bad the conditions are before deciding how much priority you should get for council housing. There is usually a scale of priority for poor conditions. If the council decides that your home is in such bad condition that it is dangerous or potentially damaging to your health, you will get a lot more points.

- If you have a medical condition

You may also get reasonable preference if anyone in your household has:

- health problems that are made worse by where you live
- mobility problems that make it difficult to get around your home
- mental health problems, which are made worse by your accommodation.

If you include medical reasons in your application, you should give as much information as possible about your health problems and how they are affected by where you are living. Explain the difficulties the medical condition causes in as much detail as you can.

The council will normally ask a doctor, health visitor or other expert to assess your medical problems and may use an independent person who does not know you. They may also contact your GP and you should include details of any other health worker or social worker who can support your application.

If you were seriously injured in the armed forces

The UK Government is encouraging local councils to give extra priority to you if you need specially adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition, or disability which you received while you were serving in the armed forces.

If you need to live in the area to avoid hardship

You should also be given reasonable preference on the housing waiting list if you can show that there are special social or welfare reasons why you need to live in a particular area. This might be the case if, for example:

- you or someone in your household is studying at a special school in the area
- you need to be able to access support networks in the area - for example, if you're leaving care and need to be close to people who can support you
- you need to be close to a relative so that you can look after her/him (or s/he can look after you).

Having friends or family in the area won't necessarily be enough to give you extra points, although the council may consider it.

If you are at risk of violence or threats

You should also get extra points if:

- you are at risk of domestic abuse in your current home
- you've been a witness or victim of crime and are at risk of intimidation
- you have been harassed, threatened or attacked in the area because of your race or sexuality.

Losing your priority for council housing

If the council believes that you, or any member of your household, have been involved in behaviour that is serious enough to make you unsuitable to be a council tenant, they can take away any priority you have been given for council housing. This includes any 'reasonable preference' you have been given for the reasons outlined above.

The most common reasons why this might happen are if:

- someone in your household has been involved in antisocial behaviour, or
- you have a history of rent arrears.
- You can also lose your priority for housing if you:
 - have moved and the conditions in your new accommodation are better

- have moved to settled accommodation and are no longer homeless
- have recovered from an illness which gave you extra priority
- can afford to buy or rent accommodation for yourself.

When making a decision, the council will use the same criteria as it uses when assessing whether or not you are eligible. If the council tells you that your priority for council housing has been reduced or taken away, get advice. An adviser can look into your situation and may be able to help you show the council that what happened was not your fault or was outside of your control.

Disagreeing with the council's decision

You may be able to challenge the council's decision in a number of ways. Get advice first as an adviser may be able to help you put together your case. For example, you may need to arrange for a medical report to show how your health problems are made worse by your current housing situation.

People who don't automatically get priority on the housing list

Some groups of people do not automatically get priority:

- you may be entitled to help if you are pregnant and homeless, but the council doesn't have to give you a council flat
- there are restrictions on eligibility for people who have recently arrived in the UK.