

HOUSING NEEDS AND HOMELESSNESS

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Today I will be talking about Homelessness

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- What if someone in this room was suddenly living on the streets, would we change our views and opinions of them? How would you feel in their position?
- If I asked you to describe a Homeless Person, would you come up with a classic response of a man dressed in dirty clothes, maybe drunk?

Although this person may exist the reality is...

Homelessness can affect anyone!

Homelessness happens when people fall into situations such as:

- Rent Arrears/Mortgage Arrears
- Unsafe/Insecure Accommodation
- Job Loss
- Physical and/or Mental Health problems
- Relationship breakdown
- Drug & Alcohol addictions
- Alienation from society
- Lack of housing supply (particularly in London)

The Legal Position

- Housing Act 1996 Part 7 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002)
- Central Government's Code of Guidance
- Relevant Case Law

The Legal Tests

A person will not be entitled to a full housing duty unless he/she is

- Homeless (i.e. Has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere in the world that is available and reasonable to occupy)
- Is not subject to certain immigration controls
- Has a priority need for accommodation
- Has a local connection with the borough
- Did not become homeless intentionally

The Merton Position

Main causes of homelessness in Merton:

- Assured Shorthold Tenancies coming to an end
- Friends and relatives evicting
- Parental evictions
- Non-violent relationships coming to an end
- Domestic violence
- Leaving institutions

How we tackle homelessness in Merton

Homelessness prevention strategies includes:

- Legal advocacy
- Sanctuary scheme
- Repossession fund
- Rent Deposit Scheme
- Severe weather emergency protocol
- Targeted housing allocation scheme
- Increasing housing supply by working with private landlords
- Improving conditions in the private rented sector (HSSRS) Housing Act 2004

Homelessness Reduction Act

- It will not build/produce one more unit of accommodation
BUT
- It puts a statutory framework on the work the Council currently does
- It puts prevention of homelessness at the centre of the legal framework
- Focus on homeless prevention: earlier and more proactive (i.e. casework)
- New duty to prevent and new duty to relieve (within 56 day period)
- Threatened with homelessness, within 56 days rather than 28 days
- Not reasonable to continue to occupy after Section 21 Notice (AST)
- New duty to refer on statutory agencies, police, hospitals, will be referring more cases
- Duty to produce Personal Housing Plans and a duty on the applicant to co-operate
- New duties regardless of priority need, no longer just families with children and vulnerable adults

Homelessness Reduction Act cont.

- New duties owed regardless of local connection
- New abilities to request review (11 stages)
- Care Leavers – very specific duty related to “choice”. Easier for care leavers to show they have a local connection with both the area of the local authority responsible for them and the area in which they lived while in care, if that was different.
- Biggest change in homelessness since the 1977 Homeless Persons Act
- Royal assent in February 2017
- Enacted – April 2018
- Amend Housing Act 1996 Part 7. Does not replace it, but not retrospective so applications up to 31 March 2018 under old framework.

Facts and figures

There were 9581 households on Merton's Housing Register at the end of March 2017

For the period April 2016 to March 2017, 260 social housing properties were let.

- 135 One bedroom units
- 81 Two bedroom units
- 41 Three bedroom units
- 2 Four bedroom units
- 1 Five + bedroom units

Any questions?

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