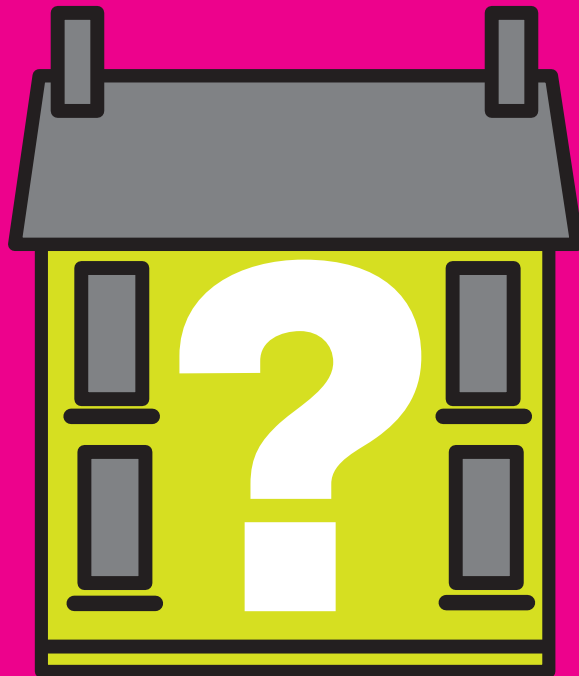


Homeless Assessment

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Falkirk Council will offer advice and assistance if you are homeless or threatened with homelessness, but how much depends on your eligibility and your level of need.

This leaflet tells you:

- what will happen during your homelessness interview
- how your homeless application will be assessed
- the legal responsibilities the Council has to you
- what will happen next

Your Homeless Interview

Who will interview me?

You will be interviewed by an Assessment Officer who has specialist knowledge of homelessness and housing options.

Attending a homeless interview is very important as it allows you to talk to an Assessment Officer about your housing situation. The interview will be held in private and anything you say will be treated as confidential.

The same Assessment Officer will deal with your case from start to finish so you will always know the name of the person dealing with your case and how to get in touch with them. You can be interviewed by a member of staff who is the same sex as you if that is what you want. We try to offer this choice to everyone wherever possible. You have the right to bring a friend, relative or support worker along to your interview.

It is very important that you are honest about your circumstances during the interview.

If you don't tell the Assessment Officer certain information it may take us longer to make a decision on your homeless application or it could mean that you are not offered temporary accommodation which you may be entitled to.

Your Assessment Officer will ask you a number of questions about your personal circumstances. They may ask you to provide information or ask for your written permission to contact other people for more information or to confirm what you have told us. If you have been asked to provide other information it is important that you do this as quickly as possible.

The assessment officer needs to find out:

- if you are homeless
- if you are unintentionally homeless
- if you have a local connection

To be entitled to permanent housing, you have to meet the following conditions, which are set out by law:

- You must be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless within the next two months
- You must not have become homeless or at risk of becoming homeless intentionally
- You have a local connection

Under each of these conditions there are a number of definitions saying what each actually means.

The following sections will explain what these definitions mean.

Are you Homeless?

You don't have to be living on the streets to be homeless.

You are homeless if:

- You have no accommodation which you are permitted or entitled to occupy
- You are sleeping rough
- You are unable to get access to housing
- You live in a night shelter, refuge or other emergency housing
- You are experiencing violence, harassment, racial harassment or are threatened with violence from someone you live with or used to live with
- You live in a mobile home or houseboat and there is nowhere for you to pitch or moor it
- Your household is overcrowded in terms of housing legislation and this is causing physical or mental health problems
- Your household is forced to live apart
- You have somewhere to live but it is unreasonable for you to do so, for example your house is in a poor state of repair
- You are living with friends or relatives and they have asked you to leave

You are at risk of becoming homeless if you are likely to fall into one of the above categories in the next two months.

Are you Intentionally Homeless?

You may be intentionally homeless if:

- Your house was taken away from you because of your own actions, for example, not paying your rent or mortgage or behaving in an antisocial way
- You voluntarily left your house without a good reason
- You were aware that your action would make you homeless
- If we decide that you are homeless, but that you are intentionally homeless, we have a duty to give you temporary housing for a short time (if you need this) and advice and assistance to help you find somewhere else to live

Do you have a Local Connection with the Falkirk Council Area?

As a general rule, you will have a local connection with the Falkirk Council area if:

- You have lived in this area for a significant length of time
- You work in the Falkirk area
- You have close family links in the Falkirk area
- You have special circumstances, for example you need to continue your education or provide care for a member of your family
- You are fleeing domestic abuse
- You have recently left the armed forces

If you are unintentionally homeless but have no local connection with the Falkirk Council area and there are no special circumstances why you have to stay in the area, we will refer you to another council area to which you do have a local connection. However, we must give you temporary housing until the other council agrees to help.

Assessing your Homeless Application

The Assessment Officer looks at each case individually and carefully examines all the information before reaching a decision. When the Assessment Officer has made a decision on your homeless application, we must let you know, in writing, what our duties are towards you under homeless legislation. We aim to assess your situation within 28 days of the date of your application. This may sometimes take longer depending on the circumstances of your homeless application.

While we are assessing your case you have the right to temporary housing if you need this.

Housing Support Needs Assessment

As part of your interview, your Assessment Officer will complete a housing support needs assessment. This will look at your current circumstances and your ability to manage independent living. They may decide that you will need some housing support in your new home.

Housing support can offer practical assistance if you are having difficulties maintaining independent living and covers a range of activities such as help with applying for benefits, sorting out debts, setting up utility bills / payment plans, and accessing other services to meet your needs. Housing support aims to help people to maintain their accommodation, meet their duties and responsibilities as a tenant and get involved in the local community.

Housing support will only be provided if you have housing problems such as rent arrears or tenancy issues. Housing support is a free short term service for residents of the Falkirk Council area aged +16 in any type of accommodation.

If you have no housing support issues but would benefit from a different type of help (for example - mental health services), we will signpost or refer you to a relevant agency.

If you think that you would benefit from housing support, please speak to your Assessment Officer to discuss with them the suitability of a referral to the housing support service.

Supported Accommodation

If your Assessment Officer considers that you need specialist housing support they will refer you to the support team. The Support Team may refer you to one of our supported accommodation units in the Falkirk Council area. They will ensure that you access supported accommodation that will meet your needs. The information below provides details about our supported accommodation units.

Assessment Centre

Our Assessment Centre provides supported accommodation for 21 single persons aged 25 and over. The accommodation consists of flats with 3 or 4 bedrooms that share communal facilities. The service aims to provide practical support while applications are awaiting their homelessness assessment and looks to help applications with the transition to further supported, temporary or permanent accommodation.

Young Persons Supported Accommodation

We have specialist supported accommodation unit that provides young people aged 16-25 with support during their transition from homelessness to permanent accommodation. The service aims to support young people to gain important skills and the ability to manage their own tenancy independently and develop a range of life skills appropriate to their needs. The accommodation is in flats with 3 or 4 bedrooms with shared communal facilities.

Multiple needs

We have a specialist accommodation that looks to support our most vulnerable homeless applicants with complex needs such as within their own tenancies. Accommodation is a cluster of one bedroom flats supported by a main complex access building.

What Happens Next?

Offer of Permanent Housing

If the Assessment Officer finds that you are unintentionally homeless and have a local connection, you will be entitled to an offer of permanent housing and will be awarded Home Seeker Band 1 status within Falkirk Council's Allocations Policy and a Gold pass on Link Housing Association's Home Hunt Scheme. If you are at risk of becoming homeless within the next two months you will be a Home Seeker with Band 1 priority. More information about Falkirk Council's Allocations Policy and choice based letting scheme is available in the Homespot information booklet.

You will be expected to bid for Falkirk Council properties once you have been awarded your Home Seeker status, however please note that we may also nominate you for any suitable vacancies with local housing associations. You are also expected to register with Link Housing Association's Home Hunt scheme. During this time you will be offered temporary accommodation from Falkirk Council if you need it.

It is important to bid for properties. As a Home Seeker with Band 1 priority we expect you to bid for all properties which meet your household needs.

This is a high level of priority to help you access housing. If you need help to bid for properties please speak to a member of staff at the Access to Housing Service.

We will monitor the bids you make and if you do not bid for suitable properties for three months, we may make you an offer of housing outwith the choice based scheme. We will try to offer you a property in the areas you have chosen but this will depend on the availability of properties. This offer of housing will discharge our duty to you in terms of homeless legislation. This arrangement to offer you a property out with the choice based scheme will also apply if:

- you successfully bid for a property and then refuse it
- you do not bid for suitable properties advertised by Link Housing Association through their HomeHunt scheme
- you refuse a property that is offered to you by a local housing association

If you refuse an offer of housing for either ones you have bid for or one we made outwith choice based lettings, then you will move from a "Home Seeker" to a "Home Starter". Your priority for homelessness will be removed and your housing situation will be reassessed.

If you are living in temporary accommodation provided by the Council, you will have to leave it. If you think that any offer of housing is unreasonable then you have the right to appeal. Information about the Homespot Appeals Process and how to appeal an offer of permanent housing is available online or from any Advice and Support Hub or Neighbourhood Office.

Homelessness Appeals Process

If you don't agree with our decision, for example, it has been decided that you are not homeless, you can ask for this decision to be reviewed. A separate leaflet called the "Homelessness Appeals Process" explains how the appeals process works. You can get this form from the Access to Housing Service.

Tel: 01324 503600 or
Freephone: 0800 587 4440.
E-mail: ath@falkirk.gov.uk

You can also download the form from the Council's web site www.falkirk.gov.uk

Independent Advice

At any time during your homelessness assessment you can seek independent advice from a solicitor, Citizens Advice Bureaux or Shelter. The local contact details are listed below.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Falkirk CAB
27 - 29 Vicar Street
Falkirk FK1 1LL
Tel: 01324 626070

Denny and Dunipace CAB
24 Duke Street
Denny FK6 6DD
Tel: 01324 823118

Grangemouth and Bo'ness CAB
1 Kerse Road
Grangemouth FK3 8HW
Tel: 01324 483467

Legal Advice

Shelter Housing Advice Helpline:
0808 800 4444

Can give free, independent and confidential advice on all housing matters.

Local Solicitors

The Law Society of Scotland
26 Drumsheugh Gardens
Edinburgh EH3 7YR
Tel: 0131 226 7411

Access to Housing Team / Local Area Offices / Advice and Support Hub

Access to Housing Team
Callendar Square,
Falkirk FK1 1UJ
Freephone: 0800 587 4440
Tel: 01324 503600
E-mail: ath@falkirk.gov.uk

Camelon One Stop Shop
256 Main Street, Camelon,
Falkirk FK1 4DY
Tel: 01324 503640
E-mail:
housing.camelon@falkirk.gov.uk

Dawson Centre
David's Loan, Falkirk FK2 7RG
Tel: 01324 501450
E-mail:
housing.dawson@falkirk.gov.uk

Denny One Stop Shop
Carronbank House, Carronbank
Crescent, Denny FK6 6GA
Tel: 01324 504050
E-mail:
housing.denny@falkirk.gov.uk

Falkirk One Stop Shop
Callendar Square, Falkirk FK1 1UJ
Tel: 01324 506868
E-mail:
housing.falkirk@falkirk.gov.uk

Advice and Support Hub
5 York Lane, Grangemouth FK3 8BD
Tel: 01324 504550
E-mail: housing.grangemouth@falkirk.gov.uk

Stenhousemuir One Stop Shop
398 Main Street,
Stenhousemuir FK5 3JR
Tel: 01324 503340
E-mail: housing.stenhousemuir@falkirk.gov.uk

Have your say on how your Housing Service is run, or how it could be improved. To find out more, contact Inspector Tenant on 01324 590796, email inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk or visit us at www.falkirk.gov.uk/inspectortenant for more information.



Falkirk Council

www.falkirk.gov.uk/housing

If you would like this information in another language, Braille, large print or audio tape please contact one of our Neighbourhood Offices or One Stop Shops.

July 2017