

HomeChoice and the Housing Advice Team

North Somerset Council's HomeChoice and Housing Advice Team provides free, confidential and impartial advice for people in housing need, anyone who is homeless or potentially homeless or those who simply wish to apply for social housing via HomeChoice North Somerset (see HomeChoice section for further details).

The council's main priority is to prevent homelessness whenever possible as the effects of homelessness can be distressing and detrimental to people's lives. It is therefore important that if you have any issue with your housing you let us know as soon as possible. The earlier you let us know the more we can do to help.

The advice and help provided by the Housing Advice Team is wide ranging and includes the following:

- Tenancy rights and responsibilities.
- Illegal eviction and harassment.
- Notices to leave and possession action by landlords or lenders.
- Disrepair.
- Rent and Mortgage arrears.
- Re-housing options following relationship breakdown including domestic abuse.
- Family/Friend evictions.

- Neighbour disputes including racial and other harassment.
- Referrals to specialist support services.
- Referrals for debt advice and court representation.
- Advice on the council's duties to you if you are homeless or potentially homeless.

HomeChoice

HomeChoice is North Somerset's Choice Based Lettings scheme. If you are looking to rent a property from a Housing Association you will need to make an application. If you wish to apply you can access the application in one of the following ways:

- Apply online
www.homechoicensomerset.org.uk
- Print off the application form from the HomeChoice website.
- Phone the HomeChoice Team on 01934 426 330.

All empty properties owned by Housing Associations in North Somerset are advertised on the internet at www.homechoicensomerset.org.uk

They are also advertised in a weekly newsletter which is available at the council's housing reception and in libraries across the district. If you see a property you like and it is the right size for your household you can place a 'bid'. You must be registered with HomeChoice

North Somerset before you can place a bid expressing your interest in a property.

For more information about HomeChoice or for help applying please contact the HomeChoice Team on 01934 426 330 or visit our reception at Somerset House, Oxford Street, Weston-super-Mare BS23 1TG

Private rented accommodation

Housing Association properties in North Somerset are in short supply and there is high demand for the limited number of properties that become available. This means that you can wait a long time before being offered a Housing Association tenancy, if ever. Therefore if the council has a duty to help you find somewhere to live we will help you access private rented housing and may be able to help with the necessary deposits/deposit bonds. The private rented sector allows you to choose from a range of accommodation types and locations. Finding accommodation in the private sector may be your best or only available option.

Even if the council doesn't have a duty to re-house you the Housing Advice Team can give you advice about privately renting, the best places to look for vacancies, Housing Benefit rates and your rights and responsibilities as a tenant. We can also help you if you have been served notice requiring you to leave your private tenancy or if you are having problems paying your rent.

Tenancy relations

We also provide a tenancy relations service and can provide information on tenancy law to both tenants and landlords and can investigate claims of harassment and illegal eviction.

Homeowners

Many people have difficulty meeting their mortgage repayments for reasons such as increasing interest rates, higher household bills, redundancy, relationship breakdown and ill health. It is important to seek help and advice as early as possible if you are in mortgage arrears or think you may have problems meeting your monthly payments. There are several schemes available to help struggling homeowners such as:

- support for mortgage interest
- homeowner mortgage support
- the Governments Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

For information about these please visit the council's website: www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Housing/mortgagesolutions/

The National Homelessness Advice Service (NHAS) also have a very informative booklet called 'are you worried about your mortgage'. This can be downloaded at their website www.nhas.org.uk/publications_events.htm

or alternatively you can collect a free copy from the Housing Advice Team, Somerset House.

Supported housing

Supported housing is for people who need help to live independently. In North Somerset there are various supported housing schemes ranging from services for young people to refuges for people fleeing domestic abuse. A Housing Advice Officer can discuss this type of housing with you and if appropriate can make referrals to relevant schemes. A directory of services can be downloaded on the Council's website at www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Social+care/Supporting+People/ServiceDirectory/

Emergency housing

The council has referral rights to a limited amount of emergency housing. Depending on your circumstances and eligibility if you are homeless that night the Housing Advice Team may secure temporary housing for you. For single people this would be accommodation with shared facilities. For families there are a limited number of designated small self contained flats around the district. This housing is available until a decision about your homelessness application has been made or alternative housing has been secured for you.

The council runs a homelessness out-of-hours service. If you become homeless outside of normal office hours each weekday or at any time at weekends and bank holidays you should call 01934 622 669. A telephone assessment will be carried out and a decision

will be made as to whether you qualify for emergency housing.

Contact details

For further information, to book an appointment or if you have any questions please contact us at:

HomeChoice and Housing Advice Team
(postal address)

**Adult Social Service and Housing
North Somerset Council
Town Hall
Weston super Mare BS23 1UJ**

Or visit us at our Housing Reception at:

**Somerset House
Oxford Street
Weston super Mare BS23 1TG**

Tel: **01934 426 330**
Fax: **01934 426 728**

Email: homechoiceteam@n-somerset.gov.uk

We also carry out an appointment based surgery in Portishead once a week and in addition can carry out home visits where necessary. For more details please contact us as above.

Other useful contacts

Liberata

Housing and Council Tax Benefit
North Somerset Council Benefit Office
PO Box 83
Weston super Mare BS23 1UF
Tel: 01934 888 144

Citizens Advice Bureau

NS Citizens Advice Bureau
The Badger Centre, 3-6 Wadham Street
Weston super Mare BS23 1JY
Tel: 0844 826 9692

Woodspring Deposit Guarantee Board

Rooms 1-2, St Johns Hall, Boulevard
Weston super Mare BS23 1NA
Tel: 01934 617 617

Council documents can be made available in large print, audio, easy read and other formats. Documents on our website can also be emailed to you as plain text files.

Help is also available for people who require council information in languages other than English.

For more information contact:
01934 426 330



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**Advice and information about
housing options in North
Somerset**