

Ex-armed forces who are experiencing or threatened with homelessness

If you're leaving the armed services, or you are a former member, you may be entitled to extra help if you become homeless

Key advice:

- Check Southwark Council's housing allocation scheme
- Get help with housing or apply as homeless before you're discharged

Homelessness rights for ex-forces

You may qualify for help from Southwark Council if you are a former member of the armed forces and are homeless or threatened with homelessness. In addition you will have to prove to the Council that you are eligible for housing assistance, and have not made yourself intentionally homeless.

Subject to you satisfying the above criteria Southwark Council has to help you with both emergency and longer-term accommodation if it is accepted that you are homeless and in priority need with regard to needing accommodation.

Southwark Council must consider if it can help you using both general rules that apply to everyone and special rules that apply to people who were in the forces.

General rules for people in priority need

It can be easier to get help if you qualify under the general rules for people in priority need, for example if you have dependent children or are pregnant.

Southwark Council should also look to see if you are vulnerable in some way. This may involve showing how a disability, mental health problem, addiction or other issue effects your ability to secure housing for yourself compared with other people who are rendered homeless.

Extra homelessness rules for the armed forces

You should also be treated as being vulnerable and therefore in priority need for accommodation if you can show that your vulnerability is as a result of being a former member of the armed forces.

When deciding this, Southwark Council may consider:

- how long you were in the forces and what role you had
- if you spent any time in a military hospital
- if you were released from service on medical grounds (and have a Medical History Release Form)
- if you have had accommodation since leaving service and if you have been able to obtain or maintain accommodation since you left
- how long it has been since you left service

To help support your case, you may need to provide medical evidence from the MOD, including a Medical History Release Form (if you were given one). It can be hard to establish that you are vulnerable.

You may need to seek independent legal advice or help from a specialist agency to make representations on your behalf if this council decides that you do not meet the criteria set out above, and therefore it does not owe a duty to you to provide you with accommodation.

Re-housing in the area of your base

To be accepted as homeless in the local council area where you were based, you must be able to show that you have a local connection with the local council where your base was situated.

You may be able to show a local connection with that area if you:

- currently work in the area
- have lived in the area for six out of the last 12 months or three out of the last five years
- live with a partner who currently works in the area

If you have left the forces and are not yet working for another employer in the area, you won't be able to show a local connection through working in the area. However, you may still be able to show that you have a local connection as the time you spent living or working in the area may still count.

You should also consider if you are able to show a local connection with this or another local council area where you have close family connections.

You don't need to have a local connection to apply to go on Southwark Council's housing register if you are serving in the armed forces or left in the last 5 years.

Applying as homeless before discharge from the forces

Contact Southwark Council's Housing Solutions service if you think you will be homeless after discharge from the services. Southwark Council should not wait until you are made homeless before it helps you.

Upon the production of a letter of discharge or some other evidence that confirms the date of your discharge from the Forces, Southwark Council should accept that from the date of discharge you will become homeless. In the event that you have not sought any housing assistance from this council prior to your discharge from the Forces you may need to stay in your accommodation as long as possible and wait for Defence Estates to evict you.

Defence Estates have to give you a Notice to Vacate before they can take you to court in order that they can obtain a possession order. You can use any Notice to Vacate and any possession order that is obtained against you as evidence in support of your homelessness application.

Ex-forces and single, homeless and on the streets

Many single homeless people don't qualify for help from Southwark Council or any other local authority. There is a range of services for people who find themselves homeless and on the streets, for example:

- day centres are a useful source of practical support – they provide a warm place to stay during the day and food, clothing, laundry facilities and showers
- the Royal British Legion might be able to help with a rent deposit contact
www.support.britishlegion.org.uk
- SSAFA provide housing advice to people currently serving in the forces and ex services personnel and their families. SSAFA can be contacted through www.ssafa.org.uk.

Use the Homeless England directory to find details of other day centres and hostels in London and across the UK. This can be located at www.homeless.org.uk.

Further housing support and advice by Veterans' Housing Advice

Veterans' Housing Advice is a new service which provides clear pathways for ex-Service personnel in housing need throughout the United Kingdom to move into permanent homes.

It is provided in partnership with The Royal British Legion, Shelter and Connect Assist, its main aim is to make accessing the services of charities easier through a telephone helpline open seven days a week from 8am-8pm.

It can, for example, provide a housing intervention that negates the need to consider a rent bond or rent deposit.

There is now a Veterans Housing Advice (VHA) web site www.veteranshousingadvice.org.uk and the direct number to an advisor is 0808 801 0880, that can also be accessed via the Veterans' Gateway on 0808 802 1212 that is available 24/7.

Services provided by members of the CHC include:

- Supported Accommodation - providing temporary accommodation for veterans, with support.
- Long Term Housing - providing settled accommodation for veterans, with or without support.
- General Needs - Unsupported housing for members of the ex-Service community unable to buy or rent on the open market. Tenants will usually be self-sufficient, but may need to avail themselves of some of the floating support listed. Some adapted properties may be available or adaptations arranged as necessary.
- Floating Support - Services delivered by visiting workers to people in their own homes to help people maintain their settled accommodation. • Outreach Services - Covering work with rough sleepers or people in temporary accommodation to help them access more settled accommodation and any support needs. • Day Centres - The provision of activities and support to homeless and vulnerably housed people. (Also called by some providers 'drop-in' facilities).

Homeless after dishonourable discharge

Southwark Council may not have a duty to help you if you are homeless after being discharged on disciplinary grounds from the UK armed forces.

Joining the Housing Register

The following categories of applicants will be afforded a priority status for accommodation on Southwark Council's Housing Register if they have left the Armed Forces within the last 5 years:

- Those discharged from the Armed Forces as a result of sustaining a serious injury, illness, medical condition, or disability during service which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person's service
- Those former serving members of the Reserve Forces who need to move because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability sustained as a result of their service
- Those applicants who are in housing need and have been discharged from the Armed Forces such as former armed forces personnel in housing need
- Those bereaved spouses or civil partners of those serving in the regular forces where the bereaved spouse or civil partner has recently ceased to reside, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in Ministry of Defence accommodation
- Those applying following the death of their service spouse or civil partner, where the death was wholly or partly attributable to their service

Contact us

If you need advice, assistance and support with your housing needs, please contact Southwark Council's Housing Solutions service.

Housing Solutions service

25 Bournemouth Road, Peckham Rye, London, SE15 4UJ

020 7525 4140

Out of hours phone:

020 7505 5000

housing.options@southwark.gov.uk

Call Southwark Advocacy and Support Services (SASS) for further information on 020 7593 1290 or for more information on the council's work in this area please access information on the Southwark Council web site at www.southwark.gov.uk