

Housing Options **Advice Service**



Housing options in the Lancaster district

Lancaster City Council is committed to helping you find safe and secure accommodation that is the right choice for you. The aim of this booklet is to help people in need of housing accommodation in the Lancaster district – Lancaster, Morecambe, Carnforth and the surrounding rural areas.

Anyone aged 16 or over who wishes to apply for social rented properties within the Lancaster district can apply to join the housing register and will be advised accordingly of all the options available.

However as there is a shortage of properties within the district and a huge demand for accommodation, there are lengthy waiting lists. Both the council and private registered providers of social housing (previously called housing associations) allocate

properties according to housing need, giving due consideration to individual circumstances.

Because it is not possible to offer accommodation to the majority of people applying for properties each year, we have brought together a wide range of housing options for you to explore.

Our Housing Advice team aim to prevent homelessness and our Housing Standards team aim to improve housing conditions within the private sector.

Homeless prevention

Lancaster City Council's Housing Advice team provides a free and confidential advice service.

The majority of homelessness is preventable and we aim to act as early as possible before the problem worsens. We will work with you and liaise with all parties concerned to help resolve any issues such as rent arrears, disrepair and any associated tenancy problems. We offer a personal service with options and advice to suit your needs.

How we can help

We offer a specialist casework service along with advice and assistance with:

- Notice to vacate and possession orders issued by landlords or lenders
- Legal rights and responsibilities
- Repair/Disrepair obligations
- Ensuring that rent increases are completed correctly
- Rent arrears and rent account management
- Advice on Rent deposits
- Mediation services
- Harassment and unlawful eviction
- Tenancy housing floating support
- Access to private rented property
- Shared Ownership
- Assistance to homeowners with mortgage issues and referrals to Citizens Advice Bureau
- Access to shared accommodation

- Sanctuary Scheme (Domestic Violence Support)
- Haven Scheme Support for victims suffering from Anti-social behaviour
- Access to specialist supported accommodation and social lettings agency
- Support with finding accommodation
- Advice to homeless 16/17 year olds

The earlier you let us know about your housing problems the better, as it allows us time to intervene early and offer the necessary advice and assistance to help you resolve the issues.

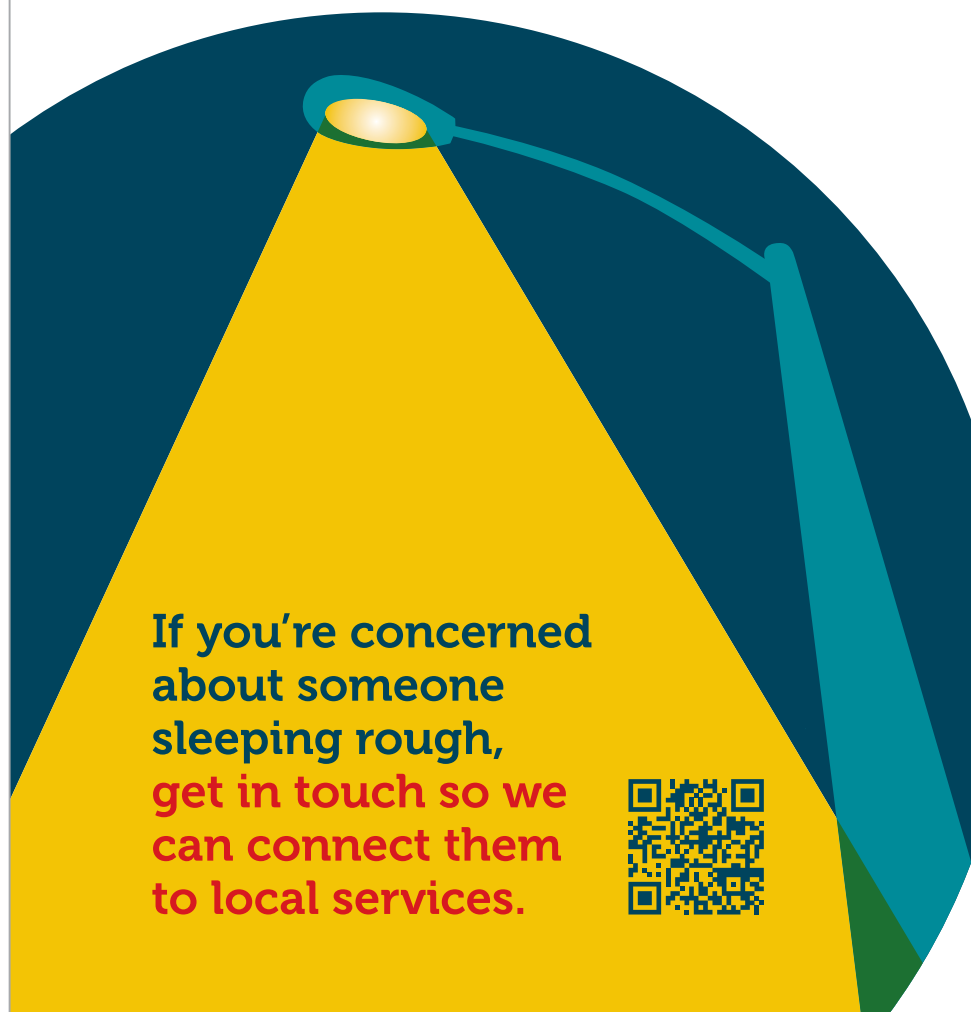
Our designated prevention officers will, upon request, visit you at home and can offer practical advice for all residents, particularly those whose tenancies are at risk of failing. For further details call: 01524 582257





Connecting rough sleepers to local services

0300 500 0914 www.streetlink.org.uk



If you're concerned about someone sleeping rough, get in touch so we can connect them to local services.



Tenancy Support

Clients experiencing problems with their tenancy can obtain support and assistance from DISC, a charity that helps people to make positive changes to their lives and achieve their goals. DISC provides a high quality support service which can help you maintain your tenancy and live independently.

You can either refer yourself to this service by emailing compass@disc-vol.org.uk or ask another agency to complete the referral form on your behalf.

Within the first weeks of registration an officer will contact you to discuss your needs and together you will agree your personal support plan and set achievable goals. The officer will visit you regularly at pre-arranged appointments and you will be offered continued support to help you achieve those agreed goals.

You will normally work with the same support worker for the time that support is provided. The support is aimed at increasing independence, and the support worker will help with all your housing/social needs and encourage you to help yourself wherever possible. You will be involved in all decisions regarding your support needs and wherever possible you will be expected to act upon the suggestions made by the support worker.

Support provided:

- Tenancy advice
- Advice, advocacy and liaison in securing accommodation
- Debt problems including rent arrears

- Life skills
- Benefit advice
- Social and person issues
- Employment and training advice

Access to local services

All support officers are fully trained and will work in a professional manner to help you move on to independent living. For further details call 0800 107 5558

A Place to Live – Social Lettings

Lancaster City Council has entered into partnership to fund the development of a Social Letting agency with A Place to Live. The purpose of the scheme is to create more opportunities for tenants registered with the council to secure accommodation in private rented properties.

What is A Place to Live?

'A Place to Live' has been set-up to help people in the Lancaster district in housing need access private tenancies. Through this we aim to prevent people becoming homeless or moving into temporary accommodation, by providing a sustainable place to live; we aim to break the cycle of transient living, and help people feel more stable in their accommodation.

Stable permanent accommodation also helps tackle numerous other issues such as unemployment and anti-social behaviour. The Housing Options Team will assess all potential tenants and refer clients to us.

Who is Methodist Action North West?

Methodist Action North West is a well-respected charity that provides support, assistance and advice to people in housing need. The charity has operated in Preston for a number of years and is developing and expanding its services across the North West.

As a non-for-profit charity, any profit that is made is channelled back into improving the quality and delivery of services. Methodist Action – A Place to Live is a Social Lettings Agency set up with the sole aim of helping people in housing need that often come up against barriers when following traditional housing routes.

For further information on how to access this service call 01525 582257.

If you are an existing tenant contact

Methodist Action's head office:
Howick House, Howick Park Avenue,
Penwortham, Preston, PR1 0LS. tel.
01772 751000

Methodist Action
(North West) Ltd.
Empowering People to Achieve Independence and Fulfilment

Private Rented accommodation

If you need somewhere to live and you are not in priority need, you are unlikely to be housed via the council's housing register. Private rented accommodation will be one of your main options.

Private rented accommodation within the Lancaster district can be difficult to find and is often expensive, and allocated on a short-term basis only.

You can find accommodation in the following ways:

- Online
There are numerous ways to find accommodation on-line
- Newspapers
All of the local and many national newspapers advertise accommodation to rent within the private rented sector. Bear in mind that a lot of people will be reading these, so it is advisable to buy a newspaper as early as possible and act swiftly

- Notice boards
Notices are often placed in newsagent's windows and on other public noticeboards to advertise flats or rooms at the cheaper end of the market. Try to visit the area you are interested in as regularly as possible
- Students' Unions or Colleges
If you are a student your college may be able to help you find somewhere to live
- Accommodation or Letting Agencies
These agencies let and manage accommodation which includes rooms, flats and houses on behalf of private landlords. Most agencies advertise in the local and national press, however it would be advisable to visit them in person and register with them. Finding accommodation through an agency can prove expensive as they often expect rent in advance, usually with a deposit and an agency fee

Be prepared to visit several agencies and view the different rooms, flats and houses that they are offering. If you are not working you must enquire whether they accept people who are in receipt of benefits. You must also confirm the rent and type of accommodation available, and the agency's standard fee.

An agency can only charge you a fee for its services if you accept the accommodation it has secured for you. The Accommodation Act (1953) states that it is illegal for an agency to charge just for registering a person's details or supplying addresses of accommodation to people.

If an agency asks for money in advance, you are advised to seek advice before making any payment. You will be required to provide references. The agency may charge for drawing up a tenancy agreement and an inventory of the contents, fixtures and fittings. You may be asked to pay a returnable deposit and one month's rent in advance – this is quite normal.

You can find information about how to go about renting or buying a home from Lancaster City Council's Housing Options Service 01524 582257.

Ideal Choice Homes

Ideal Choice Homes is the choice based lettings scheme in the Lancaster district. Ideal Choice Homes includes council accommodation, rented accommodation from private registered providers of social housing, private rented accommodation and shared ownership properties.

Through Ideal Choice Homes, Lancaster City Council provides good quality housing advice to all applicants to enable them to make informed decisions about their housing options. Ideal Choice Homes allows you to bid on which properties interest you, and gives you a greater say in where you live.

Vacant properties are advertised on a weekly basis at www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk and in our newsletter which is available from the Customer Service Centre at Lancaster or Morecambe Town Hall. To be able to participate you need to have an active application on the



Photo by Steve Pendril

Lancaster City Council housing register.

The easiest way to apply is online, at www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk

You must be over 16 years of age.

You will be given a banding based on your housing need, and provided with your application number which will allow you to bid for available properties.

You can bid for properties in a number of ways:

- Online at: www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk
- By phone on 0845 505 8230 (24hr)
- By text message on 07537 404370
- In person at Lancaster or Morecambe Town Hall Customer Service Centre

To find out more visit:

www.idealchoicetohomes.co.uk

Contact us on 01524 582005 or email idealchoicetohomes@lancaster.gov.uk

Discretionary Housing Payments

If you are receiving housing benefit or the housing costs element of universal credit and you still need help with paying the rest of your rent or certain other housing costs, you can apply to the council for a discretionary housing payment.

Many people have a shortfall between the housing benefit they get and the rent they have to pay. If your landlord does not reduce the rent, you must ensure that you pay the shortfall or you will build up rent arrears. You may find that even if you

have moved to somewhere cheaper, other costs may have increased (for example travel costs to work or school), meaning it is still difficult to pay the rest of your rent.

What can I get it for?

You can apply for a discretionary housing payment for many reasons, including if you:

- have a shortfall between rent and housing benefit
- need support to continue to live in specially adapted accommodation
- need help to pay rent in advance or a deposit, especially if you are moving because the maximum housing benefit you can get has been reduced
- need to pay rent arrears, if you have not received housing benefit to pay that rent

What can't I get it for?

You can't get a discretionary housing payment for:

- service charges that are part of your rent but are not covered by the housing benefit scheme, such as heating, hot water, or water charges
- making up for a reduction in housing or other benefits resulting from an overpayment or a penalty
- rent arrears if you have already received housing benefit to pay that rent
- council tax liability

How do I apply?

You must apply to your local council, normally to the housing benefit office - 01524 582965. You will need to provide evidence of your outgoings and details of any circumstances that cause you financial difficulty. Making a discretionary housing payment is not obligatory for the council.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Citizens Advice Bureau give free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to help you solve problems.

Housing issues will always arise and therefore you need to know your rights and responsibilities.

You could also find yourself threatened with eviction if you can't cope with your mortgage payments.

The Citizens Advice Bureau can also give advice on handling problems with your landlord and help to avoid losing your home.

Citizen's Advice Bureau can assist with:

- Rent arrears
- Mortgage problems
- Repairs in rented housing
- Discrimination in housing
- Moving and improving your home
- Your money – your home
- Problems where you live

For further details please visit - www.citizensadvice.org.uk

You can email the bureau at - enquiries@northlancashirecab.org.uk

Telephone 01524 400400

If you have been asked to attend court regarding mortgage arrears Citizens Advice Bureau have a court desk at Lancaster County Court and can provide advice and represent you if required.

Housing Disrepair

If you are having problems with the condition of your rented property, the council's Housing Standards team can offer help and advice on issues such as:

- Fire safety
- Overcrowding conditions
- Inadequate facilities
- Dangerous fixtures
- Structural damage
- Disrepair



Housing Standards enforcement officers are responsible for inspecting properties within the private rented sector. They target unfit properties, overcrowding and poor maintenance through education and enforcement, which can include legal action under the Housing Act 2004. If you need any further information or advice please contact 01524 582000.

Our aim

To improve the poorest housing within the private rented sector by tackling issues that affect the health, safety and wellbeing of the families and individuals who have least control over the standard of their living accommodation.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

Under the Housing Act 2004, councils can serve notices to force landlords or their managing agents to improve their rental properties. They will focus on health and safety, energy efficiency and more.

To achieve this aim the team will:

- Inspect privately rented properties to ensure that they comply with the relevant legislation
- Offer advice and assistance and liaise with landlords
- Enforce regulations where necessary
- Conduct awareness raising events such as the Landlords' Forum
- Licence houses in multiple occupation to ensure standards are met, improved and maintained
- Register properties onto the Accreditation Scheme

Contact the Housing Standards Team 01524 582000. For information on what you need to consider when renting properties visit www.shelter.org.uk

Home Improvement Agency

If you are living in your own home and are over 60 or disabled, you can get help with repairs, maintenance and adapting your home to suit your needs.

Lancaster City Council's Home Improvement Agency offers a Handyperson service to do small jobs around the home such as basic plumbing work, fixing door bells, locks, loose shelves and moving beds and furniture.

We can also help you with:

- Dealing with contractors, choosing a trustworthy builder, plumber or other contractor, getting estimates and supervising works
- Advice on home repairs and planning your home for your future needs
- Finding ways to raise finance, increase benefits, reduce energy costs and make your home safe and secure.

This is a free service provided by Lancaster City Council's Home Improvement Agency.

For more information or to request a home visit contact us on email hiaenquiries@lancaster.gov.uk or 01524 582257.



USEFUL CONTACTS

Lancaster City Council	Housing Options Team email strategichousing@lancaster.gov.uk www.lancaster.gov.uk/housing	01524 582257
	Out of Hours Emergencies (Homeless)	01524 67099
	Housing Standards	01524 582000
	Ideal Choice Homes	01524 582005
	Home Improvement Agency / Handyperson Service	01524 582257
	Council Housing management / repair & maintenance	01524 582929
Social Services	Housing Benefits	01524 582965
	Morecambe: Unit 6, Northgate, White Lund Industrial Estate, Morecambe, LA3 3PA	0845 0530 009
	Lancaster: Storey House, White Cross Industrial Estate Lancaster, LA1 4XQ	0845 0530 009

Services for the elderly

Lancashire Age UK	7-11 Chapel Street, Lancaster, LA1 1NZ	0300 303 1234
Alzheimer's Society	Altham Meadows, Bartholomew Rd, Morecambe LA4 4RR	01524 402610
Piper Lifeline 24 hrs	Emergency contact system for elderly residents	01524 67099

Services for young people

Young People's Service	Palatine Hall, Dalton Square, Lancaster	01524 387600
YMCA	Fleet Square, Lancaster, Lancashire LA1 1EZ	01524 32737
Young Addaction	www.adaction.org.uk	01524 428310

Other useful organisations for further help and advice

Women's Aid	Freephone 24 hours www.womensaid.org.uk	0808 2000 247
Shelter	Free housing advice helpline: Open 8am – 8pm Mon – Fri or 8am – 5pm Sat – Sun www.shelter.org.uk/advice	0808 800 4444
Money Advice Line	www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk	0300 500 5000
National Debt Line	www.nationaldebtline.co.uk	0808 808 4000
Child line	www.childline.org.uk	0800 1111
Barnardo's	www.barnardos.org.uk	0208 550 8822
DISC	www.compass.disc-vol.org.uk	01772 325320
Empowerment	www.blackpooladvocacy.co.uk	01524 389637
Probation	www.clcrc.co.uk	01524 63537
Inspire	www.cri.org.uk/inspire_northlancs	08458 941 745
Police	www.askthepolice.co.uk	101
LDHAS	www.ldhas.org.uk	01524 842008
Urgent Care & Needs Support Scheme	www.lancashire.gov.uk	0300 123 6735

Opening hours:

Monday to Friday: 9am - 5pm

Morecambe Town Hall
Marine Road
Morecambe
Lancashire
LA4 5AF

01524 582257
strategichousing@lancaster.gov.uk

How to contact us outside office hours

If you are homeless and our office is closed, please call the council's Emergency Call Centre on 01524 67099 and you will be put in contact with a Housing Advice officer. (Please note calls are recorded for monitoring and training purposes).