

# THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR: OUR POLICY FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS AND THOSE AT RISK BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK MARCH 2026

## Key Terms:

<b>We / Us / The Council</b>	The Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk
<b>You</b>	Someone (or a household) who is homeless or at risk of homelessness
<b>Our Strategy</b>	<a href="#">The King's Lynn and West Norfolk Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029</a>
<b>Prevention Duty</b>	<a href="#">A legal duty</a> owed to some people at risk of homelessness, to prevent them from becoming homelessness
<b>Relief Duty</b>	<a href="#">A legal duty</a> owed to some people who are homeless, to relieve their homelessness within 56 days of becoming homeless
<b>Main Duty / s.193 duty</b>	<a href="#">A legal duty</a> owed to some people who are homeless, where their homelessness has not been relieved
<b>HCoG</b>	<a href="#">Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities</a> - MHCLG

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As a council, we published our Strategy – "[Ending Homelessness, Person by Person](#)" at the end of 2024. Our strategy aims to "ensure that safe accommodation is available to everyone who needs it, [and] that accommodation is suitable to a household's needs" (p.24).
- 1.2 If you are homeless or at risk, we may owe you a duty to work with you towards preventing or relieving your homelessness (we call this the Prevention and Relief duty). In some circumstances, we may also be required to find accommodation for you, which will be our offer to you to discharge your homelessness (we call this the Main or Full duty).
- 1.3 As part of our strategy, we work with local social landlords to improve the supply of affordable and social rented properties available through the [Homechoice housing register](#), managed by the council. However, we have more people looking for social

housing than we have properties available – this is especially true for single households and larger families. There may also be situations where we are unable to source accommodation for you through Homechoice – for instance, if you are eligible for homelessness assistance but are ineligible under the Homechoice policy<sup>1</sup>.

1.4 This means that there will be occasions where an offer of accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) will be an appropriate offer for you. In such circumstances, we have a responsibility to ensure that an offer of PRS accommodation is suitable for your household, to prevent or end your homelessness.

1.5 This document describes our general principles for

- Procuring PRS properties
- Allocating PRS properties
- Assisting you to find a PRS property

1.6 Further guidance can be found in the government's [Homelessness Code of Guidance](#), chapters 16 and 17.

## **2. LEGAL BACKGROUND**

2.1 The Housing Act 1996, part 7 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) sets out what we must do by law if you are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

2.2 The Localism Act 2011 gives us the power to discharge our duty towards homeless households in 'priority need'<sup>2</sup> by using privately rented housing. Privately rented accommodation can be used to prevent or relieve homelessness, or to bring the main housing duty to an end.

2.3 Accommodation must be suitable in all cases where the Council has secured it or helped to secure it and, in certain circumstances, must meet additional suitability requirements. These are set out in the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 and apply to private rented sector accommodation that is offered:

- To end the main housing duty (Housing Act 1996, section 193(2))
- As a final accommodation offer to relieve homelessness (Housing Act 1996, section 189B)
- If you are in priority need, to prevent or relieve your homelessness.

## **3. OUR PRINCIPLES AND PROCESS FOR PROCURING PRS PROPERTIES**

3.1 The private rented sector is highly competitive, with an estimated average of ten expressions of interest for every PRS property in England<sup>3</sup>. This means that we will be proactive in procuring PRS accommodation.

3.2 Our approach will include working with contracted services who support PRS tenants and landlords, and who play a vital bridging role between the council and PRS landlords. Currently this service is provided by the Sustainable Housing Pathways Service (SHPS), who develop and maintain relationships with landlords.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, due to having no local connection under the Homechoice policy or having a large level of housing debt that has not yet been addressed. Full details are available on the [Homechoice Allocation Policy](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities - Chapter 8: Priority need - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Rightmove Rental Trends Tracker – 2025 Q4](#)

- 3.3 We will also take a proactive inhouse approach to work with PRS landlords. The forthcoming Renters Reform Act provides a strong opportunity to develop a safer and stabler PRS market – as a council, we can support this by engaging with PRS landlords and providing the information they need to comply with the demands of the act.
- 3.4 Additionally, West Norfolk Property Limited (a company wholly owned by the council) provides us with opportunities to procure good-quality PRS accommodation.
- 3.5 To be suitable for you, we work to ensure that properties are:

<b>Affordable</b>	<p>Whether a property is affordable will depend on your household income and other circumstances (such as your ability to obtain additional work).</p> <p>We will treat each case on its merits, but we will aim to procure accommodation that is as close as possible to <a href="#">Local Housing Allowance rates</a>.</p>
<b>Practical</b>	<p>We will look to procure accommodation that is likely to be suitable for the greatest number of people. In our assessment, we will consider the property’s proximity to transport links, schools, GP surgeries and community resources.</p> <p>We will not actively seek to procure accommodation outside of the district, but we may make an offer of accommodation outside of the district where it fulfils all other suitability criteria<sup>4</sup>.</p>
<b>Safe</b>	<p>We procure accommodation that fulfils a good, safe quality, in line with the council’s standards<sup>5</sup>. The process is outlined in section 3.6 below.</p>
<b>Sustainable</b>	<p>The above criteria aim to procure accommodation that is sustainable for you, in line with our Strategy aim that “nobody experiences homelessness more than once”. We will work with PRS landlords to procure accommodation that is suitable for as long as you need it.</p>

3.6 To ensure that the properties we procure are safe, we will:

- **Inspect the property**<sup>6</sup> – including property and room size, provision of facilities, and overall condition.
- **Produce a report** summarising the condition, size and suitability of the property.
- **Where a property is not suitable**, issue an improvement report to the landlord and explain the work needed to bring the property to a lettable condition.

<sup>4</sup> For example: if you currently live in Walsoken and work in Wisbech, an offer of accommodation in Wisbech may be suitable for you, even if it is situated in Fenland district.

<sup>5</sup> “[Amenity & Space Standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation](#)”; “[Standards for Private Rented Single-Family Dwellings](#)”. **Note** that this may be superseded once the Decent Homes Standard is applied to the PRS, following the implementation of the [Renters Rights Act](#).

<sup>6</sup> The property inspection will be carried out by the council’s Housing Standards team or another officer trained in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

- **Where a property remains unsuitable**, and where a property remains privately let outside of the scope of this policy, inform our Housing Standards team so a formal inspection can be carried out.

3.7 Further guidance on suitability can be found in [HCoG chapter 17](#).

#### 4. OUR PRINCIPLES AND PROCESS FOR ALLOCATING PRS PROPERTIES

4.1 To be eligible for a PRS property under this part of the policy, you need to be

<b>Homelessness or at risk</b>	We will owe you a Prevention, Relief or Main duty under the Housing Act 1996
<b>Able to manage a privately rented property</b>	<p>You will have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sufficient income to afford your tenancy, after any other essential expenditure</li> <li>• evidence that you have the right to rent a property</li> <li>• the ability to look after the property and follow the rules of your tenancy agreement. If you need help from others to achieve this, then that help will be in place.</li> </ul>

4.2 With your consent, we will complete a credit check on your behalf. Landlords often carry out their own credit checks – by obtaining a credit check in advance, you have an opportunity to explain or correct anything that might have a negative effect on your rating.

4.3 If you are eligible, then we will create a record to show that you are suitable for PRS, with your needs recorded. **Please note that** being marked as suitable will not affect your ability to bid for social housing through HomeChoice.

4.4 Once a property becomes available, we will prioritise suitable applicants according to the order set out in appendix 1. **As a general principle**, we will aim to match PRS accommodation with households who are least likely to find accommodation through the Homechoice housing register.

4.5 We will nominate applicants to a landlord with the highest priority first. Landlords must be satisfied with the nomination and be happy to proceed. If the landlord does not accept the nomination, we will move to the next household on the list.

4.6 If you are nominated and the landlord accepts, you will receive a formal letter offering you the property. This will include a report on the condition of the property. If you are owed the relief or main duty, then this letter will represent your final offer of accommodation to you.

4.7 You will then be able to view the property and raise any issues with us. If we still regard this property as suitable for you, we will explain this to you in a letter.

4.8 If you accept the property, then we will close your case. If you do not accept the property (and we regard it as suitable) then we will end our homelessness duty to you. You will still be able to receive advice and assistance, but our duty towards you will end. In such circumstances, we will provide you with details of how you can ask for a review of the decision.

## 5. OUR PRINCIPLES FOR HELPING YOU FIND A PRS PROPERTY

5.1 The above sections relate to our process for procuring PRS accommodation where it represents our final offer to a household to end their homelessness.

5.2 We also will work with you to assist you into PRS accommodation in other circumstances. These might include:

- **where you are at risk of homelessness**, including when we owe a prevention duty to you.
- **where you are leaving care or other institutional setting** and an offer of PRS accommodation is suitable for you.
- **where you are leaving supported accommodation** and can maintain a tenancy in the PRS.

5.3 The support we provide may include:

- **Ensuring there is sufficient information** on our website to help you find suitable accommodation.
- **If you have a Personal Housing Plan**, ensuring this includes specific and achievable actions towards obtaining PRS accommodation.
- **Referring you to organisations like SHPS**, if you need help to find privately rented accommodation.
- **For HMO and similar accommodation:** allowing you to retain a “medium” band for social housing where you obtain accommodation where “you share facilities (bathroom, kitchen or toilet) with people you’re not related to”.

5.4 We also will continue to work with internal and external partners (such as the council’s Housing Standards team, and the charity Shelter) to improve access to good quality PRS accommodation, and to address barriers to sustaining accommodation.

## 6. HELP WITH A RENT DEPOSIT AND/OR RENT IN ADVANCE

6.1 As well as the assistance outlined in section 5, we may assist you with the cost of a rent deposit and first month’s rent in advance. This help may also be available if a PRS tenancy is your final offer of accommodation (section 4)

6.2 All payments are made directly to the landlord or letting agent responsible for the tenancy. In line with the Renters Rights Act, the maximum payment will be one month’s rent in advance plus a deposit with a maximum value of five weeks’ rent.

6.3 As a default, payments will be made as a grant. In some circumstances, where repayments are clearly affordable over a 12-month period, we may provide the payment as an interest-free loan.

6.4 To qualify for help, the property should be:

Criteria	How we will assess
Affordable	We will ask for details of your income and expenditure, including any debt commitments. We work closely with Citizens Advice

	Norfolk and may be able to refer you for support to maximise your income if you need it.
<b>Available</b>	We will ensure that the landlord / letting agent is willing to accept a payment from us. If you have found accommodation, you should give us sufficient notice to enable us to make payment – typically two weeks’ notice is ideal.
<b>Genuine</b>	We will work with you to ensure the offer you have been made is genuine and that the property meets the description of any advertisement. You should never be charged to view a property or to hold a property prior to viewing.
<b>Safe</b>	We will provide you with the information you need in advance, so that you know what to look for (and what questions to ask) when viewing a property. This information is contained within the government’s <a href="#">How to Rent</a> booklet. We will also carry out background checks through the council’s Housing Standards team to see if there has been a history of complaints or enforcement action against the landlord or property.

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## APPENDIX ONE: PRIORITISING THE ALLOCATION OF PRS PROPERTIES

**As a general principle**, we will aim to match PRS accommodation with households who are least likely to find accommodation through the Homechoice housing register.

This means we will prioritise applicants for PRS accommodation according to the following order of preference:

1. Applicants to whom the Council has accepted the main s193 duty **and** who do not meet the Council's housing register eligibility.
2. Applicants to whom the Council has accepted the main s193 duty **and** who do meet the Council's housing register eligibility **and** who are banded as "low" due to exceeding income threshold limits.
3. Applicants who are owed the relief duty where the likely outcome is that the main s193 duty will be accepted should homelessness not be relieved - **and** who do not meet the Council's housing register eligibility.
4. Applicants who are owed the relief duty where the likely outcome is that the main s193 duty will be accepted should homelessness not be relieved, **and** who do meet the Council's housing register eligibility, **and** who are likely to be banded as "low" due to exceeding income threshold limits.
5. Applicants who are owed the prevention duty where the likely outcome is that the main s193 duty will be accepted should homelessness not be prevented or relieved - **and** who do not meet the Council's housing register eligibility.
6. Applicants who are owed the prevention duty where the likely outcome is that the main s193 duty will be accepted should homelessness not be prevented or relieved, **and** who do meet the Council's housing register eligibility, **and** who are likely to be banded as "low" due to exceeding income threshold limits.
7. Applicants to whom the Council has accepted the main s193 duty **and** who do meet the Council's housing register eligibility criteria **and** who have a housing need specific to their circumstances that is unlikely to be met through social housing.<sup>7</sup>
8. Applicants to whom the Council has accepted the main s193 duty and who do meet the Council's housing register eligibility criteria.
9. Applicants who are owed the relief duty where the likely outcome is that the main s193 duty will be accepted should homelessness not be relieved.
10. Applicants who are owed the prevention duty where the likely outcome is that the main s193 duty will be accepted should homelessness not be prevented or relieved.
11. Applicants who are owed a relief duty but do not have a priority need but do have a local connection to the Council.
12. Applicants who are owed a prevention duty but do not have a priority need but do have a local connection to the Council.
13. Any other household at the Council's discretion.

Further information on how we assess and prioritise applicants to the Homechoice housing register can be found on the [Homechoice Allocation Policy](#).

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<sup>7</sup> For example: a household with a 4-bedroom need living in Downham Market, who has a specific need to remain in the town but has been unsuccessfully waiting for a suitable social property to become available.