

**The Blue Light Approach:
Improving accommodation
options for people with
alcohol dependency
and complex needs**

**Part Two: The law, benefits,
and national guidance**

Acknowledgements

This work is the result of a partnership between Alcohol Change UK and 29 local authority partners, national experts and people with lived experience.

The contributors are listed in Appendix 2. The authors are very grateful for their input, without whom this work would not have been possible.

All images within this report are stock photos used for illustrative purposes only and posed by models.

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About this report

Structure of the report

This guidance document forms the second part of our work to improve accommodation options for people with alcohol dependency and complex needs. It is designed to support frontline practitioners by strengthening understanding of housing law and the welfare benefits system. It aims to help professionals support individuals in accessing and maintaining secure, appropriate housing.

The first part of our work, [The Blue Light Approach: Improving accommodation options for people with alcohol dependency and complex needs – Part One](#), sets out a clear direction for local authorities, commissioners, housing providers, and partner agencies. It builds on Alcohol Change UK's Blue Light Approach, which focuses on those who are often excluded from services and whose needs are frequently unmet.

Language and terminology

In presenting this report, we have tried to use non-stigmatising language that is both respectful and accurate, aiming to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and assumptions while clearly describing the experiences and needs of the people this report is designed to support.

- Homeless and homelessness – may be controversial terms but are used by the Government.
- Complex needs – this describes people who have multiple and compound needs e.g. homelessness, substance use disorders and mental disorders.
- People that services find difficult to engage – this is preferred to “difficult to engage individuals” because it places the emphasis on the services ability to engage.
- Alcohol use disorders – this is now the internationally agreed term to cover all those who are experiencing harm or causing harm because of their drinking.
- Dependent drinkers – In England and Wales this covers the 600 - 650,000 people who are physically or psychologically dependent on alcohol.



1. Introduction

“There is a benefit to homeless people when non-housing professionals have a basic understanding of homeless processes”.¹

Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Review (2019)

Every year, large numbers of people approach local authorities² either because they are experiencing homelessness or are facing the prospect of becoming homeless. This guidance will help practitioners to understand housing law in order to support people who are alcohol dependent in their journey towards secure and appropriate housing.

In addition, it will look at the welfare benefits system. It will provide an overview of what benefits might be available to people who are alcohol dependent, what the barriers might be to claiming benefits, and how professionals might help clients to get the best outcomes from their claim in order to help them obtain and retain appropriate housing.

Separate sections cover English and Welsh legislation. Many Acts of Parliament apply across both nations, but there are some differences. The law specific to Scotland and Northern Ireland is not covered here. The law relating to asylum seekers or others who are not eligible for local authority housing or support is also not covered in this document. Practitioners are advised to work closely with services or organisations in their areas who specialise in supporting people in this position as such services will have access to specialist advice and provision.



¹ Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Review (2019) Case 5/18 – Josh: Overview Report. Available [here](#).

² In this guidance local authority usually refers to the local authority with housing responsibility i.e. unitaries or lower tier authorities (boroughs and districts) in County Council areas.

2. Housing law and guidance (England)

In this section you will find:

- What the law says about housing applications in England
- What is meant by priority need and who might have an 'automatic priority need'
- Domestic and non-domestic abuse
- What is meant by intentional homelessness
- People who might be entitled to housing support due to their mental or physical health
- People who might be entitled to better housing than they currently have
- What other duties a local authority might have
- How we might help people to challenge decisions made by their local authority

2.1 Background

The 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act (England and Wales)³ places a duty on local authorities to secure permanent accommodation for people who meet the criteria for a main duty under section 193 of the Act. To be eligible for a main duty, the authority needs to be satisfied that the applicant:

- Is experiencing homelessness
- Is eligible
- Has a priority need
- Has not made themselves intentionally homeless from their last settled accommodation

Over the years, many attempts have been made to improve the 1977 Housing Act and its provisions. In the following sections, we look at the Act and the various pieces of legislation that have followed and how they might be used to support vulnerable people, which could include those who are alcohol dependent, to become and remain housed. At the heart of this is a series of questions:

- Does the applicant have a priority need?
- What is priority need due to non-domestic violence?
- Did the applicant make themselves intentionally homeless from their last settled accommodation?
- Is the applicant entitled to housing support as result of domestic or non-domestic abuse?

- Is the applicant entitled to housing support due to their mental health?
- Is the applicant entitled to housing support due to their physical health?
- Are they entitled to better accommodation than their current housing?
- What other duties, if any, might the local authority owe them?

2.2 What is meant by priority need

In this section you will find:

- Definition of priority need
- Automatic priority need

Priority need means that, were the applicant to experience homelessness, they would find it harder to cope than the "ordinary person". What the applicant needs to evidence here is that they would struggle more than someone who did not have their challenges, whether these are physical health issues, mental health challenges or anything else that would impact on their ability to deal with the experience of homelessness.

Some applicants will have a priority need automatically. This includes households with children, households containing a pregnant person, or anyone made homeless by a "disaster or emergency" such as a fire or flood.⁴ Those who are experiencing domestic abuse will also have an automatic priority need. There is more information about this in section 2.7: *Entitled to housing support as a result of domestic abuse*.

The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order expanded the categories of priority need in England to include:

- People aged 16 and 17 years old.
- People under 21 years old who were in local authority care between the ages of 16 and 18.
- People of any age who are vulnerable because of having been in local authority care, the armed forces, or prison.
- People of any age who are vulnerable because of "ceasing to occupy accommodation by reason of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out".

3 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Available [here](#).

4 Shelter (2025) Priority need. Available [here](#).

Case study — Jim

Jim is a 43-year-old man who has been experiencing difficulties with alcohol. His relationship broke down two years ago and he had to leave his family home. After several months sofa-surfing with various friends, Jim ran out of places to stay and ended up sleeping on the streets.

With support from a local outreach charity, Jim applied to his local authority for a homelessness assessment. His support worker advised him to ask for Interim Accommodation (under Section 188 of the 1996 Housing Act) which he did. As the person assessing him agreed that they had 'reason to believe' that Jim was:

- a) Homeless
- b) Eligible for assistance
- c) Possibly in priority need – they provided him with hostel accommodation until they had chance to consider his application.

Following the assessment Jim was contacted at the hostel and told he wasn't owed main housing duty under Section 193 of the Housing Act because the assessing officer did not consider him to have a priority need. The letter said that he had to leave the hostel in seven days.

Jim's support worker did not agree with this decision and supported Jim to request a Section 202 review of the decision.

In the evidence they submitted to the reviewing officer, they outlined how the experience of homelessness was impacting on Jim, how he could not sleep at night for fear of being assaulted, how his mental health had become much worse since he was on the streets, how much more he was drinking in an attempt to cope, and how he had given up attending the support groups he used to go to because he could not afford the bus fare to get there. They also asked that the interim accommodation in the hostel should be extended until the review had been completed and this was agreed, meaning that Jim didn't find himself street homeless again.

The support worker got a letter from Jim's GP confirming that his mental health issues were increasing and that he felt secure accommodation was crucial if Jim were to address his alcohol use.

The review was carried out and, because Jim and his support worker had put such a strong case forward for the fact that Jim **was significantly more at risk of harm, or less able to keep himself safe if homeless, than the "ordinary person"**, the reviewing officer changed the decision and Jim was given main housing duty which meant the authority had to give him temporary accommodation until something permanent became available for him.



2.3 Priority need due to non-domestic violence

In this section you will find:

- What is meant by non-domestic violence
- What the local authority must consider
- Vulnerability and how this might apply to the people you support

A person has a priority need for the purpose of housing assessment if they are vulnerable because of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence or threats of violence which are likely to be carried out. The person must have left the accommodation for this to apply, and it applies only to the person making the application, not another member of their household.

Violence is not limited to physical contact and includes any violence from another person (other than domestic violence) and threats of violence likely to be carried out. This could include gang violence, violence from neighbours, violence directed at a person based on race, sexuality, gender, disability, or age, and includes physical violence, threatening or intimidating behaviour, and any other form of abuse which, directly or indirectly, may give rise to the risk of physical or psychological harm.

The word 'likely' means a real or serious possibility. When assessing whether threats of violence are likely to be carried out, authorities must only consider the probability of violence and not actions that the applicant could take such as obtaining an injunction against the perpetrators. This is not about judgement, simply fact. The homelessness code of guidance states that "another person" does not necessarily mean one known person and could include known or unknown groups.

A person who has left accommodation due to violence or threats of violence only has a priority need if they are vulnerable as a result (this does not apply where someone is homeless because of domestic abuse – see below). When assessing priority need due to non-domestic violence, the local authority should consider whether the person ceased to occupy accommodation because of violence, or threats of violence likely to be carried out and whether, if homeless, the applicant would be significantly more vulnerable than the "ordinary person". This includes where the applicant would suffer or be at risk of suffering harm or detriment which the ordinary person would not, and that the harm or detriment would make a noticeable difference to their ability to deal with the consequences of homelessness.⁵

We know that some of the people who engage with services have been impacted by trauma in childhood and beyond, including experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and that this can affect their ability to engage with support and impact on, for example, how they manage to keep themselves safe or engage with others.⁶ A number of these categories will be relatively common in vulnerable populations, including people who are alcohol dependent and, even if it is not possible to secure accommodation for someone based on their current alcohol dependency, it may be possible to do so because of one or more of the vulnerabilities listed above.

2.4 Intentional homelessness

In this section you will find:

- The legal definition of intentional homelessness
- What the *Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities* states about intentional homelessness
- Capacity for managing own affairs
- Acting under duress
- How this might apply to the people you support

In order for the local authority to find an applicant intentionally homeless they must be satisfied that the applicant has "deliberately done, or failed to do, something, in consequence of which they have ceased to occupy accommodation which was available to them, and which it was reasonable for them to continue to occupy".⁷ This can be the reason why an authority might make the decision that a main duty under section 193 is not owed to some applicants.

The applicant must have been aware of all the relevant facts before deliberately taking or failing to take the actions. Therefore, an act or omission "in good faith, in ignorance of a relevant fact, should not be treated as deliberate".⁸

The *Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities* is clear that an act or omission that might otherwise be seen as rendering someone intentionally homeless should not be considered deliberate in several circumstances that are often relevant to vulnerable people who are alcohol dependent. In particular, "an act or omission that was a result of limited mental capacity...mental illness, frailty, or **an assessed substance misuse problem**".⁹

⁵ Shelter (2025) Priority need if homeless due to violence. Available [here](#).

⁶ TED (2015) How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime | Nadine Burke Harris | TED. Available [here](#).

⁷ Housing Act 1996. Available [here](#).

⁸ Shelter (2025) Deliberate act or omission definition for intentional homelessness. Available [here](#)

⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025) Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities – Chapter 9: Intentional homelessness. (9.17) Available [here](#).

Other circumstances that may be relevant to people who are alcohol dependant include:

- Non-payment of rent or a mortgage due to financial difficulties beyond a person's control.
 - This might be as a result of delays in benefit payments, or it could be because of affordability of the accommodation. "As a matter of common sense, it cannot be reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation when they can no longer discharge their financial obligations in relation to that accommodation, i.e., pay the rent and make mortgage repayments, without so straining their resources as to deprive themselves of the ordinary necessities of life, such as food, clothing, heat, transport and so forth."¹⁰
- A person incapable of managing their own affairs.
- An act or omission made under duress.



Case study — Sarah

Sarah is a young woman who has been drinking very heavily for many years to try to cope with the trauma of childhood abuse. Sarah had a flat until 12 months ago when she was evicted by her landlord for anti-social behaviour following complaints from several of her neighbours. They said that Sarah was drunk and loud, playing music at all hours, banging on neighbours' doors and shouting at people. Since then she has been living with different short-term partners, some of whom have been abusive towards her.

With help and encouragement from her new support worker, Sarah approached the local authority to ask for a housing assessment. She decided not to ask for interim accommodation as she didn't want to go to the large, mixed hostel that she knows the council use for people who are being assessed for housing eligibility.

When Sarah heard from the Housing Office, they said that she did not meet the criteria to be owed main duty under Section 193 of the Housing Act because she had made herself intentionally homeless from her last settled accommodation. This was because she had done something that resulted in her losing accommodation that would have otherwise been available for her, by which they meant the anti-social behaviour that led to the neighbours' complaints.

Sarah was upset by this decision and, with the help of her support worker, asked for a review under Section 202 of the Housing Act. Together they explained

that Sarah's behaviour was a result of her alcohol dependency and her worker quoted the Code of guidance for local authorities which states that **"an act or omission leading to homelessness should not generally be considered to be deliberate if it is the result of an assessed substance misuse problem or limited mental capacity"**.

As a result of this, and other details that Sarah shared in her review statement about her mental health and the impact on her of repeated trauma over many years, the reviewing officer decided that the original decision had not been fair and overturned it. Sarah was given main housing duty and offered a property soon after with appropriate support so that she could manage her tenancy and have better relationships with her neighbours.

2.5 Capacity for managing own affairs

When making a decision on intentional homelessness, the authority should consider whether someone is able to manage their own affairs or if they are incapable of doing so due to mental illness, disability, or other conditions that might impact on decision-making. The outcome of this consideration can have a significant impact on the outcome of the decision.

Chapter 9 of the homelessness code of guidance provides guidance on the issue of intentional homelessness and highlights that a person may not be deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless if “the housing authority has reason to believe the applicant is incapable of managing their affairs, for example, by reason of age, mental illness or disability”.¹¹

The law does not expect individuals who are not capable of managing their own affairs to make decisions in the same way as someone who has full mental capacity. When making decisions on applications, local authorities will assess if a person’s vulnerability, due to their lack of ability to manage their own affairs, contributed to them losing their housing. It should also be asked whether the person was receiving support at the time they lost their accommodation and if they were not, this should be taken into consideration when a decision on intentionality is made.

This could be very relevant to people who are alcohol dependant and you should be working closely with other professionals if possible, including treatment providers, CPN’s if they are involved, GPs and others to get supporting evidence from them to help your client’s housing application.



2.6 Acting under duress

In cases where the person lost their accommodation due to an act or omission made under duress, the law provides an important safeguard. According to Section 191(2)(b) of the Housing Act 1996, a person will not be considered intentionally homeless if “the act or omission was made when the applicant was under duress”.¹²

The authority is required to take into account all details of the circumstances leading to the act or omission occurred and, if someone was forced, threatened, or coerced into an action or omission that led to them losing their accommodation, the authority should not reach a decision of intentional homelessness. This could include if someone had been “cuckooed” in their property.¹³

Case study – Robert

Robert had been living in his flat for 18 months when two other men from the area started staying there. Robert didn’t mind at first as he got lonely on his own and was happy with the company but one of the men started dealing drugs which caused a steady stream of visitors at all hours of the day and night. Robert tried to object but was frightened when his two “new friends” became aggressive.

Robert’s drinking and mental health got worse due to the situation – the number of people in the flat who he didn’t know and the threats from his landlord to throw him out if he got any more complaints.

Robert’s support worker suggested he go to the police and ask for help but he was too afraid to do this and instead abandoned his flat and went back to living on the streets.

When he approached the local authority some months later and they assessed his housing application they agreed he had a priority need because of his alcohol dependency and mental health challenges but said he had made himself intentionally homeless because he had left his flat. A Section 202 review request (see below) was made and Robert’s support worker helped him to explain in writing how he had been threatened and cuckooed in his last property. The decision was changed and Robert was given main housing duty.

¹¹ Housing Act 1996. Available [here](#).

¹² Housing Act 1996. Available [here](#).

¹³ Coventry City Council (2022) One Minute Guide: Cuckooing/Home Invasion. Available [here](#).

2.7 Entitled to housing support as a result of domestic abuse

In this section you will find:

- What the Housing Act says about domestic abuse
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- What is domestic abuse? Legal definitions from case law
- Local authorities asking for evidence of domestic abuse and what the Homelessness Code of Guidance states

It is very clear from the legislation that anyone who is at risk of homelessness, or has become homeless, as a result of domestic abuse has a right to accommodation support from their local authority. The Housing Act 1996 states “it is not reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation if it is probable that this will lead to violence or domestic abuse against [them] or against those who live with, or might reasonably be expected to live with, them”.¹⁴ The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 added to the categories of people in “priority need” any person who is vulnerable as a result of “ceasing to occupy accommodation by reason of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out”.¹⁵

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021¹⁶ broadened the definition of “domestic abuse”, stating that “it does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct”. In *Yemshaw v the London Borough of Hounslow*,¹⁷ Lady Hale gave the leading judgment clarifying that the court holds that “domestic violence in s.177(1) of the 1996 Act includes physical violence, threatening or intimidating behaviour, and any other form of abuse which, directly or indirectly, may give rise to the risk of harm”. In the case of *Bond v Leicester City Council*,¹⁸ Justice Steel stated “The only test is what is probable (i.e., more likely than not). This in my view is a pure question of fact, devoid of value judgments about what an applicant should or should not do”. This shows the duty of local authorities to support victims of domestic abuse without withholding support or services to people who choose not to report violence to the police or take any legal action against perpetrators, such as domestic violence prevention orders.

This broader definition of abuse is the one that local authorities in England must use when deciding whether it is reasonable for someone to remain where they are living. In short, someone who has experienced abuse as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 is in priority need of housing.

The Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities is very clear regarding authorities asking for evidence of domestic abuse. It states that “local authorities may seek information from health care professionals, social services, or friends/relatives of the applicant” – however, it is made clear that local authorities must ensure their inquiries do not provoke further violence or abuse, and that they should not approach the alleged perpetrator. It also outlines that evidence from police or family members may not be obtainable and should not be a requirement for support from the authority.

2.8 Entitled to housing support due to their mental or physical health

In this section you will find:

- An explanation of Section 117 of the Mental Health Act
- The 2024 Guidance on discharging people from hospital

Many vulnerable people who are alcohol dependent will have had experience of mental ill-health and involvement with services, and it may be possible to use mental health policy and legislation to help meet their accommodation needs.

Section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 states that the NHS and local authorities with social care responsibilities must provide aftercare services to people who have been in hospital under certain sections of the Act. The aim of this is to reduce the risk of a person needing to be readmitted to hospital.

When a person is discharged from hospital after having been detained for treatment under Section 3 of the Mental Health Act 1983,¹⁹ there is a joint duty on health and local authorities in England to “provide or arrange for the provision of aftercare services...until such time as [they] are satisfied that the person concerned is no longer in need of such services”. (This does not apply to people who have been detained under Section 2 or Section 136 – the other commonly used sections of the Act with this group).

¹⁴ UK Parliament (2025) Domestic abuse and housing support. Available [here](#).

¹⁵ The Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002. Available [here](#).

¹⁶ Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Available [here](#).

¹⁷ UK Supreme Court (2011) Press summary: *Yemshaw (Appellant) v London Borough of Hounslow (Respondent)* [2011] UKSC 3. Available [here](#).

¹⁸ vLex Justis (2025) *Bond v Leicester City Council*. Available [here](#).

¹⁹ Mental Health Act 1983. Available [here](#).

The Mental Health Act code of practice states that health and local authorities should interpret the definition of aftercare services broadly and that it can include supported accommodation. The duty to provide aftercare services continues as long as the patient is in need of such services and recognises that patients may continue to need support after they have resettled into the community, in order to prevent a recurrence of mental health problems.²⁰

Given that many people with alcohol dependence experience some degree of cognitive impairment, it is worth noting that the code also states that an unwillingness to accept [aftercare] services does not mean that patients have no need to receive services, nor should it preclude them from receiving them under section 117 should they change their minds.

The 2024 guidance on discharging people at risk of or experiencing homelessness states that hospitals in England that see more than 200 homeless patients each year should have access to a specialist multidisciplinary homeless discharge team to provide clinical in-reach for mental health and/or drug or alcohol dependency to prevent early self-discharge and should use the opportunity to engage the patient with the healthcare they need.²¹ If you are supporting clients who are attending a hospital covered by this guidance, it may be worth engaging with the hospital homeless discharge team to address accommodation needs.

2.9 Entitled to better accommodation than their current housing

The Housing Act 1977 established the principle that there are some places that it is not reasonable to expect a person to live in, and the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 states that all rented accommodation must be fit for human habitation.²² The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 aims to ensure that rented houses and flats are “fit for human habitation”, which means that they are safe, healthy, and free from things that could cause serious harm.²³ The Act applies to tenants in England and means that a landlord should fix problems that could cause health issues, or are a potential safety risk, quickly.

Professionals who support vulnerable tenants should help them to approach landlords and ask for repairs to be carried out according to the Act. If rented properties are not “fit for human habitation”, tenants can take their landlords to court. The court can make the landlord carry out repairs or put right health and safety problems. The court can also make the landlord pay compensation to the tenant.

2.10 Other local authority duties

In this section you will find:

- The Homelessness Act 2002
- Prevention and relief duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Personalised Housing Plans
- The duty to refer

The Homelessness Act 2002: The Homelessness Act 2002 created duties on local authorities in England to:

- Carry out a homelessness review, with a focus on preventing homelessness and to secure that accommodation is or will be available for people who are or may become homeless.
- Publish a homelessness strategy to achieve the same two aims.

It is worth reading a local authority’s homelessness review and homelessness strategy to identify what options they offer for accessing accommodation for this group of people in the area in which you work.²⁴

Prevention and relief duties under The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017: The Homelessness Reduction

Act 2017 introduced prevention duties which placed a responsibility on local authorities in England to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness, by stating that they must act if someone is threatened with homelessness within 56 days (for example, if they have been issued with a valid Section 21²⁵ notice) which was an increase from the previous period of 28 days when authorities had to provide support, advice and guidance.



20 Department of Health (2015) Code of Practice: Mental Health Act 1983. Available [here](#).

21 Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government and Department of Health and Social Care (2024) Discharging people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Available [here](#).

22 Landlord and Tenant Act 1985. Available [here](#).

23 The Stationery Office (2018) Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018: Explanatory Notes. Available [here](#)

24 Homelessness Act 2002. Available [here](#).

25 [A section 21 notice is used by landlords in England and Wales to begin the process of taking possession of a property let on an assured shorthold tenancy without providing a reason for eviction. It does not bring the tenancy to an end. The notice must give at least 2 months, but some tenants have a right to a longer notice.](#)

NOTE: It is worth noting that people who have accommodation but have been given a valid Section 21 notice should not be told by the local authority that they have to remain in their home until the court issues a bailiff's warrant. Some local authorities tell applicants that if they leave their homes before this step, this will lead to an intentional homelessness decision against them.

This does not apply if it is not reasonable for someone to stay, because they cannot afford the accommodation for example, or they are suffering high levels of stress or anxiety.



Prevention duties could include measures such as mediation with family members, support to access financial help such as discretionary housing payments or hardship funds and assisting people at risk of violence and domestic abuse to stay safely in their home if this is what they want to do through Sanctuary schemes.²⁶

Relief duty applies when a person has become homeless and puts a duty on local authorities to take reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure suitable accommodation. This might include measures such as providing a bond guarantee, funding a rent deposit, or working with a private landlord to make properties available.²⁷

Personalised Housing Plans: Local authorities are required to provide homelessness services to anyone who needs them, including those deemed not to be in priority need or found to be intentionally homeless, although this does not create an obligation for local authorities to house people in these categories.

The Act creates a duty to assess the case of any person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness, and to include in that assessment the circumstances that caused them to become homeless or threatened with homelessness, their housing needs, in particular what accommodation would be suitable for them and any persons with whom they live and what support would be necessary for them to obtain and retain suitable accommodation.²⁸ This is known as a 'personalised housing plan' and applicants should be given a copy of this and can give consent for their support worker to be sent a copy.

After this assessment has been made, the authority must try to agree with the applicant the steps they can take to secure and retain such accommodation. If the applicant deliberately and unreasonably refuses to take

the steps agreed, and to attend appointments, etc., to support their search for accommodation, the Act releases local authorities from their duty of support providing the applicant has been properly warned of the consequences of such behaviour.

In the case of vulnerable people such as those impacted by alcohol dependency, social workers, advocates or other support workers should challenge any steps in the personalised housing plan which are not reasonable to expect the applicant to carry out, because they don't have access to a phone for instance, or because of physical or emotional health challenges including depression or anxiety. A review can be requested and the authority will have to consider whether the individual was genuinely unable to comply with the plan due to their alcohol use (or other health-related issues) and whether the local authority provided adequate support and explored alternatives to accommodate the applicant's specific needs.

Even in the case of the authority discharging duty to someone who fails to carry out the steps in their plan, anyone deemed to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need must be given another final offer of accommodation.²⁹

Duty to refer: The 2017 Act places a "duty to refer" on specified public bodies, including several that will be encountering vulnerable people who are alcohol dependent. These agencies must pass on to a relevant local authority, with the person's consent, details of anybody they encounter who is at risk of homelessness. This duty applies to public bodies including emergency departments, urgent treatment centres, and hospitals in their function of providing inpatient care, prisons, youth offender institutions and services, and probation services, Jobcentre Plus, and social services.³⁰

²⁶ Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (2025) Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities. (21.37) Available [here](#). *Sanctuary schemes can prevent homelessness by enabling victims to remain safely in their home where it is their choice, and it is safe to do so. A sanctuary comprises enhanced security measures in the home which delay or prevent a perpetrator from gaining entry into and within a property, and allow time for the police to arrive. Use of sanctuary is not appropriate if the perpetrator lives at, or retains a legal right to enter the home, or if the victim continues to be at risk in the vicinity around the home.*

²⁷ Shelter (2022) Local authority duty to relieve homelessness. Available [here](#)

²⁸ Shelter (2024) Local authority duty to devise personalised housing plans. Available [here](#).

²⁹ Shelter (2021) Deliberate and unreasonable refusals to cooperate. Available [here](#).

³⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (2018) A guide to the duty to refer. Available [here](#).

2.11 Challenging decisions under Section 202 of the Housing Act

Under Section 202 in the Housing Act 1996 (right to request review of decision), a homeless applicant has a statutory right to request a review of certain decisions made by an authority on their homelessness application. These can include decisions about whether an applicant is homeless, in priority need, has made themselves intentionally homeless, is eligible, etc. An applicant can also request a review of a decision to end the prevention or relief duties, to refer the person to another local authority or that an offer of accommodation made under the main housing duty is suitable. There is no right to request a review on the suitability of emergency accommodation.³¹

NOTE: Interim Accommodation provided under Section 188 can be extended by the authority pending a review decision.

A request for a review under Section 202 must be made within 21 days of notification of the authority's decision to the applicant. However, it is worth asking for a review after that time period if there is a valid reason for the applicant not asking sooner, for example, if they have been in hospital or their post was not forwarded from an address where they have been staying temporarily. The reviewer must be a senior officer, and the scope of the review requires that:

- The local authority must notify the applicant that they can make written representations and what the review process entails.
- The officer must then carry out the review.
- The reviewer must take account of not only the material from the original investigation, but also any new material or argument put forward.
- The authority must generally inform the applicant of the review decision within eight weeks, there are different time limits for local connection referrals.
- Any emergency accommodation provision can be extended until the review decision has been made. This is a power of authorities rather than a duty, but it should be asked for if the person is vulnerable and will be returning to unsafe living conditions.

There is a very useful template to request a review of a housing decision on the Shelter website.³²



31 Shelter (2024) Internal review requests. Available [here](#).

32 Shelter (2024) Ask for a review of a homeless decision. Available [here](#).

3. Welsh legislation

Wales is currently in the process of legislative reform regarding homelessness. This section is correct at the time of publication but may be subject to change in the near future. The full list of proposed reforms can be seen in the Welsh Government White Paper on ending homelessness.³³

In this section you will find:

- Priority Need
- Intentional Homelessness
- Fleeing domestic and non-domestic abuse
- Entitled to support because of physical or mental health challenges
- Entitled to better standard of accommodation
- Other local authority duties
- Local Connection

3.1 Priority need

The categories of priority need in the Housing Act 1996, which applied across England and Wales, were expanded in the 2001 Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order and are now included under Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. In full, these are:

- Households containing a pregnant woman/women.
- Households with dependent children.
- Applicants who are vulnerable due to a special reason.
- People homeless due to an emergency or disaster.
- People made homeless as a result of domestic abuse.
- 16 and 17 year old applicants.
- 18 to 20 year old applicants at risk of sexual or financial exploitation.
- 18 to 20 year old care leavers.
- People homeless since leaving the armed forces.
- Vulnerable former prisoners with a local connection.
- People who are street homeless (introduced in 2022 under section 70 the Housing (Wales) Act 2014).³⁴

A number of these categories will be relatively common in the population of vulnerable people who are alcohol

dependent, and even if it is not possible to secure accommodation for someone based on their current alcohol dependency, it may be possible to do so on the grounds of one or more of the vulnerabilities listed above.

3.2 Intentional homelessness

The Housing (Wales) Act (2014) restated the Housing Act 1996 definition of intentional homelessness but allowed local authorities in Wales to decide whether they wished to categorise anyone else in this category. When supporting someone who could be classified as intentionally homeless in Wales, you should gain an understanding of the local authority's policy and practice.³⁵

In December 2019, Section 75(3) of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 broadened the categories of applicants who are exempt from the intentional homelessness criteria requirement. Unless an applicant has already applied and been given an offer of accommodation within the last five years, the local authority must not apply the criteria test to:

- Families with children.
- Pregnant women.
- People who were under the age of 21 when they made their application.
- Care-experienced people under the age of 25 when they made their application.³⁶

When an authority decides that it does not owe main duty to an applicant who they deem to have made themselves intentionally homeless, it is still under a duty to provide interim accommodation for a sufficient period from the day that the applicant receives notification of the decision, so that they might find alternative accommodation. The precise length of the period will depend on the circumstances of each individual case and must consider any adaptations that a person might need to accommodation, and the availability and affordability of housing in the area.³⁷

33 Welsh Government (2024) White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales. Available [here](#).

34 Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – Section 70. Available [here](#).

35 Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – Section 78. Available [here](#).

36 Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – Section 75. Available [here](#).

37 Welsh Government (2024) Allocation of accommodation and homelessness: guidance for local authorities. Available [here](#).

3.3 Entitled to housing support due to domestic or non-domestic abuse

Domestic abuse: The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 restated Section 177 of the Housing Act 1996 regarding domestic abuse.³⁸ Abuse is defined in the 2014 Act as “physical violence, threatening or intimidating behaviour and any other form of abuse which, directly or indirectly, may give rise to the risk of harm”. The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 gives a wider definition of abuse as “physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse”, which could be applied to the abuse and exploitation some vulnerable drinkers face from partners and other members of their households, causing them to become homeless.

Non-domestic abuse: The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 includes any violence that causes someone to leave their home as a valid reason for being homeless. This means that someone fleeing violence from a non-domestic source, such as violence from a stranger, criminal activity, or gang-related abuse, cuckooing, etc., is owed the same duty as a person fleeing domestic violence under the law. This could be relevant to examples of the abuse and exploitation that some vulnerable drinkers face from neighbours, community, and others who are not part of their domestic group.³⁹

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 prevents local authorities from referring a person to another local authority (whether in Wales or England) if “the applicant or any person who might reasonably be expected to reside with the applicant has suffered abuse (other than domestic abuse) in the area of the other authority, and it is probable that the return to that area of the victim will lead to further abuse of a similar kind against him or her”.

3.4 Entitled to housing support due to their mental or physical health

Mental health: Many vulnerable people who are alcohol dependent will have had experience of mental ill-health and relevant services, and it may be possible to use mental health policy and legislation to help meet their accommodation needs. Section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 (as amended by subsequent legislation) mandates that when a person is discharged from hospital after having been detained for treatment under the Act (e.g. Section 3 but not Sections 2 or 136), there is a joint duty on Local Health Boards and local authorities in Wales to “provide or arrange for the provision of aftercare services...until such time as [they] are satisfied that the person concerned is no longer in need of such services”.⁴⁰ The aim of such aftercare is to reduce the risk of deterioration and readmission to hospital.

The Mental Health Act in Wales code of practice⁴¹ states that aftercare can include supported accommodation. The code reiterates that the duty to provide aftercare services exists until both the Local Health Board and the local authority are satisfied the patient no longer requires them, and notes that patients will continue to need support after they have resettled into the community, in order to prevent future mental health problems. Given that many people who are alcohol dependent experience some degree of cognitive impairment, it is worth noting that the code states “an unwillingness to accept [aftercare] services does not mean patients have no need to receive those services and such a refusal would not be sufficient grounds to discharge section 117 responsibilities”.

Physical health: The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 recognises the importance of providing housing that meets the needs of people with health problems or disabilities and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 ensures that people with care and support needs, which include needs relating to physical health challenges, will have access to support, caring services, and appropriate housing. It emphasises the need for a person-centred approach in identifying and meeting such needs.⁴²

3.5 Entitled to better accommodation than their current housing

In this section you will find:

- The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 and what is required
- Limits on the use of B&B accommodation
- Section 21 notices in Wales

The Housing Act 1977 established the principle that there is accommodation in which it is unreasonable to expect a person to live, and the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 mandates that all rented accommodation must be fit for human habitation. There have been more recent moves in Wales to set specific and demanding requirements for landlords there. The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006 set standards for temporary accommodation in terms of location, condition, overcrowding, and affordability. Bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation should be offered to families or households with a pregnant woman for a limited time (two weeks in a basic standard B&B or six weeks in a higher standard B&B as defined by the Order), after which they should be moved to self-contained accommodation. Local authorities must consider the health and social needs of vulnerable applicants when allocating temporary accommodation.⁴³

38 Housing (Wales) Act 2014 – Section 58. Available [here](#).

39 Shelter (2022) Homelessness priority need categories in Wales. Available [here](#).

40 Mind (2025) Leaving hospital. Available [here](#).

41 Welsh Government (2016) Mental Health Act 1983 Code of Practice for Wales Review. Available [here](#).

42 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Available [here](#).

43 The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2015. Available [here](#).

The Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 states that all rented dwellings must be “fit for human habitation” throughout the term of the contract, defined in 2022 regulations as including provision of a working smoke alarm, a safe electrical supply, and a carbon monoxide alarm in every room. Rented accommodation must be “in repair” which covers the condition of the structure of the building such as the walls, roof, external doors and windows, the sanitary fittings, including pipes, heating and hot water, wiring and any gas appliances.⁴⁴ Landlords are not responsible for repairs which are required as a result of the actions of the tenant, even if this results in the property becoming unfit for human habitation and a tenant may be in breach of their occupation contract (tenancy) if they cause nuisance or annoyance to other people or to the landlord, which may occur in the case of some dependent drinkers.

NOTE: Section 21 (no fault eviction notices) can no longer be used by landlords in Wales, and tenants are entitled to six months’ notice in most cases.

3.6 Other local authority duties

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to undertake a homelessness review to assess levels, and likely future levels, of homelessness and to assess the current availability of accommodation and support.⁴⁵

There is a duty to publish a homelessness strategy focused on preventing homelessness and ensuring accommodation and support is available for people who are or may become homeless. The strategy must include provision relating to those who may be in need of support which includes several categories that may be relevant to vulnerable people who are alcohol dependent. These are:

- People leaving prison or youth detention.
- Young people leaving care.
- People leaving the armed forces.
- People leaving hospital after treatment for ill-health as an inpatient, and people receiving mental health services in the community.

It will be worth reading a local authority’s homelessness review and homelessness strategy to identify what options they offer for accessing accommodation for the people you are supporting. The 2014 Act allows local authorities to fulfil their duty to house someone by providing suitable private sector accommodation whereas previously social housing had to be offered.



44 Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016. Available [here](#).

45 Welsh Government (2019) Strategy for Preventing and Ending Homelessness. Available [here](#).

4. Local connection (England and Wales)

In this section you will find:

- Criteria for local connection
- Rules and guidelines around rehab
- Care leavers and local connection
- People fleeing domestic abuse and local connection

To qualify for housing duty from an authority in England and Wales, a person will generally need to have a connection to the area and there are clear guidelines in the homelessness code of guidance about how this should be applied.⁴⁶ This is established by the applicant, or anyone in their household:

- Having lived in the area, by choice, for six out of the last 12 months, or three out of the last five years. Being in prison or hospital will not count, but living in emergency housing or a domestic abuse refuge will.
- Having close family (parents, children, or siblings) who have lived in the area for a minimum of five years.
- Being employed on a full or part-time basis in the area. This can be paid or unpaid work, but work on a casual basis will not count.
- Having a particular reason to be in the area which could include receiving long term specialist health care.

If someone has been in rehab in an area, this will not establish an automatic connection in the traditional sense, but the local connection rule can be more flexible, depending on the discretion of the authority and the individual's circumstances.



Special provision applies to homeless applications made on or after 3 April 2018 by a person who was in local authority care in an area. A care leaver has a connection to a local authority area which owes them duties as a “former relevant child”.⁴⁷ This applies until the person’s 21st birthday or, if they are pursuing a course of education set out in their pathway plan, until that course of education is finished. A care leaver also has a local connection to a local authority area in which they were in care for a continuous period of two years, at least some of which fell before their 16th birthday. This connection lasts until their 21st birthday.

If a person is fleeing domestic abuse, they can make an application with any local authority and should not be asked for evidence of the abuse if it would put the applicant in danger. The authority cannot insist that the applicant returns to their home area. If violence or abuse is non-domestic, the authority can choose to waive the rule on local connection, but this would be at their discretion and may be harder for the applicant to achieve. If a person can be referred to another authority, the referring authority still owe them a duty of care until the referral has been accepted. A decision on a referral should be made within five working days and, if it is accepted, all duties are then owed by the authority accepting the duty. If the referral is not accepted, the referring authority still owe interim duty until the matter is resolved. A person should not be left unsupported between authorities.

NOTE: The Act also gives local authorities the option to refer people who lack a local connection to another authority with whom they do have connection in certain circumstances. As Crisis have noted, this raises concerns that assessments of housing need could be made based on “value judgments about an adult’s past behaviour [and] reasons for homelessness”.⁴⁸

46 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025) Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities. Available [here](#).

47 Shelter (2025) Local connection in homelessness applications – Care leavers. Available [here](#).

48 Crisis (2018) Chapter 13 Homelessness legislation. Available [here](#).

5. People leaving prison (England and Wales)

Some of the people you support may have involvement with the Criminal Justice System and could spend time in custody. There are provisions for people in this position who may be very vulnerable if they leave prison and do not have a safe place to go.

We have already looked at some of the ways in which people might be supported so that they don't fall through the net and be left at risk. They may have a priority need for housing assessment purposes, and they should be referred for housing assistance well in advance of the end of their sentence so that appropriate support can be put in place.



Case study — Steve

Steve is 50 and has been alcohol dependent for some years. He lives on the street, sofa surfs, has time in local hostels when the Severe Weather Protocol is active and sometimes stays with family for short periods, but they will not let him stay permanently because his behaviour can be challenging due to his drinking and his poor mental health.

Steve has had several short stints in prison, usually for not attending court, on shoplifting charges, or for breaching probation and court orders. He usually leaves prison with no accommodation to go to and is advised to present at his local authority housing office on his return to his home city. Steve always intends to do this but has never managed so far because he gets sidetracked by seeing friends and finding someone to drink with.

His most recent sentence was for 20 weeks, meaning he will serve 10 weeks in prison then be released to serve the rest of the sentence in the community.

During this sentence Steve gets an appointment with a housing support worker in prison. He explains that he doesn't have anywhere to go on release and gives permission for the worker to refer him to his local authority. This is done through the Duty to Refer pathway set out in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to offer a more joined up support network between statutory services.

As a result of the referral, a housing officer visits Steve in prison and does a full housing assessment. She says she will keep in touch with him. Three weeks later Steve is contacted in prison and told that he qualifies for main housing duty. This is because Steve is homeless upon leaving prison, he has a priority need due to his mental health challenges, his alcohol dependence and his history of trauma and incarceration. Steve did not make himself homeless from his last settled accommodation as he was evicted illegally by his landlord.

As Steve is owed main duty he is offered hostel accommodation upon leaving prison which will be short term, he will then move to supported accommodation provided by a local charity working with the authority and he will be helped to gain valuable life skills to prepare him for his own independent tenancy when he is ready.



6. Understanding the benefits system to support vulnerable people who are alcohol dependent to become, and remain, safely housed

Vulnerable people who are alcohol dependent may struggle financially to meet their own accommodation needs. Because the UK benefits system is complex to navigate, and making a claim generally requires claimants to be well-organised and have to hand a range of information and documentation about themselves, it is likely that workers will need to provide considerable and ongoing support to people with alcohol dependence to help them navigate the system to obtain, and retain, the benefits to which they are entitled.

If you are supporting someone who is not in receipt of benefits, or who might not be claiming all that they are entitled to, there are several things you need to be aware of in order to be able to support them.

In this section you will find:

- Definition of disability for the purposes of making a benefits claim
- Universal Credit
- Personal Independence Payment
- Pension Credit
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Council Tax Discount
- Attendance Allowance
- Constant Attendance Allowance

6.1 Disability and claiming benefits

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disability as a “physical or mental impairment [that] has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”, which might include holding down a job and managing their own self-care.⁴⁹ So, while many people who are alcohol dependent would not consider themselves to be disabled, we can clearly see how the definition might apply to alcohol dependence. The Act does say that “addiction to alcohol, nicotine, or any other substance is to be treated as not amounting to an impairment for the purposes of the [Equality] Act”, however,

many conditions resulting from severe alcohol dependence could be classed as long-term impairments. If a person who is alcohol dependent is experiencing cognitive impairment or mobility problems as a consequence of their history of drinking, for example, they may be entitled to some of the disability payments described below.

6.2 Universal Credit

In this section you will find:

- What Universal Credit is and which benefits it replaced
- Savings and Universal Credit
- What causes a move to Universal Credit
- Claiming Universal Credit
- Signing a claimant commitment
- The Universal Credit Journal
- Supporting someone to manage their claim
- What are alternative payments
- Universal Credit for housing costs

Universal Credit: The centrepiece of the reformed benefits system is Universal Credit (UC). It was introduced in stages from 2013, and has gradually replaced six legacy benefits:

- Job Seekers’ Allowance (income based)
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Employment and Support Allowance (income based)
- Housing Benefit (there are exceptions for people in supported accommodation)

UC is available to UK residents aged 18 or over but under state pension age. People over the state pension age should claim Pension Credit instead of UC unless they live with someone under pension age, in which case they would

⁴⁹ Equality Act 2010. Available [here](#).

make a joint UC claim.⁵⁰ UC is available to people aged 16 or 17 in a limited range of circumstances.⁵¹

UC can be claimed by people who are seeking employment, people who are in work, but not earning enough money to live on or people who are unable to work, for example, because of ill-health.

Savings: Claimants must have no more than £16,000 in savings and savings between £6,000 and £16,000 will affect the amount of UC paid on a sliding scale.

Moving to Universal Credit: The move from legacy benefits to Universal Credit can happen in a number of ways. This might be 'voluntary migration' where a person decides they would rather claim UC than their current benefits. If you are supporting someone who is thinking about doing this, it would be advisable to use a benefits calculator such as Turn 2 Us or speak to an advisor before making the change, as many people can find themselves worse off financially. A UC claim might be triggered by a change in circumstances such as a new claim or moving in with a partner and making a joint claim (known as 'natural migration') or people will be transferred by 'managed migration', when their area moves everyone onto UC and send out letters (a 'migration notice') to all claimants explaining the process.

Claiming Universal Credit: Universal Credit is intended to be a simplified system that provides greater rewards for work; a flexible benefit that responds to people's changing circumstances and which is paid monthly to encourage claimants to learn budgeting skills that will be helpful when they are in work and no longer claiming. It has not been without challenges, and many claimants have found the claims process and other aspects of UC to be confusing and unhelpful. Universal Credit is claimed online which can be a barrier for people who experience digital exclusion. Vulnerable people who are alcohol dependent may need significant support to create their online account and to manage it. To make a claim requires a person to have:

- A bank, building society, or credit union account
- An email address
- Access to a phone
- Proof of identity

If someone doesn't have proof of identity, such as a passport, driving licence, or birth certificate, this should not prevent them from making a claim. There are other things that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) can do to satisfy this requirement, including cross-checking with other government departments such as national insurance (known as 'alternative verification') or if the claimant is unable to provide any ID at all, they may be asked to provide different documentation, or a social worker or other professional might be able to help the claimant prove their identity. This might apply where the individual has lost

all forms of ID following homelessness or other traumatic event. The claimant will also need to provide a National Insurance Number (NINO) but if they do not have one, this can be issued as part of the claims process.

The claimant will need to provide information about:

- Their housing situation and costs
- Any childcare costs they might have
- Any earnings and/or other benefits being received
- Any other income they receive
- Any savings and/or investments
- Any disabilities and/or health conditions

Claimant Commitment: Claimants are asked to sign a Claimant Commitment which spells out the responsibilities (if any) attached to their claim, such as attending preparation for work meetings with their job coach, providing fit notes, etc. People who are alcohol or drug dependant may be placed in the Limited Capability for Work (LCW) or Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) group, depending on the severity of their condition. This status can provide some flexibility in terms of meeting work-related requirements which will reduce the pressure on them to attend job-related activities or interviews.⁵² The commitment will also cover the fact that claimants are responsible for keeping their online account up to date, attending any meetings they are required to attend, and reporting changes in their circumstances.

The Universal Credit journal: The Universal Credit journal is an online tool that allows claimants to communicate directly with DWP and record all interactions. Claimants should use their journal to report changes in circumstances, ask questions, and provide any additional information that might be required for their claim. Both the claimant and the DWP can send messages via the journal which might include things like requests for information, details of upcoming appointments, and updates of claimant circumstances.⁵³

The journal acts as a live record to ensure information is always up to date, so if there are any changes in a claimant's circumstances, including changes in income, employment status, or number of people in the household, these should all be reported through the journal. People should check their journal regularly to see any appointments or tasks they might be required to complete. This could include appointments they need to attend or completing work-related requirements that are part of the claimant commitment. The journal will show when people have completed a task and any deadlines so that they don't find themselves at risk of being sanctioned.⁵⁴ Note that if sanctions are applied to a UC claim, the housing element, (or Housing Benefit if the person is in supported housing)

50 UK Government (2025) Pension Credit. Available [here](#).

51 Department for Work and Pensions (2022) Who can claim Universal Credit. Available [here](#).

52 Turn2us (2025) Work Capability Assessment – Limited Capability for Work Related Activity. Available [here](#).

53 Coventry Independent Advice Service (2023) Managing your Universal Credit journal. Available [here](#).

54 Department for Work and Pensions (2025) Universal Credit sanctions. Available [here](#).

will still be paid. The sanction is applicable to the personal allowance part of the claim, and no-one should be made homeless because of UC sanctions.⁵⁵

The journal provides a secure method to upload documents to support a claim or evidence information, such as proof of rent, etc. Claimants can track their Universal Credit payments, including details of when payments are due and any deductions, etc. This means that if there are deductions, for an advance payment on a new claim for example, a request can be made to reduce the amount that is taken before the first payment so that further financial difficulties can be avoided. People who are required to look for work or meet work-related requirements as a condition of their claim can use the journal to update on job search activities and other related tasks.

Claimants can ask for help regarding any issues with their claim via their journal and can obtain guidance on what steps they need to take next. The journal is accessed through the claimant's online account, and they will have a login to do this. There is a mobile app for people who find this an easier way to access their account. There is a link to a short video on the Department of Work and Pensions YouTube on making a claim,⁵⁶ and if someone is struggling to make an online claim, there is a helpline available.⁵⁷

Supporting someone to manage their claim: If a person is unable to manage their Universal Credit claim, they can give "explicit consent" to another person, such as their alcohol treatment or housing support worker, to do that for them. This person is known as the "claimant's representative" and explicit consent can be provided by the claimant in writing, on the telephone, or face-to-face at the Job Centre at any point in the claim. Explicit consent usually only lasts until a specific task has been completed. To give explicit consent, the claimant must:

- Give consent for their personal information to be shared and say which information that includes.
- Explain why the information needs to be shared.
- Give the name of their representative and their organisation, or job role.

In cases of mental incapacity or severe disability, an "appointee" can be made responsible for managing someone's Universal Credit claim. This can be:

- An individual, such as a friend or relative.
- An organisation or representative of an organisation, such as a solicitor or local authority employee known as corporate appointees.⁵⁸

Alternative payment arrangements: One of the stated aims of Universal Credit is to encourage claimants to take responsibility for their own financial affairs and to that end, the benefit is usually paid monthly directly to the claimant and includes any housing costs to which the person is entitled which they are then expected to pay to their landlord in rent. There are options for Alternative Payment Arrangements if there is a risk of financial harm to the claimant or their family, including the risk of someone losing their home, for people who would struggle to manage one monthly payment. This can include:

- More frequent payments, which are usually two-weekly but can also be weekly.
- Paying rent directly to a landlord, known as a 'managed payment' and can be requested by the tenant or the landlord.
- Splitting payments between the two joint claimants where there is domestic abuse or other risk of financial exploitation.⁵⁹

Several factors are described by the Department for Work and Pensions as creating a "highly likely or probable need for Alternative Payment Arrangements", some of which could apply to people who are alcohol dependant. These include:

- Problems with alcohol, any type of illegal drug or improper use of non-illegal substances.
- Being homeless or in temporary accommodation.
- Experiencing domestic abuse, now or in the past.
- Having a mental health condition which impairs their ability to manage their own affairs effectively.
- Being part of a family with multiple and complex needs.

Universal Credit for housing costs: Universal Credit housing element can be claimed for housing costs such as:

- Rent paid to a private landlord.
- Rent and service charges paid to a housing association or local authority.
- Service charges on a property the claimant owns.

55 Shelter (2025) Universal credit housing element. Available [here](#).

56 Department of Work and Pensions (2024) Step-by-step guide to making a Universal Credit Claim from DWP. Available [here](#).

57 UK Government (2025) Universal Credit – Contact Universal Credit. Available [here](#).

58 Department of Work and Pensions (2025) Universal Credit consent and disclosure of information. Available [here](#).

59 Department of Work and Pensions (2024) Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs). Available [here](#).

It can also be claimed for rent and service charges for supported or sheltered housing, but only if the claimant is not receiving care, support, or supervision from the housing provider or someone contracted by them to provide such services.⁶⁰ People claiming Universal Credit and who live in certain circumstances can claim Housing Benefit instead of the housing costs element of UC. This includes people living in:

- Supported or sheltered housing or a hostel in which care, support, or supervision are provided.
- Temporary accommodation arranged by a local authority because of homelessness, such as a B&B.
- Refuge accommodation for people fleeing domestic abuse.

6.3 Other benefits

There are other welfare benefits which people impacted by alcohol dependence may be able to claim.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP): PIP is gradually replacing Disability Living Allowance for people aged 16 or older but below state pension age (unless they've received PIP prior to reaching that age). It can be claimed at the same time as almost all other benefits (the only exception being Armed Forces Independence Payment) and is sometimes available more quickly and at a higher rate to people who are not expected to live for more than another 12 months or who are in receipt of palliative care. PIP can be claimed by people who have a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability and have difficulty doing certain everyday tasks or getting around. Claimants must expect that condition to continue for at least 12 months from its starting point.

There are two elements to PIP. One is for daily living and the second for mobility. The daily living element covers help needed with things such as preparing food, eating and drinking, managing medication, personal care, managing finances, and interacting with others in a social setting. The mobility element can cover difficulties physically moving around, and difficulties resulting from mental ill-health (such as anxiety) and/or cognitive impairment which might impact on someone's ability to use public transport.⁶¹ Although PIP is paid to meet specific needs, how the money is spent is up to the claimant. There is a short video on the Department of Work and Pensions YouTube providing an overview of PIP.⁶²

Back payments of PIP: If you support your client to apply for PIP and they are successful, they will often find themselves in receipt of a large amount of money as a back payment for what they have been owed since the claim was made. This poses significant problems when the person has an alcohol use disorder and may risk undermining a period of stability or worsening an already serious situation. There are ways you can help someone in this situation:

- Work with the person to update their risk assessment/safety plan as their risks *will* have changed due to the availability of a large sum of money
- If necessary, contact other professionals working with your client such as their social worker or community psychiatric nurse (CPN).
- If the client doesn't already have a social worker then a request could be made for an assessment under safeguarding if you think they are at risk of being exploited due to the money situation.
- If the client lacks capacity they can appoint someone to manage it for them. This has to be someone they trust so a conversation about this before the back payment is made would be a good idea.
- Look at the person's support plan together. Are there things that they want to do that will be possible now they can finance it such as improving their home or starting a hobby? If they can see what long term effects could be achieved by spending the money wisely it might help them to plan and budget.
- If the person lacks capacity then the DWP can look at Alternative Payment Arrangements where they pay the money in smaller amounts or to a representative who has Power of Attorney.



⁶⁰ Shelter (2025) Universal credit housing element. Available [here](#).

⁶¹ Department for Work and Pensions (2024) PIP handbook. Available [here](#).

⁶² Department for Work and Pensions (2023) PIP video 1 – An overview. Available [here](#).



Case study — Helen

Helen has had problems with alcohol for several years since her husband died.

She was without support for a long time but has now accepted input from a local organisation and gets on well with her support worker who sees her at least once a week. She is starting to attend groups and has managed to reduce her alcohol use. Helen got a flat through the local authority and moved in two months ago. It is small and not nicely furnished. Helen still doesn't have carpets in every room, but she likes where she lives and wants to make it comfortable.

With support from her worker Helen applied for PIP and was successful. She got a letter saying she will be paid PIP every month and that she will get over £1200 in back pay owed from when she made her claim. Helen is really happy about this but scared that she will be tempted to drink more, or that people will find out about the money and try take it from her.

The first thing Helen and her support worker do is to write all this down in a new safety plan (sometimes called a risk assessment). They are really honest and think about how the money might risk Helen's current level of alcohol use, and who might be a threat to her. She decides that she won't tell anyone at the groups she goes to and won't tell her brother as he has issues with heroin and gambling and she thinks he might try to get the money from her.

They also look at the support plan that was written when Helen moved into her flat and what she said she wanted to do when she could afford to. This included new carpets and curtains for the flat and also buying a sewing machine as this was Helen's hobby when she lived with her husband.

Helen asked if DWP could keep the money and give it to her as an extra £40 a week but, as she has capacity, it is very unlikely that they would be able to do this. She does agree for her social worker and GP to be told about the money so that if she couldn't contact her support worker for help then there were other people who would know about her situation.

Before the money is paid, Helen and her support worker choose curtains, carpets and other nice things for her home and pick out a sewing machine that will be ideal for her to start her hobby again. When the money goes into her bank account they are able to pay for these things which accounts for over half of the back payment.

Helen did struggle a bit with having money in the bank that she wasn't used to, and it meant that she drank more than she intended to on a few occasions but as people who were supporting her knew the situation she was able to ask for help when she needed it, and when there was still £250 left she decided to open a separate account to put this money in so that it could be used for treats later in the year when the weather's nicer.



Pension Credit: Pension Credit is paid instead of UC to people over the state pension age unless they make a joint claim with someone under pension age. It will top up a single person's weekly income to £227.10 and a couple's weekly income to £346.60. People already receiving more than this may be entitled to Pension Credit if they have a disability, have caring responsibilities, or have certain types of housing costs. People who receive Pension Credit may be entitled to Housing Benefit, Council Tax discount, and help with NHS costs including dental and optical costs. A person can be in receipt of the following benefits without it reducing their Pension Credit:

- Attendance Allowance
- Child Benefit
- Personal Independence Payment
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax discount

Discretionary Housing payments: Additional help may be available from local authorities for people claiming Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, via discretionary housing payments. These payments can be made for:

- Temporary hardship due to illness
- Shortfall in rent due to housing payments being below the Local Housing Allowance
- Buying furniture or equipment
- Outstanding rent arrears
- A deposit for renting a property
- Any other lump sum costs associated with a housing need, such as removal costs

Discretionary housing payments can be one-off payments, but DWP guidance states that local authorities can consider making longer term awards where appropriate, for example, where a claimant has ongoing needs, such as a disabled person living in specially adapted accommodation.⁶³

Council tax discounts: There are a range of Council Tax discounts available to people who meet the criteria. Sometimes payments can cover the full bill. Each local authority has its own discount categories, and workers will need to look at the relevant local authority website for each client.

Attendance Allowance and Constant Attendance Allowance:

Attendance Allowance: Attendance Allowance is paid instead of PIP to people who have reached state pension age and who have a physical or mental disability that means they need assistance, or supervision to keep them safe, and who have needed that support for at least six months. It is available at two rates, depending on the level of support needed. Like PIP, Attendance Allowance is paid to meet specific needs, but how the money is spent is entirely up to the claimant; and it may be available more quickly and at a higher rate if someone is nearing the end of their life. Attendance Allowance can be claimed regardless of a person's level of income or savings and people in receipt of Attendance Allowance may also be entitled to Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax discounts.⁶⁴ Constant Attendance Allowance is a benefit available to people in receipt of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) or a War Disablement Pension, who need daily care and attention because of a disability.⁶⁵

63 Shelter (2025) Discretionary housing payments (DHP). Available [here](#).

64 UK Government (2025) Attendance Allowance. Available [here](#).

65 UK Government (2025) Constant Attendance Allowance. Available [here](#).

Appendix 1: Methodology

This guidance and the accompanying resources were developed through a national multi-partner project initiated by Alcohol Change UK. This followed the innovative approach used to develop the *Blue Light* approach. Local authorities each contributed funding into a central pot to fund the development. In return, they received workshops, presentations, surveys and training.

Twenty-nine local authority partners contributed; another 10 expressed interest in the project. This alone highlights the importance of this issue. The partners are listed in Appendix 2. Alcohol Change UK is grateful for their support.

The development was overseen by an expert steering group made up of representatives of the partner areas and national experts (see Appendix 3). The day-to-day management was undertaken by Alcohol Change UK.

The guidance was built through:

- Development workshops in each partner area where both the challenges and possibilities for work with this client group were discussed
- A national online survey which had over 600 responses
- Interviews with national experts and local stakeholders
- Desk research
- Discussions with the national steering group.



Appendix 2: Partner areas and steering group membership

Partner areas	
Buckinghamshire	Gloucestershire
Westminster	North Yorkshire
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	Royal Borough of Kingston
Surrey	Croydon
Cheshire West and Chester	Luton
Newcastle	Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole
Newham	West Sussex
Hartlepool	Blackburn
Kent	Nottinghamshire
Cornwall	Manchester
Carmarthenshire	Stoke on Trent
Islington	Oxfordshire
Sandwell	Nottingham City
Medway	Bath & NE Somerset
Sunderland	

The national experts on the steering group	
Andrew Misell (Alcohol Change UK)	Andrew Brown (Department of Health)
Professor Michael Preston-Shoot (Emeritus Professor University of Bedfordshire)	Dr. Sarah Wadd (University of Bedfordshire)
Jo Prestidge (Homeless Link)	James Cofield (Lived experience)
Dr Hannah Carver (University of Stirling)	Jenny Ewells (DLUHC)
Ellie Atkins (Manchester City Council)	Mark Holmes (Alcohol Change UK)
Jennie Fortune (Westminster City Council)	Lauren Booker (Alcohol Change UK)
Fiona Palmer (Alcohol Change UK)	Kanishka Rathnayake (Alcohol Change UK)
Susan Laurie (Alcohol Change UK)	KP Sarvaiya (Alcohol Change UK)
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