

Homes for Cathy: Our commitments

In 2016 a group of housing associations, formed around the era of 'Cathy Come Home', came together to mark the film's 50th anniversary and highlight the continuing need of people experiencing homelessness.

The resulting 'Homes for Cathy' group works alongside the National Housing Federation, Shelter, Crisis and others to campaign for the support and prevention of homelessness.

NCHA is signed up to the seven Homes for Cathy commitments. Each year we review and develop our homelessness action plan, procedures and working practices to embed the commitments in our services and to ensure we make a real positive impact to homelessness.

1) To contribute to the development and execution of the homelessness strategies of local and combined authorities.

We provide temporary accommodation across the East Midlands for homeless prevention:

- Linby Drive and Corporation Oaks in Nottingham
- Heathfield House in Leicester City
- Supporting young people in Leicestershire, Newark, Bassetlaw and Sherwood

We provide a floating support homeless prevention service in Nottingham, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Dales.

In 2017 the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced a new requirement to all registered social landlords, known as the 'Duty to Refer'. NCHA have written this duty into all of our tenancy management procedures. We ask our colleagues to contact their local authority if anyone is rough sleeping and we will launch an internal reminder campaign in the winter.

We aim to ensure at least 25% of general needs homes are allocated to households with a background of homelessness. In 2023/24 over 26% of our lettings went to households with a homeless background, a total of 122 households.

2) To work with stakeholders and people with lived experience of homelessness to provide a range of affordable housing and services which meet the needs of homeless people in their local communities.

We recognise that an individual's housing history and circumstances may mean they need more support to sustain a tenancy; this shouldn't be a barrier to housing. Our Lettings team will refer all new tenants coming from a homelessness background to our Community Support team for additional support.

All customers, whatever their tenure, can benefit from our Community Support team's services. Those identified as in need are referred internally and support is tailored to their needs.

During 2023/24 the Community Support team supported 192 customers. 156 customers were supported to claim £46,200 in benefits, one customer was helped to write off debt, totalling £5,000, and 35 customers were supported to claim £14,500 in grants.

3) To operate flexible allocations and eligibility policies which allow individual applicants' unique sets of circumstances and housing histories to be considered and to monitor acceptances and refusals and benchmark performance.

We have embedded additional support in our lettings and Community Support team's processes for customers moving from care and support to general needs accommodation. We'll monitor acceptances and refusals so that we can learn how we can improve our processes.

4) To work with local authorities and others to understand and remove the barriers that disadvantage some applicants with a background of homelessness, including people from ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ community and migrants, from accessing housing association properties.

NCHA continues to allocate a minimum of 75% of properties through local authority Choice Based Lettings Schemes. Through these nominations, local authorities are able to prioritise homeless households and those in housing need to ensure local demand is met.

We'll continue to review tenancies, at the point of termination, to identify lessons learned. These findings will be fed into the Homes for Cathy Working Group to help inform future homeless prevention activities.

5) To offer support to maintain 'at risk' tenancies and to not make homeless any tenant who is engaging with the landlord.

Where a customer is facing potential eviction, our Welfare, Debt and Benefit Advisor will engage with the household to offer advice and support whilst seeking to secure a repayment plan.

Key stages have been written into our housing management policy to refer customers to the Community Support team. This team will co-produce a tenancy sustainment plan and work with the customer to prevent homelessness.

Working alongside the Community Support team and our Your Money Matters team, we will do all we can to prevent court action. In 2023/24 NCHA's Welfare, Debt and Benefit Advisor has supported 62 customers and increased their welfare benefit uptake by £1,700. They've secured back payments to a value of £11,500, and discretionary housing payments and other grants to the value of £2,700.

6) To support new tenants who were homeless to access the essential items they need to make their property a home.

Our Community Support team supports new customers on limited incomes to obtain furniture and white goods through charitable grants and access to furniture charities.

All of our care and support properties are carpeted, and white goods are provided. We provide bedding and a home starter set so that people can move in and have a good night sleep and something to eat.

All outgoing customers are asked to leave their carpets in a good condition to be gifted to the incoming tenant. We clean these carpets before the next customer moves in.

7) To lobby, challenge and inspire others to work to end homelessness.

As a Homes for Cathy member, we'll share good news stories and best practice both internally and externally, to help prevent homelessness and help more people secure homes. We'll commit to externally share a new case study at least once a quarter and use our popular social media channels to share key, relevant messages.

We'll play our part in the collective voice of the Homes for Cathy campaign, to continue to lobby those with the power to bring about solutions and lasting change. We invite our local MPs to our homelessness projects and strive to keep the issues of homelessness in the hearts and minds of our political stakeholders.