



Project 17
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How to make a robust Section 17 referral

This resource is to help you prepare a robust referral to a local authority for support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 for a family with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) who are facing homelessness and/or are destitute/at risk of destitution.

Who do I make a referral to?

Section 17 support is usually provided by the social services department of the relevant local authority. However, some local authorities have dedicated teams set up to provide this support called the NRPF Team or the Nil Recourse Team; the structure varies between local authorities. You can find out which local authority to refer to by searching their postcode [here](#). We advise that you have a look on the local authority's website to try and establish where to send a referral to request a Child in Need assessment, and if it's not clear then make a referral to MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and ask them to redirect it to the appropriate team.

Referrals made over email should be sufficient and there's no need to advise your client to go in person. However, your client may be asked to go to the local authority in person during their assessment to sign forms or drop-off supporting evidence. If you do make a referral over the phone it is good practice to also follow it up in writing so that there is a record of your referral.

How do I write a referral?

Some local authorities will have a template referral form that you can download from their website, complete, and return by email (the relevant email address is usually on the form). Other local authorities have online portals where you must enter the referral information into a web-form; we advise saving your answers into a document as you go in case of technical issues, and to keep a record of what you've submitted. If you can't find a local authority's referral form or online portal, we have produced a [template referral form](#) which can be adapted, and submitted by email.

Try to make your referral as clear and detailed as possible. You may wish to attach supplementary documents outlining a client's financial situation - particularly if they can't produce bank statements. Template income and expenditure logs, and other forms to support your referral can also be found on Project 17's [website](#). Outlining a client's income and expenditure can be useful in evidencing that the family's income is not enough to meet the children's needs.

Your referral should include the following information:

- Request that social services conduct an assessment with a view to providing accommodation and/or financial support pursuant to their duties under s17 Children Act 1989.
- State why you think the child is in need e.g. are they soon to be evicted? Is there enough money to meet the child's need for food, nappies, clothes etc.?
- State that the parents have no recourse to public funds.
- State that you expect an acknowledgement within 1 working day and in urgent cases the date by which you think the assessment needs to be completed.
- State if an interpreter is needed.
- If the family are homeless or imminently homeless or have no money at all, state that you would like accommodation and/or financial support on an interim, without prejudice, basis pending the outcome of the assessment.

What evidence should be included?

To help the local authority conduct their assessment it is important that your client provides as much documentary evidence as they can to demonstrate their housing and financial situation, although we understand that some documents may be difficult or impossible to obtain. We have provided a comprehensive list of documents which could help to corroborate a referral [here](#). Not all documents in this list will be relevant to each family and not all will be available immediately. If the situation is very urgent, you should make the referral straight away, even if they do not have all the relevant documents. It is good practice to send any photos, scans, or digital copies of documents needed by social services by email so you have a record of what has been sent, and when.

What makes a good referral?

A good section 17 referral:

- Is specific with dates (ie of when your client became destitute/homeless, or will become destitute/homeless) and should have a deadline by which you expect the local authority to respond. This is particularly important if the situation is urgent, for example, if a family will be homeless tomorrow.
- Is detailed and provides as much evidence as possible.
- Is clear about what support you are requesting: accommodation, financial support or both.

- Refers to the [relevant case law](#).

Please note that it is very important that you check with your client that what you have stated in the referral is correct. Any inconsistencies between your referral and information later disclosed by a client may be used by the local authority to undermine the credibility of the family.