

**R N I B**

See differently

Starting Out

# Help from Social Services



## About this guide

This guide explains the help you can get from social services to continue leading an independent life if you're affected by sight loss. This help and support – often called 'community care' or 'social care' – can include specialist help for blind and partially sighted people, as well as help for anyone who looks after you.

Although social care is available across the UK, there are significant differences to the way these are organised in **Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland**. Because these differences are too complex to explain briefly in this leaflet, we shall focus on how local councils provide social care in **England**. Please call our Helpline if you need information or advice about getting social care in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, and one of our advisers will help.

If you have a query about something that hasn't been covered in this leaflet, please get in touch with us. We're ready to help, just give us a call or drop us an email.

**RNIB Helpline 0303 123 9999**  
**helpline@rnib.org.uk**

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## Coronavirus Update

The information in this booklet is now subject to The Coronavirus Act 2020, which is temporary legislation that has been passed to help tackle the Coronavirus outbreak. The Act may affect how local authorities assess your needs and the support provided over this period. You can read our briefings on the changes brought in by the Coronavirus Act on our website: **[rnib.org.uk/social-care](https://www.rnib.org.uk/social-care)**

# Getting help from social services

## – first steps

The first step towards getting help from social services is to contact them. If you're unable to make the call yourself or are uncomfortable with doing this, then someone can do this on your behalf.

You can find your local council's social services telephone number from directory enquiries. You can also search for it online or use the Sightline Directory at **[sightlinedirectory.org.uk](http://sightlinedirectory.org.uk)** – this is a listings directory run by RNIB with details of useful local services. You can also contact our Helpline and we'll find the number for you.

Before you contact your local social services department, you may want to think about the help you need or want that will allow you to stay independent.

When you call social services, you'll need to make it clear that you're blind or partially sighted and that you'd like an assessment of your needs. You should be able to speak to a specialist team within social services (often called a Sensory Impairment Team) but you

may have to speak to another member of staff first. It can be useful to make a note of who you speak to, and when, as you go along.



# Rehabilitation

The first service you may be offered by your local authority is **rehabilitation** (sometimes abbreviated to 'rehab'). This is a type of care which helps you learn, or relearn, a range of activities to maintain your independence.

Rehabilitation is provided by specially trained rehabilitation workers or officers. The activities they can support you in learning includes:

- getting about safely indoors and outdoors, also called mobility training
- daily living skills such as cooking, cleaning and looking after yourself – plus equipment or simple changes you can make to help you carry out these tasks
- communication skills such as using a keyboard, mobile phone or learning braille
- carrying on with leisure activities or starting new ones
- rehabilitation should be provided free of charge for the first six weeks. After this point, if you need further rehabilitation your local authority can charge for the service, but statutory guidance says they should consider against doing this.

You can find out more about rehabilitation and other help available to promote your independence in our 'Staying independent' factsheet. Call our Helpline if you would like to request a copy. You can also download the factsheet from [rnib.org.uk/socialcare](http://rnib.org.uk/socialcare)



# Your needs assessment

You have a right to an assessment once social services are aware you may need care and support. Your financial situation doesn't matter and you don't have to be on your council's register of blind and partially sighted people.

## What is a needs assessment?

The aim of an assessment is to look at what your care and support needs are, and whether you are eligible for any extra help through social services.

Depending on what level of support social services decide you are eligible to receive, you might be able to get help with:

- personal care at home (such as bathing, getting up and going to bed)
- support at home (such as shopping, cleaning, cooking, correspondence)
- aids and adaptations to your home.

While social services should help you to live independently in your own home where possible, there may come a time when you're considering moving into supported accommodation or a residential care home and this can also be arranged through your needs assessment.

Because moving accommodation can be a significant decision to make, it is worth getting some independent advice about your care options. We can offer advice about finding a residential home – contact our Helpline for more information.

## **How long will I have to wait for my needs assessment?**

Social services should tell you how long you're likely to have to wait for an assessment. Good practice is for your assessment to be carried out within four to six weeks, but people often have to wait longer than this. You can contact social services again if you feel you've waited too long for an assessment, or if your needs are urgent. See the section 'Making a complaint' on page 22 for more information if you are not happy with the service you've received from social services.

## **How can I prepare for my needs assessment?**

Once your social services department has contacted you to let you know the day and time of your assessment, spend some time getting ready for it. Think carefully before the

assessment about any difficulties you are having, and the kind of support you might need so you can discuss these with the assessor. You could make a list of things you find difficult, or keep a daily diary of when you have needed help or found things difficult to do. It's important not to underestimate your needs, and to give as full a picture of your life as possible to the person doing the assessment.

## **What should I expect during the assessment?**

A professional such as a rehabilitation worker for blind and partially sighted people, social worker or care manager will carry out the assessment. They will usually do this in your home, so that they get a better understanding of your home life. Sometimes they may carry out the assessment at other places such as a social services office, a day centre or a resource centre. You can have someone with you during the assessment and they can speak on your behalf if this is what you prefer.

The person carrying out your assessment should look at how your sight loss affects your independence, what you can and cannot do, and what you could do if you had support. They

will be assessing you against national eligibility criteria that look at how you cope in relation to the following areas of your life (which they call 'outcomes'):

- managing and maintaining nutrition
- maintaining personal hygiene
- managing toilet needs
- being appropriately clothed
- being able to make use of your home safely
- maintaining a habitable home environment
- developing and maintaining family and other personal relationships
- accessing and engaging in work, training, education and volunteering
- making use of necessary facilities or services in the local community, including public transport and recreational facilities
- carrying out any caring responsibilities you have for a child.

One of the best things you can do to prepare for your assessment is to understand how your needs are being assessed, so that you can make clear to the assessor the areas in which you may need support. We have a factsheet called 'Preparing for a needs assessment' which goes

through this process in more detail, gives more information about the eligibility criteria and the sorts of things included in each outcome to help you to understand what to expect.

Call our Helpline if you would like to request a copy, or you can download a copy from [rnib.org.uk/socialcare](https://rnib.org.uk/socialcare)

## What should I expect after the assessment?

Once your social services department has completed your assessment and has a full view of your needs, they must decide whether you're eligible to receive care.

If you are found not eligible, then your council must explain why in a letter, which should also include advice and information on:

- accessing other care and support in your area
- accessing support organisations, such as your local society for people with sight loss
- where to get financial advice, such as information about benefits or managing debt
- how to prevent or reduce care needs developing in the future.

You can challenge social services' decision that you are not eligible for care through your local authority's complaints procedure. See the section 'Making a complaint' further on in this booklet for more information if you are not happy with the service you've received from social services.

If you are found to meet the criteria for care and support, then social services have a legal duty to meet these needs if you want them to. Your assessor will work with you to draw up a **care and support plan** to deliver those services.



# Your care and support plan

Your council should agree a written record of your support plan with you, or someone acting on your behalf, to show how it's going to meet your needs. You should get a copy of your care plan in a format you can read, such as large print, audio or braille.

Social services should involve you in developing and shaping your own care and support plan so that it meets your needs as an individual. Your local authority should make it clear that the plan belongs to you.

Part of this plan will include developing a personal budget, which is a sum of money that the local authority estimates it will cost to meet your needs. Your local authority can meet your needs by providing services directly or arrange for services to be provided by another organisation.

Alternatively, you can request **direct payments**. These are payments which enable you to buy services in to meet your assessed needs. In order to be given direct payments, social services must be sure that you, or a suitable person on your behalf, can manage the direct payments.

It is important to understand that while direct payments give you more flexibility and choice around choosing your care, you do have to take on extra responsibilities in organising your care and you won't be able to complain in the same way to social services if you are unhappy with the service you've received. For more information on direct payments, call our Helpline.



## Good to know

If you have problems accessing services in your area, do let us know by calling our Helpline. We're campaigning to improve services across the UK and it may be possible for us to take up your case if you're not getting the support you need.

## Paying towards the cost of your care

Some types of help from social services should be free of charge, regardless of your income and savings, such as:

- rehabilitation
- specialist aids, equipment and adaptations costing £1,000 each or less
- NHS services

However, social services will usually charge for most other care and support, depending on your level of income and savings. The local authority will carry out a financial assessment to find out how much you may need to contribute towards your care. It is important to note that different rules apply to the financial assessment depending on whether you receive care at home or in residential care.

Once your financial assessment has been carried out, your council should tell you in writing what the charges are and how they were worked out.

For residential care charges, you may wish to contact Age UK on **0800 169 2081** or visit their website **[ageuk.org.uk](http://ageuk.org.uk)**

If you think you have been charged incorrectly for the care you receive, you can ask for a review of your financial assessment. Contact our Helpline to request a copy of our 'Challenging charges for community care services' factsheet, or for advice on disputing charges. Our Legal Rights Service might be able to help you with your case.

## Support for your carer

If you have someone that looks after you, then the council should take their needs into account when they decide what services to arrange for you, including what help your carer is willing and able to provide. The assessor should not make any assumptions about the extent or quality of support from your carer without discussion and agreement with both you and your carer. Your carer should, if available, be given the opportunity to talk alone to the rehabilitation worker, social worker or other professional during your needs assessment.

If your carer helps to meet some of your needs, they have the right to request a carer's assessment. It does not matter if your carer is a relative or a friend, or if they live in a different council area to you. The carer's assessment will look at things such as:

- how much help your carer is able to give while still doing other activities, such as work and leisure
- what, if any help they may need
- when and for how many hours a week they care for you

- what sort of care they give you
- what effect your housing situation has on your carer (for example if you have any difficulties moving around your home which your carer needs to help you with)
- planning how you would be looked after if your carer was suddenly unable to do it.

If social services find your carer eligible following the assessment, they'll be provided with their own support plan. Your carer may get help with caring duties, be given equipment, or be offered support like respite care breaks.

Your carer may also be eligible for specific benefits available for carers such as Carer's Allowance or Carer's Premium. Your local social services department should advise you about carer's benefits, or you can contact our Helpline for a copy of our Starting Out leaflet on 'Benefits, concessions and registration'. We are also able to offer a full benefits check for both you and your carer. Contact our Helpline to find out more.

You can also call Carers UK on **0808 808 7777** or visit **carersuk.org** for information and advice about carers' rights and how to get support.



# Making a complaint to social services

If you're not happy with how the council has dealt with you, with your community care assessment, or the care and support that they have either provided or have refused to offer, you can complain. Every council has a complaints procedure and they must offer you help and support in using this.

Your complaint may be dealt with informally and quickly by talking to the person who is responsible for providing the service. However, if you're not satisfied you can make a formal complaint. Your local authority should acknowledge your complaint within three working days and offer to discuss how you want the complaint investigated to achieve a resolution. The council should also inform you how long it will be before you will receive a written decision. If you're not happy with the outcome you can take the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman where it will be independently reviewed.

You can ask your local councillor or voluntary organisations for support in making your complaint. You can also call our Helpline to speak to one of our advisers to see if our Legal Rights Service may be able to assist you.

## Further information

### **RNIB Helpline**

Our Helpline is your direct line to the information, support, advice and products you need, including getting referred to the Sight Loss Counselling Team. Call **0303 123 9999** or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**

We're here to answer your calls 8am-8pm weekdays and 9am-5pm on Saturdays.

### **Sightline Directory**

An online directory which will help you find services and support from national charities, local societies or befriending services. Visit **sightlinedirectory.org.uk**

### **Hospital eye clinics**

Some hospital eye clinics provide an information or advice service on a regular basis, often run by the local voluntary society. Contact your local hospital or sight loss adviser for more information.

### **Connect with others**

Meet or connect with others who are blind or partially sighted online, by phone or in your community to share interests, experiences

and support for each other. From book clubs and social groups to sport and volunteering, our friendly, helpful and knowledgeable team can link you up with opportunities to suit you. Visit **[rnib.org.uk/connect](https://www.rnib.org.uk/connect)** or call **0303 123 9999**.

## **Age UK**

Age UK provides information and advice to older people. They can provide details of local Age UK branches. Call their Information Line on **0800 169 2081** or visit **[ageuk.org.uk](https://www.ageuk.org.uk)**

## **Carers UK**

Carers UK is fighting for the recognition of the true value of carers' contribution to society with carers getting the practical, financial and emotional support they need. They provide information and advice to carers about their rights and how to get support. Their Advice Line can be reached on **0808 808 7777**, Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm, or you can visit **[carersuk.org](https://www.carersuk.org)**

## **Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB)**

CAB provides information and advice on a wide range of legal matters in local branches. Contact details are available by visiting **[adviceguide.org.uk](https://www.adviceguide.org.uk)**

# RNIB Booklet Series

## About the Starting Out Series

The Starting Out series aims to give people who are losing or have recently lost their sight essential information about living with sight loss. Titles include:

- Benefits, Concessions and Registration
- Emotional Support
- Employment
- Help from Social Services
- Making the Most of Your Sight

## About the Confident Living Series

The Confident Living series is for people who are losing or have recently lost their sight and are trying to build their confidence to continue to lead full and independent lives. Titles include:

- Leisure
- Reading
- Shopping
- Travel
- Technology

## About the Understanding Series

The Understanding series is designed to help you, your friends and family understand a little bit more about your eye condition. Titles include:

- Age Related Macular Degeneration
- Cataracts
- Charles Bonnet Syndrome
- Dry Eye
- Eye Conditions Related to Diabetes
- Glaucoma
- Nystagmus
- Retinal Detachment
- Retinal Pigmentosa
- Posterior Vitreous Detachment

All these leaflets are available in audio, print and braille formats. To order please contact our Helpline on **0303 123 9999** (all calls charged at local rate), email **helpline@rnib.org.uk** or visit **shop.rnib.org.uk**

For a full list of the information sources used in any of these titles or to provide feedback on the Starting Out and Confident Living Series, please email **ckit@rnib.org.uk**

To provide feedback on the Understanding Series, please email **eyehealth@rnib.org.uk**.

If you or someone you know is living with sight loss, we're here to help.

## **RNIB Helpline**

Call: **0303 123 9999** or email: **helpline@rnib.org.uk**  
Or say, **"Alexa, call RNIB Helpline"**  
to an Alexa enabled device.

The Sight Advice FAQ answers questions about living with sight loss, eye health or being newly diagnosed with a sight condition. It is produced by RNIB in partnership with a number of other sight loss organisations. **sightadvicefaq.org.uk**.

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