

Outstanding Actions
Response to action AHR5

- 1) In relation to housing provided by private landlords whose rent is guaranteed by Rent Guarantee Scheme, please clarify what procedures and protection there is for low income families on the Council's housing register.**

Under the rent deposit guarantee scheme, landlords can make a claim at the end of the tenancy up to value of one month's rent. This may be for damage or rent arrears. The council does not guarantee the rent over and above this amount. Prior to the council agreeing to sign a bond under the scheme, the landlord must provide gas and electricity safety certificates. We also carry out a land registry check to determine whether the landlord is the registered owner of the property. The Housing department will also carry out an inventory prior to the tenancy commencement.

Any tenant of rented property whether or not on the deposit scheme is afforded the same rights in relation to the condition of their property. Environmental Health will investigate all complaints in relation to conditions and ensure that any sufficiently serious risks to health and safety (as defined in the Housing Act 2004) are remedied by the landlord through enforcement mechanisms.

- 2) Is there a procedure Members should follow when they receive complaints from residents about the standard of accommodation?**

If a resident is occupying a property under the Rent Deposit Scheme, it would be helpful if Members could notify Donovan Elliott who is co-ordinating the scheme within the Housing Department. He will then notify Environmental Health colleagues who will investigate.

If a resident is a tenant outside of the Rent Deposit Scheme, in either private or social rented properties, Members should advise residents to first speak with their landlord, but if their concerns are not addressed to contact Environmental Health at envhealth@watford.gov.uk, or 01923 278503.

- 3) Does the Council have a responsibility for the condition of the homes people accept through the rent guarantee scheme?**

The condition of the properties is the responsibility of the landlord and should be stated in the tenancy agreement. In a significant number of cases applicants will identify a property themselves and only seek assistance through the financial aspect of the bond. In other cases applicants will view properties which Housing has become aware are vacant and where landlords are willing to accept tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit. Housing officers seek to ensure the safety of occupiers through the gas and electric requirements stated above.

For all rented properties, whether or not they are within the Rent Deposit Scheme, Environmental Health has enforcement powers regarding conditions which come to the attention of the council.

4) Does the Council have a procedure for monitoring complaints about individual landlords?

Complaints received by Environmental Health about property condition are logged on a central database.

5) If a family accepts the Rent Guarantee Scheme and finds the accommodation is of a poor standard, who should they contact and what rights do they have with regards getting back on to the housing register?

Initial contact should be made with Donovan Elliott in the Housing Department who co-ordinates the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme. He will refer the residents to Environmental Health for further advice and assistance on property condition issues; they will work to improve the standards. Households within privately rented accommodation within Watford would usually be eligible for the Housing Register. However, if families are living in self contained accommodation which is not overcrowded, or presenting risks to their health and safety they will not attract the same priority banding as those in greater housing need or who have no accommodation.

6) What rights do tenants have if a landlord acts inappropriately, e.g. entering the property without notice or prior agreement, and the tenant leaves the property and makes themselves homeless?

If a landlord breaches the tenancy agreement, tenants have the right to seek legal redress. We would advise residents to contact the Housing Department for further advice if they are considering leaving a property and do not have alternative accommodation. Our Prevention and Advice Team will work with residents to resolve issues which could lead to their homelessness wherever possible. Each case would need to be examined in detail but there is a risk that where households leave accommodation voluntarily (even if they feel there are compelling reasons to do so) they may be found intentionally homeless under the legislation.

7) Is there a minimum floor space for accommodation under the Rent Guarantee Scheme?

No there is not a minimum floor space.