



Private Sector Housing Service Standards

Private Sector Housing

The Private Sector Housing Team ensure that all private sector housing by improving the quality of the private sector housing stock and thereby improving the health, safety and welfare of the occupants.

These include **privately rented properties** - rented family houses and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) which include bedsits, shared houses and individual rooms in houses where unrelated households share facilities, such as a bathroom or kitchen and self contained flats that do not meet the 1991 Building Regulations. **Properties rented from a Registered social landlord** and those in **Owner Occupation**.

We aim to achieve this by use of advice, education, financial assistance (where possible), and enforcement action (where necessary).

The Private Sector Housing Team will:

- Deal with statutory nuisance due to poor housing conditions.
- Carry out Health & Safety Inspections in response to complaints from occupiers.
- Identify, inspect and improve the standards of houses in multiple occupation (HMO's)
- HMO Licensing Scheme.
- Reduce the number of empty properties within the Borough.
- Deal with statutory nuisance and Public Health issues in relation to domestic drainage.
- Carry out Immigration inspections for people moving to the area from outside the European Union.
- Co-ordinate and manage the Borough's Landlord Accreditation Scheme & Landlord Forum.
- Approve Grants and arrange Financial Assistance within the Private Sector
- Deal with disrepair complaints

How to contact us

Private Sector Housing, Housing Services, [Town Hall, Darlington](#), DL1 5QT.

Telephone **(01325) 388 304**. E-mail: housing.renewal@darlington.gov.uk

Website address: www.darlington.gov.uk for advice use our online [Complaints e-form](#);

When you get in touch with us we will:

- Be welcoming and polite;
- Tell you who we are and which service we work for;
- Listen carefully to what you say;
- Record your details accurately;
- Give enough time to deal with your enquiry;
- Deal with your query in a fair, helpful, respectful, friendly and efficient manner;
- Resolve enquiries at the first point of contact where possible and do all we can to support you;
- Explain what more information we need from you to help resolve your query;
- Be prompt with our responses;
- Provide correct information and explain things clearly;
- Give you the details for the right organisation if your enquiry is not part of our service;
- Keep all parties informed on the progress of the service request;
- Provide a fair and unbiased service, regardless of your race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age or disability;
- Respect your legal rights under the Data Protection Act;
- Treat all information in confidence and ask your permission to share it, unless we are legally bound to pass information on to others;
- Provide opportunities for you to be consulted and give us feedback on how we are delivering our services;
- Provide you with a full explanation if we are unable to give you what you are asking for.

If you telephone us we will:

- Greet you with hello/good morning or afternoon, give you our name and which service you have contacted;
- Try to answer your query. If we are unable to we will give you the contact details of the person who should be able to answer your query before we transfer you;
- Take your contact details if the person you wish to speak to is unavailable and ask that person to make contact with you either the same day, if possible, or the next working day;
- Only use voicemail when it is not possible for us to answer the telephone. If you leave a message we will either make contact the same day, if possible, or the next working day

If you fax, e-mail or write to us we will:

- Provide a full response to 90% of letters, faxes and e-mails within ten working days, making reference to the date of your enquiry. If we are unable to do this we will write to give you a date when you can expect a full reply;
- Respond to any requests made through our internet request form within 2 working days;
- Use language which is clear to understand in our reply;
- Include a contact name and direct telephone number to help you if you need any further information;
- Use Braille, large print and different languages if you need us to.



BRAILLE



If we visit you at home we will:

- Visit you at a time that is convenient for you where possible;
- Give your landlord 24-hours notice of our intended visiting time where appropriate unless it is an urgent request;
- Identify ourselves and show you our identity badge;
- Keep our appointment or make contact with you if we are delayed;
- You will be advised of the actions resulting from the visit;
- Respect your home and any occupiers present.

If we ask you to visit us we will:

- Welcome you on arrival;
- Keep our reception areas warm, clean, tidy and comfortable;
- Identify ourselves and show you our identity badge;
- Respect your privacy and see you in a private place if you prefer;
- Offer an appointment if this is more suitable;
- Assist any visitors with particular access requirements;
- Offer help with completing forms or with seating if you need it.

Town Hall Reception, Customer Service Centre opening times:

Monday-Thursday 8.30am - 5pm Friday 8.30am - 4.30pm

Advice

What we will do

Advice will be made available by:

- Through Officer knowledge and experience
- Routine Inspection.
- The issue of leaflets.
- Via the Council's website.

Operate a Private Landlord Accreditation scheme

Darlington Borough Council has developed a Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LAS). The scheme aims to improve property and management standards within the private rented sector by publicly identifying landlords and their property as being of a recognised higher standard.

What we will do

- Monitor property standards by inspecting 10% of members properties every three years;
- Revoke the membership of an accredited landlord who does not comply with a statutory notice without valid reason;
- Encourage and support Landlords to improve both the physical and management standards of the private rented sector by issuing a Dwelling Upgrade Plan following each inspection which will indicate areas for improvement.

Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's)

HMOs include bedsits, shared houses and individual rooms in houses where unrelated households share facilities, such as a bathroom or kitchen and self-contained flats that do not meet the 1991 Building Regulations.

What we will do

- Respond to enquires within two working days;
- Provide advice and assistance on standards and legislation which will be kept up to date and made available via the Councils website, display stands, leaflets etc.
- Monitor HMO Licence conditions and re-inspect properties, where needed, within the time limits stated on the Licence;
- Inspect every Licensable HMO at least every five years;
- Keep a database of licensed HMO's up-to-date and available for inspection when requested.

Private Sector Housing Conditions

What we will do

- In order to serve our clients best a three-tier priority system is in operation, with response times consistent with the priority.
 - Priority 1** Complaints classed as P1 require a quick response as these are considered urgent, for example damage by fire or water to property causing a serious threat to safety. These will be responded to within two working days.
 - Priority 2** P2 complaints are those that are suspected to be category 1 hazards. These should be responded to within 5 working days.
 - Priority 3** P3 complaints for example a request for advice, information or for an immigration inspection should be responded to within 10 working days.
- In times of high service demand it may not be possible to adhere to these timescales. The client will be advised as to the potential waiting time.
- Give advice and information to landlords and tenants about facilities and amenities required in rented properties;
- Inspect HMO's to ensure that they safe and have adequate amenities for the number of occupiers and are in reasonable repair;
- Liaise with the fire service about the levels of fire precautions required in rented accommodation; and
- Take necessary enforcement action where appropriate in accordance with the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy.

Enforcement Action

What we will do

- Give both tenants and landlords 24-hours notice of our intention to visit your property unless dealing with a Priority 1 request;
- Adhere to the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy in a firm but fair, open, consistent and helpful way;
- Consider the views of all affected parties;
- Ensure that any enforcement action will be compliant with relevant legislation;
- Take formal legal action such as prosecution after considering all other alternatives;
- Provide opportunities for appeals at all stages of enforcement and have a clear complaints procedure.

Help us to help you

To help us deliver our Service standards it is important that clients treat our staff with courtesy, politeness and respect. We will not tolerate abusive behaviour and language and we will support our staff who experience discrimination, abuse or threats.

We ask landlords

- Provide us with your preferred contact details or an agent and keep these up to date;
- To carry out certain basic repairs to the fabric and amenity provision in rented properties;
- Comply with all current legislation;
- Provide alternative management arrangements to cover absences;
- To provide adequate fire protection for the occupiers;
- Supply certificates when requested for competent trades persons i.e. CP12, EPC, Electrical test certificates;
- Provide a copy of the tenancy agreement;
- To engage with us to enable timely resolution of complaints;
- Liaise and update us with any ongoing work;
- To allow your tenant at least 24-hours notice except in an emergency to inspect and carry out repairs.

We ask homeowners and tenants

- Please inform your landlord or agent of the defects within your property and give him/her a reasonable amount of time to make arrangements for repairs prior to contacting us;
- To allow your landlord/agent reasonable access to carry out an inspection or repairs (at least 24 hours notice should be given by your landlord - except in an emergency). Housing advice can give help with legal aspects of right of entry for landlords.
- Please provide as much detail as possible regarding request including your tenancy and landlord details when you contact us for assistance;
- Provide us with your preferred contact details and keep these up to date;
- Please ensure that you keep appointments made with the inspecting officer;
- Please inform us if your landlord/agent makes the necessary repairs in the meantime;
- To use the premises and facilities in a responsible manner;
- We ask that occupiers do not smoke while officers are visiting your property.

Monitoring our Customer Service standards

We will regularly monitor the quality of our service to ensure we meet our stated obligations through satisfaction forms. These will be evaluated on a regular basis.

Your Right to Comment, Compliment and Complain:

Our aim is to put you, the customer, first and provide you with the best possible service. To make this aim a reality it is important that you have the opportunity to tell us what you think about the services we provide. You can tell us when we get things wrong so we can put them right. You can also tell us when we get things right, make comments about the things we do and suggest new ways of doing things. If we have helped you, or a good service has been provided, please tell us.

Contact Details for the Corporate Complaints Unit

We have tried to make it as easy as possible for you to tell us what you think. If you know the member of staff who delivers your service you can speak to them about the problem.

Contact the main switchboard on **01325 388 542** and ask to be put through to the person who has helped you.

You can also contact the Corporate Complaints Unit:

- use our online [Complaints e-form](#);
- email complaints@darlington.gov.uk;
- download a [Complaints form](#) [pdf document, 541kb]; or
- telephone the Corporate Complaints Unit on (01325) 388401 or 388043 or
- visit the Corporate Complaints Unit at the [Town Hall, Darlington](#).