

Private Housing

Reactive Workload Prioritisation Policy

The Private Housing service responds to requests for assistance, advice and information about housing conditions from customers living in homes they rent from a private landlord or that they own. The requests for service can also come from interested third parties for example parents of students in rented homes or from occupiers of neighbouring properties.

Service overview

The service offers a wide range of options for contact to make it as accessible as possible to all customers. However, a visit is only made to properties that have been assessed to have or are likely to have a serious problem affecting the health and safety of the occupier [note one].

The assessment of each case is undertaken based on information gathered at the first point of contact from the customer. In some cases this may not be possible so more details are gathered, usually through a telephone conversation, although this could also be through e-mail. The service will accept relevant information to assist in making the assessment, for example photographs, copies of tenancy agreements etc. In exceptional circumstances a visit can be made to the property as part of the assessment procedure.

Working in this way maximises the effectiveness of the service by gathering better intelligence at first contact, to enable a judgement to be made about the condition of the property and the likely health impact on any occupiers. This enables a priority for further action to be assigned as follows:

High priority cases

These are properties where the assessment identifies that there is, or is likely to be a minimum of one category one hazard present and there is a member of the relevant vulnerable group currently living there [note 2]. Cases are allocated for inspection in date order of receipt of initial service request.

Other priority cases

These are properties where the assessment identifies that there is, or is likely to be a minimum of one category one hazard present but there are no members of the relevant vulnerable group living there. Cases are allocated for inspection in date order of receipt of initial service request

Emergency cases

These are properties where the assessment identifies that there is, or is likely to be a minimum of one category one hazard present and that the hazard(s) presents an imminent risk of serious harm to the health and safety of the occupiers. The assessment takes into consideration the location, extent and nature of the hazard and external factors such as the time of year i.e. winter or summer. The assessment also considers the occupiers currently living in the property.

Non priority cases

These are all other service requests, i.e. those cases that have been assessed to have category 2 hazards or no actionable hazards. The service does not visit the property but where possible provides information to enable the customer to further investigate and resolve their issues themselves. The range of information varies and may include access to websites, leaflets and referral details on to other relevant organisations.

The service does not make referrals to other organisations on behalf of the customer; assistance is given only with contact details.

What happens after the assessment?

All customers are advised of the outcome of their service request. This is usually either as a letter, or as an email, where email details are given. It is important that customers are able to understand how and why decisions are made about their enquiry and that this is confirmed to them in writing.

Where a full property survey is needed this is to be completed in strict priority order where the higher risk properties are inspected first. In all cases any subsequent action taken will be in accordance with the Private Housing Enforcement Policy.

Priority action

The service may identify areas of the city as a priority for specific initiatives and action in order to meet the strategic objectives of the Private Housing Renewal strategy and corporate requirements. A different policy for responding to service requests and prioritising cases may be introduced as part of this area based work.

Quality of service

The service seeks to ensure that there is consistency in the assessment process and any subsequent decisions.

Review

The policy for working in this way will be reviewed during the first year and subsequently annually, or as a result of other external factors, including financial and/or statutory pressures.

Customer feedback

Customers are encouraged to provide feedback on the service they have received from Private Housing. There are opportunities to do this through questionnaires once the case has been either closed or resolved.

Note 1: The Housing Act 2004 sets out the method for assessing property conditions using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). A category one hazard arises where there is a defect in the property that is very likely to cause harm to the occupier or any one visiting the property, and this is legally defined. Guidance is available for using the HHSRS. There are 29 hazards identified and a property is assessed against each of these depending on any defects found.

Note 2: The relevant vulnerable group are those identified in the HHSRS guidance as being most at risk of harm from an identified hazard i.e. people over 65 years are most at risk from excess cold and are therefore the relevant vulnerable group for that hazard.