

# Housing Standards

Guidance for dealing with disrepair, safety and poor conditions in your rented home



Dorset  
Council

**If you are concerned about the condition, repair or safety of your rented home, Dorset Council's Housing Standards Team can help.**

## Reporting problems:

- If you are living in a rented property where the conditions are poor and you feel they could be putting your health at risk, you should notify your landlord in the first instance.
- Tell your landlord about the problems initially in person, by phone or text. However, it's advisable to also write to them by letter or email to confirm the details and keep copies of all correspondence.
- You can also report repairs to your letting agent, if they manage the property on behalf of your landlord.
- Housing associations have a system for reporting repairs. If you are renting your home from a housing association, check their website or your tenant's handbook for further information.

## What you need to do:

- To help you we also have a template letter to report problems to your landlord. This is available on the Dorset Council Website  [www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions](http://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions)
- Remember that you must allow your landlord and their contractor's reasonable access to your home, so they can assess what repairs are needed and to carry out the work.



- You'll need to allow a reasonable period of time for any work to be completed. Some works such as a leaking water pipe may need an urgent response, other repair works may take longer, requiring your landlord to organise contractors, obtain quotes and in the case of a boiler for example, wait for parts to be delivered.

- While repairs are being carried out or even if you are in 'dispute' with your landlord over repairs, you must keep on paying your rent. You don't have the right to withhold your rent, even if your landlord refuses to do any repairs or improvements.



## Reporting problems to us:

- If your landlord won't do the necessary repairs or improvements, you can report it to the Council's Housing Standards team at [www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions)
- When we receive your enquiry we will contact you to discuss your concerns and agree how we can best assist.

## You can tell your landlord that you are going to ask the council to inspect your home.

We frequently investigate complaints and offer advice on issues such as:

- inadequate heating and insulation
- penetrating damp
- condensation including mould (for more information see [www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/damp](http://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/damp))



- drainage problems
- unsafe gas or electric installations
- inadequate fire safety precautions
- inadequate security measures
- increased risks of slips, trips and falls
- poor general property management

### How we can help

- Once you have reported your concerns to us, an officer will normally contact you within 3 working days to discuss the issues you have raised and talk further about your options.
- If we agree with you that an inspection is necessary, it will be arranged with you at this time. We are then required to write to your landlord or if you have one, the letting agent, informing them of the inspection.
- We must give the landlord or letting agent at least 24 hours' notice of this visit and they may also choose to attend.
- The inspection of your home will be undertaken using an assessment called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The inspection will normally take about an hour and a half and access will be needed to all rooms and

the outside of the property. Our inspection is focussed only on the structure, condition and design of the building and how that all has the potential to affect your health and safety.



## Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

If we formally inspect your home, we will use a legally prescribed system called the HHSRS to decide whether works of improvement or repair must be carried out. The HHSRS uses a risk assessment approach to assess housing defects and helps officers to work out whether they potentially constitute a high or low risk to the occupant's health. We will normally focus required works on the higher risk defects that exist in your home.



## What happens next?

- If your complaints are substantiated and there is sufficient evidence to proceed, we will work with your landlord to ensure the works are carried out.
- You will be notified of the outcome of our inspection and you are entitled to a copy of our assessment or report if you so wish.
- Where a landlord does not cooperate or the risk posed by the defects is high, then the Council has a range of formal enforcement powers to require works to be carried out.
- After the inspection we will also advise you if there is any action you can take to help improve the situation

## What other legal requirements should my landlord comply with?

The laws which landlords must now comply with when renting houses have become complicated. In summary:

- The "How to Rent" handbook (available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-rent](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-rent)) is a government approved guide to good practice and the legal requirements of renting and letting homes. Landlords are now obliged to provide an 'up to date' copy of this guide to new tenants and those on renewed tenancies.
- Most properties rented out since 2008 are now required to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). This tells tenants how energy efficient their home is. Unless an exemption is in place, properties rated 'F' or 'G' should not be 'let out'. Find out the EPC of your home at <https://www.epcregister.com/>
- From the 1 October 2015 all rented homes should be provided with a smoke detector on each storey. Also a carbon



monoxide detector must be provided in a room with a solid fuel burning appliance such as an open fire, log burner or solid fuel stove.

- All gas appliances must be checked at least annually by a 'Gas Safe' registered engineer.
- If your landlord takes a rent deposit, they are legally required to protect it in a government approved deposit scheme.
- If you live in a bedsit or shared house (also known as a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO)), specific legal provisions apply in relation to fire safety, amenity provision and overcrowding. Legislation now requires that all HMOs with five or more occupants, who share a bathroom, toilet or kitchen must be licenced with the Council.

See [www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/hmo](http://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/hmo) for more information.

## Tenants of Housing Associations

- We have agreed protocols in place with the larger, local housing associations. In these cases we will contact your housing association in the first instance to discuss their current response to your concerns, what action is necessary and the timescales for any work.
- We will then check with you whether you are satisfied with their response.

## Tenancy Support

- If you are concerned that your landlord is unreasonably harassing you or may give you 'notice to quit' your home as a result of contacting Dorset Council; then we can also give you advice and assistance to help maintain your tenancy and remind your landlord of their legal obligations.

### Where can I get further information?

#### Housing advice, eviction and homelessness

Further information is available from:

- Dorset Council  
 [www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housing](http://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/housing)
- Citizens Advice Bureau  
 <https://citizensadvisedorset.org.uk/>

#### Report housing conditions

Housing Standards Team:

 [www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions](http://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/report-housing-conditions)

#### Contact telephone numbers for local offices

North Dorset, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland areas:  **01305 251010**

Purbeck area:  **01929 556561**

East Dorset area:  **01202 795096**