



Key principles for private rented sector access schemes

April 2013

Crisis and the private rented sector

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Crisis has worked to assist single homeless people to access private renting in partnership with local authorities and community organisations all over the UK since 1997 and has a wealth of experience and practical resources about how to provide sustainable privately rented homes in a range of different housing markets. Crisis runs the Crisis PRS Access Development Programme, which funds local community organisations to help single homeless people find and then keep a private rented home, and we also provide a store of online advice and resources on private renting. Crisis has undertaken a number of important [research studies](#)¹ into the PRS, and are jointly delivering the groundbreaking [Sustain longitudinal study](#)² into the outcomes for individuals in private rented accommodation over three years.

Preventing homelessness through use of the private rented sector

Stable and secure housing is the foundation of successful work with homeless and/or vulnerable people. People need stable homes to enable them to access support services, integrate into their local community and to obtain and sustain work and training. As the stock of social housing dwindles private rented properties are increasingly sought after to meet the housing needs of homeless people. With the cuts to welfare benefits, and with the Localism Act allowing the compulsory ending of the main statutory homelessness duty through the private rented sector (PRS), effective working with landlords and others in a local private rental market is now absolutely essential in obtaining decent and sustainable tenancies for homeless people.

The private rented sector is not a panacea for the housing needs of all homeless and/or vulnerable people but it can provide an effective housing solution for many different clients, where appropriate support and safeguards are in place. By taking account of the needs and aspirations of both landlords and tenants, PRS access schemes, such as deposit guarantee schemes or local lettings schemes, can establish a successful and sustainable working relationship that is beneficial to both parties.

Establishing key principles

There are now hundreds of PRS access schemes in operation throughout the UK and Crisis maintains a [database](#) of all the schemes we know about³. Among schemes there is considerable variation in delivery models and client groups assisted. Some variation is helpful as any model should be tailored to the client group and local housing market. New schemes should avoid duplicating or competing with other local services, each one will be dependent on available resources, however some features of PRS access schemes are fundamental to delivering an effective service and should be common to all schemes.

¹ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/research.html>

² <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/sustain-research-project.html>

³ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/help-with-your-housing.html>

The key principles set out in this document are based upon Crisis' knowledge and experience of the sector and that of an expert group of stakeholders representing central and local government, the homeless sector, private sector landlords and tenants

We would like to thank the following for their input:

Homeless Link

National Landlords Association

Greater London Authority

Oxford City Council

The National Practitioner Support Service

Who is this document for?

These key principles are intended for housing professionals who help households to access and sustain accommodation in the PRS, whether by directly delivering a PRS access schemes or by commissioning and designing such services. These principles are relevant for both the design of new services and the improvement of existing services.

For the purposes of this document a PRS access scheme is defined as:

A scheme which has direct contact with both a prospective tenant who is homeless or insecurely housed and a private sector landlord, and which assists both parties in establishing a tenancy.

This definition is deliberately broad as the principles are intended to apply to a range of different models, including deposit guarantee schemes, landlord incentive schemes, PRS leasing and local letting models. These principles are equally applicable whether the scheme is operated by a voluntary, statutory or private sector body, and should be applied to both those schemes currently in operation and those still in the planning or development stages. While we appreciate that not every service can meet every single one of the requirements set out here, these are the aspects of an excellent service that any PRS access scheme should be striving for.

How to use this document

This document should be used periodically to enable schemes to assess how they are doing, areas they are particularly strong on, and areas they need to work on to meet best practice standards. Subsequent reviews should take place on at least an annual basis.

Follow up support

Where schemes uncover shortcomings in their service Crisis provides support to help address these issues and deliver improvements. On the [private renting website](http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-private-renting.html)⁴ Crisis collates and publishes materials based on the cumulative knowledge and experience of hundreds of organisations working in the private rented sector to prevent and tackle homelessness.

⁴ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-private-renting.html>

The information and tools Crisis publishes are aimed at a wide range of stakeholders including housing professionals, private sector landlords, local authorities, tenants, and potential tenants. You can also contact Crisis directly for advice and guidance by e-mailing our private renting team at private.renting@crisis.org.uk

Crisis has produced specific guides on [working with young people](#)⁵ which includes work on shared PRS housing, [working with ex-offenders](#)⁶ and establishing an income generating [local lettings agency](#)⁷.

In addition to helping PRS access schemes to collect relevant data and highlight the value of their work and the outcomes achieved to funders and commissioners Crisis has published the [Making it Count](#) outcomes monitoring tool⁸.

⁵ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/housing-research.html#young>

⁶ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/housing-research.html#exoffenders>

⁷ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/-local-lettings-agencies-a-good-practice-guide.html>

⁸ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-private-renting-news-.html#makingitcount>

Key principles of a good PRS access scheme

Organisational principles

All private renting access schemes should be part of a strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness in the local area. This strategic approach should take into account the needs of *all* homeless and vulnerable client groups whether or not a statutory homeless duty is owed.

At the time of writing schemes can be funded and commissioned by a range of sources at the including the Crisis PRS Access Development Programme (to March 2014), the Homelessness Transition Fund, local authorities' Homelessness Prevention grant, Supporting People funding, Single Homelessness Funding (distributed sub-regionally by DCLG in 2012), DWP transition funding and other funding to support local authorities tackle welfare reform, and local authority general revenue funding. Schemes can also be funded by charitable trusts, donations, Probation and health services and by charging for certain aspects of their service.

Before establishing or committing to any new services it is important to check and review any existing PRS access services and seek to build on, expand or complement that existing provision rather than automatically establishing something new and potentially contradictory or duplicatory.

Any excellent scheme should have the following in place:

- Clearly published aims and objectives and clear outcome indicators, and systems to measure outcome performance
- A funding plan for current and future sustainment of the service, including the information required to make a robust business case to commissioners
- A business plan and clearly defined model which consists of services for landlords and services for prospective tenants
- Well-publicised feed back mechanisms through which landlords, tenants, service users and stakeholders can influence the development of the service
- Clearly advertised and adhered-to service standards that include maximum timescales for responding to queries from landlords, tenants and others approaching the scheme
- Robust financial monitoring to provide clear costs and comparative savings resulting from the service, in order to demonstrate quantifiable outcomes that justify and retain investment (for example through using the Crisis [Making it count](http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-private-renting-news-.html#makingitcount)⁹ tool).
- Secure electronic monitoring systems that adhere to best practice on data protection for the storage of data on clients, landlords and properties
- Protocols with neighbouring boroughs and other similar local services that establish policies on competition, duplication and relocating clients where necessary
- Formal arrangements with partnership agencies to ensure timescales and service standards are adhered to for outsourced services, and that information is shared
- Information on other relevant services for signposting purposes

⁹ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-private-renting-news-.html#makingitcount>

- A named point of contact within the housing benefit department and the housing options service with whom the scheme worker can raise any relevant issues

Staffing. The scheme should ensure:

- Staff time should be dedicated to the scheme and those involved have clear roles and responsibilities. See Crisis' [model job description](#)¹⁰ as a starting point.
- Members of staff receive regular supervision sessions and are CRB checked where necessary
- All staff should be supported to refresh and develop their skills in a structured way
- Lone working and personal safety procedures are in place and all staff trained and supported accordingly
- Safeguarding procedures should be in place and the staff trained to identify vulnerable people at risk of harm and to take appropriate action.

Services for tenants. The scheme should:

- Clearly publicise the services they offer
- Clearly set out referral routes and eligibility criteria to service providers and individuals, and ensure these criteria are in line with equal opportunities legislation and available in a format that meets the needs of the scheme's client group
- Ensure that clients receive a needs assessment to identify support needs that may affect their ability to maintain a private rented tenancy This should include checking with other agencies (statutory and non-statutory) in contact with the individual to ensure that hidden needs are not overlooked.
- Where support needs are identified, develop an appropriate support plan or refer the client to an appropriate support service.
- See that clients receive written advice and assistance to access a PRS property such as a bond, deposit, incentives, including non-financial incentives to landlords and training on how to find a property and present themselves to a potential landlord and where appropriate practical help and support to source suitable accommodation.
- See that clients receive assistance with setting up a tenancy, including information on their rights and responsibilities as a tenant and support with basic essentials for setting up a home, including advice on sourcing furniture, white goods and accessing alternatives to the Social Fund
- Ensure that clients have a full welfare benefits check (even where employed) to maximise their income and ensure that they access relevant training and employment
- Support clients to use IT facilities, develop IT skills and access personal budgeting support where appropriate when Universal Credit is introduced
- Ensure that clients receive contact details of support they can access through the duration of the tenancy, including contact details for assistance and advice that is available out of office hours
- Ensure that clients know how to find out about local services such as education,

¹⁰ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Toolkit/PRS_Co-ordinator_Job_Description.doc

volunteering and employment opportunities, health services and services that provide advice on benefits and returning to work

- Ensure that pre-tenancy training is available to clients to help pre-empt common issues in a new tenancy
- Invite feedback from clients to inform future development and improvements to service delivery

For tenants subject to the shared accommodation rate, in addition to the above schemes should:

- Inform potential tenants about their entitlement and manage their expectations
- Help clients prepare for shared tenancies, for example through training on managing a shared tenancy. support and with finding potential flatmates

Housing Benefit and rent. The scheme should ensure that:

- Clients have their maximum affordable rent calculated and should not be encouraged to move into a property that is more expensive than this maximum unless the client is shown to be able to afford the necessary top-up. This calculation should take account of current and projected reduced local housing allowance levels and any additional income the tenant receives on an ongoing basis (for example through discretionary housing payments)
- Clients in need of benefits are supported with setting up a claim, a bank account and – where necessary – an application for alternative payment arrangements /direct payment to the landlord
- Clients are advised on where they can access advice and information on returning to work and the benefit implications of this, including *Better off in Work* calculations.

Services for landlords. The scheme should ensure that:

- It clearly publicises the services they offer to landlords
- All landlords are provided with information on their rights and responsibilities as a landlord including the requirement to protect any cash deposits where taken
- Landlords are informed about accreditation schemes, landlord forums, landlord associations and other forms of support available to them
- Landlords are provided with details of a named contact and encouraged to contact them should problems or questions arise with the tenancy
- Landlords are directed to model tenancy agreements and inventories where required
- In the case of bonds, schemes respond to claims within a maximum of 14 days of the tenancy ending and release funds within a further 14 day period
- Where there is unmet demand for shared properties the scheme works with local landlords to encourage them to convert properties or let existing properties to sharers
- Feedback from and consultation with landlords is undertaken to ensure that the service continues to develop and improve its offer

Properties and property management. The scheme should ensure that:

- All properties are inspected before being accepted by the scheme and the findings recorded. The inspection should ensure that all the basic safety are complied with and should take account of any mobility issues for the potential tenant and any modifications that may be required. See the Crisis [property inspection checklist](#)¹¹.
- All properties accepted onto schemes must be free from HHSRS category one hazards and must be well maintained by the landlord or managing agent and appropriate for the individual. Landlords must be informed if their property fails to meet the standard of the scheme and of any remedial action that is required before the property can be accepted onto the scheme. If any property is found to have a Category One hazard or to be in a state of serious disrepair the local authority enforcement team must be informed
- A copy of the gas safety certificate (GSC) is obtained by the scheme before the start of the tenancy and a copy of annually renewed GSC is obtained for as long as the scheme has an active interest in the tenancy
- All tenancies must be formalised in a written tenancy agreement, a copy of which is held by the scheme. The scheme will provide model agreements where necessary. Individuals should be issued assured shorthold tenancies *not* licenses
- The option of longer tenancy agreements (i.e. 12 months or longer) is brought to the attention of tenants and landlords. These should only be entered into when both tenant and landlord approve of such an arrangement and there are appropriate notice clauses that both parties agree to
- An inventory is carried out and the scheme retains a copy of the inventory signed by both landlord and tenant
- Meter readings are carried out (by scheme or by tenant) so tenants aren't charged for any costs owing to previous tenants.
- It only works with landlords who have the right to let their property and who comply with their legal responsibilities, including the protection of cash deposits in one of the tenancy deposit protection schemes and compliance with local licensing requirements
- A copy of the energy performance certificate (EPC) is obtained by the scheme before the start of the tenancy.
- There is a clear complaints procedure for tenants housed through the scheme to raise issues relating to the property or landlord, which includes an appeals process. Where complaints are upheld against the landlord and not remedied, the landlords may be dismissed from the scheme. In such cases no further clients should be placed in properties managed by the landlord in question.
- It encourages landlords to join a local accreditation scheme where one exists.

¹¹ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Toolkit/Crisis_Minimum_Property_Standards.doc

Key principles self-assessment tool

Date completed: --/--/--

A: Organisational principles

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Comment	Actions
<p>1. Has the scheme been involved in the development of, and is it mentioned in, relevant local strategies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the scheme a member of key local multi-agency fora? 			
<p>2. Does the scheme have clearly published aims and objectives?</p>			
<p>3. Does the scheme have a business plan and defined delivery model?</p>			
<p>4. Does the scheme have a funding plan including the information required to make a robust business case to future funders?</p>			
<p>5. Does the scheme have well-publicised feedback mechanisms for both tenants and landlords?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is feedback used to 			

develop and improve the existing service?			
6. Does the scheme set out maximum timescales for responding to queries and providing services?			
7. Does the scheme have robust financial and outcomes monitoring in place? • has it assessed its value through the Making it count tool?			
8. Does the scheme have secure data storage systems and robust outcomes monitoring systems for the storage of data on outcomes?			
9. Does the scheme have protocols with neighbouring boroughs and other similar local services, and formal arrangement for any outsourced services?			
10. Does the scheme have a named point of contact within the housing benefit and housing options departments?			

B: Staffing

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Comment	Actions
10. Is there staff time dedicated exclusively to the scheme?			
11. Do staff receive regular supervisions and skills development?			
12. Are relevant policies in place and adhered to on safeguarding, lone working, personal safety etc?			

C: Services for clients

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Comment	Actions
13. Does the scheme clearly publicise the services they offer, including referral routes and eligibility?			
14. Do all clients receive a detailed needs assessment ?			
15. Where support needs are identified, does the scheme develop an appropriate support plan?			
16. Do clients receive advice and assistance to access a			

PRS property and to set up that tenancy?			
17. Do clients receive contact details for support (including out of hours) and signposting to relevant local services?			
18. Where clients are subject to the shared accommodation rate, do they receive help with preparation for sharing?			
19. Are clients informed about local employment and training services?			
20. Are clients able to access pre-tenancy training ?			

D: Services for landlords

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Comment	Actions
21. Does the scheme clearly publicise the services they offer to landlords?			
22. Are all landlords informed about their rights and responsibilities? Including the need to protect any cash deposits?			
23. Are landlords informed about accreditation schemes, landlord forums,			

landlord associations and other forms of support?			
24. Do landlords know details of the support they can access should problems arise with the tenancy, or with benefits and changes to these specifically?			
25. Are landlords directed to model tenancy agreements and inventories where required?			
26. In the case of bonds, do schemes respond to claims within a maximum of 14 days of the tenancy end, and release funds within a further 14 day period?			
27. Where needed, does the scheme work with landlord to encourage them to let/convert properties for sharers?			
28. Are landlords consulted on any changes to the service?			

E: Properties and property management.

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Comment	Actions
29. Are all properties are inspected before being accepted by the scheme			

and the findings recorded? (including meeting basic regulatory requirement on fire and carbon monoxide safety, per the Crisis inspection checklist).			
30. Are all properties accepted onto schemes free from HHSRS category one hazards and well-maintained? • And are any unsafe properties reported to the council's private sector enforcement team?			
31. Is a copy of each property's up to date gas safety certificate, and the energy performance certificate obtained by the scheme?			
32. Are all tenancies assured shorthold tenancies, with a written tenancy agreement , (copy retained by the scheme)?			
33. Is the option of longer tenancy agreements (i.e. 12 months or longer) brought to the attention of tenants and landlords?			
34. Is an inventory carried out, signed and a copy retained			

by the scheme?			
35. Does the scheme ensure that it only works with landlords who have the right to let their property and who comply with their legal responsibilities, including licensing requirements?			
36. Is there a clear complaints procedure for tenants, which the scheme takes action upon?			