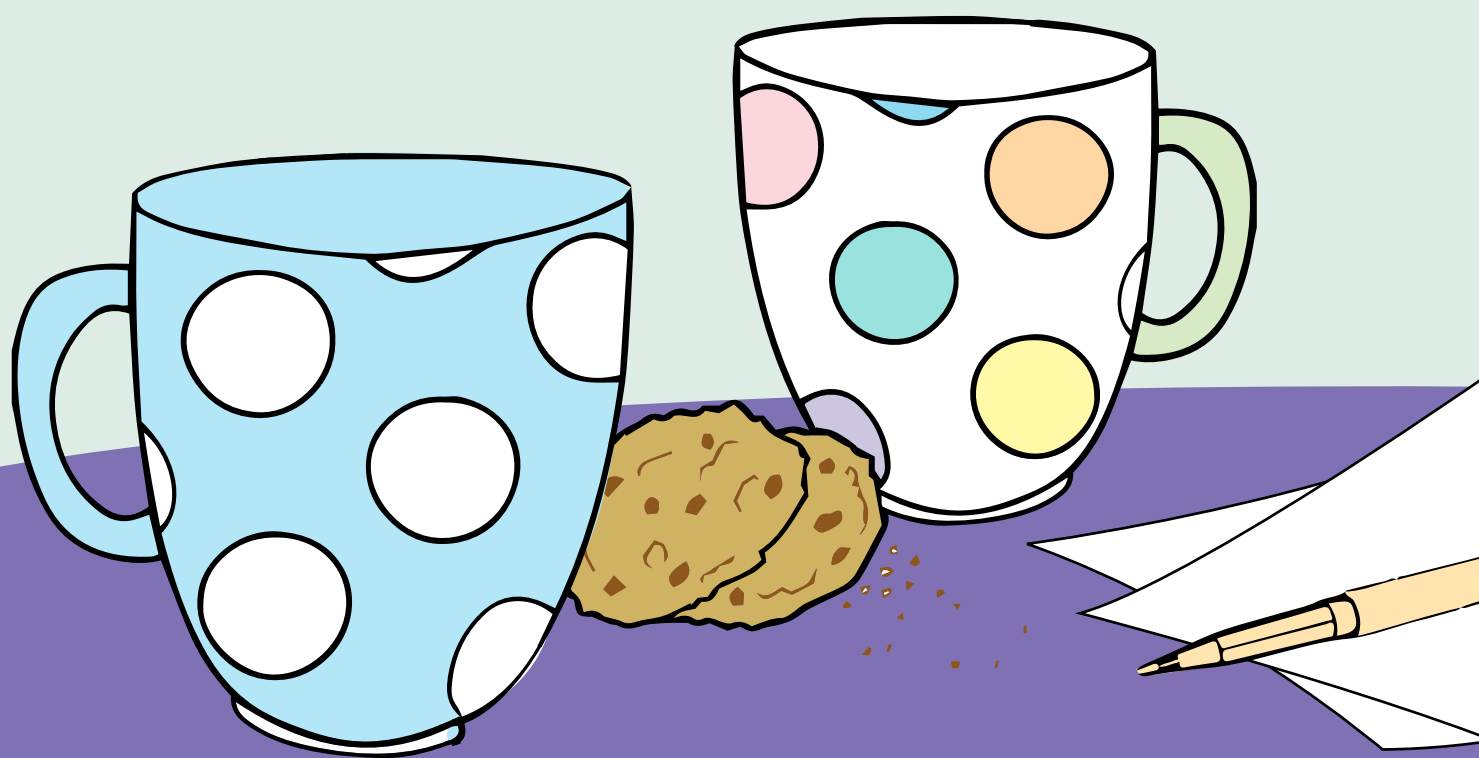


A shared approach

Setting up and supporting tenancies in shared houses

Ella Wesolowicz

March 2015



Crisis

About Crisis

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

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help homeless people to transform their lives.

We are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience.

Crisis Head Office

66 Commercial Street,
London E1 6LT
Tel: 0300 636 1967

Crisis UK (trading as Crisis). Registered Charity Numbers:
E&W1082947, SC040094. Company Number: 4024938

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Aim of the toolkit

This toolkit draws on the learning from the various models of sharing trialled by access schemes across the country. The toolkit provides information on how to best support landlords to let their properties to tenants in a shared house as well as how to best manage shared tenancies.

Who the toolkit is for

This toolkit is intended to be a resource for existing schemes in the voluntary and statutory sectors working with clients under the age of 35, and subject to the shared accommodation rate (SAR) (although it is recognised that for financial and social reasons it is often beneficial for those over 35 to share, especially when in employment).

The set up section of this toolkit is brief as it is anticipated that a private rented sector (PRS) access scheme is already being delivered, and that staff, resources and structures will already be in place. If you are a brand new scheme please refer to our Private Renting toolkit¹.

This toolkit is also intended to be of use to local authorities who wish to improve their offer for single homeless people, as well as other providers of accommodation, such as housing associations.

This toolkit is for schemes across the UK and much of its' content will be relevant nationally. However, we will be producing a Scottish version of this toolkit, which will take into account the differences in legislation and practice between Scotland and English. This will be available in June 2015.

The Crisis Housing team in Scotland have put together a useful report for Local Authorities in Scotland who wish to trial a model of sharing. This report is available online².

¹ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/prs-toolkit.html>

² <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/best-practice-.html>

The Toolkit

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter sets the context for the toolkit, explaining why a focus on shared accommodation in the private rented sector is necessary, and describes the Crisis Sharing Solutions Programme.

Chapter Two: Set Up

This chapter looks at what you need to do before setting up a sharer's' scheme, including understanding the local market and establishing referral routes and relationships with external organisations.

Chapter Three: Understanding landlords and shared tenancies

This chapter looks at the different types of landlords in the sharers market, as well as information on HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation) licensing and different tenancy agreements.

Chapter Four: Models of Shared Accommodation

This chapter explains some of the models of shared accommodation your scheme may wish to follow including lodgings, training flats, 'stranger shares' and non-resident parent households (i.e. parents with visiting children but not full custody).

Chapter Five: Procuring Shared Accommodation

This chapter looks at how to procure shared accommodation, focusing on different landlord offers and ways your scheme can work with landlords to improve their property standards.

Chapter Six: Better supporting people in shared houses

This chapter looks at how your scheme can support people in shared accommodation through pre-tenancy training, matching in shared houses and peer support (peer mentors and lead tenants).

Chapter Seven: Working with voluntary organisations and statutory partners

This chapter looks at the importance of partnership working across statutory and non-statutory organisations, including how to work with other access schemes, the local authority and Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations). This chapter also describes ways in which these relationships can increase the supply of shared housing.

1. Introduction

Why the private rented sector (PRS)?

Access to social housing is becoming increasingly restricted for single people. It is argued that changes to the way Registered Providers are funded has created the need for a more business minded approach to allocations, which necessitates the need for more caution and single people on low incomes are often deemed too financially risky to house. Additionally, there is a paucity of social housing (especially one bedroom properties) in many areas, arguably due to Right to Buy and renewed pressure on smaller social housing due to the Spare Room Subsidy (hereafter referred to as Bedroom Tax).

Because of this, the PRS is fast becoming the main viable housing option for single homeless people and many local authorities are beginning to discharge their statutory duty into the PRS, putting even more pressure on an already highly pressurised market.

However, we know that the PRS market is in need of reform and it is becoming increasingly unaffordable in many areas for those on low incomes or in receipt of housing benefit.

The homelessness sector has focussed on making private rented accommodation a realistic and attractive option and Crisis has been working in the PRS since 1997. Our work has included delivering, funding and supporting schemes who support homeless or vulnerably housed people into PRS accommodation. From these funding programmes, and our relationships with access schemes we have produced a variety

of good practice documents, including our factsheets and our PRS toolkit.

Why sharing?

Currently, those in receipt of housing benefit and under the age of 35 are only be eligible for the shared accommodation rate (SAR), i.e. enough only to cover a room in a shared house. This age threshold was increased in 2012 from 25 to 35 years of age as part of the wider Welfare Reform Act 2012.

There are two main exemptions to the SAR for those over 25 years of age:

- People who have spent three months or more in a hostel where they have received resettlement support.
- Ex-offenders who are managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) at levels 2 or 3.

People falling into either of these categories will be eligible for housing benefit at the self-contained level. Also care leavers up to the age of 22 will able be exempt from the SAR³. (For more information on how to claim exemptions for clients please see Chapter One: Set Up.)

The full extent of the issues created by the changes in age eligibility for the SAR are too vast to go into in any great detail here (please see our interim report⁴ and Sheffield Hallam's Evaluation of The Sharing Solutions Programme for more detail). However, the main challenge facing those trying to access shared accommodation at the SAR is the increased competition for such

3 www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05889.pdf

4 http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Sharing_Solutions_Interim_Report_Oct_2014_-_FINAL.pdf

accommodation due to the expansion of the age range from 25 to 35. In many areas there is a lack of suitable and affordable shared housing. Where properties can be found at affordable levels there may be a compromise, which has to be made to achieve a lower rent, perhaps living in unacceptable conditions, lack of space and at times putting up with landlord misbehaviour.

At Crisis we recognise that sharing a house is not suitable for everyone and those with high support needs or particular vulnerabilities should seek alternate arrangements where possible. For people who have previously been homeless moving into the private rented sector can be a daunting experience, and moving into a home shared with others, and often strangers, could be even more difficult and cause further anxiety.

There are, however, different models of shared houses and sharing arrangements however, which can mitigate these challenges and make the experience more positive, as well as ways in which both statutory and non-statutory organisations can best support this group of people. This toolkit explores some of these.

The Sharing Solutions Programme

Crisis has been funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to run The Sharing Solutions Programme. Through this programme, which has been running since December 2013, Crisis is supporting eight access schemes to pilot new models of sharing, and to deliver and support decent sustainable tenancies in shared PRS accommodation.

The aim of the Sharing Solutions Programme is to understand and promote different models of sharing for those in housing need who are subject to the SAR by:

- Developing new models to encourage and support landlords to rent their properties to SAR claimants.
- Improving the availability of shared accommodation.
- Improving the support for tenants to sustain their tenancies and develop the skills necessary to live independently.

The funded schemes are intentionally in a diverse range of housing markets across the country. The schemes' location was critical in the shortlisting process as different geographical areas face distinct local challenges and the aim of the programme was to trial replicable models of sharing. This has meant that the learning and good practice collated throughout the programme is often regionally specific and some of the models trialed have been proven to work better in certain areas than others.

The following schemes have been funded through the Sharing Solutions Programme: Elmbridge Rentstart (Surrey), Crisis Housing Coach (London), PATH (Plymouth), Shelter (Great Yarmouth), CAB WHABAC (Worcester), NOMAD (Sheffield), Foundation (Ryedale) and Oasis Aquila Housing (Gateshead).

More information on the funded schemes and models trialed can be found in the Interim Report, and Evaluation of the Sharing Solutions Programme.

Geographical coverage of the Sharing Solutions Programme



2. Set Up

KEY ACTION POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Work out the shared accommodation rate (SAR).
- Establish potential open market rents.
- Do your market research – is there a need?
- Build relationships with your referral agencies.
- Manage expectations early and consistently.
- Take time with your assessments.

The local market

In order to facilitate appropriate models of sharing, it is important to understand the housing market and the extent and nature of local housing need, as different sharing models will be more or less relevant in different areas. In many parts of the South of England for example, the major barrier to accessing shared accommodation is the lack of suitable and affordable shared accommodation. Schemes based in these areas therefore may decide to focus on increasing supply and property standards. In many parts of the North of England however, this is not so much of a problem; the main issue instead being a lack of a sharing culture, so the schemes' focus may be on promotion to clients of sharing in the private rented sector (PRS) as a positive housing option, or as a new 'norm'.

Here are some points, which you will need to take into consideration when setting up a sharing scheme, and some suggestions on where to find additional relevant information:

- What is the shared accommodation rate (SAR) and how does it compare with local market rents?

It is very important that your scheme knows the local housing market and the achievable SAR. You can search on the Gov.uk website to find out what the SAR in your area is, using your exact postcode, or local authority area.

Working this out is paramount, as it will give you an indication of the maximum rent your clients will be able to pay. This will also aid landlord procurement as you will be able to use this information to tailor your landlord offer.

Once you know the SAR in your area, it is useful to establish what the average market rents are (i.e. what rents landlords may be able to achieve if they were letting to people not in receipt of housing benefit). This will allow you to work out how financially viable it is for landlords to let out rooms at the SAR. You can find this information by checking on flat share websites such as Gumtree, or Spareroom.co.uk which has a useful rental index on average rents advertised on their website broken down by UK towns.

- What is the local need?

It is important to consider if there is a need for a sharer's market locally. To do this you may wish to think about:

- If there is another local scheme working with sharers in the PRS.

If there is, it is important to speak to them and establish how successful the scheme is, and if there is high or low demand.

- Housing and homelessness statistics

It would be worth checking with the housing benefit department to see details of their caseloads, specifically numbers of those aged 25-35 who previously were eligible for the self-contained rate. This may give your scheme an indication of the number of young people who are now eligible for, or claiming the SAR. It may also be possible to obtain information from the local authority on the number of single people under 35 who are on the Housing Register or those who are under 35 but over 18 and in overcrowded family homes where a move out could alleviate the overcrowding.

- What is the sharing market?

Another important consideration when setting up your sharing scheme is the nature of the sharing market in your local area. Questions to consider include:

- Is it typical for young people to share?
- Are there lots of shared houses in your area? Where are they? Is there a specific area to target when leafleting /advertising?
- Are there schemes already in operation, which support people into shared accommodation?
- Where are available rooms advertised?
- Is there a large student population?

Answering these questions will help you better target appropriate landlords and ensure your offer to them is attractive and appropriate.

It is also useful to hold focus groups with your clients around sharing. Their responses will better enable the scheme to manage expectations, and may provide useful information around what to focus on in pre-tenancy training. For more information about pre-tenancy training, please see Chapter Six.

Referrals to your scheme

Referral agencies

As with any PRS access scheme it is important to establish sound and appropriate referral routes from the outset. Creating good links with referral agencies is vital, and ensuring they are aware of what the scheme does and who it can help will help manage expectations.

If you already run a successful access scheme it is likely you already have referral routes in place, but it is useful to consider agencies who could specifically refer young people and those subject to the SAR into your scheme, for example:

- (Local authority run or commissioned) Housing Options/Homelessness Services
- Young people's advice services/ Youth centres
- Night shelters
- Further Education Colleges
- The probation service
- Supported housing schemes

Once potential referral routes have been established, and meetings with referral agencies have taken place it is useful to establish key steps in the referral process.

This should be agreed jointly by both the scheme and the referral agencies. For information on how external agencies can refer into your scheme please take a look the first section of our PRS toolkit (more specifically the Set Up section 6: Identifying your clients and eligibility)

Direct application

You may choose to offer clients the option to refer themselves to your scheme directly. If this happens it is important to carry out a thorough assessment of the client and it may be necessary to make an appointment with the client to return on a set day at a set time. This is also a good early indicator of the client's engagement with the scheme. It is important to ensure that it is explained that an assessment does not necessarily guarantee placement onto the scheme.

Managing expectations

Managing clients' expectations can be challenging. Frequently young people are still under the impression that they are eligible for self-contained accommodation, or social housing. Whilst for a small minority this may be true, the vast majority of those under 35 and in receipt of housing benefit will only be eligible for a room in a shared house. Establishing this early on will ensure clients are well informed, not disappointed, and will save the scheme time and resources. A leaflet for clients may be useful for clients to understand the realities of living in a shared house. A sample leaflet is available in our templates file.

It is important to ensure that a consistent message is being given to clients from the outset, and this message will need to start at the referral agency. Living in shared accommodation can be daunting for some people, for example due to age, or vulnerability, or for cultural reasons. So in order to manage expectations and prepare clients for shared accommodation, it is important that the referral agency are promoting sharing in the private rented sector so as to 'normalise' the concept as much as possible.

It is important to meet regularly with the referral agency, and it may be appropriate to run training events for staff who will be referring into your scheme. This training could help dispel myths about the PRS, and ensure the same information about the realities of shared PRS accommodation is given consistently by all services working with this client group. It may also be beneficial to invite the referral agencies to visit properties you are accessing, which will again dispel myths about property conditions in the PRS.

Assessment of clients

As clients are moving into shared accommodation, where they will be sharing living spaces with others, it is especially important to ensure a robust assessment is carried out in order to identify any risks. It may be the case that the assessment may need to take place over a number of meetings, especially if the client has little experience of dealing with services, or if there is very little or no other information from a referring agency.

There is no single 'right' way of assessing clients, but taking time in your assessment of potential clients is paramount. Whilst the PRS may not be the most appropriate option for your client, if you have spent time on the assessment you will be better placed to signpost them to more appropriate services. Equally neither are there 'right' answers from a client – scheme workers will use their experience to make informed judgements on someone's ability to hold down a tenancy and share accommodation, and clients should always be offered and encouraged to attend pre-tenancy training.

A face-to-face assessment is best practice, as this helps establish a positive and trusting relationship between client and scheme worker. There may be some instances where a telephone interview may be the only option – however the scheme should try and make every effort to meet the client face to face. In the event that a meeting is not possible,

it is important to ensure the assessment is followed up with a written document detailing what was covered in the conversation.

Some schemes also require clients to provide references – these could be from a previous landlord, support agency or community worker. References can be a useful way of understanding clients' needs and ability to sustain and cope with a shared tenancy. However, it is also important to be flexible: as the majority of clients accessing shared accommodation will be young, the amount of people they can call upon for references may be minimal. You could instead ask for a reference from their teacher or GP for example if they have never rented privately or engaged with other support agencies.

Vulnerable clients may find assessments difficult, as often traumatic or uncomfortable past experiences are discussed. In order to minimise potential distress to clients it is important to try and keep the number of assessments as low as possible to make sure the client doesn't have to repeat him or herself. Good relationships with referral agencies will be paramount in achieving this, as a good referral should already list all the relevant (and often sensitive) information a scheme needs. It may be possible to share paperwork with referrers and combine any referral form with a subsequent assessment form to minimise the need for repetition.. It is also important to explain to clients the reasons why you are asking such questions.

Things to consider during the assessment include:

Client's previous housing history

- Has the client previously:

... been evicted? If so, what for?

...lived in a shared house? What was his/her experience? What were the major challenges they faced?

...lived in a hostel where they have received resettlement support? (They may be eligible for an exemption to the SAR if this is the case). It is the responsibility of the scheme or the client to prove their exemption when putting in a claim for housing benefit. This can be done by providing the housing benefit department with a letter from the hostel confirming dates of stay (see our SAR hostel exemption letter template) and resettlement support received, or a letter from the client's probation worker confirming their MAPPA status.

Client's support needs

- Does the client have/ previously had:

...a learning disability?

...a substance misuse issue?

...alcohol misuse issues?

- Is the client an ex-offender? Are they managed by MAPPA (If so they may be exempt from the SAR – a letter from their probation officer should suffice as a way to prove this to the housing benefit department)

Client's employment circumstances

- Is the client currently working or do they expect to take up work soon? This may have an effect on where you look for a room in a shared house as affordability will be an important consideration
- Does the client have support networks in certain areas on which they rely?

These suggestions will have an impact on the clients' suitability to live in a shared house with others. Some schemes also find that the assessment process is a valuable way of establishing the living habits of a potential client, and with what kind of flatmates they may live with more harmoniously.

Please see our template assessment form.

Promoting a culture of sharing

Whilst many expect to share a rented house with others at some point in their lives, for others it is an unfamiliar experience, and not something that previously would have been necessary. This is particularly true in areas where there has historically been a lot of available social housing.

In these areas it may be necessary to promote a culture of sharing to potential tenants, landlords and referral agencies.

Ways to do this include:

- Meeting regularly with referral agencies to discuss sharing as a housing option.
- Providing training at hostels or supported accommodation (Watch this space for our hostel training toolkit).
- Using peer mentors to promote the positives of sharing (see our section on peer support in chapter five).

3. Understanding landlords and shared tenancies

KEY ACTION POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Identify your landlords – what matters to them will be different dependent on their priorities.
- Ensure you know about Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing in your local area.
- Ensure you know about tenancy agreements and licenses.

This chapter will consider who your landlords are, what is important to them, and what information it is essential to know in order to aid landlord procurement and build solid working relationships with landlords.

Identifying your landlords – what is important to them?

Before you can decide on the services you will offer, it is important to be identify your landlords and work out what matters to them, as well as potential concerns they may have about letting to sharers. You need to understand the types of landlords you may be dealing with – invariably they will have different priorities and needs. Understanding individual priorities means you can tailor your services to make your private rented sector (PRS) sharing scheme as attractive as possible.

Private sector landlords can broadly be grouped into the following categories:

Buy-to-let landlords

They may have a small portfolio of similar properties, are likely to use letting agents and are looking for long- term tenants and limited void (empty) periods. Their buy-to-let mortgage agreement may stipulate that they cannot let to people who are claiming

housing benefit. They may be interested to work with schemes who are able to lease properties from them and take on the management responsibility for the property.

Accidental landlords

They probably only have one property that was gained in an unplanned manner (e.g. inherited). Often accidental landlords will not be aware of their rights and responsibilities and will benefit from assistance with this. Your scheme can help with this.

They may worry about property damage, prefer low-risk tenants and may require more intensive support. It may be difficult to persuade accidental landlords to let their property to sharers, especially if the property would need extensive modifications to pass the requirements needed for HMO licensing (see below).

Many accidental landlords prefer to let their property through an agency (who may charge hefty fees) to avoid the hassle of managing the rental.

Large scale investor landlords

They will have a large mix of properties and tenants to spread risk. They are likely to have large properties, which they may have converted to self-contained units. They

usually run a professional business and have good knowledge of their responsibilities. They are looking for a steady supply of tenants, and updates in how they can save or invest.

Resident landlords

They let out one or more rooms in their home. They will still live in the property, and will be more selective and choose low-risk tenants. They are likely to have limited knowledge of their responsibilities and may need intensive support.

Student market landlords

They may be set up for a particular type of tenant, but increasingly working with access schemes. They may be unwilling to accept Council Tax liabilities if letting to non-students. They will however be looking to fill voids and have longer-term tenancies which PRS schemes can support them with. They may already meet particular legal requirements, for example around HMOs.

HMO licensing

It is important to ensure your scheme is familiar with HMO licensing, and is able to explain this easily to any potential landlords.

There are two main types of HMO licensing: mandatory and additional licensing.

Mandatory licensing

Following the 2004 Housing Act, all HMOs which fall into the following category must be licenced:

- If the HMO is three or more storeys

And

- is occupied by five or more people in two or more households who share toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities

A “household” refers to people living together (for example, a couple or 2 or more family members). For example, a three

storey terraced house with five bedrooms let out separately would need to be licenced as more than one household occupy the property.

Landlords applying for mandatory licensing will need to contact their local council to find out what the process is, and any costs involved. These processes can sometimes be complicated, so it is a good idea for schemes to have information ready for landlords on this.

Get in touch with your local authority to find out what HMO licensing rules they have – processes and costs vary dependent on the local authority. Knowing this will increase landlord faith in the scheme and you may be able to assist them to bring their properties up to HMO licensing standards.

Additional Licensing

Local authorities have discretionary powers to bring in additional licensing of other types of HMOs. These cover HMOs, which are not subject to mandatory licensing, but which are being insufficiently managed and causing problems for the public or tenants. The council must consult local landlords for a minimum of 10 weeks before introducing additional licensing and they have to publicise it when it comes into force.

Selective licensing

Councils also have the power to introduce additional ‘selective’ licensing of all rented properties (not necessarily only HMOs). This is usually to curb issues such as anti-social behaviour in certain areas. If they want to do this, they must consult with all relevant stakeholders, including landlords, before they proceed. Again, it is important to check all local licensing rules and ensure you can provide landlords with accurate and up to date information on this.

Good Practice Example:

CAYSH in Croydon, London

When working with young people accessing shared accommodation CAYSH had an arrangement with the local authority which helped with HMO procurement.

Croydon Council offered a 50% discount on licensing per room to any landlords who applied for an HMO license and then took CAYSH clients as their tenants, saving landlords approximately £120 per room.

Tenancy agreements, Licences and Lodgings agreements

Tenancy agreements in shared houses broadly fall into the following two categories:

- **Individual Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs)** – Rooms are let to individuals on separate ASTs between the single tenant and landlord. Tenants have exclusive possession of one room (bedroom) but share communal areas with other tenants. If a tenant on an individual AST decides to leave the property, s/he has to give notice in the appropriate way to the landlord, but this does not affect any of the other tenants in the property. The landlord is responsible for finding another tenant and is also responsible for paying the Council Tax.
- **Joint Tenancies** – Tenants do not have exclusive possession to any particular room, but share all rooms in the house. The tenancy agreement will include all the tenants' names. As all tenants on the tenancy agreement are jointly and severally liable for the rent, if one tenant leaves the others are still responsible for the full amount of rent and it is up to the remaining tenants (generally) to find a replacement. All the tenants on the tenancy agreement will be responsible for Council Tax (unless they are students in full time education)

Generally speaking landlords prefer to let a shared house on a joint tenancy as the tenants are then liable for Council Tax. Joint tenancies are also less risky for landlords as all tenants are liable for rent, so arrears can be chased through all or one of the tenants on the agreement.

In a shared house where all tenants have individual agreements the landlord will be responsible for the Council Tax. All bills (including utilities) will remain in the landlord's name. Charges for this are normally passed to the tenants either as included in the rent, or through an additional service charge. This can be paid weekly or monthly.

Individual tenancies allow the tenants more flexibility and freedom, and should be used wherever possible, and always when clients move into a shared house with people they do not know.

Below are some key points which may help you 'sell' individual tenancies to landlords.

- The Council Tax can still be charged indirectly to the tenants through a service charge payable to the landlord.
- Dealing with deposits is simpler as each tenant has an individual deposit logged under his/her name. Under joint tenancies all tenants have a stake in the deposit. It can be difficult to ascertain liability if

there is damage to the property, and if one tenant moves out it can be cumbersome to arrange a transfer of deposits.

- Landlords (or schemes) have more freedom to enter and inspect communal areas with individual tenancies.
- The landlord does not need to worry so much about who is in the property and the dynamics of the household as if one tenant leaves it is easier to find another.

Many landlords will have their own tenancy agreements. If they don't, it is possible to assist your landlords in obtaining a template tenancy agreement online, or use our sample tenancy agreement.

The scheme should ensure that all tenancies (whether individual or joint) have:

- A signed agreement.
- An inventory signed by both landlord and tenant (with photos if possible). See our template inventory for a room in a shared house/lodgings.
- Details of where the deposit is held and protected (if there is one), as well as the prescribed information.

Schemes should also have a copy of:

- The clients' housing benefit (HB) claims form.
- Gas safety certificate.

Licence Agreements

Licence agreements give tenants very few rights, and schemes should generally aim to ensure tenants are given ASTs. However, there are situations in which a client cannot have an AST tenancy. Although the law around licences and tenancies is not conclusive, and can be considered a grey area of housing law, a client is most likely to

have a licence if he or she is what housing law calls an 'excluded occupiers'. A client may be an excluded occupier in one of the following situations:

- When the client shares some accommodation (for example, kitchen, bathroom, WC, lounge) with his or her private sector landlord.
- When the client is in hostel accommodation provided by a public sector landlord - a Housing Association, charity or local authority. A 'hostel' is defined as accommodation where the occupiers do not have any self-contained accommodation, and where meals, or facilities for food preparation, are provided.

Key differences between licences and tenancy agreements

- The tenant lives with his/her landlord and shares living space

If a tenant lives with his or her landlord and shares some accommodation with him or her, they will be a lodger and not a tenant. Lodgers cannot be issued with either an individual or joint AST and will be on licences, or lodgings agreements (see our lodgings agreement template). For more information on lodgings and lodgings agreements please see Chapter 4: Models of Shared Accommodation.

- No security of tenure

Unlike an AST where the landlord cannot evict the tenant without serving the correct notice, and then obtaining a court order, under lodgings or licence agreements occupiers have no security of tenure. Landlords can ask them to leave at any point and only have to give 'reasonable notice'. This notice period is usually linked to how often rent is paid (weekly or monthly), but in cases where there is a threat of violence from the occupier the landlord can ask for almost

immediate vacation of the property.

- No 'exclusive possession'

An excluded occupier will not usually have exclusive possession of their room (with an individual AST they do). The landlords can enter the bedroom without prior notice. The landlord, however, may agree to allow an occupier to have a lock on their bedroom door and not to enter the room without permission. Such an occupier will still be an excluded occupier.

A small number of clients with private sector landlords may instead have what is known as a 'contractual licence'. This might happen where the landlord reserves the right to access the client's room - for example, to

carry out cleaning or to do laundry. It may also happen where two unrelated people share a room. However, this situation is unlikely to arise very often. Such a licensee might be entitled to a court order before he or she can be evicted. For more information on the differences between licences and tenancies please see our factsheet⁵.

The following table may be of use to your clients:

Type of Tenure	Joint tenancy	Individual tenancy	Licence
Key features	One tenancy agreement covering all tenants	Each tenant has their own separate agreement with the landlord	Applies to people living with resident landlord
Pros for tenants	Landlords prefer them so may be more likely to let on this basis Allows tenants to choose new flat mates	Each tenant is only responsible for their share of costs	Can leave very quickly if required (subject to what lodgers agreement says)
Cons for tenants	If one tenant leaves the remainder have to cover costs during the vacancy period An entirely new agreement is needed to add the new tenant. Tenants will be liable for council tax.	Landlord loses income when a tenant leaves, so may fill vacancies without consulting existing tenants tenant's name	Landlord can ask tenant to leave with very little notice

⁵ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Factsheets/11-13_AST_Factsheet.pdf

4. Models of Shared Accommodation

KEY ACTION POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Work out which model of sharing works best in your local area.
- Ensure you have the right staff resources in place.
- Consider your client group and what works for them.

Once you have completed your market research, and have a better understanding of the local sharers market it is time to think about what model of shared housing may work best for your clients and be most successful in your area.

Types of Shared Houses

Shared houses come in all different shapes and sizes. When accessing shared accommodation for people in receipt of housing benefit the local market will generally dictate the sizes of the properties offered. For example, in areas where there is a large disparity between the market rents and the shared accommodation rate (SAR), the shared accommodation available is likely to be large Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). This is because landlords can charge the room rate numerous times which generates a bigger profit. In areas where the

SAR is high compared to market rents it may be possible to access smaller properties, i.e. two bedroom houses. This set up is often more manageable for schemes, easier for sharers, and creates fewer management issues.

Living spaces in shared rooms

It is useful to consider how the space in a shared house is used, and this may have to be tailored to your client groups. For example, landlords are likely to want living/dining rooms to be let out as bedrooms to maximise on rental income, but it may be beneficial for tenants to keep the room as a communal space as this may help with socialising. However, in some HMOs, for example, those with a young tenant group, or a high percentage of clients with drug/alcohol dependency or with previous substance misuse issues, having a communal and

Individual tenancies in shared accommodation: 'Stranger Sharers'

This model may work best for **clients** who:

- Are happy to share with people they do not know
- Have low support needs and need minimal support in their tenancies
- Do not have anyone else to share with

This model may be most suitable in an **area** where locally:

- There is already a culture of sharing

social space maybe detrimental. Access to communal spaces may encourage parties/ gatherings which could put the landlord's relationship with the neighbours at risk, as well as encouraging situations in which tenants are tempted back into their negative habits or peer groups.

The most common model of shared accommodation is a 'stranger share'. This is where schemes are supporting clients on six month ASTs in shared houses living with other sharers who are often strangers to both the scheme and the tenant.

This model includes:

- Pre-tenancy training for clients.
- Attending property viewings with the client.
- Support to sign up to the tenancy.
- Support for landlords at sign up and throughout the tenancy.
- Ongoing tenancy sustainment support for the client.
- Matching of potential flatmates (where possible).

Rent is likely to be paid monthly by housing benefit, and the scheme may assist with rent in advance, or a deposit.

This model, although most common, can be difficult to manage as it is likely that there will be a mix of personalities in the house share, and often the scheme will only be offered a single room by a landlord so there is little, or no, control over who else is in the property and very little work that can be done around matching.

Lodgings

This model may work best for **clients** who:

- Have low support needs
- Are working
- Younger clients who would benefit from a more stable environment

This model may be most suitable in an **area** where locally:

- There is a large amount of social housing
- Social housing is centrally located
- There are support services which hosts can be referred to if necessary
- The local authority is not currently using discretionary housing payments (DHPs) to cover rent shortfalls caused by the bedroom tax

What are lodgings?

A lodgings arrangement is when a tenant lives with his/her landlord (sometimes called a 'host'). This can be in a family house environment, or where the resident landlord lives in the property in his/her own room, but lets out the other bedrooms to individuals.

Whilst lodging is the least secure of shared housing models it can offer some very distinct positives, including:

- A short-term option.
- A better option for working clients.
- A more settled 'family' type accommodation choice.

If you chose to trial a lodgings arrangement it is important to ensure you are clear with clients from the outset about the realities of living with their landlord. Lodgings will not be suitable for everyone and will be a more appropriate sharing arrangement for certain client groups.

Schemes should ensure that the liability of any lodgings arrangements remains between

the host and the lodger. Viewings should be attended by scheme workers, and time should be given to allow hosts the potential to ask any questions of the lodgers. Hosts should have the last word as to who they take on as a lodger. Equally, lodgers should be free to turn down any properties/ hosts if they are not happy.

Potential lodgers referred to the scheme should have already been through the scheme's assessment process and deemed ready to live independently. Where clients have additional support needs that require further support, or need intensive assistance to hold down a tenancy they should not be referred to a lodgings scheme, and a 'training flat' may be a more suitable option (see our section on 'training flats')

Some schemes access rooms in social housing affected by the bedroom tax. This is a good option if your scheme is in an area that has a high percentage of social housing tenants that are subject to the bedroom tax. For more information on accessing rooms in social housing affected by the bedroom tax please see Chapter Seven, our section on working with registered social landlords or housing associations.

Example of a financial breakdown for hosts (with one spare bedroom):

Host's current circumstances (without lodger):

All the following figures are weekly.

Housing benefit: £183.30 p/w

- £71.70: Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)
- £14: Bedroom Tax
- £20: Bills:
- £17: Council Tax (with a 25% single person's discount)

Total weekly income: £20.70

With lodger:

All the following figures are weekly.

Housing benefit: £183.30 p/w

- £71.70: Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)
- £20.00 Rent from lodger
- £10: Bills
- £11.50: Council Tax (with no single person's discount but shared between lodger and host)

Total weekly income: £65.20

Host recruitment

The host recruitment process should be a formal process. Not everyone will be suitable to become a host and the scheme should ensure there is a paper application (see our host application template), a thorough assessment at the host's home, and an interview. Hosts should also be supported and receive relevant information on becoming a host (please see our example host information pack). Schemes can also host 'matching' events to introduce potential hosts and lodgers.

Finances

Hosts can decide how much to charge a lodger, but schemes should work with hosts to set rent levels, which are affordable for their clients.

If the host is claiming **housing benefit**, by taking in a lodger they will no longer be deemed as 'under occupying' so the bedroom tax will no longer apply to them. If they are under occupying by more than one room and take in one lodger, their bedroom tax will be decreased. Hosts can keep up to £20 of the weekly rent before this affects their own benefits. Anything above this will be counted as income and will affect their benefits pound for pound.

If the host is claiming **Universal Credit** the bedroom tax will still apply if they take in a lodger, even though in theory they are no longer 'under occupying' (this, again is dependent on how many bedrooms they are deemed as under occupying by). However, under Universal Credit regulations they will be able to keep all of the rent from the lodger, so they should end up better off than those on housing benefit.

If the host is a resident landlord they may be eligible for the government's Rent-A-Room Scheme⁶ which allows hosts to earn up to £4,250 per year tax-free through rent.

Lodgings agreements

There are different types of agreements for different lodgings arrangements. In lodgings the lodger will be living with the landlord, so an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) cannot be issued. This applies to owner-occupied properties, as well as social rented properties that are sub-let (with permission of the landlord).

It is recommended that a written lodgings agreement is signed by both host and lodger. This should lay down the rules of the sharing arrangement, as well as details of any rent and notice periods.

Please see our example lodgings agreement.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/rent-room-in-your-home/the-rent-a-room-scheme>

Training Flats

This model may work best for **clients** who:

- Are young.
- Have higher support needs.
- Would benefit from more intensive support and tenancy training.
- Have never lived independently.
- Do not have friends they wish to share with.

This model may be most suitable in an **area** where locally:

- There is little supported accommodation.
- There is little provision for young people locally.
- There is no culture of sharing (and where clients who have completed a period in a training flat would be an additional incentive to landlords).

If your scheme works with young clients, or those with little or no experience of living independently, you may want to trial a 'training flat' model.

A training flat is accommodation which is designed to be short-term (normally for a maximum of six months) and provide clients with the necessary skills to move on to more long-term private rented tenancies. Training flats act as a 'stepping stone' for those who have little experience of living independently, or those with a negative housing history, which would make it difficult for them to manage a tenancy independently without some prior support, and training.

Tenants in these properties should complete more extensive and intensive pre-tenancy training, and gain a better understanding of how to live with others, organise cleaning rotas, manage their own finances and bills and build relationships with their flatmates and their landlords. Once clients have completed a period of time in their training flat it is expected that they will be better equipped to hold down a private rented tenancy.

Tenants who have completed a period in a training flat may also be a more attractive option for landlords who would like some reassurance that your client is tenancy ready. You may wish to provide your clients with some form of proof that they have completed tenancy training, for example a 'Tenancy Ready' certificate upon completion of the training. Alternatively, as an additional incentive for tenants you may wish to provide those who have engaged and completed a period in a training flat with rent in advance and a deposit bond for their move on into more long-term independent accommodation.

Schemes wishing to trial a model of training flats must ensure that they provide support for clients to move on from the training flat. This could be at the end of the allotted time period (usually six months) or at an earlier date if the client has completed their training and feels ready to move on.

Staffing

Training flats are undoubtedly more resource intensive than other models of sharing. This is because clients in these flats need additional support and guidance in their tenancies. If

your scheme decides to facilitate training flat tenancies ideally there are enough resources to allow one staff member to work exclusively on facilitating and managing the training flat(s). This is of course dependent on how many tenants are in training flats, and on what scale your scheme trials this model. However, it is important that staff have adequate time to dedicate to managing the training flat(s).

It may be possible for your scheme to claim the intensive housing management subsidy of housing benefit to cover the cost of having a dedicated staff member, but it is worth remembering that this is an expensive form of support. Should the client move into work it will not be possible to claim this enhanced level of housing benefit, and the client should never be expected to pay the rate previously received. For this reason we would not recommend this for ongoing sharing arrangements as the rent levels will be prohibitive to work, however it can work as a short term 'training' option before moving onto more settled, cheaper accommodation.

Staff duties may include:

- Regular house meetings.
- Property inspections.
- Meaningful in situ pre-tenancy training/ budgeting training.
- Providing advice and support around education and employment.
- Assistance to move on from the training flats when suitable.

Property type

This model works best when properties are leased by a scheme. In this way the scheme is better placed to make decisions about individual clients' progress, and when they are ready to move on. Private landlords often want long-term tenancies, so procuring shared accommodation in which tenancies are for a maximum of six months may be problematic. It may be possible however to procure shared housing for these training flats through a private landlord. Alternatively it may be useful to approach local housing associations or registered social providers to see if it is possible to source some of their hard to let accommodation for use for sharers. For more information please see our section on working with housing associations.

Tenancies

It may be that your scheme decides to provide licences for tenants in training flats. These may offer more flexibility in terms of moving clients on. However, training flat tenancies can be facilitated on normal ASTs. Although these carry an initial fixed term of six months, it is possible to relinquish these at an earlier date (with the agreement of landlord and tenant) and move the client on to more long-term shared housing.

Case Study: Tenants in training flats

NOMAD

Training flats can provide clients with a positive stepping stone to move on to more independent accommodation, as the following case studies demonstrate:

Sam's story

I was living in interim accommodation after I had been thrown out of my supported accommodation. I wasn't sleeping because I was so scared. I used to walk the streets at night so I didn't have to be in the temporary accommodation at night. If I didn't do this I got so drunk that I could sleep. My friend told me about Nomad and she rang and made me an appointment and before I knew it I had somewhere to live. Basically I have gone from being told that my support needs were too high and that I needed 24 hour support to receiving banging support in Nomad's house. I feel safe now and can sleep at night.

Anna's story

I was living with my friend who treated me really badly. She started messing with my head to the point where I thought I was going crazy and needed to be in a mental hospital. My "friend" then kicked me out. As a temporary measure I went back home to my mum. I couldn't cope with what had happened to me and began drinking heavily to make myself normal. My mum has noticed that since moving with Nomad I am more like myself. My anxiety has lessened and I am due to start a course soon so I will be able to do security work.

Parents with non-resident but visiting children

This model may work best for clients who:

- Have visiting but non-resident children.
- Are working.
- Do not have extensive or chaotic housing histories.
- Are willing to complete a police check prior to move in.
- Will engage well with support staff.

This model may be most suitable in an **area** where locally:

- There are a high number of single parents with non-resident children seeking accommodation.
- There are a number of organisations working with that client group.
- There is a shortage of suitable social housing.

Your scheme may have a number of clients who have visiting but non-resident children. For this client group the traditional set up of a shared house, where clients often share with strangers, is not safe or practical for those who want to bring visiting children into the accommodation.

A household where all the tenants are single parents with non-resident children will be a better solution for this client group, although this is only possible where your scheme can procure a whole empty property. This model works better in areas where the difference between the SAR and real rents isn't too extensive, and where it is financially viable for landlords to have a spare room for which they aren't receiving any rent.

Ideally, these properties have one room, which can be used for visiting children, and for a father / mother to sleep in also when their children are staying over.

Client assessment and safeguarding practices

Although the matching process is voluntary and the liability lies with the tenants, as facilitators of tenancies it is important that schemes are thorough in their assessment processes.

Assessments should also manage clients' expectations. Although the liability for the safety of their children lies with the tenant, police checks should be carried out on all potential tenants of such a shared household.

Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS) (previously CRBs) can only be carried out on employees or volunteers, but if your scheme has a good relationship with the local police force, it may be possible to ask them to complete a police check on the client.

If your scheme finds it is not possible to secure a check through your local police station, it is possible to do a national police check by completing a 'Subject Access' check through ACRO⁷ which costs £10 and can take up to 40 days to arrive.

⁷ <http://www.acro.police.uk/>

Sometimes, clients may not disclose all relevant information. For this reason, and in order to avoid disappointment, it is important to discuss the importance of these compulsory checks with your clients.

Your scheme should also discuss this model with local young parents' organisations or with local authority partners in order to increase potential referrals and manage clients' expectations as to what is expected of them. You may want to consider visiting staff at such projects to ensure they are familiar with how the scheme works, including its limitations.

Once a potential client has been identified, it is important to try and involve the other parent as much as possible in the arrangement. For example, if the relationship between the two parents is good it should be possible to arrange viewings with both, to ensure that the arrangement is suitable for both parties. Ideally, both will also meet any tenants who are currently in the property. This will create a more secure and safe environment for both clients and their children.

If this is not possible, it may be appropriate to contact the second parent directly, and it is good practice to confirm their agreement in the arrangement. You may find the template parental agreement letter useful.

Resources

As with any shared house, tenants should be supported in their tenancies (see Chapter five for more information). This model may require additional tenancy sustainment support, and alongside house meetings, the support worker should provide more personalised support for clients on a one-to-one basis when needed. There should be care taken to ensure all clients' expectations are managed, and it is clear what is expected from them from the outset. It may, for example, be necessary for the scheme to draw up a list of expectations around rotas

and cleaning of the children's bedroom which could include the following:

- Washing the bed sheets and putting on clean bedding
- Washing the towels and putting out clean ones
- Vacuum throughout
- Polishing throughout including wiping the skirting boards
- Cleaning the shower room, brushing and mopping the floor
- Tidying the toys away
- Return all belongings for children's use to the children's room

In addition, it may be useful to provide mediation between tenants and partners/ex-partners. It may be the case that as some residents have recently separated from their partners, in which case it can be difficult for them to settle into a different environment away from their family. The scheme support workers can assist them with this and link them in with other organisations. It is important to build good relationships with organisations or floating support services that can help with this.

Staff Experience:**Shared House with Visiting Children**

Due to changes two years ago in the Local Housing Allowance shared accommodation rate, we had an increase in the amount of people trying to access this type of accommodation, including fathers who were experiencing difficulties having their non-resident children to visit or stay regularly overnight. We recognised this as an inequality issue and were able to acquire a property through a local charity specifically with this group in mind. Individuals were selected having expressed an interest and following a thorough risk assessment process.

Three residents were offered a place and with support, have been successfully living at the accommodation since March 2014. Individuals have reported that living at the accommodation has eased the pressures on their relationship with their partner/ex-partner and have stated that this regular contact with their children has helped them and the children with the separation as a family.

This project has experienced the usual challenges in terms of sharing accommodation with strangers with different values and beliefs but with the regular support in place and a settling in period these challenges have been overcome and the home remains very settled. At times it has been upsetting listening to individuals concerns and hopes that there will be reconciliation as a family and maybe having to start to come to terms with the fact this may not happen. But there has also been reward in terms of the time they get to spend with their children in a safe environment and relief at how happy their children seem when they visit and how well they have adapted to the situation.

Case Study: Single father in a shared house.**CAB WHABAC, Worcester**

DC self-referred to CAB WHABAC in Worcester for support with housing following separation from his wife. He was unemployed, homeless and had no savings to secure alternative accommodation. DC was under 35 years and in receipt of JSA, so he was only eligible for the shared accommodation rate under Local Housing Allowance, which concerned him because he has two young children with whom he has regular contact and he realised that this would be very difficult whilst living in shared housing. DC was referred by his support worker to a new shared housing project, which was specifically set up for fathers to have regular access to their children whilst living in shared accommodation.

Following a thorough assessment, including an Enhanced Police Check, he was offered a viewing at the property along with his wife and children. The house is set up so there are four rooms, one for each of the tenants, and a separate dedicated room with bunk beds, so that tenants can have their children to stay by arrangement. This viewing went well and a move-in date was agreed. He was supported to claim for Housing Benefit with payments direct to landlord at the accommodation.

Since living at the accommodation DC has entered full time employment. He regularly has his children to stay overnight at the bungalow accessing the separate children's room. He regularly attends the weekly house meetings and participates fully. DC keeps his rent account up to date and has taken part in group activities including pre-tenancy training on budgeting. DC had never lived in shared accommodation before always having lived with family, so emotionally he found this difficult. He indicated that he hoped that he and his wife would be reconciled but he found that having his children to stay each week during this period has helped him to cope better with the situation. His children have settled in well to a routine of staying at the accommodation and they view the children's room as if it was their own room.

5. Procuring Shared Accommodation

KEY ACTION POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Establish your landlord offer.
- Try your hand at negotiation (and be ready to highlight the positives of working with the scheme).
- Get a list of local HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation).
- Consider accessing void student accommodation.
- Work with landlords to improve property conditions.

Procuring shared accommodation at the shared accommodation rate (SAR) is difficult, regardless of the local market. This chapter will look at how to make this easier.

When approaching property procurement, your scheme should take into consideration

whether there is already a culture of sharing in your housing market, or if your scheme will have to challenge preconceptions of sharing and promote it as a housing option. Knowing this will ensure that the resources put into landlord and property procurement are used efficiently.

Putting together a table, such as the one below, may be useful in this.

Borough	Weekly SAR rate	1 tenant	2 tenants	3 tenants
Southwark - Monthly	£88.00	£381.33	£762.67	£1,144.00
Year	£4,576.00	£4,576.00	£9,152.00	£13,728.00
Hackney - Monthly	£94.38	£408.98	£817.96	£1,226.94
Year	£4,907.76	£4,907.76	£9,815.52	£14,723.28
Newham - Monthly	£70.79	£306.76	£613.51	£920.27
Year	£3,681.08	£3,681.08	£7,362.16	£11,043.24

Example service charge calculation:

Service Charge Weekly	£15.00	£15.00	£30.00	£45.00
Service Charge Monthly	£65.00	£65.00	£130.00	£195.00
Service Charge Yearly	£780.00	£780.00	£1,560.00	£2,340.00

Where sharing is ‘the norm’

In areas where sharing is common, and many young professionals, students and young adults share accommodation, your scheme can focus on accessing safe and secure shared housing which is available at the SAR.

You should follow the usual channels of property and landlord procurement. These are set out in our Private Rented Sector (PRS) Toolkit⁸, and include:

- Landlord forums.
- Local authority forums.
- Word of mouth.
- Public advertising.
- Landlord shows.
- Through lettings agencies.
- Through local universities’ student accommodation office.

If you are in an area with a high concentration of student accommodation you may wish to explore this as an option to increase the amount of shared accommodation available. Consider approaching student landlords or contact your local universities’ student accommodation offices to see if they can put you in touch with the relevant people or refer landlords to you where they have no demand from students. Access schemes can offer student landlords long-term tenants, for 12 months of the year, with fewer void periods, and additional tenancy support. This is more than the university can offer them.

All local authorities will have a list of licenced HMOs in the borough and have to produce this when asked. It is worth speaking to all local authorities your scheme works across

to obtain this information. A mail out of your scheme’s leaflets and an introductory letter may be a way to access HMO landlords. It is important to ensure any literature you send to landlords is clear and professional looking, as this may be the first contact your scheme has with a potential new landlord.

It is also useful to work out the potential total rents a landlord could get if he or she let out, for example, a two bedroom/three bedroom house to sharers on individual tenancy agreements compared to the potential rents letting to a couple or a family. In some areas the achievable rents when letting to sharers is greater and this will help the scheme procure rooms in shared houses (especially in light of the benefit cap). Having this information to hand will make it easier to persuade landlords to work with your scheme and house those in receipt of housing benefits.

What is your landlord offer?

Once you’ve identified your landlords you can start to think about what they want and how to amend your offer so you can provide them with a good, well thought through and robust service.

Generally, landlords want three things; the rent paid in full and on time, the property kept in a good condition and for the tenant not to be troublesome. Landlords may also be concerned about managing numerous tenants in a shared house, and may anticipate this to be time consuming, and a ‘hassle’. Schemes can work with landlords to ensure their needs are met, and there are different services you may want to offer landlords depending on scheme resources.

The following explores some of these options:

Tenant find and support

This is the most basic service access

⁸ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/PRS_Toolkit_.pdf

schemes can offer landlords. Schemes following this model work with clients to ensure they complete pre-tenancy training and then offer a tenant introductory service for landlords. By offering initial support to landlords and tenant at the start of a tenancy and on-going support throughout the tenancy, landlords' fears of having to manage a shared tenancy can be allayed.

This model would include:

- Assessment of clients.
- Pre-tenancy training.
- Matching tenant to property.
- Facilitating tenancy sign up (including housing benefit forms and, where possible direct payments to landlords).
- Providing on-going support for both landlord and tenant (generally for a minimum of six months).

Extras:

- Rent in advance.
- Deposit.
- Inventory.

It is worth remembering that an estate agent will charge the landlord for this kind of service (typically between 1 and 5% of the monthly rent) whilst an access scheme can offer it for free.

Best For: Accidental landlords, portfolio landlords.

Management offer, no guarantees

This model may work well for landlords who have large HMOs, and a high number of individual tenants as the model takes away the stress of managing the shared household for the landlord, but the landlords would still

have ultimate control of the property.

The risk to your scheme would be minimal as guaranteed rent would not be offered, and the landlord remains liable for the costs of any gaps or shortfalls in the rent. Established schemes may want to charge a management fee for this service but schemes operating in difficult markets may want to offer this for free. It may be possible to offer this service for free once to a large investor landlord, but a fee for any additional properties the scheme takes on.

This service would include:

- Rent collection.
- Repairs and maintenance.
- Tenant selection.
- On-going support.
- Rent-in-advance/deposit/bond.

Best for: New portfolio/investment landlords to the scheme, those who want to retain full control of the property but would like more support with management of the shared property.

Management offer with guaranteed rent

As above but with guaranteed rent to the landlord. This model would mean that the scheme is liable for all the rent, as well as any rent loss during void periods. It is possible to offer the landlord a guaranteed rent which is slightly lower than the achievable LHA rates which would leave some leeway for void periods.

This service will be less financially risky in areas of high demand where void rates will be minimal. This service will also work best where the LHA rate is attractive to landlords and where schemes can charge higher management costs (typically around 8 – 10%).

Good practice example:**Elmbridge Rentstart, Esher**

Elmbridge Rentstart is an access scheme working in an affluent area of Surrey, South-East England. Procuring shared accommodation at the SAR in this area is very challenging, and whilst the scheme have good local relationships with landlords and the local authority, they have found that property conditions in shared private rented accommodation are very poor.

To address this, the scheme is working with a local hostel to carry out renovation work to properties. Through this programme hostel tenants carry out maintenance work to run down properties, under the supervision of a qualified maintenance operative. The skilled operative is paid a daily rate (this is covered by a local charity) and the once the property is renovated the scheme are able to place clients there. Ideally those hostel residents who worked on the property move into it once complete.

This project has improved relationships with the local authority, as well as providing those staying at the hostel with useful practical skills and providing an excellent service to landlords. The scheme is currently looking into getting this project accredited.

Best for: Accidental landlords who do not want to deal with finding tenants, collecting rents etc., Ex-Student landlords

This may be an especially attractive offer for landlords with shared houses to let because of the naturally transient nature of HMOs, and the high turnaround of tenants in shared accommodation.

Leasing Model

The scheme takes on a full repairing lease on the property from the landlord for a set number of years (typically 2-5 years). The scheme is responsible for all the rent, repair and maintenance costs and void periods.

This model poses a financial risk to schemes, but many charge higher management fees of approximately 12% or more of all rents to cover potential losses. Please note that these figures are indicative, but will vary considerably across the country. It is important for schemes to do market research to inform your landlord offer.

Best for: Landlords who live abroad, accidental landlords without personal or emotional investment in the property.

Key tips to aid procurement of shared accommodation**Negotiate!**

It may sometimes feel that no shared accommodation is available at the shared accommodation rate. Whilst it will be difficult, it is sometimes possible to negotiate with landlords and bring the rents down to make them really affordable to those in receipt of housing benefits.

To do this you will need to have a strong landlord offer, and be confident in your approach to landlords. Even in areas where there is a big difference between the SAR and market rents it is still possible to find rooms at an affordable rent. Lots of schemes in London (where arguably the shortfall is largest) successfully procure rooms in shared houses by offering other, non-financial

incentives to landlords, such as selling the support element of their service.

Although landlords will obviously be concerned that their rent is paid in full and on time, don't assume that finances are necessarily the most important thing to all landlords. Many will value the support the scheme can provide more than any financial incentives. Indeed, there is some evidence that landlords are moving away from local authorities and the cash incentives they give out, because local authorities do not then have the resources to continue to provide support for the landlord and the tenant. Thus, if there are any issues with the tenancy neither landlord nor tenant will be supported.

If you have a particularly friendly landlord it may be worth speaking to them to see if they would be willing to give you a quote or act as a case study. This could be used in your promotional materials.

Work with landlords to improve property standards in HMOs

Your scheme should speak to the local authority to see if there are any grants or loans available for landlords to bring their properties up to standard.

Many landlords are wary of any PRS access scheme that might involve them with the local Environmental Health department. This can happen even when their properties comply with existing regulations or they could be eligible for renovation grants. It's important to reassure them of the benefits of working in co-operation, highlighting any access to grants and information. It is also worth noting that local authority Environmental Health departments are measured on the conditions of the private rented accommodation in their borough and your scheme should work closely with them to achieve this and foster good working relationships.

You could also speak to local maintenance organisations, including those within Local

Authorities and Registered Providers who might be able to offer works to the property at a subsidised cost if they are guaranteed ongoing work through you.

If your organisation has a training arm, consider painting and decorating training. In this way new tenants can practice in a void property before moving in. This will have the added bonus of encouraging a feeling of ownership by the tenants and may lead to longer sustainment levels.

For more information on property standards please see our PRS Toolkit.

Be helpful

Many landlords will avoid letting their house to sharers as they do not understand the rules and regulations involved.

Ensuring you know about HMO licensing regulations and local planning rules will make it easier for landlords to let to sharers. You will need to build excellent relationships with the local authority and Environmental Health departments in order to do this. For more information on HMO licences please see chapter three of this toolkit.

Landlords may also be reluctant to let their property to sharers if they are then liable for all bills. The scheme can offer to arrange for gas and electricity supplies to be changed to pre-payment meter. Dependent on the electricity and gas providers this sometimes incurs a small fee but is often offered free of charge. If you decide to do this it is worth bearing in mind that tenants can end up paying more for their gas and electricity on meters. However, this is not always the case; the supplier will be able to tell you if this will be the case.

It is a good idea to attend property inspections with the local authority Environmental Health team and the landlord.

Be realistic and don't overpromise

If you promise the world, but then can't deliver, your landlord will lose faith in the scheme and will be unlikely to return to your scheme with any other properties they may have.

Be knowledgeable

Knowing about changes to welfare benefits (especially with Universal Credit) will be very important to landlords. If they feel they can trust the information and support from the scheme they are more likely to return to you if any other rooms or shared houses become available.

You may consider running training days for landlords, speaking at local Landlord Forums, or having a regular email update containing latest changes in housing law and practice. Even if a landlord does not choose to work with you initially, it is worth staying in touch as they may decide to work with you at a later stage.

6. Better supporting people in shared houses

KEY ACTION POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Provide clients with sharing specific pre-tenancy training.
- Match your clients.
- Consider a 'sharer's' charter'.
- Consider peer support - mentors or lead tenants.

Once you have found suitable and safe shared accommodation you can begin to work with your tenants to ensure they are ready to take on, and sustain, their tenancy. The following are ways in which schemes can support clients and help manage shared tenancies.

Pre-tenancy training

From the moment you start working with a client you should be preparing them to live independently. Pre-tenancy training is an effective way to do this and the scheme should be flexible on how to deliver it. It is important to cater to your client

Good practice example:

Pre-tenancy training

England

NOMAD Sheffield run four week compulsory pre-tenancy training for all their clients. These are on one set day a week, and are run in conjunction with Crisis Skylight Sheffield.

The scheme worker sits in on all these pre-tenancy training sessions and is able to assess the living habits of the clients, matching them into potential households. The scheme has found that unusual pairings work – for example an older client with a younger client.

Scotland

Trust in Fife in Scotland run pre-tenancy training sessions in their 10 bed training flat. They offer a training programme for prospective sharers which they must complete before they are matched.

In order to increase the chances of creating good matches between clients they open these sessions to young people in housing need locally, but who are not residents of the accommodation. This has meant that successful matches are even more likely and these sessions have even been used to rematch and replace tenants in pairings that have not been successful, helping to avoid the risk of failed tenancies.

groups' needs and for some it will be more appropriate to deliver in groups, whereas with other clients a more personalised one-to-one approach will work better. Lots of schemes find that group pre-tenancy training works particularly well for sharers, as scheme workers are able to observe group dynamics and get a sense of which clients may work better with other clients, and therefore would be a good sharing match. However, for clients who have English as a second language, or who have particular support needs, one-to-one training may be more appropriate.

It is also worth taking into consideration the following when deciding how to deliver pre-tenancy training:

- The clients' ability to concentrate for long periods of time (this will determine how you structure your day/sessions).
- How clients will travel to your centre (if you chose to deliver it at your scheme).
- If it is possible to deliver the training at referral agencies, for example at supported housing schemes.

Courses such as the Crisis Renting Ready package can be delivered on a modular basis according to the specific needs of the individual. The Renting Ready course is an accredited course which covers all aspects of pre-tenancy training. Please see the templates document for an extract from the Renting Ready module 'Finding and Living with Flatmates'

Some examples of things to cover in sharing specific pre-tenancy training include:

- Difference between individual and joint tenancies.
- Finding flatmates.

- How to get along with flatmates.
- Cooking and cleaning.
- House meetings.
- How to divide up bills.
- How to deal with visitors and parties.

Matching

Where possible, schemes should aim to match clients to other clients or households in order to improve the chances of the tenancy being sustained and the experience of sharing being as agreeable as possible for the tenants.

Some schemes match clients intuitively and make judgements on successful sharing matches, whilst others ask clients to complete questionnaires in the assessment which gives the scheme worker a better understanding of potential good flatmate matches. Questions you may wish to consider for the questionnaire may include, for example:

- Do they work?
- Do they smoke?
- Are they vegetarian?
- Have they lived in shared accommodation in the past? How was it?
- Would they consider themselves an early bird/night owl/ sociable/introverted

Please see our matching questionnaire templates and factsheet⁹ on matching for more information.

⁹ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Factsheets/UPDATED_11-13_Factsheet_TenantMatching.pdf

Budgeting Support, Good Practice Example:

The Money House, Hyde Housing.

Hyde Housing (in collaboration with the Royal Borough of Greenwich) run a five day course for young people (16-25 year olds) on finances and financial inclusion.

A mixture of young tenants and young people leaving care and support are invited to attend the five day training which takes place in a real flat. For those leaving care completing the course means they are allowed to bid for social housing.

Modules include budgeting, benefits, dealing with bureaucracy (letters etc) and a guest speaker from the housing profession or the Citizens Advice Bureau comes in on the fourth day for a Q&A session. Referrals to the scheme are identified by the council's and other partner's housing options team and 5-10 young people at a time attend the week long training course.

Quite often unlikely matches work in shared houses. Just because clients are similar ages, or have similar hobbies, it does not mean they will get along as housemates. Avoid households where all tenants are not working, or those with similar support needs. Smaller shared houses tend to work well when there is a mix of ages and sexes.

Ensure you are completing regular house visits and tenancy healthcare checks – i.e. checking property conditions, HB claims with clients, and any other issues which might arise in a tenancy

The scheme should endeavor to arrange and attend weekly house meetings for at least the first three months of a new tenancy. House meetings are an opportunity for tenants to discuss with the support worker and their flat-mates any concerns about the running of the household. Things such as cleaning rotas, repairs needed, visitors, work and budgeting can be reviewed and discussed during house meetings. House meetings also encourage socialising and are an occasion for all the tenants to get together.

See our templates for a house meeting record and example cleaning rota.

A Sharer's' charter

Where tenants have to share facilities it may be worth encouraging them to enter into a sharers' charter (as an alternative to the more traditional 'House Rules'). This can improve relationships and lessen the chances of disagreement. It is important to involve tenants in the creation of a sharer's' charter, but it might include the following:

- Agreement to fairly share kitchen; washing machine/drier; TV, DVD, remote control.
- Not to use up all the hot water.
- Not to have the heating on unless the others agree.
- To pay the share of all bills (including any top-up for the rent) and to contribute to.
- A kitty for common items such as toilet paper and washing up liquid.
- To keep the common areas tidy. This includes cleaning the bathroom and washing up.
- Not to play the stereo, radio or TV so loud at night that it can be heard outside our room.

- Not to smoke cigarettes/only to smoke cigarettes in....
- To tell others in advance if you wish to have more than one visitor and to make sure our visitors do not cause any nuisance.
- Not to threaten one another and to sort out disagreements as peacefully as possible.
- Not to borrow anything without permission, including food.
- To keep out of one another's rooms unless invited.

See our template sharer's' charter.

Help with budgeting and savings schemes

Often young people in shared accommodation have a very limited understanding of their finances, and how to budget. It is good practice to set clients up with a saving scheme. Although it may be difficult to save on a very low income, even very small sums of money paid regularly can add up. If the scheme has assisted clients by providing them with rent in advance or a deposit, a savings scheme can help clients pay back their deposit. This means they will be able to access funds for another deposit when they chose to move on from their tenancy.

For more information please see our factsheet on savings.

Peer support (peer mentors and lead tenants)

Peer support can be a great way of supporting clients in their tenancies, and is especially relevant to younger clients in shared housing who so often learn better from their peers. Two examples of peer support models are lead tenants and peer mentors:

Lead tenants

Lead tenants are residents in a shared household but who provide support for the day-to-day running of the household. They live in the shared home but also provide some light touch support within it.

Examples of lead tenant responsibilities include:

- Mediation.
- Reporting maintenance issues to the landlord.
- Organising cleaning rotas.
- Sorting out bills.
- Collecting service charges.
- Liaising with the landlord.

Lead tenant recruitment

It is important to choose the right client to be lead tenant in a shared house. Ideally, this will be a client who is well known to your scheme, and who you can trust with the additional responsibility.

If you are running a training flat model a tenant who has previously been in a training flat may be an ideal candidate for a lead tenant. Alternatively, a service user who engages with the scheme, perhaps through volunteering, would be a good lead tenant.

Lead tenants should receive relevant training and information on their role, and support workers should ensure that there are no major power struggles in the shared house by being available to mediate where necessary.

Your scheme could provide lead tenants with resources which will help them in their role, for example a budget sheet (please see our template).

Case Study: Peer mentor's experience.

Crisis Housing Coach, London.

Anna is a peer mentor for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed, and who are moving into shared accommodation. Anna has previously been homeless, and was supported by an access scheme into private rented accommodation. Throughout her placement she is gaining valuable skills and experience, as well as being supported to complete an NVQ Advice and Guidance level 3.

Anna emphasises her desire to help people who find themselves in the same position as she was previously, and cites this as the principal reason for applying for the role. She says the post of peer mentor came at a perfect time for her – she had recently been released from prison and had no family and friends in the country. She volunteered at a Christmas shelter project where they were supporting homeless people accessing the shelter by promoting the PRS as a housing option. This experience ignited her interest in pursuing more volunteering opportunities within the sector and specifically sharing their experiences of renting privately.

The transition from client to volunteer has been challenging for Anna; she admits that initially it was difficult not to identify with the clients and their immediate situations. She has learnt the importance of ensuring she sets clear barriers with clients, and uses her experience to provide practical advice and information. She says mock interviews have taught her how to present herself professionally and learn to establish these boundaries between client and volunteer. Mock interviews are held between the peer mentor supervisor acting as a client with a housing issue, and the peer mentor practised supporting clients in an interview setting, exploring the clients' various options.

Anna has not worked in housing previously, so has spent a lot of time shadowing other staff members and reading relevant legislation and literature. She says she feels taking in as much knowledge as possible is imperative to enable her to best support and advise clients – 'I want to be a sponge' she says.

Anna says that being a peer mentor has given her a focus and something to work towards. She feels she would have benefitted from a peer mentor herself – she feels she wouldn't have taken so long to get to where she is now if she had had the support of someone who had been through the same. She says she felt ashamed and embarrassed as a homeless person and feels it would have been valuable to see someone who had been through that and come out the other side.

Incentives

Being a lead tenant can be time consuming for clients and comes with an extra degree of responsibility. It is important for schemes to recognise this by providing clients with appropriate incentives.

Examples of incentives for lead tenants could include:

- A subsidised rent (this would be suitable for working clients)
- Help with rent in advance or a deposit.
- Purchasing furniture for the lead tenant to keep.
- Vouchers or coupons.

- Free Wi-Fi.

Key points to consider when choosing and supporting your lead tenant:

- Has the tenant completed the pre-tenancy training?
- Are they calm?
- Are they confident? Would they be capable of 'interviewing' potential tenants and setting house rules?
- How would they deal with potential conflicts in the house?
- Do they seem organised?
- How long are they looking to stay in their shared PRS accommodation?

Peer mentors

Peer mentors are service users who have been through the experience of moving into the PRS, and can be a useful and practical way of supporting tenants in a shared household.

Peer mentors provide tenants with a lived experience of sharing, which some clients may find more helpful than learning this from a scheme worker. Peer mentors can also help challenge perceptions of sharing to landlords and potential tenants.

Key points to consider when setting up a peer mentor service:

Time - Do you have enough staff who can support and manage peer mentors? Start with one and expand from there.

Cost - You will need to cover travel and lunch for your peer mentors on their allocated volunteering days. You also need money in a budget to cover any additional work related travel. Your peer mentors may not be financially in a position to pay for their travel in advance, so take this in to consideration when agreeing on their individual development plan.

Culture - Is having peer mentors new to your organisation? Ensure you introduce the model to all staff clearly, making sure everyone is aware that your peer mentors will be frontline volunteers and are therefore expected to do client work.

Data protection and confidentiality -

Ensure your peer mentors are thoroughly trained on the importance of data protection and the sensitiveness of confidentiality. Please remember that your peer mentors may still be accessing your organisation's support services and therefore will continue to have relationships with other clients.

Support - From time to time peer supervisors may also need guidance on managing and developing your peer mentors - it is useful to link up with another organisation delivering established peer mentor programmes, so you have a "buddy" to turn to.

Qualification - It is also possible for peer mentors to complete a qualification whilst volunteering for you. There is a selection of vocational qualifications to choose from such as QCF Level 3 in Advice & Guidance or Health & Social Care. Seek information from training providers local to you. You need to bear in mind that these will require longer period of commitment and will also have a cost attached to them, so you need to decide if your organisation is able to provide this or whether peer mentors will be expected to finance themselves or to apply for finance through grants programmes which may be available to them.

Please see our template peer mentor job description.

Managing Shared Houses: FAQs

The following are some common issues facing schemes when trying to support shared households:

Bills: How should tenants and landlords manage shared bills?

There are two main ways of managing bills in shared houses:

- Through a service charge

A landlord is responsible for all utility bills (and these remain in his/her name) but the tenant has to pay a top up to his/her rent to cover all bills. We would recommend that when working with clients with very limited finances this is capped at £15 per week. Your scheme can assist the landlord in this by collecting the service charges from the tenants on the landlord's behalf.

- By installing pre-payment meters

Some landlords will prefer to install pre-payment meters at the property. This system, whereby tenants have a key or a card and have to top up their electric or gas with cash or a debit card, is preferable for many landlords. However, tenants often face higher utility bills in this way, and it can cause issues in shared households as some tenants may be more likely to put money on the keys and cards than others. This should be covered in pre-tenancy training, and support workers can address these issues at house meetings.

Empty rooms: What happens when one tenant leaves a shared house?

Tenants in a shared house should ideally be on individual assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs) or licences. If this is the case when one tenant leaves the landlord (or the scheme if guaranteed rent is offered to the landlord) will not receive rent for that particular room. When a new tenant is found and the housing benefit claim put in then the landlord or scheme will receive rent from the room again.

If, however, the tenants are on a joint tenancy then if one leaves the others will remain liable for the rent. For more information on tenancy agreements see chapter three.

Cleaning: when some tenants value cleanliness more than others...

This can be a difficult and sometimes sensitive issue for schemes to overcome. Support workers can assist clients in this by ensuring it is a regular feature on house meeting agendas. It is also a good idea to suggest a communal kitty where all housemates pay in a set amount each week/month which can be used to purchase cleaning materials. Depending on scheme resources it can be a good idea for the scheme to purchase some basic cleaning materials for each household, i.e. bleach or an all-purpose cleaner, even if this is just at the start of the tenancies to set a precedent. If there are persistent problems you may wish to revisit any pre-tenancy training which covered cleanliness and housework or provide guidance notes on the frequency and nature of cleaning tasks around the house.

Room sizes: Is it fair that one tenant in a big room pays the same as one in a box room?

No, this is not fair, but often it cannot be helped as it is unlikely to find shared houses with rooms all the same size. If the tenants are working then it may be possible to offer the smaller rooms at a slightly lower rent, but if they are claiming housing benefits are the same rate then this would be difficult.

You could use a larger room as an incentive for a lead tenant.

Friends and partners: Should sharers have visitors and overnight stays? How do we minimise the risk of antisocial behaviour?

A common complaint from tenants in shared accommodation stem from lifestyle issues, and flat mates having friends and partners to visit. Whilst it is natural for people to have visitors, it is important that these visits do

not become too regular, and cause the other tenants to feel uncomfortable or put out.

It is important to have these discussions with tenants during the pre-tenancy training stage, and it is an issue that should be revisited regularly in house meetings. It is useful to agree a maximum number of days a week.

Anti-social behaviour is a common issue in shared houses. To minimise the risk of this it is important to carry out careful matching of clients where possible.

It is also important to explain in full the importance of looking after the property as any deposit the tenant has put down can be lost if there is damage to the flat. It may also encourage a sense of ownership of the property. This can also be covered in a sharer's' charter signed by all housemates.

7. Working with voluntary organisations and statutory partners

KEY ACTION POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

- Work collaboratively with other local access schemes.
- Share resources.
- Build relationships with the local authority.
- Consider approaching Registered Social Landlord's (RSLs) to access their hard to let properties.

Working with other access schemes

In areas where there are a high number of PRS access schemes (i.e. in London) it is important that you work collaboratively with other organisations, rather than compete with each other. Accessing shared accommodation is undoubtedly difficult but all too often schemes working against each other and competing for the same small pool of shared accommodation actually end up making it more difficult to procure shared houses. This is because, as competition intensifies, schemes (and local authorities) offer bigger incentives to landlords.

Schemes should pool resources. There may be times when a scheme is offered a shared house (or room) which, perhaps due to location, size, or just timing, the scheme cannot fill. In these instances it is useful to have the possibility to pass the room or property over to another scheme who may be able to use it to fill the void with their homeless clients.

It is important to remember that schemes invest a lot of time and resources in building and fostering landlord relationships, so it is advisable to ensure a landlord or property sharing protocol is in place between schemes, and adhered to. Please see our example protocol in the template section of this toolkit.

If you work with other access schemes you will also be able to better support your clients by ensuring you do not duplicate information during the assessment phase, and being able to more fully link clients up with other schemes or organisations which might be able to provide a better provision for particular support needs, i.e. substance misuse or mental health issues.

Working and planning strategically: Working with the local authority

Local Authorities should work closely with their local schemes, supporting each other and sharing good practice.

It is not necessary for any competition to exist between statutory and non-statutory organisations, and relationships should be easy and mutually beneficial. The local authority can refer clients into your schemes, and more people will find homes and more landlords will find tenants if PRS access schemes in the same and nearby local authorities cooperate.

It is important to understand how your local authority already engages locally with the PRS – for more information on this please see our PRS Toolkit. Increasingly local authorities

are applying for the Gold Standard¹⁰. In order to qualify for this the local authority needs to have a suitable private rented sector offer for all clients. Your scheme should speak to the local authority and find out how you can support them to achieve this, as well as share best practice around this.

Schemes are most successful in procuring shared housing when they work closely with the local authority, especially their procurement team. There will be times when private sector landlords approach the local authority with a property which is not suitable to their clients' needs, and vice-versa. In these instances it is good practice to arrange to share landlord details between scheme and local authority.

An excellent working relationship with the local authority's housing benefit department will also affect your ability to secure direct payments to landlords, which is a very important incentive when selling your scheme and sharers. For more information on how to secure direct payments please see our PRS toolkit.¹¹ You should also confirm with the local authority how you can access Discretionary Housing Payments or Local Welfare Assistance funds to support your clients.

How to work well with your local authority:

- Get your face known.
- Attend team meetings.
- Engage with the Authority's and local councilors' Social Media accounts, drawing attention to good news stories from your work.
- Landlord forums – useful to forge contacts at the local authority.
- Target the right people who will be interested in your scheme (i.e. the Welfare Reform Team).
- Could you run surgeries for single people within the local authority and increase their capacity / reduce waiting times?
- Can you align your referral paperwork with the Local Authority's to minimise unnecessary administration where possible
- Build relationships with the Environmental Health team –consider inviting them to your pre-tenancy training to co-deliver?
- Get invited to 'Homeless Forums' run by the local authority
- Familiarise yourself with the Local Authority's Housing and Homelessness Strategies and find out what the Authority funds through its Preventing Homelessness Grant to best understand where you can meet need and possible access resources
- Understand what performance measures the local authority are monitoring which you can contribute towards such as:
 - Assessment times for housing benefit applications.
 - Homeless Prevention Figures.
 - Property conditions in the PRS.

¹⁰ <http://home.practitionersupport.org/>

¹¹ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/PRS_Toolkit_.pdf

Good Practice Example:

Framework Housing Association

Framework are a housing association who lease properties from PRS landlords, and trial a model of training flats. Their scheme is twofold:

- Service Aspect 1: Properties leased from a PRS landlord and a 6 month assured shorthold tenancy offered to people at risk of homelessness. This could be viewed in simple terms as a 'training flat'
- Service Aspect 2: Framework run a lettings service for the PRS where they help more independent tenants into longer term tenancies. The majority of tenants come from *Service Aspect 1*

These service aspects complement each other so it is essential they have a good mix of lease and let properties. This is to ensure they have decent throughput to avoid the properties becoming silted up.

The local authority and property standards

In terms of accessing shared PRS accommodation of a decent standard it will be important to build relations with the Environmental Health Department.

Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that private rented accommodation, in particular Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), meet at least basic minimum housing and safety standards. This particularly applies to HMOs. Responsibility for enforcing the law rests with Environmental Health officers.

A close working relationship with the Environmental Health Department means your scheme will have:

- Help with training on the laws covering repairs and housing conditions, and advice on what to look out for when visiting a property.
- Guidance on local interpretation of regulations.

- Access to information and helpful sources regarding the private rented sector.
- Assurance for tenants that they can turn to an Environmental Health officer for advice and assistance.

Environmental Health Departments may also be able to tell you if a landlord has not managed properties well or has not carried out repairs.

The local authority housing options team should have all the relevant information about your scheme, especially if you are trialing a new model which needs promotion, for example lodgings.

Housing advisers will be best placed to refer people to your scheme and will no doubt be relieved to have meaningful information to pass on to those to whom they do not have a statutory duty.

In order to increase landlord procurement of shared accommodation, local authorities could work closely with the schemes to provide simple and clear information on HMO regulations, and promote a positive approach to working with landlords, as well

as encouraging sharing, and endorsing and enforcing high property standards.

Proving your worth to the local authority

The financial climate for Local Authorities is increasingly difficult therefore any proposals you make to work alongside the local authority or to seek funding from Local Authorities will be scrutinised extremely closely for value for money.

The eight Sharing Solutions funded schemes completed the Crisis/University of York value for money tool ('Making it Count') for April-June 2014.

Although at this point the schemes had only recently begun delivering and creating tenancies at this point the data demonstrated that the eight schemes had generated savings to the public purse of £536,178 in that quarter.

We suggest that of this £390,000 were savings in housing costs which would have to be met by the Local Authority. With the introduction of Universal Credit and the impact this will have on the Temporary Accommodation subsidy which Local Authorities receive (a move away from using the more generous 2011 LHA figures and a reduction in the additional subsidy level (outside London at least) of £15 per person per week). It will only cost Local Authorities more and more if they don't invest in schemes which prevent homelessness.

The Making it Count tool could support you to make a case to the local authority or other statutory organisations to support your scheme financially or just in kind with support from procurement teams or office space.

Working with Housing Associations

Housing associations have a major role in helping improve the supply of rented properties for sharers under 35s, and this can provide benefits for both the housing association and the access scheme.

Consider speaking to your local housing association to establish if they manage hard to let or void properties in your area which might be suitable to convert for sharers. This will be especially positive if your scheme has the option to lease housing association accommodation and offer guaranteed rent.

Even if you are unable to offer this service, housing associations may well value the robust support that your scheme can offer to tenants.

The benefit cap may also offer an opportunity to access accommodation previously used for families for sharers.

Bedroom tax

If the housing association has a high percentage of tenants who are affected by bedroom tax, and arrears are rising, a lodgings scheme may be very beneficial and a way to support people into accommodation whilst decreasing the housing associations' rent arrears. Local authorities and housing associations should also take the lead in promoting lodgings as an option for households who are affected by the bedroom tax.

See Chapter 4 for more information on how to facilitate a lodgings model

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. Our purpose is to end homelessness.

Crisis helps people rebuild their lives through housing, health, education and employment services. We work with thousands of homeless people across the UK and have ambitious plans to work with many more.

We are also determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and to change the way society and government think and act towards homeless people.

Get in touch

Crisis head office

66 Commercial Street
London E1 6LT
Tel: 0300 636 1967
Fax: 0300 636 2012

www.crisis.org.uk

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E&W1082947, SC040094. Company Number: 4024938

Homelessness ends here