



DERVENTIO

Crisis Private Renting Champions 2015 for Addressing property conditions in the private rented sector

Good practice

From our start running a small bond guarantee scheme in Derby, Derventio has developed a successful property management and leasing project that covers Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire, Telford & Wrekin and Swindon. In 2014, Derventio's senior management team identified that property conditions in the 400 properties we manage were becoming an issue for us in two ways. Firstly, some properties we've managed since we started our private rented sector (PRS) leasing scheme in 2007 were poor quality, or in need of attention. Secondly, we wanted to make sure that every property we took on was of a high standard, to fit our aim of being a quality social landlord.

As we were also reviewing how we delivered our in-house maintenance and void response services, it was an ideal time to re-structure. We established two distinct teams to sit alongside our housing support colleagues who support clients in their tenancies:

- Property Procurement – to source properties, and make sure they're in the right area
- Property Standards – to improve property conditions.

First, we recruited a qualified and experienced Environmental Health Officer as Property Standards Manager. She is supported by a small team that consists of a Property Standards Surveyor and a Property Standards Assistant.

Our Property Standards Manager has developed a quality service including:

- Defining a clear 'Property Standard' for Derventio, which everyone can work to and incorporating it into our new property lease agreement – this is an ideal standard, and while some of our properties are not there yet, we also have minimum standards that all properties must adhere to while we work with landlords and our staff to bring them up to our Derventio Property Standard.
- Free Property Condition report about each property we might take on, for the owner. It points out issues needing to be tackled, and gives clear guidance about landlords' legal responsibilities, as well as clearly stating the minimum standards Derventio expects to be met, before signing the property up.
- A rolling program of routine property surveys, to ensure that standards are being maintained in existing stock and inform decisions about whether to keep (and improve) or return unsuitable properties
- Monthly and weekly health and safety check forms, that housing support staff can use to conduct their own simple checks when visiting tenants, to avoid properties deteriorating and catch problems at an early stage.



- Coaching for Derventio's Intensive Housing Management and Support & Resettlement staff, to make sure that they know what to look for when visiting properties, and can advise residents of their responsibilities as a tenant (for example to open windows to reduce condensation)
- Our next step is to achieve accreditation of our property portfolio with a regional landlord accreditation scheme

Case study

One of our valued landlords, who had previously leased property to Derventio, recently approached our Procurement Manager to enquire whether we would be interested in leasing a property he hoped to purchase. He sent over the property particulars with floor plan and our Property Procurement Manager discussed the plans with our Property Standards Manager. She saw straight away that the layout was unsuitable for shared accommodation and in particular a couple of the bedrooms were far too small to meet our minimum room size standard. This was relayed back to the landlord and he decided not to proceed with the purchase.

Undeterred and with further guidance from Property Standards Manager, the landlord finally purchased a large, Victorian terraced property. The property was a little run down but ideal for shared housing in every other respect. Derventio met the landlord on site and whilst the Property Procurement Manager went through the terms of the current lease document, the Property Standards Manager carried out a full survey of the property. The landlord was provided with a Property Standards Report & Schedule of Work, detailing all the work he would need to undertake, including fire safety provisions, repairs, decoration and floor covering. The landlord completed all the works to a good standard and a three year lease agreement was signed. The property now provides good quality and safe accommodation for four clients.

About the champion

Derventio Housing Trust tackles homelessness head-on, providing accommodation, support and opportunities to help homeless people get back on their feet. We provide shared, supported housing in the private rented sector alongside a range of learning and volunteering opportunities to help people achieve their goals and aspirations.

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