



Key principles for Help-to-Rent projects

February 2017

Crisis and the private rented sector

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

Since 1997 Crisis has been working to make the private rented sector (PRS) a viable housing option for homeless and vulnerably housed people. The focus of this work has been on funding, supporting and delivering Help-to-Rent projects. These are projects that operate using many different models, but what they have in common is that they support clients who are homeless or vulnerably housed and are willing to consider housing in the private rented sector.

The projects then work with these clients and landlords to find, create and sustain tenancies in the private rented sector, helping clients overcome the financial, structural and personal barriers that may exist to doing this. Crisis also undertakes a wide range of policy and research work into the private rented sector.

Preventing homelessness through use of the private rented sector

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

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

Establishing key principles

There are now hundreds of Help-to-Rent projects in operation throughout the UK and Crisis maintains a database of all the schemes we know about¹. Among projects there is considerable variation in delivery models and client groups assisted. Some variation is helpful as any model should be tailored to the client group and local housing market. New projects should avoid duplicating or competing with other local services, each one will be dependent on available resources, however some features of PRS access

¹ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/find-pr-scheme.php>

schemes are fundamental to delivering an effective service and should be common to all schemes.

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

We would like to thank the following external partners for their input:

Homeless Link

CAB WHABAC

Camden Federation of Private Tenants

Shelter Scotland

Dundee City Council

Trust in Fife

National Landlords Association

Derventio Housing Trust

Who is this document for?

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

For the purposes of this document a Help-to-Rent project is defined as:

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

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

Support and Resources

Where projects uncover challenges in their service Crisis provides support to help address these issues and deliver improvements. On the [private renting website](#)² Crisis collates and publishes materials based on the cumulative knowledge and experience of hundreds of organisations working in the private rented sector to prevent and tackle homelessness. Much of this is held in our [Private Renting toolkit](#).

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

Crisis has produced specific guides on [managing shared housing for young people](#), [sharing in social housing](#), establishing an income generating [social lettings agency](#) and [Universal Credit](#)

In addition to helping Help-to-Rent projects to collect relevant data and highlight the value of their work and the outcomes achieved to funders and commissioners Crisis has published the [Making it Count](#) outcome monitoring tool³.

² <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-private-renting.html>

³ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/making-it-count.html>

Key principles of a good Help to Rent Project

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

Before establishing or committing to any new services it is important to check and review any existing Help-to-Rent projects and seek to build on, expand or complement that existing provision rather than automatically establishing something new which is potentially contradictory or duplication.

Any excellent project should have the following in place:

A Organisational principles

1. Be involved in the development of, and have a mention in, relevant local strategies
2. Be a member of key local multi-agency forums
3. Clearly publish aims and objectives and clear outcome indicators, and have systems to measure outcome performance
4. A funding plan for current and future sustainment of the service, including the information required to make a robust business case to commissioners
5. A business plan and clearly defined model which consists of services for landlords and services for prospective tenants
6. Well-publicised feed back mechanisms through which landlords, tenants, service users and stakeholders can influence the development of the service
7. Clearly advertised and adhered to service standards that include maximum timescales for responding to queries from landlords, tenants and others approaching the scheme
8. Robust financial monitoring to provide clear costs and comparative savings resulting from the service, in order to demonstrate quantifiable outcomes that justify and retain investment (for example through using the Crisis [Making it count](http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/making-it-count.html)⁴ tool).
9. Secure electronic monitoring systems that adhere to best practice on data protection for the storage of data on clients, landlords and properties
10. Protocols with neighbouring authorities and other similar local services that establish policies on competition, duplication and relocating clients where necessary
11. Formal arrangements with partnership agencies to ensure timescales and service standards are adhered to for outsourced services, and that information is shared

⁴ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/making-it-count.html>

12. Information on other relevant services for signposting purposes
13. A named point of contact within the housing benefit department and the housing options service with whom the scheme worker can raise any relevant issues
14. Projects should contact their local Job Centre Plus District Manager and DWP Partnership Manager, responsible for relationships with external organisations, to ensure that they are aware of the Help-to-Rent project. These contacts may also be a useful resource for updates regarding Universal Credit in the area, and to facilitate the project building relationships with local services especially digital inclusion and personal budgeting support

B Staffing.

1. Staff time is dedicated to the project, rather than just part of someone's role, and those involved should have clear roles and responsibilities. See Crisis' [model job description](#)⁵ as a starting point
2. Members of staff receive regular supervision sessions and have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check where necessary
3. A staff training and development policy in place to ensure that all staff are supported to refresh and develop their skills in a structured way
4. Lone working and personal safety procedures are in place and all staff trained and supported accordingly
5. Safeguarding procedures are in place and the staff trained to identify vulnerable people at risk of harm and to take appropriate action

C Services for tenants.

1. Clearly publicise the services offered
2. Set out referral routes and eligibility criteria to service providers and individuals, and ensure these criteria are in line with equal opportunities legislation and available in a format that meets the needs of the project's client group
3. Clients participate in a needs assessment to identify support needs that may affect their ability to maintain a private rented tenancy. This should include checking with other agencies (statutory and non-statutory) in contact with the individual to ensure that hidden needs are not overlooked. The project should be sure to get client consent to do this.
4. Where support needs are identified, develop an appropriate support plan or refer the client to an appropriate support service
5. Pre-tenancy training is available to clients to help pre-empt common issues in a new

⁵ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Toolkit/PRS_Co-ordinator_Job_Description.doc

tenancy

6. Clients receive written advice and assistance to access a PRS property such as a bond, deposit and incentives, including non-financial incentives to landlords. They should also receive training on how to find a property and present themselves to a potential landlord and where appropriate, practical help and support to source suitable accommodation.
7. Clients receive assistance with setting up a tenancy, including information on their rights and responsibilities as a tenant and support with basic essentials for setting up a home, including advice on sourcing furniture, white goods and accessing local welfare assistance schemes and other alternatives to the Social Fund
8. Clients have a full welfare benefits check (even where employed) to maximise their income and ensure that they access relevant training and employment
9. Advise clients about impending changes to regulation which will affect them, in order to prepare for and safeguard against these changes
10. Support clients to use IT facilities, develop IT skills and access personal budgeting support where appropriate when Universal Credit is introduced in the area
11. Clients receive contact details of support they can access through the duration of the tenancy, including contact details for any assistance and advice that is available out of office hours
12. Clients know how to find out about local services such as education, volunteering and employment opportunities, health services and services that provide advice on benefits and returning to work
13. Consult with and invite feedback from clients to inform future development and improvements to service delivery
14. There is a clear complaints procedure for tenants housed through the scheme to raise issues relating to the property or landlord, which includes an appeals process. Where complaints are upheld against the landlord and not remedied, the landlords may be dismissed from the scheme. In such cases no further clients should be placed in properties managed by the landlord in question.

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

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

D Housing Benefit and Rent.

1. Clients have their maximum affordable rent calculated and should not be encouraged to move into a property that is more expensive than this maximum unless the client is shown to be able to afford the necessary top-up. This calculation

should take account of current and projected reduced Local Housing Allowance levels and any additional income the tenant receives on an ongoing basis

2. Clients in need of benefits are supported with setting up a claim, a bank account and – where necessary – an application for alternative payment arrangements /direct payment to the landlord
3. Clients are advised on where they can access advice and information on returning to work and the benefit implications of this, including the benefits calculations that can be accessed by [Turn2Us](#)

E Services for Landlords.

1. Clearly publicise the services offered to landlords
2. All landlords are provided with information on their rights and responsibilities as a landlord, including the requirement to protect any cash deposits
3. Advise landlords ahead of policy changes which will affect their rights and responsibilities
4. Landlords are informed about accreditation schemes, landlord forums, landlord associations and other forms of support available to them
5. Landlords are provided with a named contact and encouraged to contact them should problems or questions arise with the tenancy
6. Landlords are directed to model tenancy agreements and inventories where required
7. In the case of bonds, schemes respond to claims within a maximum of 14 days of the tenancy ending and release funds within a further 14-day period
8. Feedback from and consultation with landlords is undertaken to ensure that the service continues to develop and improve its offer

F Properties and property management.

1. All properties are inspected before being accepted by the project and the findings recorded. The inspection should ensure that all the basic safety requirements are complied with and should take account of any mobility issues for the potential tenant and any modifications that may be required. (including meeting basic regulatory requirements on fire and carbon monoxide safety) See the Crisis [property inspection checklist](#)⁶.
2. All properties accepted onto schemes must be free from [Housing Health and Safety Rating System](#) (HHSRS) category one hazards and must be well maintained by the landlord or managing agent and appropriate for the individual. Unsafe properties should be reported to the council's private sector enforcement team.

⁶ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Toolkit/Crisis_Minimum_Property_Standards.doc

3. A copy of the gas safety certificate (GSC) where required is obtained by the project before the start of the tenancy and a copy of annually renewed GSC is obtained for as long as the project has an active interest in the tenancy
4. For all HMO's a copy of the fixed electrical installations check certificate is obtained by the project before the start of the tenancy, and this is renewed at least every five years.
5. All occupancies are formalised in a written agreement, a copy of which is held by the landlord, the tenant and the project. Individuals should be issued assured shorthold tenancies *not* licenses, unless tenancies cannot be granted where e.g. they are living in the same property as the resident landlord, or there is a level of support provided that precludes a tenancy. where the scheme is confident the landlord will not be seeking possession of the property in the next 12 months then a license may well be a sufficiently secure offer within shared housing and in fact offer greater flexibility to the tenant.
6. Landlords are conducting [Right to Rent checks](#) in the appropriate manner, and completing follow-up checks where appropriate. Projects can assist landlords to understand their responsibilities with regard to Right to Rent, ensuring that any practice from landlords they engage with are free from discrimination
7. Landlords and tenants should be informed of the option to agree longer tenancies (12 months or longer)
8. An inventory is carried out and the project retains a copy of the inventory signed by both landlord and tenant. It is good practice to include photographic evidence to avoid disputes arising from subjective descriptions.
9. Meter readings are carried out (by project or by tenant) so tenants aren't charged for any costs owing to previous tenants.
10. The project only works with landlords who have the right to let their property and who comply with their legal responsibilities, including the protection of cash deposits in one of the tenancy deposit protection schemes and compliance with local licensing and registration requirements
11. A copy of the energy performance certificate (EPC) where required is obtained by the project before the start of the tenancy.
12. The project encourages landlords to join a local accreditation scheme where one exists
13. Any lettings agency the project works with is a member of a redress scheme and advertises its letting fees in a transparent way.

Key principles self-assessment tool

Date completed: --/--/--

A: Organisational principles

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Evidence/Description	Actions
1. Has the project been involved in the development of, and is it mentioned in, relevant local strategies?			
2. Is the project a member of key local multi-agency forums?			
3. Does the scheme have clearly published aims, objectives and outcome indicators? Are there systems in place to measure outcome performance			

<p>4. Does the scheme have a funding plan including the information required to make a robust business case to future funders?</p>			
<p>5. Does the scheme have a business plan and defined delivery model?</p>			
<p>6. Does the scheme have well-publicised feedback mechanisms for both tenants and landlords?</p> <p>Is feedback used to develop and improve the existing service?</p>			
<p>7. Does the scheme set out maximum timescales for responding to queries and providing services?</p>			

<p>8. Does the scheme have robust financial and outcomes monitoring in place?</p> <p>Has it assessed its value through the <i>Making it count</i> tool?</p>			
<p>9. Does the scheme have secure data storage systems and robust outcomes monitoring systems for the storage of data on outcomes?</p>			
<p>10. Does the scheme have protocols with the local authority, neighbouring authorities and other similar local services?</p>			
<p>11. Does the scheme have formal arrangements with partnership agencies for service standards and information sharing for any outsourced services?</p>			

12. Does the scheme provide signposting information on other relevant services?			
13. Does the scheme have a named point of contact within the housing benefit and housing options departments?			
14. Does the scheme have contact with their local JCP District Manager and DWP Partnership Manager?			

B: Staffing

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Evidence/Description	Actions
1. Is there staff time dedicated exclusively to the scheme?			
2. Do staff receive regular supervision sessions, and have a DBS check where necessary?			
3. Is there an effective staff training and development policy?			
4. Are relevant policies in place and adhered to on, lone working and personal safety?			
5. Are safeguarding procedures in place?			

C: Services for clients

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Evidence/Description	Actions
1. Does the scheme clearly publicise the services they offer?			
2. Are referral routes and eligibility criteria clearly set out for service providers and individuals?			
3. Do all clients participate in a detailed needs assessment ?			
4. Where support needs are identified, does the scheme develop an appropriate support plan or refer to an appropriate support service?			

5. Is pre-tenancy training available to clients?			
6. Do clients receive advice and assistance to access a PRS property?			
7. Do clients receive assistance to set up a tenancy?			
8. Do clients receive a full welfare benefits check and advice on income maximization?			

9. Are clients advised about impending changes to legislation that will affect them?			
10. Are clients supported to use IT facilities, develop IT skills and access personal budgeting support?			
11. Do clients receive contact details for support (including out of hours)?			
12. Do clients receive information on local education, training, employment, health and advice services?			

13. Does the scheme consult with and invite feedback from service users?			
14. Is there a clear complaints procedure for tenants to raise issues relating to the property or landlord?			
15. Where clients are subject to the shared accommodation rate, are they informed about their entitlement, and are their expectations managed appropriately?			
16. Where clients are subject to the shared accommodation rate, do they receive help with preparation for sharing?			

D: Housing Benefit and Rent

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Evidence/Description	Actions
1. Do clients have their maximum affordable rent calculated?			
2. Are clients supported to set up their benefit claim, a bank account, and where necessary alternative payment arrangements/direct payments to landlord?			
3. Are clients advised on how to access advice and information on returning to work, and the benefit implications of doing so?			

E: Services for Landlords

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Evidence/Description	Actions
1. Does the scheme clearly publicise the services they offer to landlords?			
2. Are all landlords informed about their rights and responsibilities? Including the need to protect any cash deposits?			
3. Are landlords advised ahead of policy changes that will affect their rights and responsibilities?			
4. Are landlords informed about accreditation schemes, landlord forums, landlord associations and other forms of support?			

<p>5. Are landlords provided with a named contact and encouraged to contact them should they have any questions or problems with the tenancy?</p>			
<p>6. Are landlords directed to model tenancy agreements and inventories where required?</p>			
<p>7. In the case of bonds, do schemes respond to claims within a maximum of 14 days of the tenancy end, and release funds within a further 14-day period?</p>			
<p>8. Does the scheme consult with and invite feedback from landlords?</p>			

F: Properties and Property Management.

Question	Yes / no / unclear	Evidence/Description	Actions
<p>1. Are all properties <u>inspected</u> before being accepted by the scheme and the findings recorded? (as per the Crisis inspection checklist).</p>			
<p>2. Are all properties accepted onto schemes free from HHSRS category one hazards and well-maintained?</p>			
<p>3. Is a copy of each property's up to date gas safety certificate, obtained by the scheme?</p>			

4. Is a copy of the fixed electrical installations check certificate obtained for all HMO's?			
5. Are all tenancies assured shorthold tenancies, with a written tenancy agreement , Or if licences are these used in appropriate circumstances (copy retained by the scheme)?			
6. Are landlords assisted to conduct Right to Rent checks appropriately?			

7. Is the option of longer tenancy agreements (i.e. 12 months or longer) brought to the attention of tenants and landlords?			
8. Is an inventory carried out, signed and a copy retained by the scheme?			
9. Does the scheme ensure that meter readings are carried out at the start of tenancies?			

<p>10. Does the scheme ensure that it only works with landlords who have the right to let their property and who comply with their legal responsibilities, including licensing and registration requirements?</p>			
<p>11. Does the scheme obtain a copy of the EPC before the start of the tenancy?</p>			
<p>12. Does the project encourage landlords to join a local accreditation scheme where one exists?</p>			
<p>13. Is any lettings agency the project works with a member of a redress scheme and advertises it's letting fees in a transparent way?</p>			