

Crisis Private Renting Toolkit

Crisis Housing Services

Setting up your PRS access scheme

Setting up your PRS access scheme

This section gives information on how to set up your PRS access scheme, including how to work with local strategies, recruit landlords, and identify your clients.

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1. Getting started - planning and preparation

To start off it is good to consider the ideal features of a PRS access scheme that we outline below. Keep them in mind as you plan your scheme and calculate the resources needed.

Our [Key Principles](#) of PRS access schemes will help too.

The ideal PRS access scheme...

- Has enough properties to meet demand whatever the market conditions. This is because the right incentives (including financial incentives) have been offered to landlords.
- Builds on and complements rather than competes with existing schemes in the area.
- Has an open dialogue with landlords and regularly asks them about the features of the scheme and how improvements could be made.
- Has data management, service standards communications and performance monitoring systems that work well for staff, clients and landlords.

Pre-tenancy – the ideal PRS access scheme...

- Ensures rents are within Local Housing Authority (LHA) levels.
- Has a fast track housing benefit arrangement.
- Comprehensively assesses the needs of prospective tenants to make sure they are suitable for private renting.
- And then comprehensively assesses each prospective tenant to make sure the property available is suitable for them.
- Provides landlords with a personalised service. This includes providing a named contact.
- Gives inexperienced landlords letting and management support.
- Clearly specifies the minimum standards of property condition and management practice that the scheme will expect.

- Inspects all properties prior to inclusion.
- Considers the impact and affordability of private sector rents on people who want to work, compared to other housing options.
- Establishes efficient referral routes.
- Works effectively with colleagues and external organisations through prearranged formal agreements.

During the tenancy the ideal PRS access scheme...

- Offers structured support for tenants in their tenancy and support for tenants' after the move if they need it.
- Gives support for landlords to resolve any difficulties arising from tenant behaviour (including non-payment of rent) where required.

After the tenancy the ideal PRS access scheme ...

- Has a structured way of ending its support for tenants.
- Will find the landlord a new tenant to move into the vacant property when the old tenant moves out.

2. Resourcing and recruiting staff for your scheme

Thinking about the right staff for you

Good relationships are key to the success of private rental schemes. Reliable, informed staff who set up positive partnerships and give landlords and clients regular and consistent points of contacts are critical.

You will need at least a dedicated full-time post to run your PRS operation.

It takes time to build good relationships with private landlords. Consequently, the people or person you recruit should be unfazed by what can be a slow and time consuming process – especially at the beginning. Without commitment to this stage of your scheme's development you are unlikely to find a pool of landlords willing and able to house your clients.

Offering a professional approach

Deposits, deposit guarantees, rent in advance and other incentives for landlords will obviously help improve access to the private sector, but they are not enough on their own. Your scheme and staff must be professional in their offerings to landlords and effective in their promotion to become a successful and genuine housing option for those in need.

A single point of contact is extremely important to landlords, tenants and other partner agencies. It helps in getting them on board in the first place and inspires confidence that any problems will be sorted out before they become major difficulties.

In situations where problems have continued unchecked or have become worse, tenancies have failed and landlords have withdrawn from the scheme. The staff you choose should be happy to be landlord points of contact.

The right skills for the job

People running PRS access schemes need particular skills and experiences to be effective in their role. When recruiting, remember that schemes have **two very different client groups**: those people who need homes and private landlords. You will need to provide both groups with a service and an approach tailored to their needs.

If your scheme has enough funding, a specific landlord liaison worker could be employed. Some successful schemes employ people with private rented sector experience – either as a letting agent or a landlord themselves – in the landlord liaison worker role.

Key responsibilities for staff of a PRS access scheme are outlined below. The responsibilities have been broken down into two roles – landlord liaison officer and PRS caseworker. Where some schemes have just one member of staff, these two roles would be combined, with crossover between the two roles.

Landlord liaison officer/ PRS co-ordinator – key responsibilities

- Promoting the scheme to private landlords and building and maintaining relationships.
- Finding accommodation placements.
- Inspecting properties and completing inventories.
- Financial and general administration, including issuing bonds and guarantees.
- Responding to landlords' enquiries and problems.
- Building relationships with other accommodation and support providers and social services.
- Problem solving where tenancy sustainment is threatened.
- Encouraging take-up of savings schemes among tenants, and monitoring the schemes' progress.
- Support and supervision of volunteers.
- Dealing with claims against the deposit or guarantee as they arise.

PRS caseworker – key responsibilities

- Interviewing and assessing clients.
- Pre tenancy training
- Building relationships with the housing benefit department and completing housing benefit claims.
- Responding to client's enquiries and problems.
- Problem solving where tenancy is threatened.
- Agreeing support plans with tenants.
- Carrying out support visits.

We hope the following resources will help you attract, assess and employ the right candidate.

[PRS coordinator job description](#)

[PRS coordinator interview questions](#)

[PRS caseworker job description](#)

[PRS caseworker interview questions](#)

Supporting your staff

PRS scheme staff will need regular support and supervision. This should focus on how they are achieving against their targets and any sensitive issues encountered when dealing with clients and landlords. Supervision allows staff to not only recognise their achievements, but identifies what might be needed to help them achieve other targets. Some of your clients will also be dealing with difficult personal problems and circumstances and may ask your scheme's staff to help. These situations can be stressful and it will be important for you staff to have regular time to debrief about them.

Developing knowledge and skills

PRS access scheme staff also need support to refresh and develop their skills in a structured way. Because private rented sector housing and tenancy support are areas that are continually developing, it's important that staff knowledge and skills are regularly updated through relevant training.

3. Working with local strategies, key groups and people

To be properly effective, PRS access schemes must connect with the development of local housing strategies. These can include strategies for: sub-regional and local housing; homelessness; private sector housing; empty property; Supporting People and many more.

By getting involved with the development and strategic process you will be raising your scheme's profile. You will have opportunities to share its successes and show its importance to local and regional housing priorities. This higher profile could also attract funding opportunities and helpful partners.

You can keep track of how your scheme is being included in the relevant local strategies

by completing a [strategy checklist](#)

Working and planning strategically

Make sure that your scheme co-operates fully with local authority plans to meet local needs. Cooperation involves data provision; details about the services you provide and outcomes.

PRS access schemes should be part of a strategic approach to tackling and preventing homelessness in their local areas. This includes strategies for local homelessness, PRS, and all other relevant strategies that relate to the needs of all homeless and vulnerable client groups including non-statutory homeless people.

More people will find homes and more landlords will find tenants if PRS access schemes in the same and nearby local authorities cooperate. Landlord and property sharing protocols are a good way to encourage schemes to work efficiently together.

Identifying key relationships

Effective partnerships within strong local networks are vital in finding your clients homes. This means your scheme must be part of the local network of private rented sector, housing and social welfare services.

Good relationships with the agencies working with your client group can help minimise inappropriate referrals.

An important step is for your scheme to set up a stakeholder group that includes your local partners. These could include: the local authority (including benefits departments and support services); landlord associations; accreditation schemes; letting agents; social services; health and wellbeing boards; the probation service; the health authority; drug action teams and Alcohol Concern.

Meet with as many of the support agencies and housing advice agencies in your local area as possible. You will need to work closely with them and they will want to refer clients to you.

Make sure all relevant agencies have accurate details on the eligibility criteria for your scheme. Strong multi-agency relationships will be key to finding the appropriate housing and support package for your clients.

Strong relationships with housing providers such as hostels, housing associations, and night shelters will also be crucial to your success. Details of referral procedures and application forms should be held at your office. And, where possible, the scheme should also seek to establish referral routes into these services. See: [A checklist tool for identifying local stakeholders](#)

Working with the local authority

Housing options

Your scheme will probably receive referrals from the local authority housing department. You should in turn should be able to refer anyone to the housing department that you feel could be accepted as statutory homeless.

Local welfare assistance funds

Crisis Loans no longer exist and now sit with individual local authorities in the form of local welfare assistance schemes. Good relationships with the local authority may open up access to the local welfare assistance fund. All local authorities now run different schemes and it will benefit your clients if you meet with the team dispensing funds to understand their practices and procedures.

Housing benefit department

One of your scheme's most important relationships will be with the housing benefit department. To make the most of it make sure you have a named contact and arrange for a fast-tracking service of housing benefit claims for your clients where possible, and direct payments to landlords.

As always, good relationships and providing clear information are vital to successful PRS schemes. So it is important to go to a housing benefit team meeting where you can talk to them about the scheme, how you would like to work with them and the benefits for them of doing so.

Provide a simple A4 information sheet for all housing benefit team members about your

scheme and how it relates to their work. Ask that it is used in the induction process for all new housing benefit staff. It's also a good idea to include a member of the housing benefit team on your PRS scheme's steering group.

Where possible try to set up a 'flagging' arrangement with the relevant housing benefit department. This means that all people housed by your scheme are labelled on the housing benefit system. If a client's eligibility for benefit changes and their PRS tenancy becomes unaffordable they will be flagged on the system. The housing benefit department can then let you know quickly so you can deal with it.

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.

Social services

The adult services teams may refer people to your scheme. So it's important to establish good relationships with them. Your aim should be to ensure that ongoing support contracts are adhered to and that social workers have realistic expectations of what your scheme can achieve.

Your staff should also have a basic understanding of the circumstances in which a referral should be made to social services – for example in cases of concern over child protection.

Working with landlord associations/accreditation schemes

Links with local landlord associations and accreditation schemes will help your scheme recruit good landlords. These links will also help you give your existing landlords a good service by linking them to local services and information.

You can build good relationships with private sector bodies such as landlord accreditation schemes by:

- including landlord representatives on your scheme's management committee or stakeholder group if you have one.
- liaising with a local landlord association
- liaising with local branches of the [National Association of Estate Agents](#) or the [Scottish Association of Landlords](#) and [National Landlords' Association](#).

Landlord forums are also a good source of private sector landlords. Linking with them will promote your scheme and best practice. It is sometimes possible for schemes to speak at these events, and at the very least distribute leaflets and information about your scheme.

Letting agents

Letting agents sometimes view PRS access schemes as local competition, but it is possible to develop very good working relationships between schemes and agents.

Agents typically provide two different services for their landlord clients – tenant find or full management. When recruiting new landlords, letting agencies will normally ask them whether or not they would consider letting to someone receiving local housing

allowance. If landlords are interested in doing so agents may want to work with PRS schemes to access a pool of prospective tenants.

Working relationships

Letting agents want a good reputation that gives them repeat business from landlords. So they are typically looking for tenants who can move into a property quickly, will pass their referencing criteria and will pay their rent on time. PRS schemes that can tick these boxes with letting agents have an excellent chance of fostering good working relationships with them.

Where letting agents have had bad experiences of PRS schemes, or are simply ill informed, you will need to clearly explain the benefits of your scheme. Spending time with them explaining the scheme and giving them straightforward landlord information packs/leaflets is the best way to allay concerns and increase the landlord pool. Good schemes meet regularly with letting agents. They use the meetings to foster good working relations and to keep up to date with the local rental market.

Linking with the probation service

England and Wales

[The probation service](#) can give grants to PRS access schemes as part of their duty to provide accommodation, or to provide assistance to certain groups of people. The service also acknowledges the correlation between homelessness, poor housing and reoffending.

The probation service may also be a referral agency and refer potential clients to your scheme. It is important to meet regularly with probation staff to ensure that referrals are appropriate, and the right information is being passed on, especially regarding clients' previous convictions. Your scheme should develop a protocol to ensure that it is informed if applicants are registered sex offenders or might place other people at risk.

Scotland

There is no probation service in Scotland. Equivalent roles are carried out by criminal justice social workers, who are part of local authorities' social work departments.

Drug and alcohol services

Your scheme should also find out about voluntary sector drug and alcohol agencies in your area. By working well together and referring where appropriate you will both be better able to support the people who need your help.

Alcohol Concern is the national agency on alcohol misuse. It works to reduce the incidence and costs of alcohol-related harm and to increase the range and quality of services available to people with alcohol-related problems. The [Alcohol Concern](#) website has a directory of alcohol service providers.

Scotland's equivalent of Alcohol Concern is [Alcohol Focus Scotland](#).

A searchable by local area directory of drug and alcohol services can be found on the [Drugscope Helpfinder Database](#) or [Talk To Frank](#).

Schemes have received funding through local health initiatives (see our section on Fundraising for more information). Usually it is to provide extra services promoting a healthy and active lifestyle. However, some funding for core costs may be available.

4. Identifying your landlords and putting together your offer

Before you can decide on the services you will offer, you need to understand the types of landlords you will be dealing with – invariably they will have different priorities and wants. And understanding individual priorities means you can tailor your services to make your PRS 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. Because their mortgage agreement may dictate rent levels, they may not be in a position to negotiate. The mortgage agreement may also stipulate that they cannot let to people who are claiming housing benefit.

- **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.

They will worry about property damage, prefer low-risk tenants and may require more intensive support. 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 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**

Resident landlords are landlords who 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**

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.

Putting together your landlord offer

Now you know who your landlords are you can start thinking about what they want and consider what your resources will allow you to offer.

It is important to clarify your offer to landlords from the outset to manage their expectations. This will make the scheme look more professional and landlords will be clear what service they can expect.

No tenant is 'risk free' but by working with the PRS access scheme you can help the landlord mitigate the risks. Ultimately landlords want:

- the rent to be paid on time
- the property to be looked after
- their neighbours to be respected and not inconvenienced.

Your offer will reassure them by addressing these issues.

Your landlord offer may include:

- free service / competitive rates
- fast-track and direct payment of Housing Benefit where appropriate
- voids filled quickly
- a named support worker to help with any tenancy-related problems
- guarantee bond for those without deposits, and rent in advance
- no need to comply with the national Tenancy Deposit Protection legislation if using a bond guarantee
- [inventory](#) and [tenancy agreement](#) prepared
- taking up references
- liaison with the housing benefit department –
- tenancy ready tenants who have completed pre-tenancy training, are aware of their responsibilities and how to manage their tenancy
- support for tenants, including [tenancy health checks](#)

Thinking creatively

Financial incentives are not the only, or most important, thing that attracts landlords.

Cash-strapped PRS access schemes can use more creative ways to spend their limited funds. By creating a range of products for landlords you can set your scheme apart from

other local competition. Services for clients such as pre-tenancy training and ongoing tenancy support will appeal to landlords so these should also be included.

Some ideas for cost effective products include:

- landlord information packs
- tenant packs
- pre-tenancy training
- [tenant CVs](#)
- moving-in packs
- landlord insurance
- landlord accreditation scheme membership
- inventories completed by the scheme.
- [savings scheme](#).

Example menus of [landlord](#) and [client](#) services developed for a local authority

5. Recruiting your landlords

Casting your net as widely as possible is the best way to find and recruit landlords to your scheme. But before you get started on a high profile landlord recruitment campaign be prepared – make sure you have some tenancy-ready tenants first. This is just in case landlords with available properties respond to your publicity right away.

All landlord recruitment information and publicity material should obviously present your scheme in the best possible light clearly emphasising its benefits to landlords. But be careful not to raise landlord expectations. Many schemes fail because they overpromise at the beginning to get landlords and properties on board and then don't do what they say they will.

Professional promotional materials – well written, well designed and well printed – will create a good impression on landlords, agents and other third parties.

And don't forget that word of mouth is often the best way to get landlords on board. The first landlord is always the most difficult one to sign up. Ask those with whom you already have a relationship for contacts and to share their positive experiences of working with you.

Ways to publicise your scheme to landlords

- leaflets, flyers and posters
- include your materials in housing benefit mailings
- presentations at events with incentives for landlords to come, even if it is just food and drink. Plan the timing of the events around your prospective landlords. Are they more likely to come in the day time or in the evening?
- advertise in the property/accommodation to let sections of local newspapers. Any landlords advertising usually check adverts they have placed and then will see the one about the scheme
- create a landlord mailing list of your own using local authority lists and other sources such as events registers or information from the Land registry. Every local authority has to keep a public register for licenced Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)
- offer articles and press releases to local media that focus on case studies of successful tenancies and happy landlords. See [our working with the media](#) guide.
- put up notices up in local shops, libraries, supermarkets, surgeries, Citizens Advice Bureau offices, churches, housing benefit offices, etc.
- cold call lettings agents and landlords
- get access to databases held by the landlord registration team, housing benefit department, environmental health, empty homes officer, rent officer, and landlords' associations, or get them to include your flyer in their own mailings.
- launch the scheme with a well-publicised open day, inviting the press, letting agents, landlords and other homelessness agencies.

- use twitter and other social media, or set up a website to publicise the scheme.

Putting your scheme on the web

Landlords often use the internet to find tenants. Make sure that your scheme is recognised by internet search engines – if it doesn't appear in listings then landlords won't know it even exists. And once you have put material about your scheme online make sure it's up to date. A lack of information, or that which is out of date or inaccurate, will put people off.

If you are part of an organisation with a corporate website, make sure that your scheme can be easily found through the navigation. If this isn't possible, think about developing a separate, easy-to-find website where you can have all the forms and information landlords will need available for downloading.

Vetting landlords and finding good and legal ones for your scheme

You should only work with landlords with good quality properties and who work within the law. Landlords working illegally pose risks to tenants, damage the reputation of the private rented sector as a viable housing option and of the schemes that use them.

To check an unknown landlord, contact the local environmental health officer, tenancy relations officer (England and Wales), landlord registration officer or private rented sector officer (Scotland). They could help you find out if the landlord:

- has a record of mostly managing properties well, or of not carrying out repairs
- is known for harassment
- has any outstanding enforcement notices against him or her, (including Repairing Standard enforcement orders in Scotland).

Some of this information may have to be kept confidential due to data protection.

However, anyone is entitled to ask a local authority's environmental health department to see the public register of licensed HMOs.

Under the Housing Act 2004, this register must be made available to the public. In Scotland you can see whether a landlord is registered (see below) and whether a property has an HMO licence.

Rejecting landlords

No landlord should be used by your scheme if any of the local authority officers listed above advises against it. Don't tell the landlord the reason for refusal (there is a risk of slander, defamation or libel if the information or part of it is not correct), but decline to use them. Share information with partner agencies about poor quality properties or landlords you have decided not to work with.

Registering landlords – Scotland only

Since April 2006 all private landlords in Scotland are legally obliged to be registered with a local authority. And they must also take steps to deal with any antisocial behaviour occurring in their properties. To be registered, the local authority must be satisfied that the landlord is a 'fit and proper' person to let property. Schemes can check if landlords are registered by going to the [Landlord Registration website](#) or by contacting the landlord registration team.

If a landlord is not registered your scheme should check whether a registration application has been made. If the application hasn't been made, then you should tell the landlord about the legislation and direct them to the above website to register online.

You should not work with landlords if they have not applied for registration. It is a criminal offence for them to let out property without having submitted a valid application. When they register all landlords are given a number and since 1 April 2013, the law has required their registration number be included in written advertisements of properties to let. This is one of a number of amendments made to The Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act 2011.

About HMOs in Scotland

In Scotland, landlords letting properties to three or more people who are not from the same family are legally obliged to apply for a licence from the local authority to do so.

To grant a licence the local authority must be satisfied that the property is safe and suitable for the proposed number of tenants.

The landlord must also meet appropriate property management standards. It is usually the local authority's environmental health, housing department or private rented sector officer that is responsible for HMOs. Contact them if you have any HMO-related queries.

Providing a professional service

A professional service is critical to the success of your scheme and there are simple, key things you can do to foster professional and respected relationships.

Ensure that any promotional materials and information you send to landlords are of a professional quality. A badly photocopied leaflet or a badly prepared and written pack does not send out a good signal.

You will also need to allocate some resources – staff time and finances – to continually promote the scheme.

Communication matters

Keep on top of all your correspondence with a landlord. If you are compiling a list of landlords from different databases, ensure that the landlord is only listed

¹ <https://www.landlordregistrationscotland.gov.uk/>

once. Receiving duplicate leaflets/emails/phone calls from a scheme will not convince the landlord of your professionalism.

If you liaise with landlords well, you will be building up trust, respect and support. If you do it badly you'll waste time, resources and damage your scheme's reputation.

Building your landlord pack

A landlord pack – hard copy and/or online versions – will be very useful for your scheme. The pack can help clarify exactly what the scheme can do for the landlord and what his or her responsibilities are.

Other information you can include is: a copy of the landlord and scheme agreement, information on the Housing Health and Safety Ratings System, and details of any local landlord accreditation scheme.

Landlord pack information sources

You can see that we have put together an example of what can be included in a landlord pack. But another excellent resource is the [Accreditation Network UK Landlord Handbook](#). You can also find information for landlords in Scotland on the Scottish Government website.

Suggested contents for your landlord pack

- [Intro letter and useful contacts](#)
- Scheme promotional leaflet
- Easy to understand [process map](#) so that landlords understand the steps that will be taken prior to their property being let
- [Scheme service standards](#)
- [Accreditation Network UK Landlord Handbook](#)
- [Tenancy deposit legislation factsheet](#)
- [A guide to housing benefits](#)
- [Landlord registration form](#)
- [Landlord agreement](#)
- [Tenancy agreement](#)
- [Bond agreement](#)
- [Claims procedure](#)
- [Claim form](#)
- [Abandonment policy](#)

6. Identifying your clients and eligibility

Who is eligible?

When setting up your scheme, be very clear about your client group. Who are they and what do they need? Most schemes usually start off by helping homeless and potentially homeless households with low support needs. Once they become more established they may expand to cover other categories of clients.

To help you define your client group consider the resources you have available including staff numbers. Think also about the availability of private rented properties and their sizes. Ask what support is available to your clients from existing local services and identify the gaps.

Deciding your criteria

Once you have decided your client group you can define your selection criteria.

Establish clear eligibility and referral criteria that can be used by your potential clients and local service providers. You should also get details of eligibility and referral criteria for services that you can refer potential and clients to.

Identify the level and variety of support that may be available to private sector tenants, whether provided directly or through a local agency. This will influence your scheme's ability to house people with support needs. It should also help you with your initial assessment process regarding a client's suitability for your scheme.

Example eligibility criteria for your PRS access scheme

- Non-priority need
- On low income or benefits
- Unable to pay for a deposit or rent in advance to access the private rented sector
- No arson convictions

Breaking down barriers – helping people leave supported accommodation

One of the biggest barriers to using the private rented sector effectively are the perceptions held by some workers and residents from supported accommodation schemes, such as hostels. So, it's a good idea when setting up referral routes from supported accommodation providers to run training or information sessions. This will ensure there is clarity about what your scheme can offer. They can then communicate the benefits of PRS to their residents - your prospective clients.

Under 35s and shared accommodation

The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) is the level of housing benefit that applies to single people in the private rented sector who are aged 34 years and under. SAR means that housing benefit is limited to a maximum amount based on what is deemed an appropriate rent for a room in a shared property. This limit varies dependent on where the claimant lives. The SAR is based on the level of local rents for properties that are not self-contained.

Young people need to carefully consider the financial implications of moving into the private rented sector (PRS), particularly if they are looking to move into employment or education.

If you would like to offer help to under 35s, your scheme needs to think about the following:

- the number and sizes of properties available in the area
- your scheme's ability to provide support
- the market rent for a room in a shared flat compared with what the client would get in terms of housing benefit, i.e. the need for top-ups
- the willingness of landlords to work with this age group
- checks on resident landlords
- risks from other residents in HMOs
- support needs – young people can be very vulnerable
- Your ability to match sharers in properties

If a scheme decides to work with under-35s, they may need to look at particular types of properties that will be suitable and affordable for that particular client group. Some options include:

- lodgings
- HMOs
- bedsits

- flat-shares

All of these options have particular challenges. These include: careful vetting of landlords; educating clients about house rules in shared accommodation, and thorough property inspection where a client is moving into an HMO.

For more information on sharing in the private rented sector and under 35 year olds please look at Crisis' good practice programme – The Sharing Solutions Programme. A toolkit focusing specifically on shared accommodation will be available soon.

How will a client find your scheme?

The two ways that clients will access your scheme are through referral agents and by direct application. New schemes are often unprepared for the initial difficulties they face in getting clients who want private rented sector accommodation to join their scheme.

This may be simply because clients and agents don't know about the scheme. Or it could be because the clients don't want to live in the private rented sector; sometimes they are even advised by support workers to hold out for social housing.

Just as you need to promote your scheme to landlords, you also have to promote it to clients and referral agencies. Part of this promotional activity should focus on educating agencies and potential clients about the benefits of living in the private rented sector.

Ways to promote your scheme include:

- adverts
- leaflets and posters in referral agency offices
- presentations
- attending team meetings of referral agencies and other stakeholders.

Topics to cover

- Housing options
- Renting in the private rented sector
- How the scheme works
- Eligibility criteria
- How clients can access the scheme
- Role of the scheme in assuring clients have access to good quality properties and landlords.

Making your referral process clear

When your scheme has clear eligibility and referral criteria, you should set out a referral process for use by other agencies. This process should also be made available to other internal projects/departments that will refer clients. See our [referral form template](#).

While defining your referral process it's a good idea to consult with potential referral agencies and local authority departments to ensure the process works well for everyone. You should discuss what you all do and how to make referrals.

Referral agents are vital in promoting your PRS access scheme. They can influence clients' expectation levels of the PRS, the accommodation they may be able to access, and how long the process may take. As a result, it is very important to ensure that agents are well informed about your scheme, the forms that need to be completed and the information they should provide clients with.

Key steps in a referral

- Referral agency discusses housing options with a client and together decide that they want to make a referral to a PRS access scheme.
- Referral agency and client fill out the pre-interview agreement, referral form and risk assessment. This is then sent to the PRS access scheme.
- The scheme responds within an agreed amount of time to accept the client for an interview and arrange the interview,
- Once the client is interviewed, the scheme will provide feedback to the referral agency about the interview's outcome.
- When the full assessment is completed by the scheme and actions are agreed with the client, the scheme will provide feedback on this to the referral agency. If

appropriate the scheme will agree what continued role the referral agency will play.

Think carefully about the type and amount of paperwork you need the referral agency to complete. On the one hand you don't want to duplicate the paperwork being completed by the agent and the scheme. It's time consuming for both parties and soul destroying for a client. However, you do need enough information to ensure the client can be effectively interviewed and assessed against the eligibility criteria.

An effective method is to require the referral agent to complete the referral form. This then becomes the application form for your scheme. Any additional information you require can simply be added to the existing referral form.

Applying to your scheme directly

Clients may approach a PRS access scheme directly. This will be a direct application and would have the following key steps.

- Client expresses a wish to access a private rented sector property via the PRS access scheme.
- PRS access scheme officer and client fill out the pre-interview agreement, application form and risk assessment.
- Client is assessed against the eligibility criteria and accepted on to the scheme.
- Client is supported to look for a property in the private rented sector.
- Once a suitable property has been found, the client is assisted to complete a housing benefit form and provide supporting evidence for a claim.

Assessing applications of potential clients

There is no one right way to assess applications. Each scheme needs to develop its own approach relevant to the local housing market, available resources and types of clients.

Important issues to consider

- What level of support is to be offered?
- Are there enough staff?
- Are staff appropriately trained to offer support?
- Can suitable volunteers be recruited and trained to provide the necessary support?
- What other agencies in your local area are seen as 'good support providers'?
- Are there any local befriending schemes? These can complement the work of deposit schemes very well.

Assessment is best done face-to-face. This helps build a relationship and results in a much better understanding of the client and their needs. A lot of information will be required, but it is important to avoid making clients feel they are being interrogated. This may lead to questions not being answered fully.

Examples of additional information include: housing history; any rent arrears, offending history; support and health needs, and preferred areas and property types.

When the assessment is complete a support agreement should be produced. It should specify the support services to be provided and the conditions to be met by the client – this includes regular contact with the scheme.

A detailed support plan can then be agreed with the client setting goals, target dates and review dates. A realistic risk assessment should also be carried out to protect staff working with problem clients.

Gathering references

Before you can complete an assessment your client will need to have supplied references. Most High Street letting agencies require references from prospective tenants to show they have a good tenancy history, prove their employment and show they are of good character.

Your PRS access scheme should also require clients to provide references, from landlords and/or other support agencies. This ensures that your client has the best chance of sustaining their new tenancy. And it will help you identify other agencies that they are dealing with.

Being flexible

In gathering references, you will need a flexible approach – your client may not have had a tenancy for a number of years and references could be hard to track down. This could be a difficult part of the job, but it is very worthwhile.

Good references, sparse references and the reference process can helpfully clarify issues the client may have and that your scheme may have to deal with further down the line. Early awareness will allow you to put relevant support in place, and in many cases prevent these issues from causing any problems with the tenancy.

References for a client should be allowed from:

- current or previous landlord
- employer
- current hostel
- support worker
- volunteer placement manager
- teacher or tutor

Sharing support with outside agencies

When entering into working arrangements with outside agencies, you should draw up clear protocols on how the support is going to be jointly managed. This should be done jointly. Both organisations should have a copy of the support plan and agree their respective roles in achieving it. This will make it easier to resolve any problems that may arise.

Regular and detailed communication between the two agencies is vital. The scheme will need to know, for example, if a client has any issues, which may affect their ability to sustain the tenancy, or if the support agency loses touch with the client.

7. Planning your organisational policies

Your scheme will need to develop formal policies relating to the work you do, the way you do it and the people you deal with.

Below are areas that your policies should cover:

- User involvement
- Risk assessment and lone working
- Confidentiality
- Complaints
- Data protection
- Client data
- Lone working

Getting the right guidance

The Charity Commission has a range of [guidance notes](#) for charities that will help. This includes advice on charity law, advice for charities delivering public services and some specific information for smaller charities.

[The National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#) has a range of good governance guides and toolkits for the UK voluntary and community sector.

CASS Business School's Centre for Charity Effectiveness has developed a [toolkit of guides](#) helpful in protecting and planning for the long-term future of your organisation.

About risk assessments

You will need to complete a risk assessment form with all of your clients. Risk assessment is an ongoing process. It should be used as a tool to identify and assess risk on a consistent and systematic basis. Clients should be encouraged to fully participate in their risk assessments.

Where the health and safety of staff and/or others might be compromised you may have to share confidential information from the assessment. This confidentiality will be agreed with the scheme manager.

In every instance if a client has a schedule 1 offence (i.e. offences committed against a child), the line manager should be notified. This should be part of the client assessment process and before the client is accepted onto the PRS access scheme.

Risk assessments must be reviewed at least every three months. Support workers and/or other members of staff should initiate a review within five days of a 'trigger episode' taking place.

Trigger episodes can be: violence; serious drug or alcohol abuse; self-harm; changes in contact with children; hospitalisation; domestic crises or any other serious incident involving the client. Clients should also be advised that they have the right to request a review at any time.

Managing risks and lone working

Known risks associated with a client, risk updates and cautions for PRS access scheme staff, particularly those lone working, should be listed on the scheme [at risk list](#). PRS access scheme staff should check this list prior to meeting with a client on their own. When a client moves in to their tenancy, the support worker/PRS access scheme worker should complete the [risk management plan](#).

The safety of your workers is paramount. Although incidents are rare it is important to acknowledge that visiting people at home does carry potential risks. Your scheme's staff must ensure that reasonable steps are taken to protect themselves.

Make sure there is a clear lone working [policy](#) for your scheme.

8. Dealing with confidentiality

Staff, volunteers, referral agencies, landlords and clients must treat any information about anyone participating in the PRS access scheme as confidential and information provided by an applicant/client should not be passed on to another person or organisation without their prior permission. The exception is where there are overriding legal requirements.

If a staff member or volunteer seeks advice and support from another team member about a particular client, information can be shared between them. The duty of confidentiality must then be kept by both of them.

If a staff member feels that sharing information with professional workers, agencies or a letting agent/landlord is in a client's best interest this must be discussed with them first. If the client agrees, it is always best if they share the information themselves.

Offering clients support

Your staff members can support the clients in sharing their confidential information. They could offer to be with them at the time, help them identify the most appropriate professional worker or agency and help with making appointments, travel arrangements etc.

Clients may also be asked to agree to the sharing of particular information i.e. in respect of housing benefit claims. See client [disclosure of consent form](#). If the client does not agree that to share the information is in their best interests, then the PRS access scheme must respect the client's right. To do otherwise would be in breach of the PRS access scheme's aim of developing the confidence and independence of the client.

Storing information

Confidential information must be kept in filing cabinets that must be locked at the end of every day or stored in password protected computer files. This should be read in accordance with policy on data protection.

The Data Protection Act is designed to protect the personal information that is held about individuals. Personal information is defined as 'any information kept, from which a living individual can be identified, including any opinions of the individual recorded by the organisation'. It applies to all forms of data storage, from databases to manual filing systems. There are eight basic principles that your PRS access scheme must consider to comply with the legislation.

Personal information should be:

- obtained and processed fairly and lawfully. In practice this means that a client's resistance to giving information should not unduly restrict their access to your services. It also means your information collection requirements should apply to everyone
- held for lawful purposes. Information should only be used or disclosed for purposes that are described in the register entry. In practice this means that you must be registered under the Data Protection Act, stating the purpose for which the information is held, and how it will be shared. It is also important to ensure clients are clear about what the information they are supplying will be used for
- adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose for which it is held
- accurate and where necessary kept up to date
- held no longer than necessary
- accessible to the individuals concerned and where appropriate corrected or erased
- surrounded by appropriate security
- retained within the European Economic Area.

Exceptional circumstances

In exceptional circumstances where information refers to crimes of extreme violence and/or abuse you may pass information to another agency. This is only if it is felt that to withhold such information may endanger the wellbeing of others. Similarly, it is expected that other agencies will divulge such information.

The protection of children is an important exception to the principle of confidentiality. If one of your workers is concerned by signs of possible non-accidental injury or other abuse of a child, they should first discuss the matter with a member of the PRS access scheme management team.

Police requests for confidential information

The principle of confidentiality also applies to requests for information by the police. If the police state that there is a legal duty to give the information, then a member of your PRS access scheme should ask the legal basis for the duty. They should state that they wish to obtain legal advice before giving the information.

If a police enquiry relates to a situation of serious risk or danger or to a grave offence, it may be necessary to consider whether an exceptional breach of confidentiality is justified. A decision on this could involve ethical considerations concerning the relationship with the client, legal aspects, and possible effects on the PRS access scheme.

It is advisable, when giving information to the police, to be accompanied by another person. If an oral statement is made to a police officer or other official and it is taken down in writing, a request to see the written notes should be made. This is to correct errors and then the notes should be signed as approved. Also, the police officer or official's name, rank or function, station or office should be recorded and a note made of the substance of the interview.

Court action

Where witnesses are summoned to appear in court, they cannot claim the confidentiality of any information that they possess which affects the case before the court. Only solicitors and barristers can claim in court that statements made to them by their clients are confidential and should not be disclosed.

Responsibility for confidentiality

All PRS access schemes must take all reasonable practical steps through training and guidance to ensure all staff and volunteers are fully aware of the need for confidentiality. And all administrative systems and record keeping should protect confidential information.

Each employee or volunteer is personally responsible for ensuring that they do not breach this policy. They should understand that breaching the confidentiality policy may

jeopardise the PRS access scheme and its work and that if staff breach the policy it will be a disciplinary matter.

Your scheme's policies should make it clear that confidentiality breaches by agencies, clients or landlords may have implications for their continued participation in the PRS access scheme.

Dealing with complaints

Your scheme should ensure that you give an efficient and effective response to complaints from referral agencies, applicants, clients, landlords/agents and others involved about the service received. Schemes may wish to set up their own complaints procedures or use the organisation's existing complaints procedures if available.

Complaints could be about:

- a failure of service
- a delay or not acting upon a request for service.
- poor staff attitude or performance (i.e. not calling back/responding)
- failure to follow a policy or procedure.

For more information on complaints take a look at the final section of this toolkit – 'Working for success, improvement and income'.

Crisis Housing Services

Making it happen – your PRS access scheme in action

Making it happen – your PRS access scheme in action

Here is our step-by-step guide to everything you need to do to make your scheme run well. We think the toolkit works best if you read each section in order, but the links below will help you choose your own approach as well.

- 1. Supporting and retaining your landlords**
- 2. Money matters: understanding bonds, deposits and rent in advance**
- 3. Managing landlord claims – procedures for deposits and bonds**
- 4. About property standards and property management**
- 5. Services for clients**
- 6. Setting up tenancies**
- 7. Supporting tenancies**
- 8. Helping clients move into work**
- 9. Ending a tenancy**

1. Supporting and retaining your landlords

Landlords are often wary of using PRS access schemes out of fear they will not be supported if problems arise after a tenant has moved into a property. Consequently, well-run schemes offering support before, during and after tenancies are the best way to allay their fears.

Organised support instils confidence in your scheme and sorts problems out easily. What's more, support packages can really sell a PRS access scheme to landlords. This is because they would not receive this service in the private sector – letting agents, unlike PRS access schemes, do not have a vested interest in sustaining tenancies.

Providing named contacts and response times

Landlords should be given a named contact in your scheme and clearly advertised response times – eg 24-48 hours –for the support service you offer. Providing a dedicated email address for landlords can be useful; it will also help your scheme manage resources and its time. The degree of support will depend on the resources available to the scheme but schemes have found landlord support packages really sells the service.

The support you offer could include:

- working with housing benefit to resolve relevant problems. These might be where a tenant has slipped into rent arrears and is receiving housing benefit payments direct
- setting up rent arrears repayment agreements where a tenant has fallen behind with their rent

- helping the landlord to mediate with the tenant if they have damaged property and behaved anti-socially
- giving general advice and basic legal advice to landlords on eviction processes and giving advice where problems persist
- referring landlords to third parties when they need more in-depth legal advice
- offering replacement tenants when the previous one leaves

Making your support clear

The degree of support that your scheme offers landlords should be made clear at the start of their contact with you to make sure they know what to expect and what their obligations will be.

They should be aware of your protocols for [dealing with rent arrears](#) these should be included in [the landlord information pack](#). You should also have protocols for dealing with property damage, anti-social behaviour and communication breakdowns between the landlord and tenant.

Encourage landlord participation through:

- arranging training sessions with local authority housing benefit, environmental health or private renting officers
- occasional questionnaires or satisfaction surveys
- a landlords' newsletter adverts or articles in the local press
- a landlord business club is essentially a steering group of a select number of landlords. They should meet regularly, around every three months to discuss any issues with the scheme, any ideas for change, and ensure the scheme provides the right sort of services to landlords. The members of this group should also be considered ambassadors with a mission to promote the scheme and inform other landlords of issues and changes. Landlords almost always take things on board more readily from a fellow landlord than they will from the scheme.
- [Landlord forums](#) – A forum is a popular and effective way for schemes to involve local landlords. It can be used to inform them of support available, promote their services, and give updates on new legislation and policy. Through the forum landlords can express their views and concerns which will help the scheme improve services.

2. Money matters – understanding bonds, deposits and rent in advance

Here, we look at the different types of PRS access schemes and how the tenancy deposit protection legislation impacts on them.

Guarantee bonds

The guarantee bond is a written commitment from a PRS access scheme. It covers certain types of costs that the landlord may incur at the end of a tenancy. [Guarantee bonds](#) set out the conditions under which a landlord may make a claim and the maximum amount that can be claimed. Your scheme should have clear service standards for paying out on claims, for example 14 days.

A guarantee bond is offered to a landlord instead of a cash deposit. It usually amounts to a month's rent to cover damages and sometimes rent arrears.

Time limited bonds- usually six months or one year is recommended. The tenant and landlord should be clearly informed about the time limits at the start of the tenancy of the end date. The reason for time limited bonds is to limit the resources needed and financial risk to the scheme, and ensure there are no surprise claims from clients helped years previously.

But if it is necessary to extend the bond for a particular client to prevent repeat homelessness, then the scheme should have the option to do so

During the tenancy, your scheme should support the tenant to save up for their own deposit. Even if a tenant hasn't managed to save up for the full amount, landlords are often happy to accept a smaller amount, and sometimes no deposit at all, providing

there have been no problems in the tenancy or claims on the bond. It will also enable the tenant to move on to another property independently and increase their financial capabilities.

How bonds can benefit your scheme

The benefits to your scheme of providing bonds – particularly compared to cash deposits – are:

- mitigates risks for landlords and therefore makes the tenant more attractive
- considerable savings. Alongside sensible measures to minimise claims, bond scheme claim rates do not generally exceed 15-20% of the total liability in a given year. This means that 80-85% remains unspent and can be carried forward into the next year
- assisting more people through recycling of funds and financial management. It is standard for the total value of bonds issued to be greater than the 'guarantee fund' held to cover them at a given time
- reduced administration costs by comparison to cash deposit schemes as less staff time is required. There is no chasing of unreturned moneys as it is up to the landlord to make a claim for payment
- improved cash flow and interest accumulation as the money is retained by the PRS scheme until a claim is made.

The benefits to PRS landlords are:

- reduces financial risk should damage occur (and – in some cases – rent arrears)
- bonds do not have to be protected under the Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes (TDPS)
- the scheme will pay against claims swiftly, avoiding the possibility of lengthy and costly arbitration. A system should be in place where the PRS scheme will respond to all claims within a specified number of days of a tenancy ending.

Managing the bond guarantee fund

The guarantee fund is the pot of money from which payments for valid claims are made. Your scheme must have the relevant financial capabilities and procedures in place for managing the guarantee bond.

These include:

- a guarantee fund held in a separate account or ring fenced
- strong reporting procedures to show how and where money is being spent
- the ability to issue the bond guarantee quickly
- the ability to pay any claims against the bond guarantee quickly.

See: [Example claim form](#)

The [bond modelling tool](#) may help the scheme to plan and project the following on a month-by-month basis for the lifetime of the project. It focusses on:

- bonds issued, bonds ending, live bonds and cumulative number of people housed
- live liability, value of bonds ending, value of expected claims, and cumulative value of all claims
- guarantee fund remaining, minimum guarantee fund required (and the difference between the two)

It is possible to adjust the timing and number of bonds to be issued, their value, the expected claim rate, the starting guarantee fund and the percentage of live liability to be covered by the guarantee fund.

Please note that responsibility for financial management lies with your scheme. Crisis accepts no responsibility as to the financial decisions and financial modelling that the scheme takes.

Our recommendations for guarantee funds

Based on our extensive experience working with PRS access schemes, we recommend that in the first year of operation the total value of the guarantee fund should be equal to at least 75% of the total value of guarantee bonds issued. This can be reduced to 66% if payments are within the projected range and then reviewed on an annual basis.

We advise against allowing the guarantee fund to fall below 50% of the total potential liability, unless you are confident that your claim rates are significantly lower year on year.

Based on national averages, claims do not often exceed 15-20% of guarantee bonds. However, it is important to base the fund on the scheme's own claims rates, to ensure there is no financial shortfall. Your scheme should monitor all bond claims – low claim rates are a good selling point to landlords, and proves good value for money to funders.

Understanding cash deposits and how to protect them

Funding for cash deposits could be provided directly to the prospective landlord of those clients who would be otherwise unable to access PRS accommodation. This would then have to be protected in one of the three Tenancy Deposit Protection Schemes. Both the tenant and the scheme would have to be notified as to which one is used.

In Scotland deposit schemes have recently been introduced. (please see the [Scottish government website](#) for more details). When the tenancy comes to an end the cash would either be refunded back to the scheme or used to cover damage or rent arrears.

About [tenancy deposit protection](#)

All cash deposits taken by landlords for Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) now have to be safeguarded by one of three government approved schemes. The new rules apply to tenancies in England that were started or renewed from 6 April 2007 onwards.

Any tenancy that begun before 6 April 2007, but has been renewed through a new tenancy agreement since this date needs to comply with the legislation. The original deposit amount needs to have been protected correctly or the landlord may still be liable to pay compensation to the tenant. Tenants should ask their landlord for details of the tenancy deposit protection scheme being used when signing a new tenancy agreement. Landlords can choose which scheme they wish to use. They must safeguard each deposit and inform the tenant which scheme has been used within 30 days of receiving the deposit.

Independent protection

The schemes are intended to provide a fairer system for how the deposit is handled, and how it is returned at the end of a tenancy. The tenancy deposit protection schemes are designed to independently safeguard tenants' deposits. Where necessary they are also intended to resolve disputes about deposits at the end of a tenancy. The service is free for tenants.

Even if the cash deposit is provided by someone else (a family member, or a PRS access scheme), it would still need to be paid, by the landlord, into one of the three schemes.

From 6 April 2012, deposits for all ASTs in England and Wales must now be protected within 30 calendar days of receipt by the landlord. This change is because of the Localism Bill 2011. A panel will decide how the deposit should be split between landlord/agent and tenant and pay out the deposit accordingly. If a landlord/agent fails to pay into the protection scheme, the scheme will pay the deposit monies due to the tenant and pursue the landlord/agent.

Prescribed information

This is what the landlord or agent have to provide to both the tenant and any third party who has paid the deposit. It has to be signed by the landlord, and the tenant must have been offered to sign it (although they do not need to actually sign). It includes:

- landlord address and contact details
- deposit amount
- property details to which the deposit relates.
- tenant(s) address and details, including at the tenancy end
- third party address and contact details
- details of the TDPS including contact details
- information on the procedures applying for the release of the deposit and the procedures if there is a dispute at the end of the tenancy
- procedures that apply under the scheme where either the landlord or the tenant

is not contactable at the end of the tenancy

- the leaflet for the TDPS

There are two different types of tenancy deposit protection scheme:

A custodial scheme – Under this scheme, the landlord or letting agent will pay the tenant's deposit into the scheme. It will remain there until the end of the tenancy. At the tenancy's end it will be returned directly to the tenant or a third party – such as your PRS access scheme - where specified.

If there is a dispute, then an independent panel of adjudicators will decide on a resolution. The deposit will be paid back to landlord and tenant in amounts dependent on that decision.

There is only one custodial scheme which is the Deposit Protection Service (DPS)

An insurance scheme - Here, the landlord or letting agent holds the deposit in their own account. They pay an annual membership fee and fee for each deposit protected --. At the tenancy's end, the landlord/agent and tenant should agree on any deductions from the deposit. The landlord/agent should then pay the full or part deposit amount back to the tenant.

In a dispute at the tenancy's end that cannot be resolved informally between landlord/agent and tenant, the TDPS will ask the landlord/agent to pay the disputed amount into the protection scheme who will decide the outcome. Any monies not in dispute should be returned to the tenant.

Automatic unprotecting of deposits placed in insurance schemes

TDPS automatically unprotect deposits when the tenancy's initial term has expired and if they haven't been notified if the tenant has left, signed a new lease or is on a periodic tenancy.

Landlords must let TDPSs know the status of a tenancy once the initial fixed term expires. If the tenancy has ended the scheme will require that the usual procedures outlined above are followed for the deposit's return.

If the tenancy becomes periodic the landlord has to tell the TDPS the tenancy is continuing; no fee is payable and no further action is required. If a new fixed-term tenancy agreement is signed, landlords will have to pay another fee and reissue the prescribed information. It is advisable for your PRS access scheme to register as an interested third party to ensure all client deposits are protected.

Changes with the Deregulation Bill

After the passing of the Deregulation Bill (**estimated 2015**) it won't be necessary to re-protect a tenant's deposit through a TDPS at the end of a fixed-term tenancy if the tenancy continues, providing the deposit was protected correctly initially. This will be the case whether it's periodic or another fixed term.

Within three months of the Deregulation Bill becoming law all tenants' deposits held by landlords must be protected and prescribed information served. This includes those deposits held before April 2007.

The bill requires that to protect deposits landlords will still need to let TDPSs know the status of a tenancy at the end of a fixed term. If the schemes do not hear within 30 days of the fixed term ending, the deposit will become unprotected.

Protecting deposits in Scotland

There are currently three deposit protection schemes operating in Scotland. These are Letting Protection Service (Scotland), Safedeposits Scotland and My deposits Scotland. By official definition, any payment made 30 days after the beginning of a tenancy does not constitute a deposit. PRS access schemes offering bonds as part of a repayment plan must be aware that a landlord is under no legal obligation to secure any payments made by the tenant after this 30-day period.

3. Managing landlord claims – procedures for deposits and bonds

If your PRS access scheme operates on a deposit or bond guarantee basis, the landlord

may make a claim for damages (and sometimes rent arrears) at the end of the tenancy. The claim will be against the bond pot your scheme has allocated for purpose. Claims for all cash deposits should be dealt with through the relevant TDPS provider's procedures. For insurance-based schemes, you should be able to follow the procedures set out for claims against guarantees. But for the custodial scheme – the Deposit Protection Service–your PRS access scheme and the landlord will need to notify it how the deposit should be returned.

Landlords should be required to complete a claim form if they wish to make a claim against the bond or guarantee. Submitting a claim should be time limited to make the process as efficient as possible. Landlords should be required to submit their claim within 14 days of the tenancy coming to an end.

What can a landlord claim?

It should be clearly set out in the agreement between the landlord and a PRS access scheme what will be covered under the bond or guarantee. Here are some examples of what a landlord could claim:

- damage to property or furnishings up to the bond, guarantee or cash deposit amount. This is provided it is not already covered under a pre-existing building or contents insurance policy and cannot be classed as *'fair wear and tear'*
- any rent arrears up to the value of the bond, guarantee or cash deposit
- any deep cleaning needed as a result of a pet living in the property or other cleaning required above usual 'wear and tear'.

Landlords should be required to submit evidence to support their claim against the bond or guarantee. This may include:

- inventory completed at the start of the tenancy
- check-out inventory completed
- one or two quotes for items lost or damaged
- an up-to-date rental account clearly showing housing benefit and tenant rental payments received and the amount of rent outstanding.

If the client falls into rent arrears or is served an eviction notice, TDPSs will only pay out on a claim if they have a copy of the notice and informed of the rent arrears. This encourages landlords to contact the PRS access scheme at the start of any issues rather than at the end. Consequently, there is opportunity to address problems, and possibly rescue the tenancy, or at the very least assist the client to move on.

Your PRS access scheme should have clear policies and procedures in place for when a landlord makes a claim. These policies and procedures should be shared with the landlord at sign up and at the end of the tenancy. There should be a stipulation that a landlord cannot make a claim if they do not let your scheme know they are serving notice on the client.

A claims process can look like this...

- client is given notice or gives notice to vacate the property
- landlord and client inform the scheme
- the PRS access scheme conducts a move-out inspection with the client
- within 14 days the landlord submits a claim, along with two quotes, for repairs to damages done to the property and/or rent arrears
- the PRS access scheme verifies the claim against their own record of the inventory and the move out inspection and decides whether to pay the landlord and how much to pay out
- the scheme pays the landlord within 14 days of receiving the claim.

In cases where a cash deposit has been given to the landlord, the process may look like this...

- client is given notice or gives notice to vacate the property
- the PRS access scheme conducts a move-out inspection with the client
- within 14 days the landlord submits a claim, along with two quotes, for repairs to damages done to the property
- the scheme verifies the claim against their own record of the inventory and the

move out inspection and agrees with the landlord how much to pay out

- the landlord informs the relevant TDPS what the deductions are and the balance of the deposit is returned to the PRS access scheme.

According to the Deposit Protection Service, ***“if a third party pays the deposit and is entitled to claim all or part of the deposit repayment, they should be registered as the lead tenant on the deposit submission. The third party can then fully influence the distribution of the deposit repayment and doesn’t actually need to reside in the property. The actual tenant(s) can be registered as additional tenants.”***

Recovering money from the client

It is standard practice for PRS access schemes to recover any money they have paid out on a claim from the tenant. This may be claimed from any savings the tenant has made over the course of the tenancy. If this is a process your scheme will follow, you must make it clear to the tenant throughout their tenancy. This should also encourage them to ensure there are no damages or rent arrears, as they will know they are ultimately responsible.

Your scheme may also stipulate that if there is a claim against the bond and the client does not repay the money, the client will not have further assistance from the scheme until repayment.

About rent in advance

Rent in advance is paid to a landlord to reassure them that the tenant will be able to pay the rent in future. But it can be very difficult for a client on a low income to get that money together.

To help, your PRS access scheme [may pay the rent in advance](#) on the client’s behalf. You could then recoup the money from the client’s first or second housing benefit payment. This has to be agreed by the landlord and the housing benefit department in advance.

You should also make sure that landlords in your scheme understand that housing benefit is paid in arrears. This means there will be a gap between the landlord receiving his/her next rent payment after the rent in advance has been paid. Despite this gap however, the landlord will get money upfront and then can be assured of the housing benefit claim being set up.

Setting up payments

To do this you will need to have a prior arrangement with the housing benefit department for the first or second instalment of housing benefit to be paid to the scheme. You will also need to have a good working relationship with the housing benefit department to address any issues as they arise

Another option is to help a client apply to a local welfare assistance fund - previously the social fund. But, there is no government funding for this so it is up to each authority to decide the assistance they offer. Consequently, it’s important to contact the local authority and establish exactly what they can offer your clients. If they don’t offer rent in advance, there may still be some other help for low income households, for example providing low-cost furniture.

4. About property standards and property management

All private sector properties used by PRS access schemes must be safe and free from hazards that could harm occupants. This section gives guidance on property standards and property inspections.

Setting property standards

Poor property standards are often associated with properties at the cheaper end of the market likely to be affordable to homeless or potentially homeless households. Unfortunately, PRS access schemes can be the last port of call for landlords of sub-standard properties who fail to rent their properties in the open market. Your scheme should be aware of this and insist on minimum property requirements.

Landlords are under a common law duty to ensure that the property they provide is safe.

Additionally, in Scotland, landlords must recognise their legal responsibilities under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 in relation to the [Repairing Standard](#). All residential properties in England and Wales should comply with building regulations. Local building inspectors and fire prevention officers can advise landlords on these. As a minimum, landlords should remove potentially dangerous appliances and heaters and fit smoke alarms.

Properties and their landlords must meet current standards:

- electrical safety
- fire safety and furnishings regulations
- gas safety
- meet the requirements of the Repairing Standard (Scotland only)
- comply with the Tenancy Deposit Protection legislation (England & Wales only)

We have developed an example set of [minimum property standards](#)- for use by PRS access schemes (and a separate Scotland version). This can be referred to when inspecting properties. It is good practice to ensure the property is:

- well managed
- registered if required (e.g. HMOs)
- free of any category one hazards as defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

Why good quality matters

Helping your clients find good quality accommodation increases the likelihood that they will take good care of it and sustain their tenancy. Conversely, poor property standards can encourage anti-social behaviour. This is because if the property is in a poor state already, the tenant may feel they don't need to look after it.

Poor standards can also lead to rent arrears – tenants may feel that they shouldn't pay the full amount of rent because of the outstanding works required of the landlord. They could also be looking to get themselves evicted to get access to a better standard of property.

When placing one of your clients make sure they are happy to live there and that the accommodation is safe. Your landlords should be encouraged to improve property standards to a level that is not only safe, but decent. If the property is not at the quality you prefer, but the client is happy to live there, it is fine to move them in, as long as it is safe. At the end of the day it is the client's choice.

Working with local experts

Where possible, your scheme should establish good relationships with local authority environmental health, private sector housing officers and other experts who can undertake inspections on your behalf. They could also train your scheme's staff to do so. If you have a voluntary accreditation scheme for landlords in your area, encourage them to join. You should also make sure that you have up-to-date information about any available grants or loans offered by your local council to landlords to improve standards. Many landlords are wary of any PRS access scheme that might involve them with the local environmental health department (England and Wales) or landlord registration team (Scotland). 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. You should set up a meeting with the local authority's private sector housing manager to inform them of your services and investigate how you can work together. It may be a good idea to run a joint landlords' forum with the local authority rather than separate ones. This will present a coordinated united front. It is a good way of showing landlords your commitment to a professional and sustainable partnership, but be aware that the local authorities' reputation can have both a good and bad influence on yours.

Assessing risk – guidance on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

HHSRS is the risk assessment procedure for residential properties carried out by the local authority. **HHSRS does not apply in Scotland.**

The HHSRS is a measurement of the condition of a dwelling. It is a very complicated system and it is not necessary for your scheme to understand it fully. It is important, however, for your scheme to inspect all properties. If there is concern that a property is unsafe, you should contact environmental health to do a full HHSRS inspection.

See: [Government guidance on HHSRS](#)

Understanding hazard awareness and enforcement

The local authority has enforcement powers to ensure that PRS properties are free from Category 1 HHSRS hazards. These powers also cover properties where a collection of Category 2 HHSRS hazards exist.

Category 1 hazards may include things like: the property doesn't have adequate heating; the fire alarms don't work; the roof leaks; there are broken rails on steep stairways or doors and windows don't close or lock properly. Category 2 hazards are less serious, but in combination they could be enough of a hazard for action to be taken

Many local authorities choose to approach enforcement informally at first by simply contacting and talking with the landlord. They do, however, have the authority to issue hazard awareness notices through a staged process. The final stage of a hazard awareness is a demolition order where the property poses imminent threat to health and safety and is beyond reasonable repair.

Because enforcement teams are not always adequately resourced, it is important to tell them about any properties that are not up to standard.

Inspecting properties – the importance

The only way to ensure that properties used by a PRS access are of a good standard is to inspect them all.

Inspections help you:

- check that the client is going into a property of a good standard that will not have adverse effects on their health
- show the landlord that you are serious and professional
- do a thorough inventory with digital photos should there be any claims made at the end of the tenancy
- identify the property's suitability for your client and establish any furnishings needed to make it feel like home, like furniture and white goods
- identify any property grants the landlord may be eligible for.
- provides an opportunity to identify anything additional that the client will need in their home, white goods, furniture etc.

Using a simple and logical inspection approach

The inspection completed by your PRS access scheme can be very basic with any serious issues reported to environmental health/private sector housing for their further inspection.

It may be possible to make an arrangement with your local authority to carry out inspections on your behalf.

A systematic and logical process should be used to inspect all properties to ensure consistency across different officers and to ensure that nothing is missed. Keep it simple and note down any obvious defects. Highlight the hazard category it relates to, the likelihood of it occurring and the possible effect it may have on the occupier.

See: [Inspection checklist](#)

If you would like a problem rectified before the property is let to one of your clients, then let the landlord know. Make sure your database and other administrative systems register that the property should not be let until the problem has been fixed. It's also very important that you see a gas safety certificate before a client moves into the property.

How to question property safety

Below are the key questions your scheme should ask to identify hazards and reduce risks from those hazards. The questions have been guided by the HHSRS.

- Are there adequate means of escape?
- Are there protected routes and fire doors?

- Is there a fire alarm system and emergency lighting?
- Are there smoke detectors? Mains-operated smoke detectors are preferable – heat detectors are appropriate for kitchens and bathrooms.
- In Scotland, under the Repairing Standard, all properties must now have at least a battery-operated smoke alarm
- Are there extinguishers and fire blankets? There should be a fire blanket/fire extinguisher in the kitchen.
- Does the property have a valid gas safety certificate? Can you see any signs that would suggest an inefficient boiler, for example, an orange flame or the presence of black soot?
- Does the front door have an adequate lock and are there window locks on ground floor windows?
- Are boundary walls, fences and gates in a good condition?
- Are the window openings safe? This is particularly important on higher floors where children may be occupants.

By law, a landlord must:

- make sure that all the gas appliances provided are maintained in good order and that a GAS SAFE engineer carries out a safety check each year
- maintain all electrical installations (fixed wiring etc) and any electrical appliances provided (cookers, kettles etc) and make sure they are safe to use
- make sure any furniture and furnishings provided meet the fire resistance regulations.

Ensuring fire safety

Building regulations require that all properties built after June 1992 must have a mains operated inter-connected smoke alarm fitted on every level of the property. Older properties do not have to comply, but landlords would be well advised to provide at least battery operated smoke alarms.

In Scotland, under the Repairing Standard, all properties must now have at least a battery-operated smoke alarm. Smoke alarms installed from 3 September 2007 must be mains powered.

It is also important to determine who is responsible for testing and maintaining the smoke alarms – this could be the landlord, agent or tenant. If the agent is responsible, this should be noted in the management contract. If the tenant is responsible for this then adequate warnings must be given in writing.

Dealing with damp and condensation

Damp and condensation can cause problems between landlords and tenants. When an inspection is carried out note the sources of ventilation in bathrooms and kitchens. Make sure your clients are aware of the need to ventilate in order to remove moist air. Drying laundry also causes condensation so consideration needs to be given as to how and where a tenant will do this to avoid damp and mildew forming.

Understanding inventories

Inventories protect both the landlord's and tenant's interests particularly when dealing with any claims at the end of a tenancy. In many cases they will help your scheme minimise its claim rate.

It is very beneficial to conduct inventories where possible on behalf of your clients and the landlords. This can often be done at the same time as the sign up to the property and the handover of keys. This will ensure the property condition is recorded and can be used as proof at the end of the tenancy. It is also a free service you can offer the landlord. You should not let a client move in without any record of the state of the property.

Detailed inventories can be time-consuming to compile and type, so [a pro-forma](#) should be used. This can be filled in by hand and, if possible, typed up later. Digital cameras are also really helpful for recording photographically the state of the property before your

client moved in.

Two copies of the inventory should be sent, with covering letter, one to the landlord and one copy to the tenant within five working days. The inventory should be redone if any amendments are made. New copies should then be sent to both the landlord and tenant. The final inventory should be signed by both landlord and tenant.

If the inventory is going to be completed by the landlord or a third party, the scheme should ensure that both landlord and client are happy with the inventory and have signed it. In these cases, your scheme should insist on receiving digital photographs.

How to create an [inventory](#)

- Walk through and around the property, noting all the rooms and spaces within it. These areas will then form the headings for each section of your inventory.
- Start at the top of the property and work down.
- Be logical and make sure nothing is missed.
- Include ceilings and light fittings.
- Work down each wall looking at windows, curtains, pictures, shelving and wall fittings.
- Finish with skirting boards and flooring.

The inventory should make specific remarks on:

- the state of decoration
- anything that is damaged, any marks, scratches or burns to furnishings
- how clean the accommodation is
- Anything that looks like it is about to wear out. Disagreements about fair wear and tear are common amongst landlords and tenants.
- There is no legal definition about wear and tear. But as a guide, it can be defined as damage that occurs during normal use, or something that happens due to aging. Any property, particularly its contents and furnishings, will show minor damage and other signs of wear over time, even with the most careful occupant

When taking photographs:

- take wide shots in each room
- capture specific items that are prone to damage or of concern
- take a photo of the condition of the hob, oven, fridge, kitchen cupboards, shower and bath
- make sure the camera adds the date on the photo
- if you are photographing damage, use a ruler to show an accurate scale.

Your scheme should ensure that you have an up-to-date inventory of every property. You will need them to settle any claims. The objective is to ensure that any claim for compensation is judged against a clear concise inventory and schedule of condition.

Room for improvement

If an inspection shows that the property needs improvements before your tenant can move in the landlord should be told about them and agree to do the work before the let is agreed. This agreement should be made in writing with set timescales for the work. If the property has Category 1 hazards such as not having adequate heating in the winter, it should not be let until they have been dealt with and the property re-inspected. The problems should be recorded on your office systems to ensure all of your staff are aware.

Landlords and tenants may be eligible for grants such as the Landlord's Energy Saving Allowance (LESA) and energy efficiency grants to improve the condition of the rental property.

About LESA

Since 6 April 2006, landlords who have installed loft insulation or cavity wall insulation into their rental property can claim up to £1,500 per building to offset as expenditure against profits.

Energy efficiency grants

Tenants receiving certain benefits or who are of a certain age may be eligible to apply for

grants to improve the energy efficiency of their PRS property. More information about grants available in local areas can be found by contacting Energy Advice Centres or from the [Energy Savings Trust](#).

5. Services to offer your clients

This may range from a client information pack, a supported search for properties, provision of pre-tenancy/life skills training and how to assist those tenants with [pets](#).

Pre tenancy training – training your clients for tenancy success

Pre-tenancy training, such as [the Crisis Renting ready package](#) is an effective way to prepare clients for independent living. The Renting ready course is an accredited course which covers all aspects of pre-tenancy training.

The Residential Landlords Association (RLA) say ***“Renting is a serious business - so make sure the property and the landlord are safe, legal and secure. Get advice and ask any questions before you sign. RLA landlords support Renting Ready as a sure way to successful tenancies.”***

By providing this service you will give them a greater chance of sustaining their tenancy successfully. Depending on the client's previous experience of independent living, different levels of pre-tenancy support will be needed.

Importantly, clients' knowledge and understanding of rights and responsibilities, and how to manage a tenancy should be checked to ensure the appropriate level of pre tenancy support is given. Pre-tenancy training can take the form of one-to-one sessions or group workshops. These sessions or workshops could include information on the following.

Finding accommodation

- Finding properties
- Approaching and meeting the landlord
- Viewing the property

Finance (including referrals to appropriate local agencies)

- Budgeting
- Information on managing debt
- Setting up a bank account and direct debits
- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and paying the rent
- Utilities
- Fuel poverty/energy efficiency
- Other forms of financial support, i.e. Local welfare assistance funds or charity grants
- Welfare benefit income maximisation

Managing your tenancy

- Furnishing your property
- Basic D-I-Y such as how to change light-bulbs, bleed radiators etc
- Basic cooking on a budget
- Responsibilities and appropriate behaviour

Where possible it's a good idea to work with voluntary sector training providers and adult education services to deliver your pre-tenancy training. Such training is also a good selling point to landlords as it shows that clients are tenancy ready.

Helping clients with other sources of information

Many tenants will not be familiar with their rights and responsibilities as PRS tenants. Your PRS access scheme can fulfil a valuable function by ensuring that they are properly informed. There is also a wide array of practical information that can help make settling into a tenancy easier and more likely to succeed, from information on local amenities to advice on budgeting.

The [UK government website](#) has lots of useful information for tenants and includes the following sections:

- Private renting – This section includes advice on: deposit protection; tenants' repairing obligations; health and safety legislation; and how to deal with problem landlords, harassment and illegal eviction. There is also a specific publication on 'How to Rent.'
- The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) - this section explains the LHA system. [Shelter](#) provides guidance for tenants on all aspects of renting. The [LHA Direct website](#) enables tenants renting accommodation from a private landlord to calculate the possible amount of housing benefit available to them from their local authority.

Creating a client information pack

Providing effective information packs is an important service for your scheme. They help ensure clients are aware of their rights and responsibilities, introduce them to the local area and link them with support and assistance. You could decide to separate the information you would like clients to have into an **information pack** and a **moving-in pack**.

The information pack you supply should have user-friendliness at its heart. This means it should be easy to read using simple, jargon-free words, short sentences and paragraphs and a good size font. The average reading age of the UK is 11-12 years old and so your pack should reflect this. You can test the reading age of your information by running it through online reading software such as the Flesch-Kincaid scale.

Your information should also be well-designed and presented in the most user-friendly way possible. A good starting point is an attractive folder and colour-coded sheets for different topic areas. And it's always a good idea to test the pack on several of your clients before you circulate it more widely – ask them for suggestions on how to make it better.

Suggested information pack contents:

- Your scheme's promotional leaflet
- [Scheme service standards](#)
- [Client agreement](#)
- Local information – doctors, dentists, schools, shops, bus routes, etc.
- Who to contact if things go wrong
- [where to search for accommodation including useful websites, local newspapers and a list of letting agents](#)
- [Top tips for renting](#)
- [Moving in checklist](#)
- Any agreements the client will be required to sign, for example the [pre-interview agreement](#)
- Sample tenancy agreement (AST) (SAT Scotland)
- Sample AT5 (Scotland only)
- [Bond agreement](#)
- [Inventory](#)
- Information about utilities
- Information on furnishing the property
- Housing Benefit
- Discretionary housing payments or local welfare assistance
- [Budget and savings agreement](#)
- Savings scheme information
- Ending a tenancy
- What to do regarding claims on the bond or guarantee.

Supplying a house information pack

You should also encourage landlords to provide a house information pack for clients. This should include operating instructions for all the appliances, heating etc. Explain to your scheme's landlords that if clients know how to operate all appliances efficiently, it will help them keep their utility bills to a minimum and the appliances maintained.

Landlords in Scotland have a statutory duty to provide tenants with tenant information packs as one of the provisions introduced as part of the Private Rented Housing (Scotland) Act (2011). The Scottish government has provided [guidance](#) of what it should contain

Creating a sharers' charter

Where tenants have to share facilities it may be worth considering encouraging them to enter into a sharers' charter. This can improve relations and lessen the chances of disagreement. An [example sharer's charter](#) 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 our 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 our 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 the others in advance if we 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.

6. Setting up tenancies

Devoting time to setting up tenancies will increase the chances of your clients holding on to them for the long-term,

This section includes information on tenancy agreements, setting up a client's housing benefit, improving their knowledge of their responsibilities and helping them additional financial support where required.

Helping with housing benefit

Most clients using the services of a PRS access scheme will pay all or part of their rent using housing benefit. Helping clients set up their housing benefit claim is one of the most important services that your scheme will offer. It can also be an important part of the service that schemes have agreed to provide to landlords.

Meet with your local authority's housing benefit service to introduce your own service and seek to agree specified service standards for both parties. Because your scheme will be supporting the local authority to prevent homelessness, the housing benefit department should be interested in supporting you.

They should also welcome the support you give your clients as it is more likely that claims submitted by your scheme will be accurate and comprehensive. This will help the housing benefit department better meet its own targets for accuracy and assessment times.

Universal Credit

It is important that you are aware of the proposed changes to the Housing Benefit system through the introduction of Universal Credit, as it will impact on any one receiving housing benefit currently and all new claimants.

Universal Credit (UC) is the government's new, simplified working age welfare system, rolling several benefits and tax credits into one single household payment. From April 2013 it began in a few areas, with an intention to be rolled out completely by 2017.

If your area is operating the Universal Credit system, it means your clients' claims for housing benefit will no longer go through the local housing benefit department but will be

administered by DWP nationally through an online IT system. For more information on UC [click here](#)

Helping with paperwork - focus on the detail

When supporting your clients with their applications, ensure that the housing benefit claim is filled out as early as possible. Applications must be correct and with the necessary supporting documentation. Make sure you keep a copy of the claim form and get a copy of the receipt once the claim has been submitted.

If you have agreed a procedure with the local housing benefit department for a fast track service or for a named contact for your clients' claims then ensure it's followed.

When helping clients set up their housing benefit claim, make sure they sign a disclosure of information consent form. This will allow you to talk to housing benefit on their behalf. This form should be part of their housing benefit claim submission.

As with all things, the level of support your scheme gives a client in setting up a claim should be dependent on the level of support needed. But regardless, you should take copies of all relevant forms and be able to talk to housing benefit on behalf of any client as part of your standard service.

In some cases, rents may be higher than housing benefit levels. Consequently, tenants will need to top up the housing benefit with additional money to cover the rent. It is important to do a thorough financial calculation on the costs involved.

Setting up direct payments

One of a landlord's biggest fears is non-payment of rent. So setting up direct payments is one of the most important selling points any PRS scheme can offer their landlords.

Direct payments are not the norm for local authorities, however. Under LHA, most tenants get their benefit paid directly to them and are then responsible for redirecting their rent to their landlord.

But unless you are absolutely sure a client will manage the rent payments on their own, it's best to arrange direct payments to the landlord with the local authority. Local authorities do have various criteria and steps that need to be followed to arrange this.

Understanding safeguarding and direct payments

'Safeguarding' is a DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) term. It describes the circumstances under which LHA payments can be made directly to a landlord. Where a claimant is deemed 'vulnerable', the local authority can decide to pay the housing benefit award directly to the claimant's landlord. The most recent guidance on direct payments from DWP can be found here [HB/CTB Circular A4/2011](#).

Each local authority will have a safeguarding policy and safeguard application form or process that need to be followed. Make sure your scheme is aware of the evidence required to ensure that a client's direct payment application is processed as efficiently as possible.

Often it can be enough to send a [letter](#) to the local authority outlining the reasons for requesting direct payments. But talk to the local housing benefit department first to ensure you know what they can accept, and to see if you can agree a standard approach for your clients.

Bear in mind some local authorities might ask for further evidence. Local authorities can also make payments direct to landlords where they believe it will assist in securing or retaining a tenancy. For a tenancy to be secured or retained you must make it clear to the local authority that the rent is affordable to the tenant. The local authority will only make direct payments to landlords if the rent is affordable.

Making the case for direct payments

To make a case for direct payments, you will need to provide the necessary evidence.

- For tenants where a reduction in rent has been achieved to make the property affordable, you will need evidence that there has been change in the rent being charged. This could include a new tenancy agreement at the new rate, a letter signed by the landlord detailing the variation, or evidence of the negotiation. This could be a string of e-mails or a supporting statement from the officer that

undertook the negotiation. You can find more detail in the [HB/CTB Circular A4/2011](#) para 7.041 & 7.042).

- Safeguarding can also be applied to new tenancies. Evidence substantiating this claim could include a letter from the landlord stating that the property has previously been let at a higher rent. Evidence could also be in the form of property advertisements showing a higher rental figure – you can find more Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Guidance

The most recent guidance issued by DWP on DHPs can be found [here](#).

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) provide clients with further assistance when a Local Authority considers that help with housing costs is needed. Because housing benefit regulations do not define housing costs Local Authorities have been given the discretion to interpret this term as they so wish.

In the narrowest of senses, housing costs can mean rent if clients are receiving housing benefit and council tax liability if they are receiving Council Tax Benefit.

But housing costs can be more widely defined to include:

- rent in advance (if already in receipt of housing benefit)
- deposits (if already in receipt of housing benefit)
- other lump sums associated with housing costs such as removal costs

DHPs must be administered by the local authority but the responsibility could be devolved to any department within the local authority. It can also cover the following situations:

- rent officer restrictions like the Local Reference Rent (LRR), Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR), size criteria or where the local housing allowance (LHA) rate does not meet the rent
- reductions in housing benefit entitlement following changes to the LHA rates from April 2011
- increases in essential work related expenditure. These could be increased fares to work if a customer has had to move because they could not afford to live near their work following a reduction in their LHA rates

It is unlikely that DHP budgets will be able to meet all shortfalls resulting from all welfare reform changes so Local Authorities are therefore expected to consider how best to target their DHP. This may include cross-departmental consultation within Local Authorities and the development of a new DHP strategy/policy and application process. It is important that your scheme is involved in this process.

Understanding Council Tax support

Council Tax Benefit has now been replaced with Council Tax Support. This means that many more clients who had previously not had to pay any council tax will now be required to pay an amount depending on your local authority's scheme. Confirm the Council Tax liability of the tenant **before** you arrange any tenancy so it can be considered when assessing the affordability of the tenancy. You can find out the potential liability for council tax from the local authority where the property is located. In shared accommodation the Council Tax liability would usually sit with the landlord however, it is important to confirm this before arranging any tenancy,

Scotland

In Scotland the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) have committed to jointly funding the 10% Council Tax Benefit gap until at least April 2015

Lets with pets

Many landlords are hesitant about letting to clients with pets because of the possible damage that could be caused to the rental property. But some landlords become more amenable to the idea of pets once they understand that clients with pets tend to stay in properties longer than those without.

If this approach doesn't work then schemes could try to negotiate with landlords by clients promising to be responsible for any fouling/damage. Your scheme could also provide a pet bond that would cover a deep clean of the property at the end of the

tenancy.

The Dogs Trust can provide more specialised advice on [lets with pets](#).

Supplying moving in packs and other starter help

Clients moving into a private rented sector property may find their new home sparsely equipped. And if they have few household belongings themselves they may feel they have some tough decisions to make.

This especially applies to those who have to receive direct housing benefit payments. For them it can be a matter of paying their rent or furnishing their new home. And some, at the time of moving in, might not yet have claimed the benefits they need to buy food for the first week.

Your PRS access scheme cannot solve all these problems, but you can take some of the weight off by creating moving in packs for your clients. These will relieve some of their anxieties, make their new tenancy feel like home and increase their chances of wanting to hold on to the tenancy.

The ideal moving in pack

- a pillow
- two pillow cases
- two sheets
- duvet or blankets
- duvet cover
- two tea-towels
- two hand-towels
- two bath towels
- flannel or sponge
- two saucepans
- frying pan
- tin opener
- kitchen knife
- wooden spoon
- two dinner plates
- two side plates
- two bowls
- two mugs
- two sets of cutlery
- toothbrush
- toothpaste
- soap
- shampoo
- sanitary towels
- cleaning goods
- food hamper

The items for the packs could be purchased, supplied by local retailers or donated by local people. You could approach local faith groups or businesses to help.

Explain to your donors that it helps build a client's confidence and sense of self-worth if the items are of suitable quality or even new where possible and, in the case of bedding, towels and crockery, colour coordinated.

Furniture/grant applications

Furnishing regulations means it's difficult for landlords to use second-hand soft furniture. You could help your clients find new furniture by directing them to a local furniture recycling store (or equivalent) and supporting their application. You could also put them in touch with local charities that help.

Some local authorities still provide some form of Local Welfare Support. This fund is

allocated to authorities and intended to replace DWP crisis loans and emergency payments. It's always best to contact the local authority to find out what they can provide. Even if they can't provide any direct assistance, they may well have contacts who can offer reasonable priced access to white goods and other household items your clients may need.

Local help

In many areas there are local charities and organisations who offer either financial or material support to PRS access scheme clients. Make sure you know who they are, what they offer and who is eligible for their help. You will then be armed with the information you need to help your tenants make applications. These local organisations should also be invited to join your scheme's stakeholder group.

Examples

- Furniture reuse network
- Credit Union
- Tenants' rights group
- Adult education
- Employment programmes
- Volunteering agency
- 'Floating Support' providers who are able to offer tenancy support not linked to one specific premises
- Befriending agency

Reducing energy usage and bills

Your clients are likely to be concerned about their household bills. Explain that a simple and environment-friendly way of reducing household bills, is to reduce the amount of energy used.

Pass on these tips and that should help them make sure their energy bills are as low as possible.

- Turn off all lights when leaving the room for a long period.
- Use low energy light bulbs wherever possible. They use less than a quarter of the electricity used by ordinary light bulbs and can last up to 15 times longer.
- Don't use the TV and other appliances on standby. Standby can use as much as 10%-60% of the electricity that would be used by the device if it was switched on.
- Don't leave hot taps running.
- Turn the thermostat down by one degree. This could cut heating bills by up to 10%.
- Don't overfill the kettle. Boil only the water you need.
- Taking regular showers instead of baths. Showers can use up to 60% less water.
- Use a toaster rather than a grill.
- Close curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows. But don't drape curtains over radiators. This funnels the heat straight out of the windows.
- Defrost fridges and freezers regularly to keep them running efficiently
- Wait until there is a full load before using your washing machine. The low temperature programme will use less energy.
- Draught proof your windows. A low cost, short-term alternative to double glazing is to tape polythene across window frames
- Stop draughts and heat escaping through floorboards and skirting boards by filling gaps with newspaper, beading or sealant.

Applying for energy grants

Your clients may well be eligible for energy-saving grants. They can be given for work connected to any energy saving measure including, in some circumstances, the provision of gas or electric central heating. Grants can also be given for low-energy light bulbs. For some clients and in areas of high risk of crime, security improvements like door and window locks may also be provided.

A good starting point for your research regarding what is available to your clients is The

[Energy Savings Trust](#) website which has information on grants. Many independent fuel companies and local authorities operate grants and schemes and also provide energy efficiency advice.

7. Supporting tenancies

Sadly, solving a client's housing needs through the private rented sector does not necessarily mean that their tenancy will be a success. This is because the issues that first led to the client's homelessness may still be a threat to the tenancy. Other issues could also develop as a result of being housed independently.

The main reasons for private sector tenancies failing are:

- rent arrears
- anti-social behaviour
- social isolation of the tenant
- landlord/tenant relationship breakdown
- landlord not keeping up with repair obligations.

Good post-tenancy support can reduce the risks of these problems happening and is crucial to creating long-term sustainable tenancies.

Thinking ahead

Identify the level of support that you think a client will need to sustain his or her tenancy during the assessment and pre-tenancy training. If support is needed – particularly more intensive support – then you will need to put an appropriate plan in place before the tenancy starts.

It's important to find out about your clients' needs as early as possible. In some cases you may find their needs are too high for your scheme to take them on.

Tenancy support can be provided in a variety of forms. It might include tenancy health checks,

ongoing assessment of tenant support needs, helping tenants to budget and save, and providing ongoing support for landlords and agents. Good partnership arrangements are crucial to effective tenancy support.

Making tenancy health checks

[Tenancy health checks](#) are a good way to provide ongoing support that is tailored to an individual's requirements.

The first visit of the health check should happen as soon as possible after the move-in date. Its purpose is to ensure that the client is settling in okay and that there are no major early issues that could cause the tenancy to get off to a bad start.

A full tenancy health check and visit should be carried out four to six weeks after the tenant moves into the property.

You should address the following questions.

- Is the tenant keeping up with the rent?
- Does the tenant have any additional support requirements - any interest in learning, any interest in finding employment, any budgeting advice required?
- Have all the utility bills been set up?
- Are any furniture or household goods required?
- Does the tenant know how all the appliances work in the property?
- Has the tenant got to know the local area?
- Does the tenant get on with the neighbours?

You should also:

- check with the housing benefit department to establish that the claim is in payment and that there is no documentation still outstanding
- check with the landlord to ensure rent payments are being made and any concerns they may have about the property or the tenant.

Then based on your PRS officer's assessment, the next tenancy health check date should be decided. It could range from monthly checks to six-monthly checks depending on the tenant's and landlord's support needs and method of support i.e. visits or phone

calls.

Information collected and actions for the tenant - e.g. improving the state of the property, providing documents to the housing benefit department - should be recorded on your scheme's data management system. This will help monitor successes and areas for improvement.

Setting up savings schemes

Many PRS access schemes have established schemes that encourage the tenant to save. These are intended to:

- enable the tenant to become self-sufficient and fund their own deposit over time
- encourage a sense of commitment in the tenant. Research shows that even if they only have a small amount of their own money at risk tenants are likely to be more responsible
- enable schemes to time-limit guarantees without jeopardising the future of the tenancy
- reduce the cost of claims.

Despite the arguments given above for encouraging responsibility saving schemes can be considered controversial. This is because most people accessing schemes are receiving benefits which are meant to cover the bare necessities and so have little scope to save.

Savings scheme practical concerns

- The whole idea of having to save might act as a disincentive and discourage potential applicants from approaching the scheme.
- If schemes insist that every clients saves someone could be refused help who most in needs its services.
- Some PRS access schemes 'police' their tenants to ensure that they are saving and sanction them with no further help if they do not save. A client could then be afraid to approach the scheme for advice and assistance if they have failed to save the agreed amount.
- There can also be legal issues. In many cases saving schemes insist that only the scheme can withdraw monies, but it is actually the tenant's money. Legal advice should be sought when setting up this kind of scheme.
- If a scheme is acting as the landlord, then any savings held by the scheme must be protected in a deposit protection scheme.

Whether or not to set up a savings schemes is something that individual PRS access schemes have to decide. If a scheme decides to proceed it should be done on a tenant-by-tenant basis. This will make sure any regular saving amount agreed is achievable over the long run.

Using credit unions

Because it can be inappropriate or legally complex for PRS access schemes to hold clients' money, a more effective way is to partner a local credit union. Increasing the membership of the credit union benefits all its members and maintaining an account helps tenants improve their financial literacy.

An important first step to encourage saving with a credit union is for you to help your client budget and see what is possible for them to save.

If you decide to encourage saving with a credit union, consider the following:

- the incentives they offer. Is there any funding available to match tenants' savings, or to reward them with smaller amounts -- for example £5 for every £45 saved.
- how might your schemes share client information with credit unions? For example, you may want to draw up a client consent form for the sharing of information to make the management of a savings scheme easier.
- will your clients' savings be drawn upon in the event of a claim on the bond or deposit? How will this work?

Saving and replacing the bond guarantee

When the bond guarantee period ends, your scheme could try to negotiate with the landlord to accept the amount your client has saved. This is instead of the guarantee, or

in place of the deposit your scheme has given. You could try to negotiate to do this even if the total amount your client has saved is less than the value of the bond.

Any scheme that negotiates this should ensure that the landlord protects any cash received under the Tenancy Deposit Protection legislation. If the client has been saving with a local credit union, they may be eligible for a low interest loan to top up their savings to the full deposit amount. Obviously special consideration needs to be made when advising clients on low incomes to take out loans.

The tenant should be helped to understand that that they may find themselves in a far worse position at the end of the year if they have managed to save nothing. They will not have a guarantee in lieu of deposit. The PRS scheme will have to exercise its discretion as to whether to renew the guarantee if sufficient savings have not been made

8. Helping clients move into work

Many of those accessing the private rented sector through PRS access schemes like yours, will be on benefits. But there will also be those on low incomes who will have particular needs – including wanting to work – that schemes need to address. Moving towards employment forms a key part of any move towards independence and away from homelessness.

Your scheme should encourage clients to seek employment and training opportunities when they are physically and emotionally ready to do so.

During your initial housing assessment with your client, find out whether or not they would like to or are planning to move into work. If they are hoping to work, you will need to help them calculate that they will be able to afford their rent on the wages they can expect to earn if they start working.

If the client is already housed and if the rent might become unaffordable if they start working, help them look at their options before they consider paid employment. There are a range of in-work benefits they may be entitled to and that you can assist them in applying for to maximize their income.

Calculating the cost of work

Jobcentre Plus provides a better off in work calculation. This helps people find out their entitlements if they move into employment, and how much more money they would have compared with claiming welfare benefits. They can also consider how Housing benefit entitlements would change. Many homeless people find these calculations reassure them about moving into employment.

Crisis also has a [calculator](#) for schemes to use to assist clients. The calculator produces projected income for two different scenarios. The first column shows the individual's current income, including income from active or inactive benefits. The second column shows their likely income if he or she starts work. It includes any applicable income from in-work benefits such as Working Tax Credit.

Abilities to cope with work

It is important to make sure that clients have the abilities to cope with the transition into work. The last thing you want to do is set them up to fail. Preparing them for such a step can be part of the pre-tenancy training you provide them with. The training should cover the following areas.

- **Money management** –Your clients must be confident managing their own finances before they move into employment. This is especially important if the landlord has been receiving direct housing benefit payments and the client once employed will take sole responsibility. If a client will work part time and receive some housing benefit, it should be paid directly to them and they should pay the full amount to the landlord.
- **Timekeeping and daily routines** – Don't underestimate how difficult it can be to get back into working life if a client has been out of a routine for some time. Encourage them to establish daily routines and enforce timekeeping for appointments (unless a valid reason is presented).

National minimum wage from 1 April 2017

Year 25 and over 21 to 24 18 to 20 Under 18 Apprentice

April 2017 £7.50 £7.05 £5.60 £4.05 £3.50

Resources:

- [turn2us](#) - information on benefits and grants
- [moneyadviceservice](#) - free money management service

Building relationships with agencies and local services

Good working relationships with key agencies are particularly important for helping people move into work through your scheme. You should have links and referral systems in place for local employment services and local training providers. Strong links with the following people are also recommended.

- Housing benefits officers – Good relationships and agreed service standards with housing benefits officers make them more likely to prioritise your clients' claims, and be willing to recalculate it more frequently should your client work irregular hours.
- Jobcentre Plus (JCP) advisers/ work coaches – Take time to develop good working relationships with clients' JCP adviser/work coaches to ensure their support complements the work of the scheme/other agencies.
- Welfare benefits advisers – Find out if there is one locally. And if so, will they be happy for you to refer clients? Is there a benefits helpline? Some councils run Welfare Right Services.

Tools for getting a job

We recommend that you refer clients to a dedicated employment service when they are looking for work.

They can find more tools and helpful tips on <http://www.learndirect.com/>

Working and claiming welfare benefits

Make sure your clients access all benefits they are entitled to. This will help them move into work smoothly and ensure they are not worse off. There are many back to work/in work benefits your client may be entitled to; these are dependent on what benefits they have been on.

- For standard Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimants, earnings of £5 per week are possible without a reduction in benefits

Full time work – Working 16 hours per week or more is considered full time.

- **Run-on Housing Benefit (HB)** – If the job is 16 hours or more the client will continue to get HB for the first four weeks of working if they have been on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (both means tested), and Income Support (IS) for 26 weeks or more. They need to let JCP or the local authority know, and the payments will be automatic.
- **Run on Council Tax Benefits (CTB)** – These are also available for four weeks and have the same criteria as for Run-on HB
- **Working Tax Credits** – These apply to paid work for 30 hours or more for people aged 25 years or over; paid work for 16 hours or more for those with a disability and are over 16. The amount is calculated on the previous year's income which cannot be more than £13,100. If it is more than £6,420 then the benefit will be reduced. Social Security benefits do not count as income for Tax Credit purposes.

Part-time work – working 15 hours or less is considered part time.

- **JSA** – if your client is working less than 15 hours per week they can continue claiming benefits. They will keep the first £5, but the remaining earnings will be deducted from their JSA payments. They can claim benefits even if they earn more than their original JSA payment, but this only makes sense for short-term temporary earnings. Otherwise they will have to make a fresh claim when the work stops.

- **Zero hour contracts and other irregular work** – Casual working with irregular hours and/or short contracts will probably create problems with their housing benefit. However, HB officers can be asked to recalculate the HB claim at least every five weeks, and sometimes more frequently, if working hours differ from week to week. Although it is desirable for clients to work it is very important to ensure they will not be worse off.

- **Fixed term contracts**– If the end date is known, benefits can be applied for in advance. Although the requests cannot be processed until the date needed, advance applications will speed things up. It's a good idea for your client to contact the relevant department to ask how far in advance they will accept a claim, but generally it can be sent when the end date is known.

- **Rapid reclaim** – If the claim is within 26 weeks of a previous claim, a shortened application form can be completed for IS and Income Based JSA, and subsequently for HB and CTB. The HB/CTB form should be given directly to the local authority.

Volunteering

- Volunteering is a great way for your clients to gain skills and get back into the routine of working. Only expenses should be paid to the client (travel and lunch for example). No payment for the volunteering should be received. If any allowance is given, they might lose some or all of their benefits.

- Consider getting clients involved in the work that you do. You could ask them to help out with information evenings to answer questions from new clients or set up a move-in support team to help newer clients move into their flat. They could even volunteer for a decoration service.

9. Ending a tenancy

When a tenancy has begun to fail, a landlord will seek possession of the property by serving a notice on the tenant. Your scheme should require, through your bond, guarantee or cash deposit agreement with the landlord, that they notify you before, or at the time they serve notice.

Your scheme should make every effort to resolve the issue between landlord and tenant that has prompted the service of the notice. Resolving the issue could result in your client being able to stay in their home. But how you achieve this depends on the issues concerned.

For example, you may need to arrange rental arrears repayments, or encourage a landlord to write off a proportion of rent arrears. You might also need to advise the tenant of any wrong-doings; arrange additional support services for the tenant or mediate to re-instate the landlord/tenant relationship.

Working with landlords

PRS access schemes should educate and work with landlords so they are clear about the steps involved in regaining their property and the length of time involved. This could be normally six to eight months for the [section 21 route](#). Involving the landlord in this way encourages them to engage with the services your PRS scheme provides.

If the landlord/tenant relationship is unworkable, the PRS access scheme should take action to find the client other accommodation before, on or soon after the section 21 notice expires. This type of service will encourage landlords to let their now vacant properties via the PRS access scheme once more, particularly where the void time can be minimised.

Scotland

In Scotland, notices served by the landlord regarding a short assured tenancy include a notice to quit and a section 33 notice. Usually these must be served 40 days before the end of the tenancy. For more information on procedures around repossession and evictions see the [Shelter Scotland](#) website.

Ensuring that the void time is minimised includes also establishing with the landlord

whether there is likely to be claim on the bond, guarantee or cash deposit. A prompt check-out inspection/inventory also helps to minimise void times.

Expiry of the tenancy agreement

Your PRS access scheme should make sure there is an end of tenancy date for every tenancy. This is not always possible as tenants with resident landlords do not have fixed term agreements.

Landlords should be encouraged to offer fixed-term tenancies and to renew them for a further fixed-term period. This provides security to the tenant for the fixed-term period. It is also security for the landlord if they want the tenant to remain at the property.

It is good practice for your scheme to send a letter to tenants in the last month of their tenancy to enquire:

- if they intend to continue the tenancy
- if not, what they intend to do?
- if their circumstances are such that they still need the scheme's help.

Your letter should also explain that the tenant does not have to leave the property on the date the tenancy expires and outline their housing options.

Your scheme should also send a letter to the landlord asking them what their intentions are for the tenancy. You could also highlight the possible expiry of the bond, guarantee or cash deposit.

Scotland

In Scotland, short assured tenancies are usually for a six-month period at first and usually run month to month afterwards. Landlords have to give 40 days' notice to end a tenancy. Tenants must also give 40 days' notice if the tenancy is for a first six-month period and 28 days' notice if running on a monthly basis. It makes sense to contact tenants two months before the end of the tenancy in the first six months to find out if they intend to give notice.

If the tenant is not going to renew, your scheme should try to establish if the landlord intends to make a claim. You should also encourage the landlord to re-let the property to another client of the PRS access scheme.

If the landlord does not intend to make a claim and does not intend to re-let with your scheme, then you will not need to visit the property. If the landlord wishes to re-let via the scheme then the property should be re-inspected.

A tenancy ends – policies and procedures

At some point the tenancy will end. This can be a positive step, when the tenant is ready to move on, or has saved for a cash deposit. However, it may not be a positive step and a claim may be made to your scheme or on the deposit.

Whatever the reasons for the tenancy ending, it is important for any PRS access scheme to have clear policies and processes for dealing with all eventualities regarding the end of a tenancy. It is also important that the reasons for tenancies ending are monitored.

This is because:

- if the end of the tenancy is a positive step, the intervention of the scheme has led to this positive result
- if it is not a positive step, the scheme can monitor why the tenancy has ended and use the information to learn and improve their services.

Possible positive reasons for a tenancy ending are:

- the tenant has saved up for their own deposit and has decided to move to another property
- the tenant has gained employment that requires them to move
- the tenant has gained a place in further education that requires them to move
- the tenant has reconnected with their family and wants to move to be nearer them
- the tenant's circumstances have changed and they can now afford a more expensive property
- the tenant has been offered social housing

- the tenant has decided to move in with his/her partner
- the fixed-term contract has ended with no disputes and the landlord wants to move into the property
- the fixed-term contract has ended with no disputes and the landlord wants to rent the property again or sell it.

Possible negative reasons for a tenancy ending are:

- the tenant has abandoned the property
- the tenant has been evicted due to rent arrears or anti-social behaviour
- the tenant has been remanded into custody
- the fixed-term contract has ended with a dispute between landlord and tenant
- the fixed-term contract has ended with the tenant not in a position to find accommodation independently of the scheme.

When a tenant leaves without notice

Unfortunately, some tenants will leave without giving notice. It is landlord's responsibility to inform your scheme as soon as a property becomes vacant. If you are providing tenancy support to the client and suspect the client has abandoned a property, you should inform the landlord as soon as possible.

Sometimes it is hard to decide whether a tenant has given up a property. Because abandonment can be hard to define, it's useful for schemes to have [an abandonment policy](#) they share with landlords and tenants at the start of a tenancy. The policy should state the process they will follow in the event of abandonment.

After the initial communications regarding the suspicions that the tenant has abandoned the property your policy should outline the questions and steps to consider before taking further action.

- Is the rent still being paid?
- Has the tenant left the keys to the property? If so, this may be viewed as an 'implied surrender of the tenancy'
- Can you contact the tenant or a relative?
- Do neighbours have any knowledge of the tenant's whereabouts or did the tenant tell the neighbours they were leaving? Was the tenant remanded into custody?
- Do any of the tenant's support services know of his/her whereabouts?
- Has the tenant made any changes to their Housing benefit claim or has a claim been submitted for a new property?
- Can you see through the windows if the tenant's possessions are still in the accommodation?

The landlord may have a case for entering the premises and possibly fitting a secure lock if any of the points above indicate abandonment and the property is insecure.

Similarly, the landlord may have a case to enter if you suspect internal appliances could present a danger to the property and/or neighbours.

But a landlord should only enter the property in the presence of a witness to protect themselves against claims of personal property being interfered with.

Supporting landlords during a suspected abandonment

1. A reliable witness – such as a PRS access scheme staff member – should confirm in writing the circumstances of the landlord entering the property because of suspected abandonment.
2. Under no circumstance should a landlord deprive the tenant/s of their rights to access. This would make them liable to an illegal eviction claim.
3. If there is any doubt that a tenant will wish to return to the property, the correct legal proceedings should be undertaken – service of notice, court order and bailiffs.
4. If there are tenant's belongings left at the property, then the landlord must arrange for these to be stored and access given to the tenant for a period of time. Many landlords advocate the use of an abandonment notice left on the door. This informs the tenant that the locks have been changed and that if they require access they must contact the landlord at the address or telephone number supplied within a limited

time period. However, notices left too prominently may advertise that the property is vacant and entice squatters into the property. There has been no case law to suggest that this type of notice would protect a landlord against an illegal eviction claim. Abandonment can be a big worry for landlords. It can often mean that a property is vacant for six to eight months while the proper legal process is followed. During this time there is no rental income. If the landlord chooses to take matters into their own hands and let the property more quickly they leave themselves open to a tenant's claim for illegal eviction. This could run into thousands of pounds.

Abandonment fund

Your PRS access scheme may wish to operate an abandonment fund that landlords can draw rental income from, in the unlikely event that abandonment occurs. This would be a selling point for schemes wishing to recruit landlords. It also means that a landlord would be more likely to continue letting to tenants from the PRS access scheme after experiencing a case of abandonment.

Claims against guarantees

If you operate a deposit scheme or bond guarantee scheme, the end of the tenancy may be when the landlord makes a claim for damages (and sometimes rent arrears) against the financial safety net put in place by the scheme.

For information on how to process and deal with claims go to [Money matters – understanding bonds, deposits and rent in advance](#)

Crisis Housing Services

Working for success, improvement and income

Working for success, improvement and income

- 1. Monitoring and outcomes**
- 2. Reviewing your services**
- 3. Dealing with complaints**
- 4. Giving value for money and cost effectiveness**
- 5. Contingency planning and exit strategies**

1. Monitoring and outcomes

All PRS access schemes need to measure their success in ending homelessness. To do this efficiently office-based data management systems and administration practices are essential. These will help you show how you are performing against your targets and also record your outcomes.

This section includes the types of data that should be recorded and crucial details about information relating to data protection and outcome monitoring. Because feedback is an important element of any output and outcome monitoring system we recommend you gather and record this too (see Section 2 on Reviewing your Service).

Understanding output and outcome monitoring

What are outputs?

Outputs mean what you do – the work carried out by your PRS access scheme. The outcomes refer to what your outputs (work) have achieved.

By looking at your work (outputs) and measuring what it achieves (outcomes) you can monitor the success of your PRS in finding people homes and changing their lives for the better.

Some examples of outputs are:

- number of referrals received
- number of clients interviewed
- number of clients accepted on to your scheme
- number of clients receiving welfare/debt advice
- number of clients receiving ongoing tenancy support
- number of times your scheme provides advice on rights/responsibilities to a tenant
- number of times your scheme provides advice on rights/responsibilities to a landlord
- number of bonds provided to clients.

What are outcomes?

The success of a PRS access scheme is judged on the quality of the outcomes it produces for its clients. This means the difference it has made to the people it is set up to help.

PRS schemes must be set up with a clear vision of the outcomes they want to bring about and with systems that effectively measure them. Some outcomes may be dictated by funders, local authorities or local housing/homelessness strategies. Others may be for internal use. They might measure your scheme's effectiveness, identify gaps in your service provision, highlight areas for improvement and help measure your performance against other schemes.

Your outcomes should be clear and focused because:

- you need to know what you are trying to change before you can measure if you have made a difference
- the people who use your services will know what they can expect to gain from working with you
- many funders now want to know the outcomes of services they support. They want to know what difference their money makes and how it helps the people they want to support have a better life.

Outcomes usually begin with words or phrases that show you want to change something. Words like **improve, reduce, enable, develop, decrease, expand, sustain** are commonly used. However, there isn't a universally accepted set of outcomes that PRS access schemes should be working towards or a standard approach to gathering this data.

The following table provides examples of outcomes, though it is certainly not exhaustive.

Outcome Measure

Enable people to access accommodation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

Number of people who move into a new property in the PRS

Enable people to access accommodation in the PRS through the provision of guarantee bonds

Number of new bonds issued

Keep claims against guarantee bonds to a minimum

Number of claims against bonds received

Average value of claims against bonds
Bad debt provision for bonds issued
Encourage financial independence among tenants
Number of clients who open bank accounts
Number of clients saving towards own deposit
Number of clients who have saved entire value of deposit
Number of clients who attend budgeting pretenancy training
Improving standards in the PRS and influencing the local market
Number of improvements made to properties by landlords
Number of grants accessed by landlords
Number of empty properties let to households threatened with homelessness
Number of landlords using your scheme twice or more in the last quarter
Number of landlords new to the scheme in the last quarter
Percentage of properties used by your clients that were inspected by the scheme and met criteria agreed with local authority
Enabling people to sustain accommodation in the PRS
Number of people completing pre-tenancy training
Number of people still in tenancies after six months
Number of people still in tenancies after 12 months
Number of clients making the positive move on to alternative tenancy
Number of clients helped to stay in current PRS accommodation following issue of a notice
Enabling clients to sustain or improve other areas of their life
Number of people sustaining or entering employment, training, education or volunteering
Number of people rekindling family relationships
Number of people reporting improvement in Confidence

Fact sheet: monitoring what you do

Understanding outcome indicators

Outcome indicators help you measure whether you really are bringing about the change intended.

There are three types of outcome indicators:

- **individual indicators** that help assess the progress of the individuals you are working with
- **group indicators** that help you assess the progress of the client group you are working with
- **community indicators** that help you assess and measure progress in the wider

community.

Developing indicators

The easiest way to develop your indicators is to visualise what the difference you plan to make (outcomes) really looks like in practice.

There are three steps to doing this

1. Take an outcome. Ask yourself what it would look like once you have achieved it.
2. Narrow these down so that you have the most appropriate indicators. You should only have two to three for each outcome. You need to make sure that these will be easy to measure.
3. Check with those involved in your project, including funders, that they feel these are the most appropriate to measure.

For an example of the sort of outcomes you could monitor, please see the Crisis [Making it Count](#) tool. It is increasingly important for schemes to not only record direct housing outputs and outcomes, but also associated work (for example, number of clients sustaining or gaining employment). This helps schemes show their added value in a competitive funding environment.

About data protection

The Data Protection Act is designed to protect the personal information that is held about individuals and your PRS access scheme will be expected to adhere to it. Personal information is defined as *'any information kept, from which a living individual can be identified, including any opinions of the individual recorded by the organisation'*. It applies to all forms of data storage, from databases to manual filing systems. There are eight basic principles to consider when complying with the legislation.

Personal information should be:

- used fairly and lawfully
- used for limited, specifically stated purposes
- used in a way that is adequate, relevant and not excessive
- accurate
- kept for no longer than is absolutely necessary
- handled according to people's data protection rights
- kept safe and secure
- not transferred outside the UK without adequate protection.

The Data Protection Act 1998 requires every organisation processing personal data to [register](#) with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), unless they are exempt. For further information, go to the [ICO website](#).

Managing client data

Monitoring clients takes resources. Unfortunately, it can feel onerous and intrusive, a distraction from the business of getting on and working with homeless people – just a hoop to jump through. But it has to be done, so it is best to do it accurately and effectively. It is the only way to tell the difference you have made to your client group. Monitoring and recording client data must place in a planned, organised and consistent way. And those responsible for collecting and collating data have to be aware of the importance of accurate information.

It is crucial that PRS access schemes keep track of their clients, properties and landlords. And data should be kept comprehensively and in a format that makes it easy to access and obtain information.

Excel spreadsheets can often become too cumbersome and time consuming to record the necessary information. An effective data management system can often save time and enhance the services you provide to both landlords and clients.

Some data management considerations

- What data needs to be recorded?
- How many people need access to the data? (For example: senior managers, admin staff, funders and partner organisations).
- Do staff require different levels of access? (e.g. add/edit, read only)

- Does the system require a password?
- Do members of staff require access to the data away from the office?
- Are there data protection implications for the way in which data will be stored?
- Does the system need to be capable of formulating reports?
- Does the system need to be capable of being used for mail merges and standard letters?
- Do you have a budget for implementing a good data management system?
- Can it store photos and inventories of properties?
- Do you have regular performance targets to report on?
- Does your finance department like to regularly know the scheme's outstanding financial liability?

Minimum data requirements

- Tenant details – name, family composition, support needs, housing history and contact details.
- Property details – address, type of accommodation, furnished or unfurnished.
- Tenancy details – rent, tenancy start date, tenancy agreement length.
- Landlord/letting agent contact details.
- Finances – Bond? Rent in advance? Deposit? Any repayment arrangements?
- Inspection information – date of inspection, works required.
- Legal information – gas safety certificate expiry, tenancy deposit protection.

Different schemes have developed their own systems to collect and collate data.

However, systems are only as meaningful as the data collected by front line workers. It is vital they are familiar with the system and with what is expected in terms of data gathering – client data, outputs or outcomes etc.

2. Reviewing your service

Gathering feedback

Customer feedback on their experience of your PRS access scheme will be an essential part of output and outcome monitoring. It gives an invaluable insight into where improvements can be made. Make sure you gather it from people and the key groups involved in your project. These could include clients, landlords, referral agencies, partner agencies, local representatives and funders.

Clients should be asked to complete a feedback form when the first [tenancy health check](#) is completed. This will be after they have moved into their property. [A template feedback form](#) has been developed by Crisis. And to ensure clients fill it out, you could encourage them with incentives – e.g. entry into a prize draw for vouchers towards household items

Landlords should also be surveyed regularly to ensure they can comment on their experiences of the PRS access scheme and make suggestions for improvements. Landlords could be surveyed on an annual basis or feedback could be requested as part of a regular landlords' forum.

But we don't recommend that landlords are asked to complete a feedback form after providing accommodation for each client. This is because landlords with multiple properties/rooms may become a little frustrated with filling a form in each time.

Collecting feedback online

You could carry out an online survey, for ease of distribution and analysis of the survey results. A useful mechanism for this method is using an online survey service such as [Survey Monkey](#). For small scale surveys, of less than 10 questions and less than 100 results, this service is free. If you are planning something on a larger scale, then you can still use this service, but you would need to pay a monthly subscription.

It is important to get feedback from other people and groups involved with your service, such as referral agencies, partner agencies, the local authority and/or funder. This will help ensure you are working effectively with these agencies and improving your service

through their constructive feedback. This feedback should also help you identify things you are doing well that you can then shout about.

Key principles

Crisis has developed a set of [Key Principles](#) for PRS access schemes. These principles have been developed with an expert group of stakeholders. They are intended for service providers involved in the delivery of PRS access schemes and those involved in commissioning and designing services.

The key principles are intended to act as guidance for service providers regarding the minimum standards that all PRS schemes should meet. You can use the self-assessment tool in the key principles to review your service.

Involving your users: Arranging drop ins

It is good practice for PRS access schemes to hold regular drop-in sessions. These should be well advertised, held at a set time on a set day and in a welcoming atmosphere. All clients should feel that they can drop in and discuss problems or other matters with a member of staff.

But before you choose your venue, think about practical issues that might affect people attending. These include: the location of the building, any physical aspects that may inconvenience users, and costs involved in attending. You should also consider if there are any language difficulties among the people attending and if you will need support to deal with them.

As well as being able to assist clients with issues affecting their tenancies, drop ins will give you consistent feedback about how your project is performing.

Involving clients as volunteers

Sometimes clients who have been helped by PRS access schemes like to help others by becoming volunteers for the scheme. Volunteering allows people to develop skills, gain experience and to 'give something back'.

It's important when involving clients as volunteers to understand that a change in status might have an impact on them. For example, if the volunteer assists someone who is going through a similar experience to what they (the volunteer) went through, this could either be empowering or open old wounds.

So before you commit, discuss this with them first. It may be useful to involve clients who have already been housed in the PRS in pre-tenancy training or information sessions for new clients, especially if the new clients have concerns. Peers are often listened to and believed, especially when sharing a lived experience.

Inviting clients to events and activities

Homeless (or formerly homeless) people can be an extremely effective advocates for PRS access schemes. All clients should be invited to your events and activities where appropriate.

But just as you would when planning the drop-in sessions, think about the practical issues involved. Is the location of the building accessible? Are there any physical aspects that may inconvenience users? What are the costs involved in attending and are there any language difficulties?

3. Dealing with complaints

You will need a fair and transparent process for dealing with complaints whether they are from clients, landlords or anyone else. This helps ensure that:

- those affected feel listened to. A good complaints process will ensure that issues are addressed, even if the outcome is not one the complainant initially sought
- any poor practice, mistakes or miscommunications are identified and dealt with
- schemes have an opportunity to have their internal systems and processes challenged and fine-tuned
- your service can be improved.

For more information, look at this example [complaints procedure](#).

4. Giving value for money and cost effectiveness

Making it count

We know that too often PRS access schemes undersell the range of benefits they deliver. The [Making it Count](#) tool helps schemes demonstrate the value for money of their service to the local community and the public purse.

Making it count was developed by Dr Julie Rugg and Nicholas Pleace of York University. It allows PRS access schemes to show the cost of ongoing homelessness and how much money they saved the public purse by assisting clients out of homelessness. The tool helps those running schemes make the business case for funding and expansion. All costs included in *Making it count* have been thoroughly researched and tested. The tool was published following discussions with PRS access schemes, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the probation service. The costs are national averages, but the tool can still be used using actual local figures if available.

Measuring claim rates

The claim rates against the bonds you issue are also an indicator of your scheme's value for money and cost effectiveness. The [guarantee bond](#) is a written commitment by the scheme to cover certain types of costs that the landlord may incur at the end of a tenancy. It sets out the conditions under which a landlord may make a claim and the maximum amount that can be claimed.

The claim rate is the monetary value of claims over a given period represented as a percentage of the total value of the liability (bonds or deposits) that came to an end over the same period.

For example, in 2013/2014 a scheme had 100 bonds worth £10,000 that expired or came to an end during the year. In that time the scheme had claims against four bonds and they paid out a total of £1,500. Their claim rate for 2013/2014 would therefore be 15%.

2013/2014

Monetary value of bonds that expired or came to an end during the year

£10,000

Claims paid out during the year £1,500

Claim rate % = £1,500/£10,000*100 15%

Based on national averages, claims generally result in payment in the case of 10-20% of guarantee bonds. Claim rates on cash deposits are generally higher and more administratively intensive to manage.

Section seven of the [Making it Count](#) tool also gives you the opportunity to show the cost per tenancy you create in terms of financial incentives paid to landlords and agents. This may include cash deposits, rent in advance, fees, and bond claims.

Making the case for your service

The current funding environment is difficult. As valuable as your scheme may be, it is important to regularly show how effective your service is and make the case for continued – usually financial – support.

How to make the case

- Make sure you are part of all the relevant local housing and homelessness strategies and partnerships. This means you can influence funding priorities and keep your service at the forefront of commissioners' and partners' minds
- Show how your service helps other partners fulfil their objectives. For example funding or working in partnership with your scheme will help your local authority achieve [Gold Standard](#) Challenge 6: To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
- Show the value for money and cost effectiveness of your service by calculating your bond claim rate and using the Crisis the [Making it Count](#) tool.

- Be able to easily report on your outputs and outcomes (see Section 1).
 - Show how you add value to your housing work. For example, you could show how many clients sustained or gained employment once you'd assisted them with housing. Even if you don't do any employment related work directly, your housing work will have an impact on that.
 - Have a good client case study that highlights a real-life example of how your service operates and the impact it has.
 - Have a ready quote or reference from a landlord and/or partner agency.
- Often it is a combination of these that will help make the case for your service, rather than one magic report or application you can produce. You can find out more about influencing funding priorities, different funding avenues and drafting a compelling funding application in the [Crisis PRS fundraising and future planning resource pack](#).

Becoming an income generator

Many PRS access schemes are looking to solve their funding issues by becoming income-generators through operating as a letting agency. The Crisis good practice guide: [Local lettings agencies](#) is a step-by-step guide to creating a local lettings agency. It will take you from the initial idea stage and feasibility through to a full scale business plan. The guide includes case studies, templates, checklists, example documents and financial forecasting tools.

A local lettings agency will take some time to generate any income, and longer to break even. It will only be successful with a realistic business plan. Landlords may be persuaded to pay, but only if they know that you provide services worth paying for. Consequently, it is essential to have a good reputation, and a strong track record. It may be worth offering services for free at first, until you have proven your value.

5. Contingency planning and exit strategies

Everyone needs a contingency plan. Even if you have secured all the funding you need to run your service for the year this exercise will help you know what to do in the worst case scenario. For most schemes, this is a simple but vital piece of work that will help you deliver your service for as long as possible.

A well thought-out contingency plan will ensure that clients and landlords are aware of and supported through any transition. It will also help ensure that the good reputation you've built will not be lost. Part of your contingency plan will involve developing an exit strategy if you find you can no longer run your service.

Contingency planning essentials

- Set a date when your contingency plan needs to kick in.
- Make a plan!
- Manage outstanding bond liabilities.

You can find more information about how to develop your contingency plan, including our handy checklist by downloading the [Crisis PRS fundraising and future planning resource pack](#).