



Private Rented Sector Commitment

2024-2026

Introduction

In West Lindsey, it is recognised that the Private Rented Sector (PRS) plays a key role in ensuring that our residents have suitable and safe accommodation, which meets the needs of its occupants. The PRS within West Lindsey currently accounts for around 20% of the overall households.

There is potential for significant regulatory reform to occur within this area over the next 12 to 24 months, which will seek to strengthen the regulatory role that the Council undertakes alongside improving the ability for tenants to seek redress and gain more security of tenure.

This PRS Action Plan included in the commitment document, sets out the key matters that the Council will address over the next two years in order to ensure that the PRS is regulated appropriately and continues to provide hazard free and decent housing for those that wish to utilise it.



Strategic Background

The Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027 sets out three key themes that will be focussed upon: Our People, Our Place and Our Council. It is recognised that many of the aims within each theme overlap, housing being one of these. Given that the Council is the regulatory body for the PRS, alongside its prominence with the housing sector it is clear that specific work is required within it in order for the Council to deliver its overall vision.

Quality Housing is a strategic aim under the theme of Our Place in the Corporate Plan and within this aim there is an objective to:

“Improve housing standards and take appropriate enforcement action where necessary”.

The Council also identifies a strategic aim for Clean Green and Safe Communities and within this aim there is an objective to “Use the Council's statutory functions to reduce anti-social behaviour and increase people's feelings of safety in their local communities”.

The Council's Housing Strategy Implementation Plan 2022, which is due to be refreshed in 2024 also commits to improve housing standards and reduce numbers of criminal landlords.

The Council also adopted a countywide Health and Wellbeing Strategy in 2023 and this has a specific strategic aim to:

“Improve the supply, quality and co-ordination of services to meet housing need and demand”.

This leads to a specific objective to “improve the quality of existing accommodation to secure an overall improvement in the health and wellbeing of residents.”

A cross-party Councillor working group (in place between X and X) has supported the development of the future approach to the PRS in West Lindsey and as part of this process, workshops for all Councillors were held. This work culminated in a report to the Council's Prosperous Communities Committee in September 2023 which has helped to set the direction for this document.¹

¹ Private Rented Sector Proposals (No 31) <https://democracy.west-lindsey.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=176&MId=3432&Ver=4>

Renters Reform Bill

The Governments proposals for Renters Reform are wide ranging and when introduced will make significant changes to how the sector is managed and regulated. Information on these reforms can be found here: www.gov.uk/guidance/guide-to-the-renters-reform-bill

The Governments proposals, which are now moving through the parliamentary approval process, commit to:

“Create a Private Rented Sector that is fit for the 21st century, with equal access to decent rented properties across the country and the security for tenants to make their house a home.”

The Bill and work associated with it commits to:

- Abolish Section 21 “no fault” evictions and introduce a range of new possession grounds.
- Make periodic tenancies standard.
- Set specific notice periods for rent increases.
- Give tenants more rights to keep pets in properties.
- Introduce a new private rented sector property ombudsman.
- Introduce a new property portal for landlords and tenants.
- Applying the Decent Home Standard to the PRS.
- Outlawing bans on renting to families with children or on benefits.

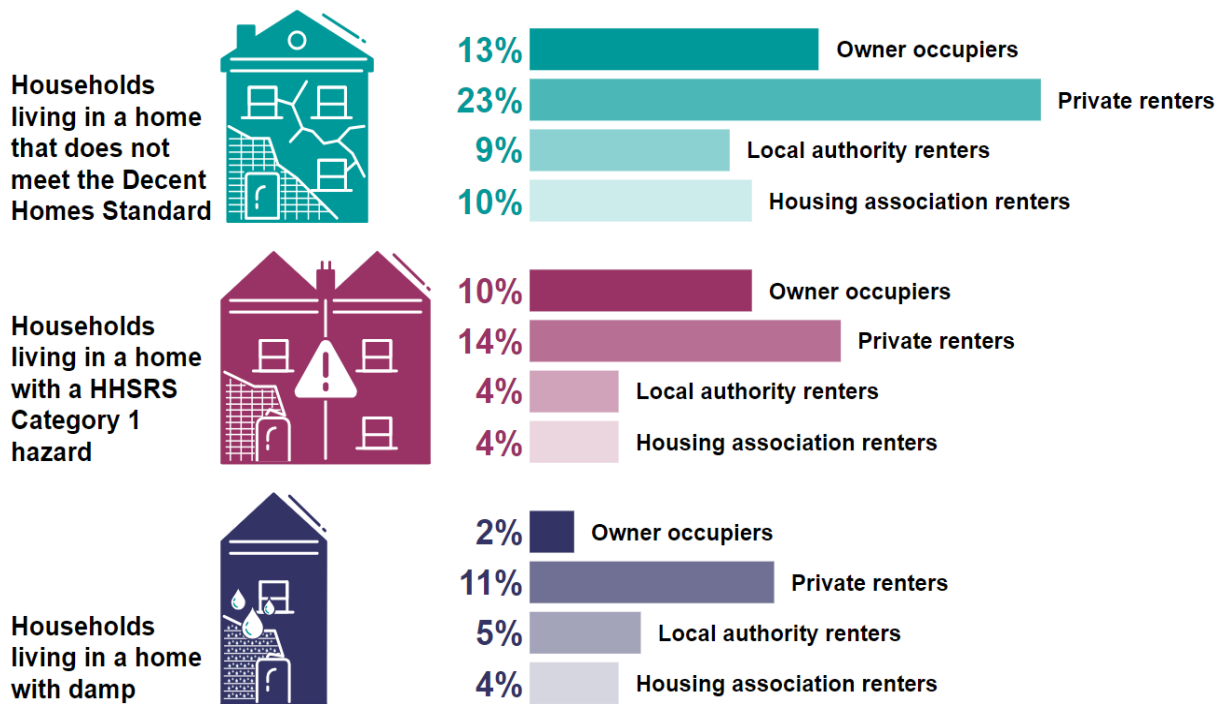
The first reading of the Bill took place in the House of Commons in May 2023 and it is estimated that it will receive royal assent towards the end of 2024. There is then likely to be a phasing in of the new reforms, which as yet have no specific timeline.

About the Private Rented Sector

The PRS has accounted for about one fifth of households in England since 2013-14 and makes up 4.6 million or 19% of households across the country. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the proportion of private rented households was steady at around 9% to 11%. While the sector has doubled in size since the early 2000s, the rate has remained around 19% or 20% since 2013-14.

The PRS also accounts for the highest number of households that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard or that have a home with HHSRS Category 1 Hazard or that is damp.²

It is also broadly accepted that improving the condition of and safety of housing contributes to the improved health and wellbeing of the persons residing within it.³



² English Housing Survey 21-22

³ The role of homes and buildings in levelling up health and wellbeing
<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2022-0170/>

In January 2022, the Council's Stock Condition and Stressors Report⁴ identified a number of key features about the PRS in West Lindsey:

- There are circa 9,048 PRS dwellings which make up 20.4% of the overall housing stock, slightly higher than the national average.
- 6 out of 20 of the Council Ward areas have a higher percentage of PRS than the national average.
- 2,413 (27%) of PRS properties are likely to have a serious (Category 1, Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)) hazard within them.
- PRS properties are disproportionately located across a few wards, being Gainsborough South-West, Gainsborough North, Market Rasen, Hemswell and Wold View.
- PRS properties have significantly higher levels of ASB incidents when compared to other tenures.

The Council averages around 200 property inspections per year and in 22/23, the Council ensured that 49 of the properties inspected had Category 1 Hazards removed. Alongside this, our inspections helped to ensure that a total of 130 properties within the PRS were improved. In achieving this the Council served 40 enforcement notices.

The Council has also delivered a specific, grant funded project relating to Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in the PRS, within which all known properties that did not meet the legal "E" Energy Performance Certificate requirement were addressed and brought up to standard using formal enforcement powers. Over 120 properties in the sector did not meet the minimum legal requirement.

The Private Rented Sector Commitment

The PRS is a key priority for the Council and this commitment sets out where we are now, where we want to get to over the next 18 months, how we plan to get there and how we will monitor our progress across the key themes.

The key areas of focus within the commitment are listed below:

- Tenancy Support
- Communication and Education
- Regulatory Reform
- Enforcement and Standards

⁴ Private Rented Sector: Housing Stock Condition and Stressors Report (January 2022)

Tenancy Support

What do we currently do?

- Deal with enquiries from tenants and landlords where tenancies may be at risk.
- Ensure that we signpost tenants and landlords to any support services that may assist to resolve the issues they are experiencing.
- Provide advice and guidance to tenants on specific subjects (e.g. damp and mould) so they can act to deal with any initial concerns they have.

Where do we want to get to?

- Tenants and landlords that understand where to get the advice and guidance they need and where to access the relevant support services.
- A broader range of tenancy support options offered by the Council in order to ensure greater tenancy sustainment.

How do we plan to get there?

- Offer an enhanced tenant liaison approach for difficult or complex tenancy issues, which seeks to mediate resolution between landlord and tenant.
- In consultation with landlords, consider the feasibility of introducing a “Call Before You Serve” type scheme within the district to provide proactive support and guidance in relation to tenancy issues.
- Offer enhanced support to landlords where there are issues with anti-social behaviour within their tenancies.

How will we know we are making progress?

In the long-term, we will work towards tenancies becoming more sustainable, which has broader benefits for both tenants and landlords. In turn, this will provide opportunities for the Council to create stronger relationship with tenants and landlords and leading to more resilient communities.

In the short-term, we will expect to see the following by way of progress:

- An increased number of enquiries from landlords seeking assistance where they are experiencing issues within their properties such as ASB or non-payment of rent.
- An increasing number of referrals for tenancy type support services following on from housing inspections.
- Increasing engagement, positive feedback and shared learning from Council run landlord workshops and legislation education sessions.

Communication and Education

What do we currently do?

- Provide a “Landlord Accreditation” service free of charge via DASH (Decent and Safe Homes) www.dashservices.org.uk/Accreditation
- Periodically provide landlords and tenants with key information relating to the PRS and changes in regulations.
- Provide information to landlords and tenants in relation to grant funding for property improvements,

Where do we want to get to?

- A well planned and routine approach to engaging and updating landlords and tenants on matters that may impact them to enable well informed preparation.
- An enhanced number of landlords who are signed up to an accreditation type scheme.
- An increased number of PRS properties accessing grant funding and assistance.

How do we plan to get there?

- Set up and deliver a twice-yearly landlord and tenant forum to provide information on key topics.
- Create a “tenants guide to the PRS” outlining what they should expect from their landlord and what their landlord should expect from them.
- Deliver annual focus groups on key issues that impact upon the sector to help determine how the Council can improve and develop its services.
- Create an online mailing list and information hub for landlords and tenants to sign up to, which can be used to disseminate information on key issues, useful online links, videos and activities.
- Increase awareness of the grant funding and other funding opportunities available to tenants and landlords.

How will we know we are making progress?

In the longer term we will create an engaged and constructive dialogue with landlords so that we can work together to drive up standards within the PRS.

In the short-term we will expect to see:

- An increased number of landlords signed up to accreditation schemes.
- A sustained reduction of Cat 1 Hazards across the PRS.
- An increasing number of landlords and tenants signed up to the new online communication tool.
- Successfully delivered focus groups, identifying key outcomes.
- An enhanced number of landlords accessing grant funding and other funding opportunities.

Regulatory Reform

What do we currently do?

- The proposed “Renters Reform Bill” will bring about significant changes to the PRS.
- The Council are currently seeking to stay informed and understand the implications of this.

Where do we want to get to?

- A set of regulatory reforms that enhance and improve the PRS.
- A smooth and supportive transition from existing regulations to the new reforms.
- A position whereby as many landlords and tenants as possible are aware of the reforms and the impacts that they may have on them.

How do we plan to get there?

- Delivering a communications campaign to raise awareness of the reforms and their potential impact. This will include any potential implementation timescales.
- By updating and gaining approval for revised policies that will include the new requirements of the reforms.
- To develop a support plan to establish where we can assist landlords to be compliant with the new reforms as appropriate.
- Provide consultation feedback to aim to influence the proposed reforms through positive engagement with the Government.

How will we know we are making progress?

In the short term, these reforms will require significant resource to implement for both the Council and landlords and we expect that any reforms will be accompanied by specific timescales in which they are to be implemented and adhered to.

We have delivered a landlord workshop on the current information available and have agreed a further session when more clarity is confirmed. We will continue to gain understanding into the what the overall impacts of the reforms may be and will complete a full review to consider this once they are in place.

- Delivering a communications campaign to raise awareness of the reforms and their potential impact. This will include any potential implementation timescales.
- By updating and seeking approval for revised policies that will include the new requirements of the reforms.
- To create an engagement plan where we can assist and support landlords to be compliant with the new reforms as appropriate.

Enforcement and Standards

What do we currently do?

- Seek to ensure that properties in the PRS meet the required legal standards.
- Carry out property inspections where complaints are received about poor conditions in the PRS.
- Utilise statutory enforcement powers to address serious hazards and poor practices.
- Utilise financial civil penalty and prosecution powers to hold landlords to account where they have failed to meet their legal obligations.

Where do we want to get to?

- A proactive inspection regime focusing on the highest risk and poorest standard properties.
- A PRS with a reduced number of category 1 hazards.

How do we plan to get there?

- Undertake proactive inspections of all properties owned by a landlord, if an initial inspection has identified a category 1 hazard within a property that they are responsible for.
- Utilise available intelligence to identify the priority areas and properties where additional inspections are required.
- Extend proactive work focussing on properties that have lower Energy Performance Certificate ratings.

How will we know we are making progress?

In the long term, reducing the number of category 1 hazards within the PRS will ensure that the PRS becomes a safer place to live for tenants. It is also broadly accepted that improving the condition and safety of housing contributes to the improved health and wellbeing of the persons residing within it ⁵

In the short-term, we expect to see the following by way of progress:

- An increased number of reports to the Council relating to hazards in the PRS. 163 were received in 22/23 and 143 to date in 23/24.
- An increase in the number of housing enforcement notices served.
- An updated and improved stock condition survey.
- Improved energy efficiency standards within the PRS.

⁵ The role of homes and buildings in levelling up health and wellbeing
<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2022-0170/>

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01427 676676

