

# **The national standards for social housing in England**

## **The six standards that apply from April 2010**

Here you will find details of the six standards that social housing providers have to meet from April 2010. Against each, we have described the outcomes landlords should achieve and our specific expectations of them.

These standards are part of our regulatory framework, which we have developed in collaboration with tenants, local authorities, housing associations and our many other partners. The standards have been designed to help improve the services provided for the eight million people who live in social housing in England.

## **Tenant involvement and empowerment standard**

### **Required outcomes**

#### **Customer service, choice and complaints**

Registered providers shall:

- provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly

#### **Involvement and empowerment**

Registered providers shall support co-regulation with their tenants by:

- offering all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing, including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formulation of housing-related policies and the delivery of housing-related services
- consulting with their tenants and acting reasonably in providing them with opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery
- providing tenants with a range of opportunities to influence how providers meet all the TSA's standards and to scrutinise their performance against all standards and in the development of the annual report
- providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved

#### **Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants**

Registered providers shall:

- treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the seven equality strands and tenants with additional support needs

Registered providers shall set out in an annual report for tenants how they are meeting these obligations and how they intend to meet them in the future. The provider shall then meet the commitments it has made to its tenants. Registered providers shall take the obligations of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

Standard into account in setting out how they are meeting and intend to meet all the other TSA standards.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Customer service, choice and complaints**

Registered providers shall provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information about:

- how tenants can access services
- the standards of housing services their tenants can expect
- how they are performing against those standards
- the service choices available to tenants, including any additional costs that are relevant to specific choices
- progress of any repairs work
- how tenants can communicate with them and provide feedback
- the responsibilities of the tenant and provider
- arrangements for tenant involvement and scrutiny

Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about performance against the standards, and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenant's/tenants' behalf.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Involvement and empowerment**

Registered providers shall consult with the tenants on the desirability and scope of local offers in relation to services to meet the following TSA standards: Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, Home and Neighbourhood and Community. In providing opportunities for tenants to agree local offers by no later than 1 April 2011 they shall offer commitments on:

- local standards for performance
- how performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by tenants
- what happens if local offers are not met (including procedures of redress)
- arrangements for reviewing the local offers on a periodic basis

Registered providers shall enable tenants' opportunities to scrutinise the effectiveness of their policies in relation to tenant involvement.

Registered providers shall inform tenants about the results of their consultations on issues related to the standards.

Registered providers shall consult with their tenants, setting out clearly the costs and benefits of relevant options, if they are proposing to change their landlord or when proposing a significant change in their management arrangements.

Registered providers shall consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service. They shall ensure that any changes to tenant involvement in governance and scrutiny leads to an enhancement of the overall effectiveness of their approach.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Understanding and responding to diverse needs**

Registered providers shall demonstrate how they respond to tenants' needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants.

### **Home standard**

#### **Required outcomes**

#### **Quality of accommodation**

Registered providers shall:

- ensure that tenants' homes meet the standard set out in section 5 of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance by 31 December 2010 and continue to maintain their homes to at least this standard after this date
- meet the standards of design and quality that applied when the home was built, and were required as a condition of publicly funded financial assistance, if these standards are higher than the Decent Homes Standard
- in agreeing a local offer, ensure that it is set at a level not less than these standards and have regard to section 6 of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance

#### **Repairs and maintenance**

Registered providers shall:

- provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas that responds to the needs of, and offers choices to, tenants, and has the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time
- meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their homes

Registered providers shall set out in an annual report for tenants how they are meeting these obligations and how they intend to meet them in the future. The provider shall then meet the commitments it has made to its tenants.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Quality of accommodation**

The TSA may agree with a registered provider an extension to the 31 December 2010 date where this is reasonable. Providers shall ensure their tenants are aware of the reasons for any extension given.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Repairs and maintenance**

Registered providers shall ensure a prudent, planned approach to repairs and maintenance of homes and communal areas. This should demonstrate an appropriate balance of planned and responsive repairs, and value for money. The approach should include: responsive and cyclical repairs, planned and capital work, work on empty properties, and adaptations.

Registered providers shall co-operate with relevant organisations to provide an adaptations service that meets tenants' needs.

## **Tenancy standard**

### **Required outcomes**

#### **Allocations**

Registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way.

They shall take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They shall demonstrate how they:

- make the best use of available housing
- are compatible with the purpose of the housing
- contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities

There should be clear application, decision-making and appeals processes.

#### **Rents**

Registered providers shall charge rents in accordance with the objectives and framework set out in the Government's Direction to the TSA of November 2009.

#### **Tenure**

Registered providers shall offer and issue the most secure form of tenure compatible with the purpose of the housing and the sustainability of the community. They shall meet all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the form and use of tenancy agreements.

Registered providers shall set out in an annual report for tenants how they are meeting these obligations and how they intend to meet them in the future. The provider shall then meet the commitments it has made to its tenants.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Allocations**

Registered providers shall co-operate with local authorities' strategic housing function, and their duties to meet identified local housing needs. This includes assistance with local authorities' homelessness duties, and through meeting obligations in nominations agreements. Where, in exceptional circumstances, registered providers choose not to participate in choice-based lettings schemes in areas where they own homes, they shall publish their reasons for doing so.

Registered providers shall develop and deliver services to address under occupation and overcrowding in their homes, within the resources available to them. These services should meet the needs of their tenants, and will offer choices to them.

Registered providers shall provide tenants wishing to move with access to clear and relevant advice about their housing options. They shall participate in mobility schemes and mutual exchange schemes where these are available.

Registered providers' published policies shall include how they have made use of common housing registers, common allocations policies and local letting policies. Registered providers shall clearly set out, and be able to give reasons for, the criteria they use for excluding actual and potential tenants from consideration for allocations, mobility or mutual exchange schemes.

Registered providers shall develop and deliver allocations processes in a way which supports their effective use by the full range of actual and potential tenants, including those with support needs, those who do not speak English as a first language and others who have difficulties with written English.

Registered providers shall minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting. When doing this, they shall take into account the circumstances of the tenants who have been offered the properties.

Registered providers shall record all lettings and sales in the Continuous Recording of Lettings system.

## **Specific expectations**

### **Rents**

Registered providers shall ensure they meet the following requirements, which derive from the Government's Direction to the TSA of November 2009 and published within Directions to the TSA – Summary of Responses and Government Response, November 2009, CLG.

Subject to paragraph 2.3, registered providers shall set rents with a view to achieving the following as far as possible:

- rents conform with the pattern produced by the rent formula set out in rent influencing regime guidance ('target rents') with a five per cent tolerance in individual rents (ten per cent for supported and sheltered housing) ('rent flexibility level') but subject to the maximum rent levels specified in that guidance ('rent caps')
- weekly rent for accommodation increases each year by an amount which is no more than RPI + 0.5% + £2 until it reaches the upper limit of the rent flexibility level or the rent cap, whichever is lower
- weekly rent for accommodation that has reached or is above the upper limit of the rent flexibility increases each year by an amount that is no more than the increase to the target rents
- rent caps increase annually by RPI + one per cent
- target rents increase annually by RPI + 0.5%

Where the application of the Rent Standard would cause registered providers to be unable to meet other standards, particularly in respect of financial viability including the risk that a reduction in overall rental income causes them to risk failing to meet existing commitments such as banking or other lending covenants, the TSA may allow extensions to the period over which the requirements of the Rent Standard are met.

Registered providers shall provide clear information to tenants that explains how their rent and any service charge is set, and how it is changed, including reference to the RPI benchmark to which annual changes to rents should be linked (except where rents are controlled under different legislation).

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Tenure**

Registered providers shall publish clear and accessible policies which outline their approach to tenancy management. They shall develop and provide services that will support tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions. The approach should set out how registered providers will make sure that the home continues to be occupied by the tenant they let the home to.

### **Neighbourhood and community standard**

#### **Required outcomes**

#### **Neighbourhood management**

Registered providers shall keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe. They shall work in partnership with their tenants and other providers and public bodies where it is effective to do so.

#### **Local area co-operation**

Registered providers shall co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic well being in the areas where they own properties.

#### **Anti-social behaviour**

Registered providers shall work in partnership with other public agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.

Registered providers shall set out in an annual report for tenants how they are meeting these obligations and how they intend to meet them in the future. The provider shall then meet the commitments it has made to its tenants.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Neighbourhood management**

Registered providers shall consult with tenants in developing a published policy for maintaining and improving the neighbourhoods associated with their homes. This applies where the registered provider has a responsibility (either exclusively or in part) for the condition of that neighbourhood. The policy shall include any communal areas associated with the registered provider's homes.

### **Specific expectations**

### **Local area co-operation**

Registered providers, having taken account of their presence and impact within the areas where they own properties, shall:

- identify and publish the roles they are able to play within the areas where they have properties
- co-operate with Local Strategic Partnerships and strategic housing functions of local authorities where they are able to assist them in achieving their objectives

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Anti-social behaviour**

Registered providers shall publish a policy on how they work with relevant partners to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) in areas where they own properties.

In their work to prevent and address ASB, registered providers shall demonstrate:

- that tenants are made aware of their responsibilities and rights in relation to ASB
- strong leadership, commitment and accountability on preventing and tackling ASB that reflects a shared understanding of responsibilities with other local agencies
- a strong focus exists on preventative measures tailored towards the needs of tenants and their families
- prompt, appropriate and decisive action is taken to deal with ASB before it escalates, which focuses on resolving the problem having regard to the full range of tools and legal powers available
- all tenants and residents can easily report ASB, are kept informed about the status of their case where responsibility rests with the organisation and are appropriately signposted where it does not
- provision of support to victims and witnesses

### **Value for money standard**

#### **Required outcomes**

#### **Value for money**

In meeting all TSA standards, including their local offers, registered providers shall have a comprehensive approach to managing their resources to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' and potential tenants' needs.

Registered providers shall set out in an annual report for tenants how they are meeting these obligations and how they intend to meet them in the future. The provider shall then meet the commitments it has made to its tenants.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Value for money**

Registered providers shall demonstrate to their tenants:

- how expenditure has been prioritised in relation to each of the standards and in the delivery of local offers, and in meeting other needs such as investment in new social housing provision
- how they have ensured value for money has been secured and tested
- plans and priorities for delivery of further value for money improvements

Registered providers shall have arrangements for tenants to influence the services delivered and the cost of those services that result in service charges to tenants.

## **Governance and financial viability standard**

### **Required outcomes**

#### **Governance**

Registered providers shall ensure effective governance arrangements that deliver their aims, objectives and intended outcomes for tenants and potential tenants in an effective, transparent and accountable manner. Governance arrangements shall ensure they:

- adhere to all relevant legislation
- comply with their governing documents and all regulatory requirements
- are accountable to tenants, the TSA and relevant stakeholders
- safeguard taxpayers' interests and the reputation of the sector
- have an effective risk management framework

#### **Financial viability**

Registered providers shall manage their resources effectively to ensure their viability is maintained.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Governance**

Registered providers shall adopt and comply with an appropriate code of governance. They shall give the reasons for their choice and explain areas of non-compliance with their chosen code.

Registered providers shall establish and maintain clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for their board, chair and chief executive and produce an annual assessment of the effectiveness of their arrangements.

Registered providers shall submit an annual return, on an accurate and timely basis in a form determined by the TSA. This is currently the Regulatory and Statistical Return (and its successor, the National Register of Social Housing).

Where there is a non-regulated element, the registered provider shall demonstrate to the TSA that it has in place effective mechanisms (such as commitments, undertakings or other assurances between itself and the non-regulated element) which ensure that:

- it is and will be able to comply with the TSA's standards and other regulatory requirements



- its ability to meet the TSA's standards and other regulatory requirements is not and cannot be prejudiced by the activities or influence of the non-regulated element
- in the event that the registered provider does not or may not be able to comply with the TSA's standards or other regulatory requirements:
  - the non-regulated element will give any necessary support or assistance to enable compliance
  - the registered provider has the ability to require the support or assistance of the non-regulated element to enable compliance.

In some situations it may be appropriate for the TSA to be a party to such arrangements.

### **Specific expectations**

#### **Financial viability**

Registered providers shall ensure that:

- effective controls and procedures are in place to ensure security of assets and the proper use of public funds
- effective systems are in place to monitor and accurately report delivery of their plans
- the risks to delivery of financial plans are identified and effectively managed

Registered providers shall ensure that they have a robust and prudent business planning and control framework. Through this framework they will ensure:

- there is access to sufficient liquidity at all times
- financial forecasts are based on appropriate and reasonable assumptions
- planning sufficiently considers the financial implications of risks to the delivery of plans
- they monitor, report on and comply with their funders' financial covenants

Registered providers shall provide to the TSA accurate and timely statutory and regulatory financial returns and an annual report on any losses from fraudulent activity.