



Private Sector Housing Strategy

2020-2024



Introduction

At Dacorum Borough Council, we are committed to ensuring that all Dacorum residents live in homes that are safe and meet the required standards. We recognise most landlords want to be compliant and provide a good standard of home to their tenants.

This strategy outlines the council’s approach to regulating the private sector for all Dacorum residents as having safe, secure and affordable accommodation is a key foundation for living well. By identifying deficiencies in a dwelling, evaluating the potential risks to a person’s health or safety, including person’s physical or mental health we can ensure the relationship between housing and health is a continuing process to achieve well living and a required standard of housing.

The strategy mainly focuses on homes in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), but also considers owner-occupiers and Registered Providers (RP). Through ‘proactively and effectively tackling poor conditions across Dacorum’s private housing sector’, we can ensure that the private sector provides a safe and accessible housing option.

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I am pleased to introduce our Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010 – 2024. Throughout this strategy, we outline how we will work in partnership with landlords, residents and statutory bodies to understand the profile of homes across this tenure, provide up-to-date information, support and training to landlords and property owners and work to make sure that all homes meet or exceed minimum energy efficiency and safety standards.

We will tackle Dacorum’s rogue landlords to ensure that all homes within the private sector are safe and secure for their residents.

Councillor Mrs Margaret Griffiths

Our vision

Our vision for Dacorum's private sector housing is "Ensuring that private sector housing in Dacorum is always a safe and suitable housing option. We will achieve this by tackling 'rogue landlords' who have a clear disregard for their responsibilities and the safety of their tenants, taking appropriate enforcement action and offering advice and assistance to home owners, landlords and tenants."

This strategy supports the Council's corporate vision of 'working in partnership to create a borough that enables Dacorum's communities to thrive and prosper.' In particular, it will help to achieve the following corporate priorities:

A clean, safe and enjoyable environment
Building strong and vibrant communities

We are committed to continuously reviewing and improving the private sector housing services we deliver by working with partners, other public bodies, Landlords and Registered Providers. Making sure that homes meet required standards means that residents can thrive in safe and clean environments.



National and local considerations

On a national scale, the private rented sector is the fastest growing housing tenure type, having more than doubled in size over the last decade. This growth, alongside the gradual decline of social rented stock due to policies such as the 'Right to Buy', means that private renting is increasingly becoming the primary option for addressing housing need across the country.

One of the key aspects of our work within the private rented sector is to ensure that homes are safe places to live. When problems causing a health and safety implication are found in rented properties, the landlord will be required to put these right, or otherwise face enforcement action. This action would follow guidance from the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

In early 2020, The Private Sector Team commissioned a stock survey of all residential property in Dacorum carried out by [Building Research Establishment \(BRE\)](#). This data shows us there are 66,078 dwellings in Dacorum, 61% of which were owner occupied, 18% private rented and 21% social rented.

Figures from the report estimate that there are **1,140** Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) with an estimate of **234** that will require mandatory licensing.

Any rented property with three or more people living across two or more households and sharing common facilities is classed as a HMO. If the property has five or more people living across two or more households and sharing common facilities is classed as a large (HMO) and must be mandatory licensed.

A report from BRE in 2017, estimated 916 HMO's within the borough; this is a rise of over **200** properties, which the Private Sector Team will need to investigate to ensure each property meets the required standards to be safe places to live.



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The national statistics show a rise in Empty Homes; this is a statutory function with the team, which requires a structured and committed approach to enable this work to develop and to bring properties back into use.

We are working to raise our teams profile and Dacorum's residents awareness of Empty Homes, by raising awareness we are able to work with owners, businesses and others, to explore all options for bringing these properties back into residential occupation. Where we are unable to work with owners to reinstate their property, we will take the appropriate enforcement action, required to ensure the property meets all required standards.

The risks of leaving the premises empty for any extended length of time are great. Risks of leaving property unoccupied include vandalism, squatters, deterioration in condition and value, and complaints from neighbours.



Delivering a great service

Equality and Diversity

As a local housing authority, we believe all residents should receive a good standard of service *regardless* of; age, disability, gender (including gender reassignment), race, religion or belief and sexual orientation (Equality Act 2010). We are committed to being inclusive with our approach.

Value for Money

It is important to us that our residents feel they are getting good value for money. The Council monitors our approach to managing Private Sector Housing and seeks to ensure that we have the resources to deliver excellent services at reasonable cost.

Working in Partnership

Our strong relationships with our partners and many other public sector and voluntary organisations enables us to deliver an excellent level of service whilst maximizing resources and avoiding duplication of effort.

Working with other agencies

Collaborative working with other agencies helps us to ensure that we are kept up to date with developments in our community and the sector to keep residents, landlords and homeowners updated. It also means we can work in partnership to resolve identified issues promptly and prevent ill health, injury or homelessness caused by unsuitable housing conditions.



The Commitments

To develop this strategy, we considered a number of key areas in the private housing sector, on both a national and local scale, as well as the needs of the service. Through our housing stock condition survey, we are able to shape this further by identifying dwellings in the private sector and allocating them into categories, likely tenure, condition and household vulnerability of the stock and the geographical distribution of properties, which helps to understand the issues by tenure type across the borough. This helps to; establish the extent of dwellings suffering from the presence of a HHSRS Category 1 hazard, Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating bands, the number of empty homes across the borough and a robust approach to mandatory HMO licensing.

From this we have developed four outcome-based commitments:

Commitment 1: We proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions across Dacorum's private housing sector.

Commitment 2: We will continue to work with partners, Landlords and Registered Providers to ensure that homes meet required standards so that residents can thrive in safe and clean environments.

Commitment 3: We will work effectively to reduce the number of empty homes across the borough.

Commitment 4: We will tackle unlicensed HMOs across the borough.

These commitments will underpin this strategy and ultimately enable us to deliver our vision of: *"Ensuring that private sector housing in Dacorum is always a safe and suitable housing option."*



The Commitments

Commitment 1: We proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions across Dacorum's private housing sector.

This commitment focuses on the development of our approach to regulating and improving conditions in the private housing sector in Dacorum.

It is important that we build a robust approach to tackling rogue landlords and strive to ensure that the private sector offers a safe and suitable housing option for Dacorum residents.

To achieve this, we will:

- Take appropriate enforcement action when required, following our enforcement policy, that sets out how we will tackle rogue landlords and sub-standard property conditions;
- Work with landlords to identify and appropriately license all Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) across the borough;
- Explore the option of developing a Local Lettings Agency to bridge the gap and provide supported access to the private rented sector;
- Review our approach to supporting tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector across Dacorum.

Commitment 2: We will continue to work with partners, Landlords and Registered Providers to ensure that homes meet required standards so that residents can thrive in safe and clean environments.

It is important that we continue to build good relationships and education for tenants and landlords.

To achieve this, we will:

- Ensure the Landlords Market Place Forum meets the needs of the Landlords, by providing a wide range of advice, education from a variety of departments, agencies and local services;
- Continue to work with landlords to promote good housing management and to enable tenants to remain in their homes;
- Review the information provided on our website;
- Publish regular newsletters for landlords;
- Carry out consultation surveys with tenants & landlords to promote education and to ensure we are meeting customer satisfaction.

The Commitments

Commitment 3: We will work effectively to reduce the number of empty homes across the borough.

Working effectively to reduce the number of empty homes across the borough and bringing them back into use for the community will assist in addressing the local shortage of affordable residential properties. This will also reduce the detrimental impact that empty properties can have on the local area.

To achieve this, we will:

- Develop a strategic approach to identify and investigate empty homes throughout the borough both reactively and proactively.
- Engage with owners to encourage and support them in bringing empty homes back into use.
- Consider rent schemes, grant programmes and other available options to assist owners in bringing empty homes back into use.
- Take appropriate enforcement action when required.

Commitment 4: We will tackle unlicensed HMOs across the borough.

Tackling unlicensed HMOs across the borough proactively to ensure landlords are meeting the minimum housing standards, fire safety and management standards will ensure that this type of housing is always a safe option for those needing an affordable home of their own.

To achieve this, we will:

- Carry out proactive project work, including partnership working with other departments across the Council, to identify and investigate all suspected HMOs across the borough.
- Target enforcement work towards non-compliant landlords.
- Encouraging landlords to obtain accreditation to ensure good management standards and an understanding of legislation.
- Carry out proactive project work, including partnership working with other departments across the Council, to identify and investigate all suspected HMOs across the borough.
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Conclusion

To conclude, this strategy demonstrates the Private Sector Housing Teams commitment to the regulation of the Private Rented Sector Housing across Dacorum.

Throughout the four commitments, we outline how this will be achieved to ensure we are giving tenants secure and affordable accommodation. Losing a home is a traumatic experience, which has a real and lasting impact on every member of the household. Each year, around 800 – 900 households approach the Council for advice and support to prevent them becoming homeless.

This reasserts Dacorum Borough Council's corporate commitment to work with partners to prevent and tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, by helping to increase the supply of affordable, decent rented homes in Dacorum.

The Strategy Improvement and Engagement team (SIE) in conjunction with annual service plans, will monitor this strategy annually. (The Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive an annual update).

This policy links to and should be read in conjunction with the following policies and guidance:

Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy – [hyperlink required](#)

[Rogue Landlord Enforcement: Guidance for Local Authorities \(2019\)](#)

