

# Private Sector Housing Accreditation Project

Southwark Rental Property Standard Consultation

[www.southwark.gov.uk](http://www.southwark.gov.uk)

This paper reports the results of the public consultation into the adoption of the Southwark Private Rental Standard and its application to accredit Temporary Accommodation.

## Summary

1. The proposal went out to consultation between the 15<sup>th</sup> October and the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2013.
2. There were approximately 450 direct consultation letters sent to a wide range of landlords, tenant groups and other stakeholders. These included:-
  - Approximately 250 landlords of varying sizes of portfolio who we have contact details for as a result of internal sourcing of accommodation
  - All the managing Agents on South Bank Universities housing list, approximately 50 agents
  - Local MP and Councillors
  - Local Stakeholders (c100), including Tenant groups, NHS, Education, Representative and advocacy organisations.
  - National organisations (c40), including housing charities, Landlord Associations and National Groups linked to housing.
3. A reminder was sent to all the direct consultees about 10 days before the closure of the Consultation
4. In addition the consultation was put on the Council website and promoted there.
5. The proposal was discussed at a meeting of the Private Landlords Forum also attended by Councillor Williams. The landlords present clearly endorsed the idea and the content of the Standard and raised no objection to its application to the property sourced by Council Officers.
6. We also attended the Tenant Council meeting and presented the Standard to the representatives of the local Tenant and Resident Associations.
7. In summary the consultation results are as follows :-
  - We received a limited number of responses, 8 web forms, 6 written or email responses and one phone feedback call.
  - In response to the question 'Do you like the draft standard?' all responses but one were positive.
  - In response to the question 'Do you agree that the Standard and its annexes are suitable for us to

use for the property we procure for our Housing duties' all respondents agreed that it was.

- The proposed standard clarifies and condenses a range of sources but creates no new duties or obligations so it would be difficult to construct a reasoned objection.
  - Likewise our procurement of domestic property is largely conducted to the terms of the proposed standard so our existing procurement chain are familiar with the quality of property that we seek to obtain.
  - The consultation asked some supplementary questions which relate to tenants and further work developing services for the PRS. Responses to these questions were more mixed, broadly landlords and their advocates supported tenant standards and accreditation and the tenant groups opposed this.
8. We received six responses that included a varying degree of narrative. In terms of length and depth the 11 page response from Shelter stood out as a paper in its own right.

## **Conclusions**

9. We asked some questions to identify if the respondent was linked to suppliers or consumers of rented property
10. There were also two core questions and several supplementary questions. Respondents were asked to give us an anonymised yes/no or agree disagree for most questions with opportunities to comment at the end of each section.
11. For the question – “Do you like the Standard as drafted “, all but one of the responses was positive, the only dissenting voice described the Standard as too prescriptive.
12. It is encouraging that most of the landlords in the responses and at the forum were very positive about the Standard including Eleanor Clark who is the London representative of the National Landlords Association.
13. No respondent sought to isolate or criticise any part of the Standard in particular. We therefore do not feel the need to rewrite or amend the draft and this can go forward in its current form.
14. For the question – “Do you agree that the Standard and its annexes are suitable for us to use for the property we procure for our housing duties”, all respondents expressed agreement to this.
15. It is fair to say that the Standard is broadly similar to the current requirements expressed by Southwark’s officers when procuring property so Landlords are used to having to meet a quality line in order to be taken forward with prospective tenants.

## **Supplementary Questions**

16. We asked a range of supplementary questions, partly to test respondent’s appetites for including other items in the standard and partly to give some feedback on the next stages of this project.
17. The first group were based around testing if we should add any further items to the Standard. Do you think we should include:-
18. “A Standard for tenants, describing their rights and responsibilities”. A more or less mixed response, landlords tended to be yes, tenant groups no. We have drafted this as a guidance leaflet and it is being included in the materials being produced for the information campaign currently being developed by Southwark’s Comms team. On balance we thought that this had value in itself but not as a part of the PRS Standard.

19. "Space standards for private lettings". Again a mixed response and as the Standard is not intended to restrict or regulate choice in the market place we don't think there is a place for this in the main Standard though it is mentioned clearly in the HMO Standards Appendix.
20. "A dispute resolution procedure managed by the Council". A positive response for this proposal. We believe there is a place for this as a service supplied by the Council but that it is not suitable for inclusion in the Standard. We will be incorporating this in our proposals for voluntary accreditation of the PRS.
21. We also asked if the Standard could be used as the basis for extension work with the PRS:-
22. "Using the Standard as a basis for a voluntary landlord or property accreditation scheme in Southwark." A majority favoured this and we will take this forward as a basis for our voluntary accreditation proposal
23. "Using the Standard as a basis to provide training and coaching for Landlords and Tenants". This received universal support and is a clear requirement for a successful accreditation scheme. It is also required for any scheme to be compliant with the GLA's London Rental Standard.
24. "Using the Standard to help Council Officers decide if we need to take action when we get complaints". A majority agreed with this and as the compliance with the Standard indicates adherence to the statutory duties and good practice, failure to comply does indicate a likely regulatory issue.
25. "Accrediting Tenants and maintaining an approved tenant list". There was no real support and several respondents indicated that we should not follow any course that might sponsor discrimination against prospective tenants who for any reason cannot obtain or lose their accreditation. We will consider this further as there are a group of prospective tenants who would be aided in their search for rental property by our endorsement. A solution might be an extension of the training and coaching proposal above where applicants who successfully complete training are certificated as 'trained tenants'.

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