

# HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

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Monday, 24 April 2017 at 6.30 p.m.

MP702, 7th Floor, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent,  
London E14 2BG.

This meeting is open to the public to attend.

**Members:**

Chair: Councillor Amina Ali

Vice-Chair:

Councillor Rabina Khan, Councillor Abdul Mukit MBE, Councillor Gulam Robbani,  
Councillor Andrew Wood and Councillor John Pierce

**Substitutes:**

Councillor Dave Chesterton, Councillor Julia Dockerill, Councillor Marc Francis and  
Councillor Candida Ronald

**Co-opted Members:**

Moshin Hamim

Leaseholder Representative

Anne Ambrose

Tenant Representative

[The quorum for this body is 3 voting Members]

**Contact for further enquiries:**

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QR code for smart phone users.

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**Next Meeting of the Sub- Committee**

The next meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee will be held on Monday, 12 June 2017 at 5.30 p.m. in

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## Tower Hamlets Homes

How the Council meets the needs  
of leaseholders and provides  
services at competitive charges

## The Context and our Improvement Plan

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- This presentation sets out the context in which we are operating, the financial position, current levels of satisfaction, what we are doing and achieving through our leasehold improvement plan and how we obtain competitive charges.
- Through these actions we are seeking to ensure that leaseholder's receive excellent customer service at competitive rates.

## The Overriding Context

- **The crucial document that provides for the 'needs' of leaseholders and the services we provide is the lease.**
- The landlord is both obliged and restricted in what it can or cannot do for leaseholders via this contractual document.
- The lease outlines our obligation to maintain the communal areas of the block and estate.
- Within this context we have developed an improvement plan that seeks to ensure we meet leaseholder's needs, provide services at competitive rates and drive satisfaction.

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## The Financial Context

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- The HRA is ring fenced. It is therefore in the Council's interest to secure VFM across the entire HRA as it has to absorb the impact of the year on year 1% rent reduction.
- In 2017/18, the Council will spend some £60m managing and maintaining its properties and estates in total.
- Of this £13.6m will be recharged to leaseholders for their share of estate and block costs, plus at least a further 12.5m in major works charges.
- Financial pressures on the HRA will require the Council to make savings of £6m over the next five years, an element of those savings will feed through into reduced leaseholder service charges for some items.



### Average service charge actuals

We believe that our actual service charges are reasonable.  
The last 3 years average service charges have been:

2013/14    £1,164

2014/15    £1,197

2015/16    £1,267

Note that these exclude heating and hot water charges.

These compare to Camden: £1,435, Southwark: £1,215 and CityWest Homes: £1,354 (for 2015/16).

In the most recent (summer 2016) benchmarking exercise Tower Hamlets Homes scored highly against other providers:

London Borough of Redbridge	62%
Circle Housing	40%
Lewisham	35%
Islington Council	43%
LB Camden	42%
Kensington & Chelsea TMO	55%
CityWest Homes	69%
Watham Forest	45%
Tower Hamlets	65%

## Our Leasehold Improvement Plan

From early 2016 we have been developing an Improvement Plan/Review in which we have involved leaseholders. Successes to date include:

- Sending lessee's major works estimated bills on 1<sup>st</sup> April of each financial year.
- Lessees can now see all their in year liability in one place and it provides advanced notification of works.
- This will drive forward operational and cultural change, so that soon we will (for the first time) be a year in advance of our major works programme.
- We are seeking to publish a 5 year advanced programme in the next few months. This is a significant improvement in terms of far better programme management, information for RTB applicants and for open market purchasers.

- Voluntarily agreed pro rata deductions where there are Commercial properties in blocks that we make a pro rata deduction where these units are deemed to benefit, e.g. roof repairs. Although not obliged to do this, we believe this to be the right thing to do.
- We are seeking to embrace the digital age with repairs going online in the next few months. This will allow leaseholders real time examination of all communal repairs to their block and estate.
- Lessees will also be able to view their account on line.
- Lessees will be able to view the 5 year programme on line to see if their block is included or not.

We held a Leaseholder workshop last year and as a result we have:

- introduced an informal stage (prior to s20) where we can discuss our proposals with lessees
- on request send out survey reports and Fire Risk Assessment reports to lessees
- set out to be as open and transparent about why we believe works are necessary
- improved clarity around our communication and letters to lessees
- Also from April of 2016 we also introduced and continually promote the Council's very generous repayment options for major works.

## Caretaking and ASB

Leaseholder satisfaction for caretaking is already in the top quartile and currently stands at 78%. We constantly seek to improve our service in this area and recent initiatives have included:

- movement of ASB from Housing Management to the Environmental Services team to improve dealing with estate based ASB;
- provision of an evening and weekend cleaning service in ASB hot spots;
- carrying out improvement tasks such as the grey sealing of staircases to improve their look and make them easier to clean;
- providing smartphones to the caretaking team to improve the reporting of issues and communication within the team;
- trained a team of caretakers to carry out weed spraying duties on hard standing areas.

## Providing services at competitive charges

A vast range of services to lessees are competitively tendered. These include:

- Major works. A new tendering exercise will commence next month.
- Lift and door entry replacement.
- Communal heating system repairs and replacement.
- Electrical repairs (a current consultation is ongoing and we will appoint the contractor who offers the best value for money).
- Day to day repairs.
- We have also been successful in a number of Property Tribunal cases where our costs have been confirmed as reasonable by the Court.

THH is working deliver the leasehold improvement plan.

This will:

- Improve the Quality of our services;
- Increase the Value for Money of those services;
- Allow transparency about the services, especially by making available the use of on-line tools;
- Improve communication about major works;

So that overall leaseholder satisfaction will increase further in the future.

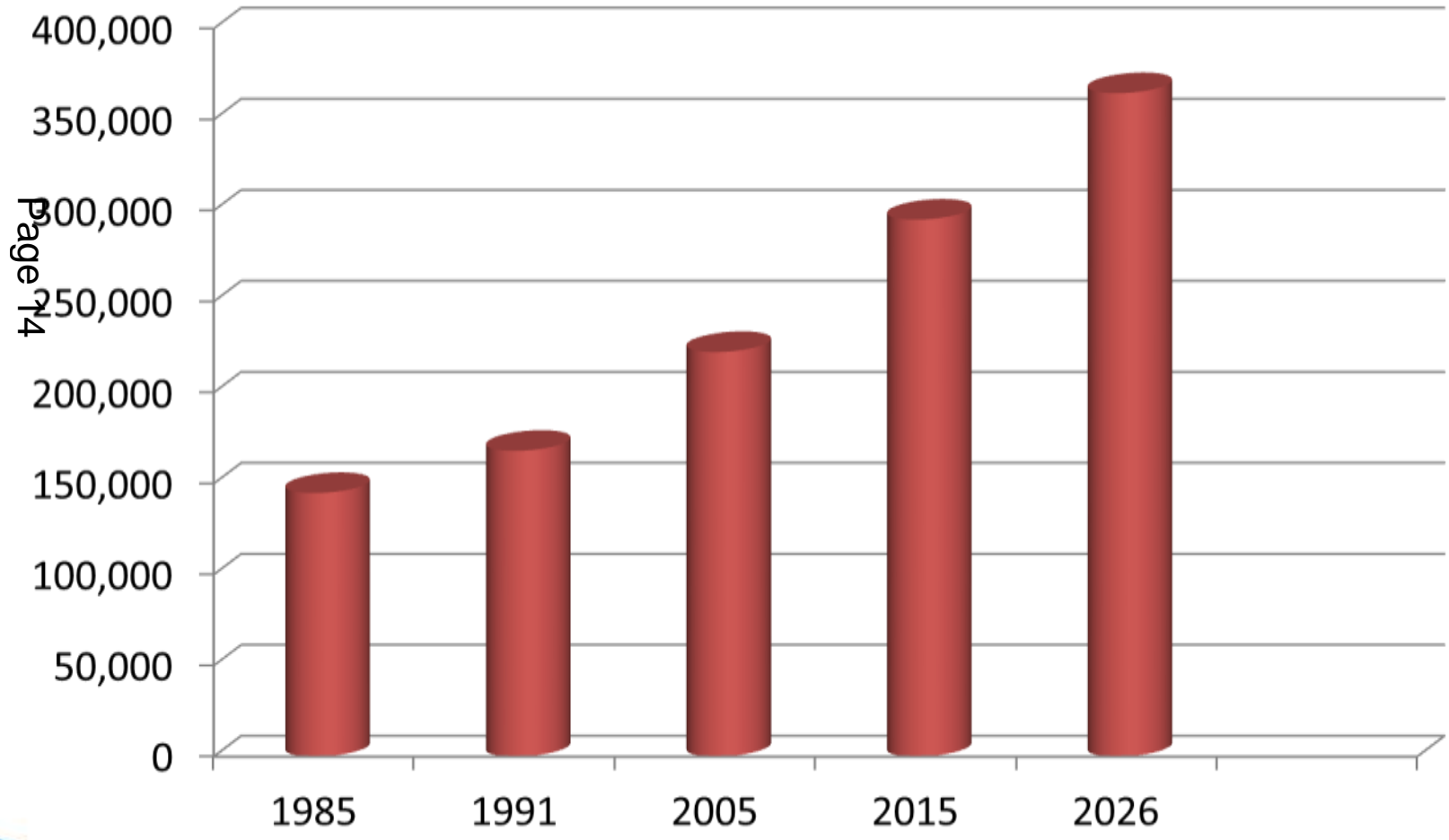


# **Tower Hamlets Private Renters' Charter**

## **Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee**

### **24 April 2017**

# A fast-growing population



# Private Renting in Tower Hamlets

36% of homes socially rented

40% of homes privately rented

6,000 'Right to Buys' privately rented

**It's expensive!**



# Private Renters in Tower Hamlets

## Diverse

30% are non-British white

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34% are from BAME communities

14,500 new overseas residents in a year

## Young

68% are under 35

10% are full-time students

# Private Renters in Tower Hamlets

## Mostly in well-paid work

57% are in professional or managerial work

**But...** More than 5,000 private renters receive housing benefit - more than half of claimants are in work

**But...** Up to 40% in poverty

## Mostly in better health

**But...** 35% of households have a disabled resident

**Nearly one in three vulnerable private renters live in a home that is not decent**

# Private Rented Housing Strategy 2016-21

## Licensing

Resources for inspection & enforcement

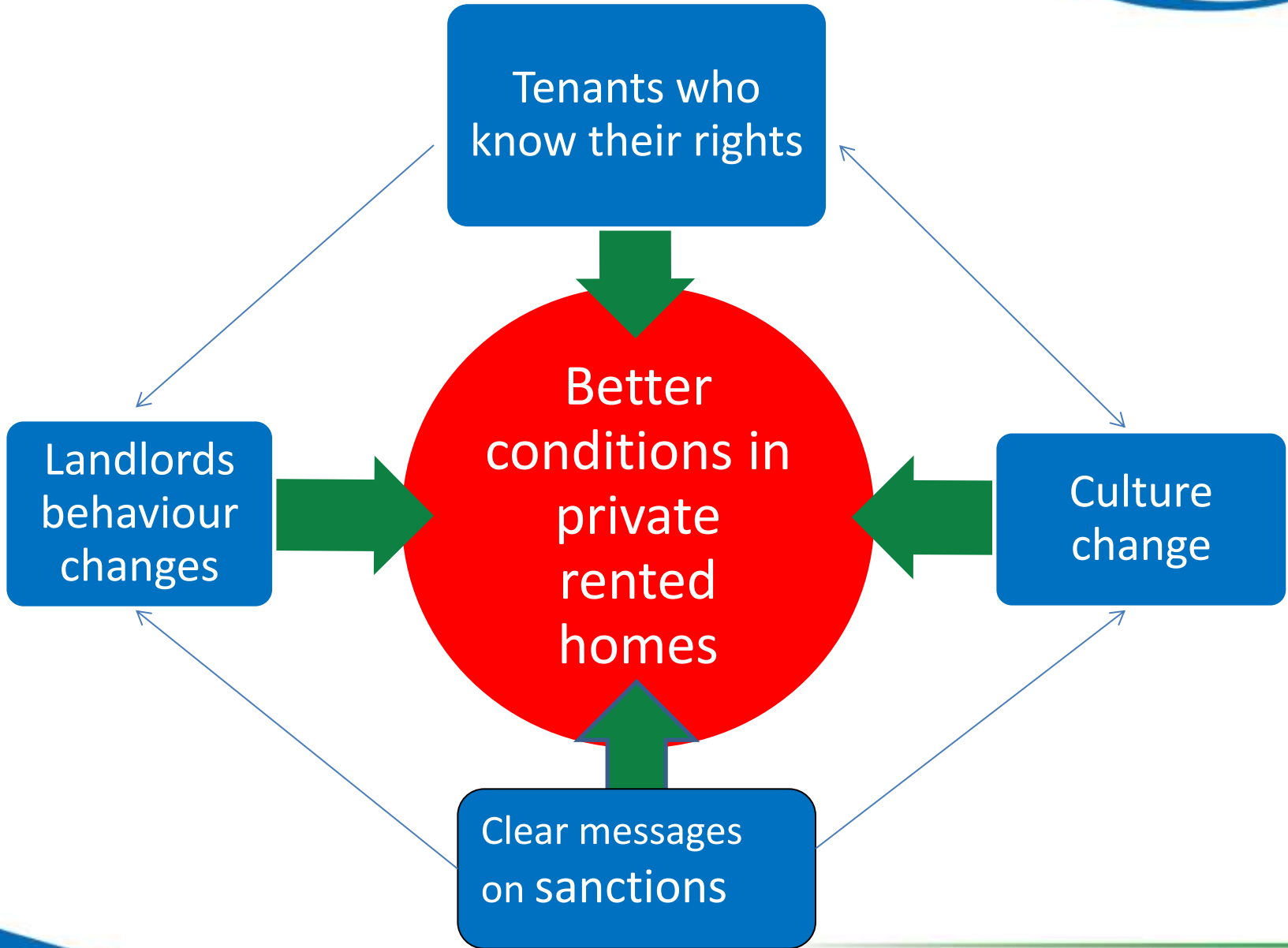
Rogue and criminal landlords

Joint work with registered providers

Private Renters' Charter

# Why adopt a Private Renters' Charter?







# Developing the Charter: Smarter Together

**Cross-departmental working**

**On-line consultation**

**Working group** - includes CAB, Toynbee Hall, Bromley By Bow Centre, Island Advice, TH Law Centre, Shelter, Generation Rent, QMU

**Registered Providers working group**

**Landlords' Forum**

**Endorsements** - includes ARLA, RLA, NLA

# Structure of Tower Hamlets Charter

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Charter

- Statement of Basic Standards
- General Commitment to Support

Web Page

- More detailed information
- Specific promise for each statement

Strategy

- Publicity campaign
- Working Group reviews



## When you are looking for a home to rent, agents must treat you fairly

- Until agency fees for tenants are banned, all agents must display any fees they charge - you should be able to see their fees in their office and on their website without having to ask.
- Any complaint must be taken seriously – and all agents must clearly display which complaint redress scheme they belong to – (TPOS, OSP, PRS logos)
- All letting agents must publically display whether they belong to a client money protection scheme.
- Any discrimination against you because of your nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability or gender is against the law – though agents may ask for proof you have a right to live in the UK.

## Your landlord must treat you fairly

- All good landlords give written tenancy agreements. If your landlord will not do this, they must put in writing your address, your rent, the length of the agreement – and their own name and contact address.
- Your landlord must prove that your deposit has been safely protected within 30 days (TDS, DPS, my deposit logos).
- You shouldn't be hit with surprise fees. Your tenancy terms must be understandable and fair.
- Your rent should not go up during the fixed period of your tenancy.
- Landlords in some parts of Tower Hamlets must have a license from the council.

# Your rented home must be safe and secure

- There must be a working smoke alarm on every floor. There must also be a carbon monoxide alarm in any room with a fire or wood burning stove.
- If you have gas, your landlord must give you a gas safety certificate when you move in - and then make sure a Gas Safe engineer checks every 12 months.
- The electricity supply, wiring and electrical items supplied with your home must be safe. Any problems must be fixed in reasonable time.
- Your home must be weatherproof. Any leaks and drafts must be fixed in a reasonable time.
- Your landlord must deal with damp or mould.
- Your home must have hot and cold water.
- Your landlord must not disturb or harass you. Your landlord should only visit when it is convenient for you – and must give you at least 24 hours' notice.
- If your landlord wants you to move out, they must give you notice in writing and then stick to the law about ending a tenancy.



# Agents must display their fees...

The Council has powers to fine letting agents up to £5,000 for failing to display their fees prominently on a poster in their office and on any website they may have. They must not mislead you. They must clearly describe the cost of each fee including VAT, and what each fee covers

Fees don't have to be published in this way for websites that only advertise properties, like Rightmove or Zoopla.

It's also a criminal offence if a letting agent charges you to register with them or to show you a list of properties to rent.

The Council can also fine agents up to £5,000 for not belonging to one of the following organisations:

- The Property Ombudsman (TPO)
- The Property Redress Scheme.
- Ombudsman Services Property

Letting agents fees for tenants will probably be banned in the next two years – the government is consulting now on whether this would be the right thing to do. Tower Hamlets Council has asked for the ban to go ahead, and we will keep you informed of any progress towards that.

For further information about your rights when dealing with letting agents please see:

- [Shelter](#) (hyperlinked)
- [Citizens Advice Bureaux](#) (hyperlinked)

**WHO WILL HELP ME IF AN AGENT OR LANDLORD BREACHES THIS PART OF THE TOWER HAMLETS RENTERS' CHARTER?**  
(Hyperlinked)





# The Charter as a process

- Resources
- Ongoing publicity campaign
- A live document
- Private Renting Forum for all signatories

# Timescales

- 9 May - MAB
- 30 May - Cabinet
- 29 June – Launch
- November – First PRS Forum
- Review in April 2018

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