

Best Practice Guidance

How to develop a Tenant Accreditation Scheme...



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Foreword

Landlord Accreditations Schemes have developed over the last ten years or so as a means of recognising good landlords and encouraging the raising of standards in the Private Rented Sector. Similarly Tenant Accreditation Schemes have developed more recently to provide the same service for tenants. They are voluntary schemes which promote responsibility and neighbourly behaviour for tenants.

They are flexible and adaptable and can also help in dealing with specific problems including area regeneration and anti-social behaviour.

This Best Practice Guide and its accompanying document 'How to Set up and Develop a Voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme – Best Practice Guidance' is a detailed account of how to develop a scheme. It considers the need for a scheme and draws on existing schemes to illustrate best practices. It is aimed at persons who do not necessarily have experience of the Private Rented Sector and provides background information, examples and recommendations to assist in developing a scheme.

It can be read in its entirety or referred to as the need arises. It is intended to be used from the earliest stages of assessing need, considering and providing arguments for establishing a scheme, to reviewing and further developing the scheme to meet changing demands. It will be a useful if not invaluable source to those responsible for providing a continual improvement in the standards of housing.

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Chair ANUK

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- Good Tenants' Scheme (Burnley)
- North Lincolnshire Council
- Easington Borough Council
- Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- Manchester Landlord Information Service
- Borough of Poole Accreditation Scheme
- Dorset National Landlord Association
- Burnley Borough Council

Executive Summary

The Study

In March 2006, the East Midlands Decent and Safe Homes (DASH) Project commissioned Accent Regeneration Ltd to undertake a study and prepare a Best Practice report on How to Develop and Set Up a Voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme and Best Practice in How to Develop a Tenant Accreditation Scheme. Over 140 accreditation schemes were questioned together with a comprehensive assessment of what accreditation schemes were doing, what they had achieved and what activities appeared to be working most effectively. The separate report titled 'How to Develop and Setup a Voluntary Landlords Accreditation Scheme – Best Practice Guidance' is available to support this document. This report aims to focus in on five active tenant accreditation schemes, to provide information on why they were developed and how they work. This report is aimed to add to, and build on previous work commissioned by former Department of Transport and Regions (DETR) 'Developing a Voluntary Accreditation Scheme for Private Landlords'.

This Best Practice report is aimed to be a good source of information for elected members, senior officers and accreditation scheme managers on considerations to make when developing a tenant accreditation scheme.

The Background

Private rented housing as part of the total housing stock has grown from 9% to 12% between 1988 and 2005, whereas the social rented sector has fallen from 25% in 1988 to 18% in 2005, coupled with an increase in the owner occupied sector. What is clear is tenants are becoming reliant on the private rented sector for housing provision while the balance between affordable housing to buy and the provision of new social rented housing is restored. Recent research suggests that 48% of persons renting in the private rented sector are less than 35 years of age, compared with 4% in social rented housing. This suggests that there is more tenant 'movement' in the private rented sector than any other housing sector, and this can create benefits as well as problems for private landlords and the local community.

Private landlords have sometimes been blamed for contributing towards the decline of local communities by not selecting tenants for their properties more carefully, with consequences being crime related, anti-social behaviour and nuisance. Landlords have also often paid the price for not sourcing good references to be able to make an informed decision in respect of potential tenants. The results have been vandalism, destruction of their properties coupled with loss of rental income, deposit disputes and intimidation. Some landlords have pooled together to create unofficial tenant blacklists in order to avoid this situation.

Landlords have often been left with the option of following a lengthy legal procedure in order to evict 'bad' tenants or may be left with an abandonment situation, where costly legal advice is required. However, some less concerned landlords have resorted to illegal eviction or harassment to ensure tenants leave their property, and in many cases this has led to the local housing authority taking action against the landlords to protect the tenant's rights. However, it must be stated that most tenants are decent, law abiding individuals; it is the few that are not that can create a bad image for tenants in certain communities, and this also reflects badly on landlords as a whole.

With the introduction of the Housing Act 2004, fundamental changes will apply to the private rented sector, especially in relation to the introduction of mandatory and selective licensing schemes, coupled with interim and final management orders. Private landlords will need to take greater care in tenant selection as well as dealing with tenant anti-social behaviour. One method would be for landlords to have access to some form of tenant accreditation or tenant vetting service or scheme.

Key Findings

One of the key findings of this research is that tenant accreditation being linked to local authorities housing strategies is a relatively new activity; it is usually linked to more established landlord accreditation schemes. However, there is a growing interest by local authorities and accreditation scheme operators to develop better methods of monitoring tenant activities, supporting landlords and tenants and developing tenant accreditation schemes. Tenant accreditation schemes also enable scheme operators to gain a better understanding of the private rented sector.

Through licensing and management orders, the Housing Act 2004 places a greater emphasis on private landlords to take greater care in tenant selection and to deal with tenant anti-social behaviour. Local authorities need to consider how they can support private landlords in achieving these requirements. Tenant accreditation may be one such method of supporting landlords in this duty and may assist local authorities in the licensing process.

The potential growth in tenant accreditation or tenant vetting schemes comes from the need to take a more pro-active approach in dealing with local issues of anti-social behaviour and crime, and in many cases private landlords have requested assistance and support to help deal with tenant related problems. One of the main objectives of tenant accreditation schemes is to educate tenants on the benefits of being a 'good' tenant. Some schemes operate a 'tenant's code of conduct', which tenants are expected to conform to. It has been found that it is often difficult to engage students with tenant accreditation.

Private landlords generally support the development of tenant accreditation schemes, and the current schemes in operation are well used by private landlords and agents alike. Tenant accreditation is often seen as a positive benefit to accredited landlords, however a number of schemes do not restrict its use to accredited landlords, as this would limit its activity in dealing with tenant anti-social behaviour.

Some landlords may view a tenant accreditation scheme as more attractive than a landlord scheme. More landlords may come forward to use a tenant accreditation scheme than those who apply for landlord accreditation, but as the tenant accreditation scheme develops, and there is an increase in contact with private landlords, they can be encouraged to join the landlord accreditation scheme.

Tenant accreditation can bring together both private sector and social sector landlords. As tenants move from one sector to another, social and private landlords can work together, ensuring greater policing of the sector and making tenants aware of their responsibilities more effectively.

A good tenant accreditation scheme may lead to fewer cases of illegal eviction or harassment for the local authority to deal with, and some schemes can act as a mediator for landlord/tenant disputes. However, schemes need to consider how they are going to support tenants who fail tenant accreditation checks, in order to prevent greater numbers of homeless or vulnerable individuals. Also, landlords not wanting to be known by the local authority are unlikely to engage with any type of accreditation scheme, and these landlords and their properties may create a refuge for those tenants who fail accreditation checks.

Tenant accreditation schemes that are linked to local authority anti-social behaviour sections and the Police may enable a valuable exchange of data and information on persons who are being sought for criminal offences. Some tenant accreditation schemes provide benefits for law enforcement agencies as well as private landlords.

One of the most important initial steps to achieving a good outcome of a scheme, is to ensure good political or corporate support. This is more likely to ensure a proposed accreditation scheme is adequately resourced and accounted for within the budgets, and it also ensures consistency with local policies and the general aims of the organisation. Political or corporate support potentially increases co-operation on activities that support accreditation from other internal departments, as well as from other agencies and organisations.

Background and Introduction

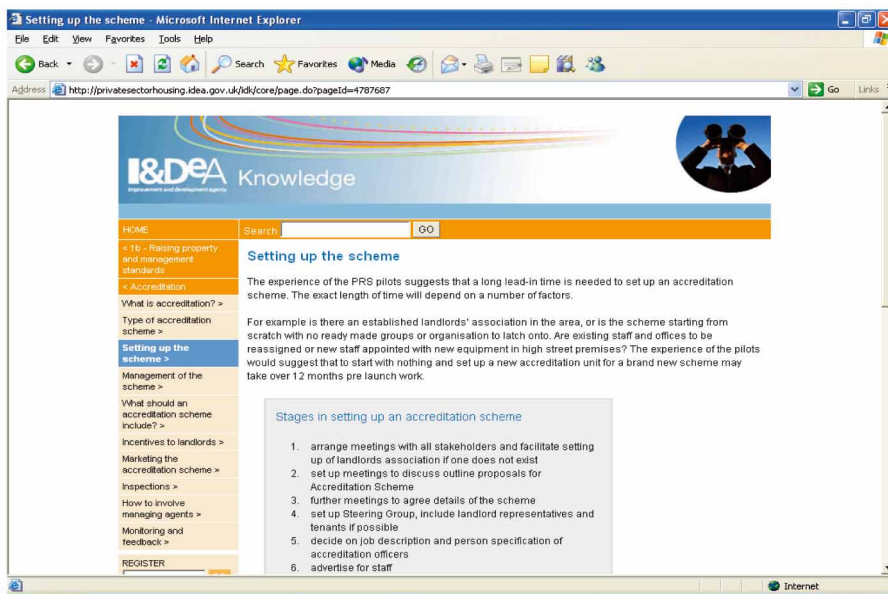
1.1 Best Practice

Best practice, if it is going to be effective or useful, needs to draw on good sources of information and experience in the field. This report will provide best practice guidance on how to develop and set up a tenant accreditation scheme, and is primarily aimed at those senior managers, elected members and council officers or other individuals or organisations that are undertaking this objective. The guidance will provide a model to help local authorities implement a similar scheme, knowing they are drawing on what has been successful in other areas.

In March 2006, the East Midlands Decent and Safe Homes (DASH) Project commissioned Accent Regeneration Ltd to prepare this guidance together with a separate guidance document 'How to Set up and Develop a Voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme – Best Practice Guidance'. DASH is funded by Government Office East Midlands and championed by Derby, Leicester and Nottingham councils to promote partnership between local authorities and landlord groups across the East Midlands. Accent Regeneration was selected because of their practical experience and knowledge of this field – having set up and managed tenant accreditation schemes in Barrow-in-Furness and Burnley.

Accent Regeneration's remit was to collect examples of best practice in setting up and developing tenant accreditation schemes. The developing schemes themselves are likely to improve the private rented sector and as such will be increasing understanding of the approach which should be taken.

The aim throughout this guidance is to simply focus upon the development and delivery of tenant accreditation schemes with the provision of case studies. Local authorities can then be given a model for setting up a tenant accreditation scheme based on tried and tested methods. It is intended that this document will provide practitioners with a valuable source of reference and guidance. The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIOH) is currently researching private rented sector activities and Sheffield Hallam University (funded by the Communities and Local Government) have also developed guidance and a web-based toolkit on the IDEa website. We would encourage the reader to examine this guidance for further information at <http://privatesectorhousing.idea.gov.uk>



I&DEA website toolkit launched 26 July 06: © Crown Copyright

1.2 Methodology

The research carried out for this best practice was split between:

- Original research - identifying what is being used in the 'field' and incorporating the views and opinions of practitioners
- Desk-based research - identifying the existing information that is available

1.3 Original Research

Questionnaires were sent to 142 local authorities across the country asking for their experiences of setting up a landlord accreditation scheme and/or good tenant/tenant referencing schemes. The findings of the information received about landlord accreditation is the subject of a separate report 'How to Set up and Develop a Voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme – Best Practice Guidance'.

Six authorities who indicated that they had active tenant accreditation schemes were visited and interviewed and this report is based on the best practice resulting from these interviews and the supporting information provided by each.

We are grateful to, Burnley, Easington, Leeds, North Lincolnshire and Manchester councils and the Dorset wide model for their contributions. Details of their schemes are shown below.

Local authority	Stand alone or linked project	Date established
Burnley Borough Council	Stand alone project	April 2005
Easington District Council	Part of the Easington Landlord Accreditation Scheme	July 2002
Leeds City Council	Linked to Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS)	January 2003
Manchester City Council	Stand alone project	February 2004
North Lincolnshire Council	Linked to Landlord Accreditation Scheme	November 2004
Dorset wide model	Reference is made to the Dorset Wide Accreditation Scheme Linked to the Landlord accreditation scheme Accreditation Model	Model Version 2003

Reference is made to the findings of the survey throughout this report but full analysis is shown in Appendix One.

1.4 Desk-based Research

In identifying and accessing relevant information in documents and over the internet, it allowed the context to be set and relevant and useful information to be incorporated into the report.

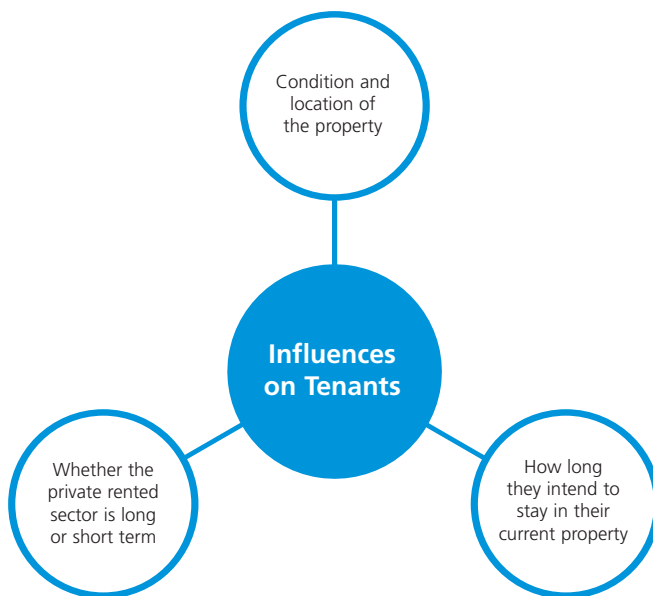
1.5 Context

Research evidence from 'Dealing with 'Problem' Private Rented Housing' (DCLG 2006 – Crown Copyright) suggests that private rented sector strategies and interventions now have an increasing priority within local authorities. This has been generated by a greater awareness of problems in the private rented sector, new powers for intervention and a new emphasis on housing strategies that take a broad view of housing markets.

Tenant and Landlord accreditation schemes are essentially interventions by which local authorities hope to change behaviour. Through structure and process it is hoped to ensure that landlords and tenants will behave more responsibly, put in place protections for each party and help the private rented sector to operate more effectively.

To do this successfully the complex nature of the private rented sector and the limitations of referring to homogeneous groups as 'tenants' or 'landlords' should be considered. Circumstance and motivation will differ between individuals.

DIAGRAM 1.1 – The Most Likely Influences on Tenants



There are likely to be more significant differences between landlords. All landlords will be driven by the financial return, capital and revenue that can be achieved through letting property. The most crucial difference is likely to be landlords owning just one or a small number of properties and those letting a portfolio of properties.

Individual property owners may have inherited the property or have purchased it as an investment. They are likely to be more attached to the property, and adopt a more personal approach to letting and managing the property. Portfolio owners will have a number of properties and are often remote from the properties they own. They will have a more formal business-like approach, they may use managing agents and may have built up a number of cheaper properties, seeking a greater financial return from those on low incomes and housing benefit.

1.6 Future Considerations and Changes

The Housing Act 2004, introduced in stages during 2006, will play a significant part in changing our future private rented sector housing markets. Whilst links between accreditation and Housing Act implications are in part dealt with in this guidance it is too early to fully analyse them yet. Future information sharing, reports and best practice sharing will occur, some of which has already begun between local and national networks and some through the IDEA and the LACORS websites. The main implications to shape the future of accreditation schemes are shown in Diagram 1.2.

DIAGRAM 1.2 – Implications of the Housing Act affecting Accreditation Schemes



The other main focus areas that are likely to play an important role are:

- Decent Homes from the Government Paper Quality and Choice – a decent home for all – Crown Copyright and the targets laid down for local authorities.
- Energy Certificates under the EU Building Directive are likely to apply to the private rented sector
- Affordability, which is becoming more of an issue as a consequence of rising house prices across the country. The private rented sector will have to continue providing housing into the future.

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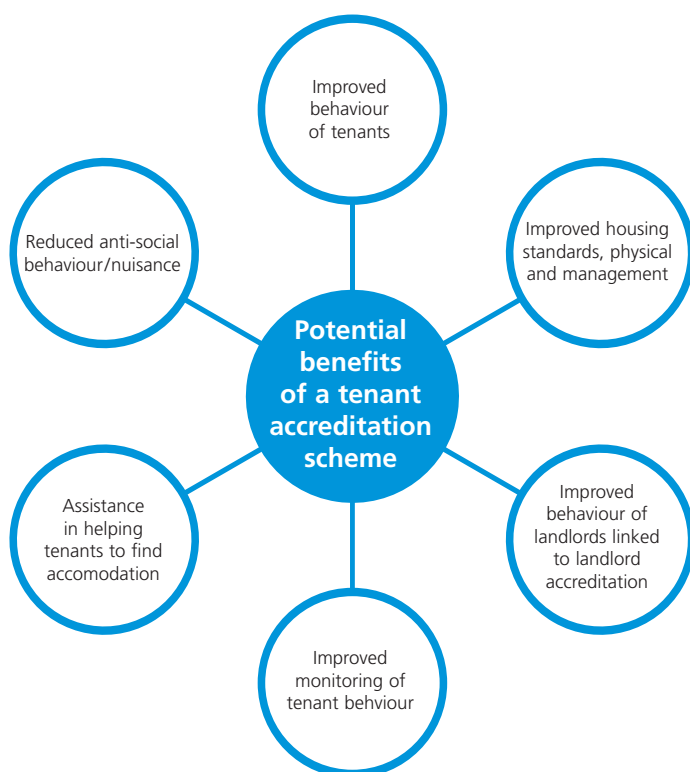
About Tenant Accreditation Schemes

2.1 What is a Tenant Accreditation Scheme?

Tenant accreditation schemes are aimed at dealing with issues of tenant behaviour and educating tenants about the benefits of being a 'good' tenant. They are seen by local authorities as a way to resolve issues of tenant behaviour and tenancy management, often in tandem with landlord accreditation schemes.

The objective of such schemes is to offer the opportunity for realistic and tangible changes to be made to the attitudes and behaviour of landlords and tenants in the private rented sector, using a multi-agency approach. Other potential benefits are improved housing standards and better monitoring of tenants and their behaviour. Those tenants not able to find suitable accommodation in areas where their history suggests serious issues with anti-social behaviour or neighbourhood nuisance can also be helped.

DIAGRAM 2.1 – Potential Benefits of a Tenant Accreditation Scheme



2.2 Why Have a Tenant Accreditation Scheme?

2.2.1 Types of Tenants

Tenants are as diverse a group as any other sector within housing. People may move into and out of the rented sector at any time during the course of their lives. The following information gives some of the different reasons people use the private rented sector. It is for guidance purposes only and is not an exhaustive list.

- 1 In poorer localities or towns there may be a dependency on housing benefit forming a major component of the private rented sector housing market. Housing benefit levels are limited and thus tenants may be forced into the cheaper and consequently less well maintained end of the private rented sector or into the social housing sector. Housing benefit claimants have fallen from 33% in 1993 to 19% in 2005*. However, in many areas there is a limited amount of social housing, and thus tenants have moved into the private rented sector.

- 2 The more vulnerable groups within society may also be housed in the private rented sector or alternatively in the social rented sector. These would include the elderly and those with mental health issues, the homeless or those with a drug dependency.
- 3 In wealthier localities or towns, renting may be the main alternative to house purchase. Employment or circumstances often dictate a preference towards renting, as it allows more freedom of movement than compared with the restraints of home ownership.
- 4 In many localities house prices have risen considerably and affordable housing for purchase has become a substantial concern. Those, often younger members or less affluent members of society may be forced into the rented sector. Some 48% of tenants in the private rented sector are under 35 years of age.* This helps to identify groups including students and those newly qualified who may find it difficult to get on to the owner occupied property ladder.
- 5 In some towns there may be high levels of students renting and an increase in shared housing.
- 6 In specific localities across the country there may be a growth in asylum seekers, migrant workers and refugees in the private rented sector.
- 7 Research has suggested some 22% of tenants renting in the private rented sector are educated to degree level, compared with 22% in the owner occupied sector and 4% in the social rented sector.*

*Source: via DCLG – based on data presented 2006. Other sources have contributed to research findings

2.2.2 Inexperienced Private Landlords

Nationally there is a growth in the 'buy to let' market which leads to many investors buying properties often at some distance to from where they live. Landlords letting these properties to tenants with little knowledge of the area and little understanding or experience of property management can have a detrimental effect on a neighbourhood. In general it appears that some landlords prefer to manage their properties themselves rather than using managing agents due to feeling that managing agents charge too much for a service that they feel they can provide themselves. (Source: 'In from the Cold – Working with the Private Rented Sector' – DETR – Crown Copyright)

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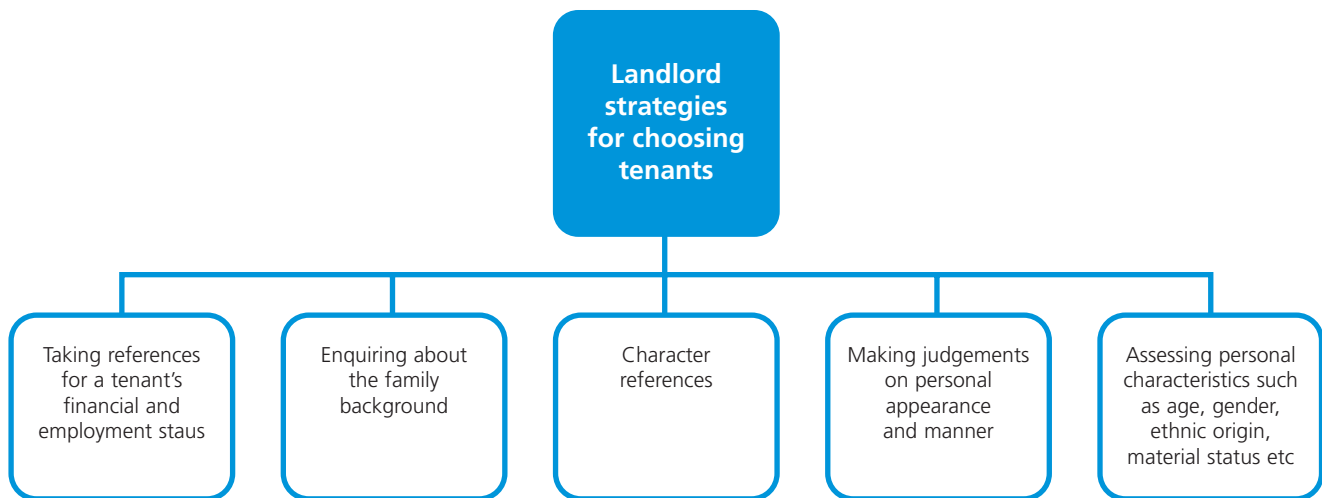
2.2.3 Private Landlord Strategies for Managing Their Properties: Tenant Selection

Landlords are often blamed for the neglect of properties or for leaving properties vacant. However, it is clear that in many instances tenants also contribute to the decline of our communities. They are the most mobile members and can easily leave rental properties without consequences – leaving landlords and neighbours to 'pick up the pieces'.

Whilst landlords should become more responsible in looking after their property and tenants, tenants also have a duty to act in a reasonable manner. Evidence suggests that this is not always the case, and is contributing to decline in certain neighbourhoods.

At present private sector landlords adopt a range of strategies for managing their property and choosing tenants is no exception to this, examples of these are shown overleaf.

DIAGRAM 2.2 Landlord Strategies for Managing Properties: Choosing Tenants



In some instances landlords may also look to 'match' the tenant to the property in terms of the properties size, quality, location and neighbourhood. Overall, landlords are looking for 'good' tenants, and these may be defined as people who:

- pay the rent on time;
- maintain the property well and do not cause damage;
- do not disrupt their neighbours; and
- appear to be presentable.

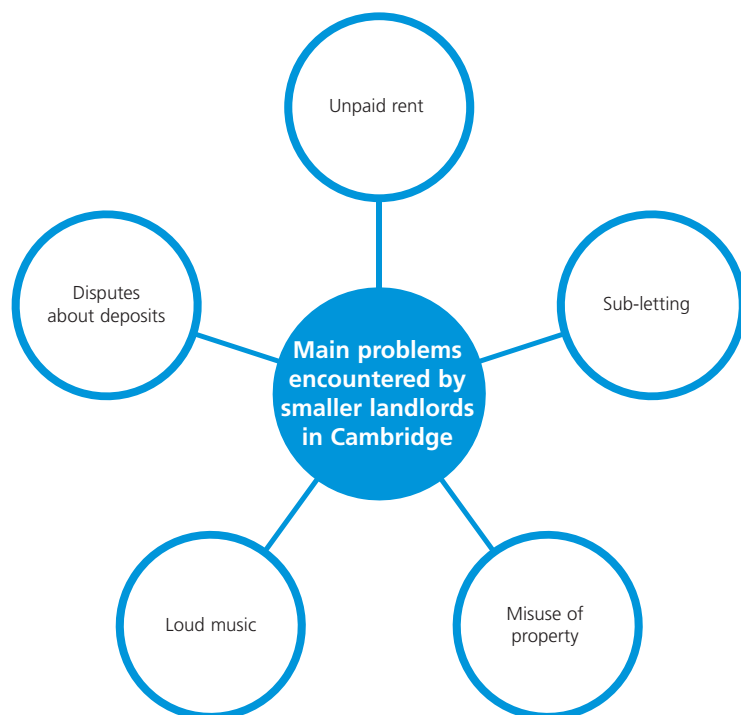
Many landlords rely on a combination of experience and judgement to help them differentiate between potentially 'good' and 'bad' tenants, but typically initial vetting of tenants may be carried out by telephone, followed by personal interviews. Some landlords, particularly those with small portfolios, may take tenants on recommendation from other long-term tenants or other landlords.

Obviously landlords have different preferences for the type of tenant they select to live in their properties. Small local landlords are generally more careful in selecting their tenants than landlords with larger portfolios who are more likely to live away from the area and may not have any direct personal link to the tenant or the neighbourhood. The small local landlord may have a greater personal interest due to a desire to protect their local reputation, and may have more time to carry out more thorough tenant checks.

The main concern of the smaller landlord is that of damage to their property – particularly if they have a personal attachment to the property. In some cases landlords may be overly cautious about the 'type' of tenant they choose, and in some cases would leave a property empty rather than risk letting it to someone who may cause damage or nuisance. (Source: 'In from the Cold – Working with the Private Rented Sector' – DETR – Crown Copyright)

Accent Regeneration carried out a survey in Cambridge in early 2006 which showed that 32% of 'small' landlords (owning five properties or less) said that the main disadvantage of renting out property was that tenants did not look after the property. The main problems they encountered are shown in the diagram over the page.

DIAGRAM 2.3 – Main Problems Encountered by ‘Small’ Landlords in Cambridge



Of the landlords in Cambridge who owned between 6 and 34 properties, 33% said that the biggest problems they experienced were tenants who sub-let and the removal of bad tenants.

Another obvious concern for landlords is the tenant's ability to pay the rent. Some smaller investors may place greater emphasis on ability to pay rent when selecting a tenant, especially where the property may be a sole or primary source of income. In light of this, many small landlords choose professional people as tenants.

Large portfolio landlords are generally more willing and able to accept Housing Benefit claimants or other tenants who might be considered to have social housing needs. Cheaper properties may have been specifically purchased to provide housing to this particular client group. This may be because they are financially able to endure delays in Housing Benefit payments and to cope with property damage and repair. Claimants can also bring benefits; they are perceived as being a 'guaranteed' income and also because such tenants are easier to find, resulting in fewer voids and shorter re-let times. This may change in 2007 with the introduction of local housing allowances; Housing Benefit payments will be made direct to landlords only in very exceptional circumstances.

PRIVATE LANDLORDS WOULD LIKE TO SEE TENANTS REFERENCED!!!

In a recent survey carried out across East Lancashire with private landlords, 92% stated that a good tenant is someone who respects the property; 80% stated a good tenant is someone who pays the rent on time, and 38% stated a good tenant is someone who respects their neighbours.

Of the private landlords questioned, the main problems they found with tenants were vandalism, property abuse, unpaid rent and problems with housing benefit. In respect of a tenant accreditation scheme 64% of landlords questioned stated they would use a scheme if it was established.

(Quaternion Research – East Lancashire Private Rented Sector Study 2004)

Source: Extract from Good Tenants Scheme newsletter June 2005, informing landlords of the results of the Private Rented Sector Pilot Landlords study – Quaternion Research 2004.

In our experience, both types of landlord are supportive of tenant accreditation schemes and the benefits they bring, not only to the landlords themselves but also to the neighbourhoods in which they operate. Schemes also educate tenants on how to be 'good' tenants.

Leeds City Council's publicity for their tenant accreditation scheme states that '...the scheme gives a tenant a competitive advantage when seeking new privately rented accommodation.'

2.2.4 The Advantages and Disadvantages of a Tenant Accreditation Scheme

Tenant accreditation can bring together both the private sector and social sector landlords. Tenants do move from one rented sector to another, and by social and private landlords working together, there is greater 'policing' of the whole rented sector, and this ensures a much more effective approach to making tenants more aware of what responsibilities they need to uphold.

For landlords there are more advantages than disadvantages to having a tenant accreditation scheme. The study group highlighted the advantages and disadvantages for landlords.

ADVANTAGES FOR LANDLORDS
■ Improved tenant behaviour
■ Serves as a reference rather than the landlord having to write a bespoke reference on request
■ Up to date information regarding anti-social behaviour perpetrators
■ Allows landlords easy access to information from the council and registered social landlords (RSL's)
■ Free service
■ More relevant information than a credit check
■ Discourages informal blacklisting
■ Access to 'good' tenants
■ Fewer evictions
■ Reduction in anti-social behaviour
■ Improved area property values
■ Contributing towards sustainable communities
■ Well supported and used by RSL's
■ Well supported by private landlords and letting agents

DISADVANTAGES FOR LANDLORDS
■ The scheme is not widely recognised as a tenant reference
■ The student sector are not interested in the scheme
■ It does not, at present cover the whole of the area
■ It does (in some cases) include the police as a source of reference information
■ Each landlord has to complete a new pre-tenancy check per application
■ Information is only as good as that provided, and is not 100% guaranteed
■ Possible lack of scheme sustainability due to external funding dependence

The study group highlighted the advantages and disadvantages for tenants.

ADVANTAGES FOR TENANTS

- Gives a tenant a reference when moving on in the private rented sector
- Prevents an illegal blacklist where tenants could not challenge information held about them
- Verifies and checks landlords
- Prevents informal blacklisting
- Quick turn around of references (1 - 2 days)
- Free service
- Access to quality, well-managed, accredited accommodation
- Assistance in resolving disputes
- Tenant can keep reference to prove compliance to other accredited landlords when relocating
- Recognition as a 'good' tenant;
- Access to bond guarantee scheme
- Access to furniture store (where available)
- Access to quality RSL accommodation/private rented sector accommodation

DISADVANTAGES FOR TENANTS

- Reference not universally accepted in area
- Lack of take-up of the scheme
- Scheme may not be perceived as being impartial
- May need to complete a new form each time a tenant moves; (in Burnley the applicant needs to complete a new form only after 6 or 12 months)
- Information is only as accurate as that provided
- Alienating those not qualifying for a reference
- Scheme should be open to all tenants, not just those in accredited landlord property

The Reasons and Need for a Tenant Accreditation Scheme

3.1 Identifying the Need for a Tenant Accreditation Scheme

Reasons for a local authority to set up a tenant accreditation scheme vary from area to area. In our study group, reasons ranged from being set up at the request of members/landlords/residents to being set up to run alongside an existing landlord accreditation scheme. Leeds City Council set up their scheme to improve tenant behaviour while Manchester City Council set theirs up to help address neighbour nuisance.

Why did you originally establish the scheme?

Local authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Landlord demand resulting from private rented sector research study
Easington District Council	From previous experience and via a request from landlords
Leeds City Council	At the request of members of the landlord accreditation scheme in order to improve tenant behaviour
Manchester City Council	At the request of residents and landlords in order to help address neighbour nuisance and also to make improvements in the private rented sector
North Lincolnshire Council	To run alongside the established landlord accreditation scheme
Dorset Wide Accreditation Scheme	To establish a model scheme for use by individual local authorities in the Dorset area.

The difference between vetting a tenant and a tenant accreditation scheme

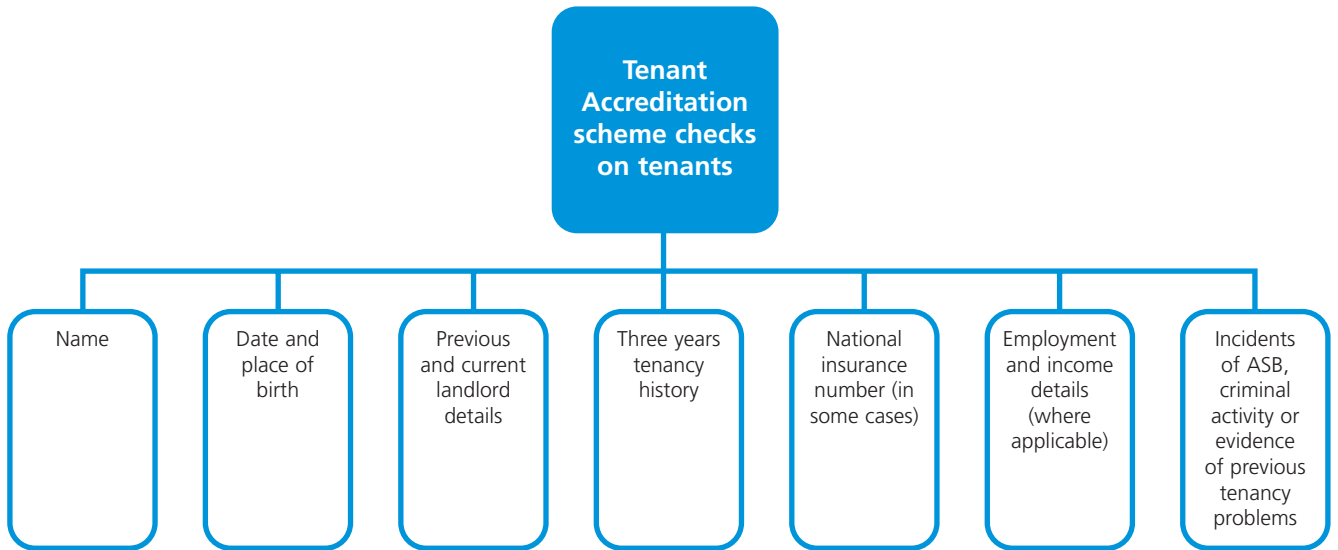
The way in which landlords select their tenants is very interesting. One very basic way is for landlords to refuse to let their properties to anyone in receipt of Housing Benefit. However, this does not dictate how a potential tenant will behave, merely that they need help paying their rent.

According to the Cambridge survey results, of landlords who owned five properties or less, 50% required two written references whilst 18% relied on verbal references. Of the landlords who owned between 6 and 34 properties, 33% said they required two written references but that they still experienced problems of subletting and removal of bad tenants. Larger portfolio landlords only took written references.

The East Lancashire Private Sector Housing Study found that the most landlords required two written references.

Accreditation schemes investigate a person's background in greater detail before awarding a tenancy. 83% of our study group check all or a combination of the following.

DIAGRAM 3.1 – Checks Before Awarding a Tenancy



Clearly the tenant accreditation process checks a person’s background and suitability more thoroughly than a standard vetting system. Leeds City Council’s publicity for their tenant accreditation scheme states that “...accredited tenant status may also be used as a good character reference when seeking new opportunities in life.”

3.2 Tenant Behaviour

Whenever and wherever there are cases of anti-social behaviour, private sector tenants and landlords wanting to ‘make a quick buck’ and offering their properties to anyone who can pay the rent are blamed. This example gives some idea of how useful carrying out checks can be.

Source: Statement from Police Liaison Officer, ASB Team, Burnley Police, Lancashire

Whilst carrying out reference checks I have often obtained valuable intelligence on the whereabouts of individuals who were wanted for criminal offences, not only in the Lancashire force area but also further afield. One example being a male wanted for serious sexual offences committed in Yorkshire. I was able to immediately forward the information to the relevant force area for their attention. Very often new addresses are obtained for individuals wanted for failing to appear at court and for non-payment of fines. The intelligence I gather for reference check applications also allows me to monitor people coming into the area from elsewhere who may have criminal records and be a risk to the local community.

Tenant accreditation schemes that are linked to local authority anti-social behaviour sections and the Police may ensure a valuable exchange of data and information on persons who are being sought for criminal offences. Some tenant accreditation schemes provide a mutual benefit for law enforcement agencies as well as private landlords. There have been cases where prospective tenants have been issued with warrants, and have been arrested as a consequence of providing their data through scheme application.

Some tenant accreditation schemes rely on accredited private landlords monitoring the behaviour of tenants during and at the end of a tenancy period.

If a tenant wants to become accredited they must, together with their landlord, read and sign two copies of the scheme, one copy to be kept by each party.

At the end of the tenancy or a period of six months (whichever is sooner) the landlord can recommend to the scheme manager that a tenant be accredited as they have complied with all requirements of the scheme. This recommendation must be in writing on an approved nomination form. (Example in Chapter 5)

Source: Extract from Dorset Model Accreditation Scheme

3.3 Tenant Accreditation, Landlord Accreditation and Selective Licensing

The potential growth in tenant accreditation schemes has come from the need to take a more pro-active approach to dealing with local issues of anti-social behaviour and crime, and in many cases private landlords have requested assistance and support to help deal with tenant related problems. Tenant accreditation may assist local authorities in making the case for selective licensing.

The Housing Act 2004, places a greater emphasis, through licensing and management orders, for private landlords to take greater care in tenant selection and in dealing with tenant anti-social behaviour. Local authorities need to consider how they can support private landlords in achieving their requirements using methods currently available to them; tenant accreditation may be one such method.

In some cases, tenants dare not complain about their landlords and/or property for fear of reprisal and so they merely move on, leaving the problem for the next tenant. Allowing a tenant to become accredited and having access to accredited property could help alleviate the problems of a transient private rented sector.

The entire study group identified a strong link between tenant and landlord accreditation and one went as far as to say that "...it is a fundamental part of the scheme". If we are encouraging landlords to become accredited it is not unreasonable to expect that they should be able to expect similar standards to be imposed on tenants who are seeking to access private rented accommodation.

In the study group only Manchester City Council has introduced selective licensing, although one other authority is considering whether to introduce it in the future.

At the time of producing this document Shelter are currently researching and producing a best practice guide to selective licensing and Communities and Local Government have published a guidance titled 'Approval Steps for Additional and Selective Licensing Designations in England'.

Anti-Social Behaviour

Section 80 (6) (a) of the Act gives LHAs the power to make a Selective Licensing designation if 'the area is experiencing a significant and persistent problem caused by anti-social behaviour.'

An area can be deemed to be suffering from significant and persistent anti-social behaviour if it suffers from:

Crime: tenants not respecting the property in which they live and engaging in vandalism, criminal damage, burglary, robbery/theft and car crime.

Nuisance Neighbours: intimidation and harassment; noise, rowdy and nuisance behaviour; animal related problems; vehicle related nuisance; tenants engaged in begging; anti-social drinking; street prostitution and kerb-crawling; street drugs market within the area of the property.

Environmental Crime: tenants engaged in graffiti and fly-posting; fly-tipping; litter and waste; nuisance vehicles; drugs paraphernalia; fireworks misuse in and around the area for their property

Section 80 (6) (b) of the Act requires LHAs to consider that:

Some or all of the private sector landlords who have let premises in the area are failing to take action to combat such problems that it would be appropriate for them to take.

LHAs should be aware that private landlords are only responsible for the anti-social behaviour of their tenants if that behaviour takes place within the boundaries of their properties. If an LHA wishes to make a designation based on anti-social behaviour they will need to establish that the problem is directly attributable to the behaviour of the occupants of a property, and that these landlords are failing to deal with their tenants' behaviour. If an area suffers from general anti-social behaviour that occurs outside the boundary of certain properties, they should consider whether this is a symptom of low housing demand.

LHAs should also be aware how the making of a designation on the grounds of anti-social behaviour will tie in with the governments' RESPECT agenda. For further information please visit www.respect.gov.uk

Approval Steps for Additional and Selective Licensing Designations in England.

Source: www.communities.gov.uk © Crown Copyright material in this report is produced with the permission of HMSO

3.4 Those who Fail to Become Accredited on Tenant Accreditation Schemes

Whilst the numbers of accredited tenants are increasing in the areas where schemes operate and the schemes have many advantages, the main disadvantage is the result of those who fail to become accredited.

In Burnley, for example, 1,730 applications for accreditation have been made to date – 54 % have subsequently been accredited. However, a further 18% are unsuitable for accreditation. Applicants classified as unsuitable are automatically given the scheme appeals procedure and directed back to the council's Housing Options department. To date, 25 appeals have been received and 10 have been successful.

Of the other authorities in the study group, 50% stated 'N/A' when asked about those tenants who do not pass reference checks. Only another 17% had an appeals procedure and 17% said an 'unsuitable' applicant '...may qualify as statutorily homeless' or '...may go to non-accredited landlords for accommodation'.

All tenant accreditation schemes are voluntary and many tenants realise the benefits of joining, for example having access to good quality accommodation. However, it can take a lot for a person to apply, as there are many checks that have to be done, and if they are then classified as 'unsuitable' it will be very frustrating and disappointing.

Methods of dealing with those who fail still need research and testing. An option to be considered is probationary accreditation. The Burnley scheme gives accredited tenants on low incomes access to a rent deposit scheme. Potentially something like this could be extended to 'unsuitable' applicants alongside the development of tenancy support projects that guide such applicants towards becoming a good tenant and being an accepted and valued member of the community.

Developing a Tenant Accreditation Scheme

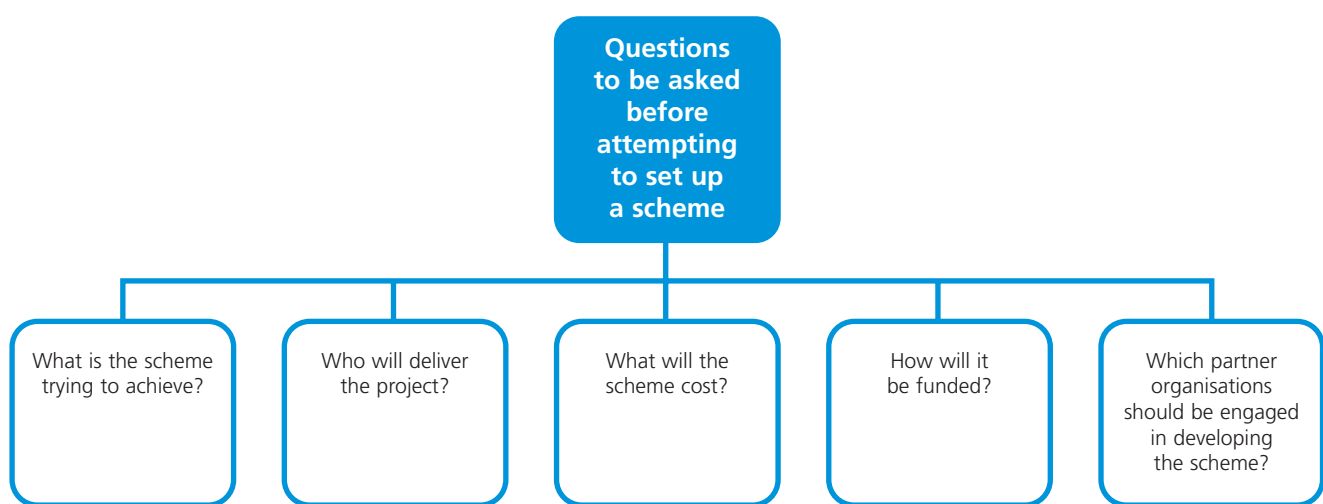
4.1 Developing a Scheme – Starting Well

In developing a good tenant scheme the local authority will need to determine how such a scheme fits in with its housing and regeneration strategies, both in terms of operation and outcomes. How well it fits with the local housing agenda will have a bearing on the levels of political support obtained.

The procedures to be adopted will differ from area to area, and will also depend on whether the scheme is 'stand-alone' or linked to an existing, or proposed, landlord accreditation scheme.

The following questions should be asked, and answered, before attempting to set up and run a scheme. Success of a scheme may be strongly influenced by the early groundwork undertaken in development; its nature, requirements, operation, delivery and outcomes.

DIAGRAM 4.1 – Questions to Ask Before Attempting to Set up a Scheme



What is the scheme trying to achieve?

This needs to be identified as part of a scheme feasibility study and needs to take into account the target group, the area of operation and the expected or anticipated outcomes and their benefits.

Who will deliver the project?

Will it be existing local authority staff, new staff to be recruited by the local authority or via an external agency, partner registered social landlord or others?

What will the scheme cost?

Considerations need to be made about operational budgets in terms of staffing and delivery, capital and revenue.

How will it be funded?

Funding available to finance the scheme includes local authority capital programme, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Single Regeneration Budget, European, referral fees, or combinations of various sources.

Which partner organisations should be engaged in developing the scheme?

Cultivating partnerships and links with other agencies is critical to scheme development. If the set-up involves all interested parties it is more likely to develop and operate successfully. The local authority, partner RSLs, the local police, local landlords groups, residents groups, community groups, neighbourhood nuisance teams, estate management teams, the fire service, council members, local letting agents, the probation service and social services could all be invited to participate.

4.2 Project Duration and Sustainability

The scheme operators need to decide whether the project will operate only for the duration of the funding source or if steps will be taken to achieve sustainability. Once these questions have been answered, the following steps should then be followed:

a) Timetable

A realistic timetable should be set for each stage of the scheme. Without proper consultation and setting up policies and procedures, the scheme will inevitably fail.

b) Political support

Gaining political support from the outset is a fundamental part of the development process and our study supports this premise. Our study group did this by briefing members and keeping them informed of all developments (17%), through the landlord accreditation scheme (17%), and through the bid for funding (34%).

c) Who to involve

Our study found that other agencies involved in schemes included private sector landlords, neighbourhood nuisance teams, tenant and residents groups, RSLs, estate management teams, the police, the fire service, local authority staff, council members and local letting agents.

In Burnley, the Good Tenants' Scheme continues to receive support from the local police who are a referencing partner and fully endorse the project as indicated in this quote from a recent press statement.

"The tenant reference checks carried out to date have provided good quality, reliable information that ordinarily would not have been obtained. I am sure that this resulted in providing residents and communities with a safer environment in which to live and ultimately an improved quality of life."

Source: Statement from Police Liaison Officer, ASB team, Burnley Police, Lancashire Constabulary

d) Funding and costs

There are a variety of ways in which to finance a scheme including local authority capital programme, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Single Regeneration Budget, European funds or through referral fees.

Operating with minimal funding will have a detrimental effect and could lead to early failure. Many existing landlord and tenant accreditation schemes operate on minimal funding streams often risking the schemes success.

The schemes in the study group are funded in a variety of ways; through the Housing Market Renewal Fund, national and European funding and through the local authority's own resources. Leeds City Council administers its scheme through its landlord accreditation scheme, and as such requires no project specific funding.

How is the project funded?

Local authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	ERDF (50%) and SRB (50%)
Easington District Council	Local authority resources plus part fee income
Leeds City Council	Low cost scheme administered by Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme, therefore no direct project specific funding required
Manchester City Council	Housing Market Renewal Fund
North Lincolnshire Council	Local authority resources

Annual operational costs range between £25,000 – £120,000. Currently none of the schemes in the study group charge tenants to become accredited 67% of the study group said that one main advantage of the scheme is that it is free to prospective tenants, however, some have said this is under review.

An example of a scheme budget showing income and expenditure is shown in Appendix Three.

e) Staffing and training

In order for a scheme to operate successfully it will require sufficient financial resources to sustain it along with sufficient staff resource to deliver it. A major consideration when setting up a scheme should be about who will run the project. Whether it is existing local authority staff, newly recruited staff or via an external third party, having the right staff with the right skills in post to develop, promote and deliver a scheme is essential. Developing a new scheme takes time and commitment and cannot be fitted into the duties of existing staff positions.

Evidence from 'Dealing with 'Problem' Private Rented Housing' (DCLG 2006 – Crown Copyright) suggests that having dedicated staff working on targeted private rented sector initiatives is the most effective staffing strategy. It allows time for the development of contacts, setting up working groups and providing specific contacts for other agencies.

Staffing of schemes in the study group varies: the Leeds scheme is self-administered by landlords in the accreditation scheme, and apart from North Lincolnshire which is run by one environmental health officer, the other schemes are run by between two and four officers.

A scheme requires staff with the ability to work at all levels with tenants, landlords and others to help interested groups generate the necessary enthusiasm for the schemes development and delivery.

For schemes funded by external sources (NRF, SRB, ERDF) the levels of staffing will already have been determined as part of the funding submission, and will be based around the ability to deliver and meet the outputs as defined in the funding bid.

However, where schemes are wholly local authority financed, staffing may have been determined by budget availability and existing staff capacity.

In either case it is important to have in place the correct staff structure at the earliest possible opportunity to allow the consistent development of the project. This will then allow for the provision of high levels of customer service.

Varying levels of support may be needed depending on the overall nature of the project. Where a tenant referencing project forms part of a landlord accreditation scheme (as in Leeds, Easington and North Lincolnshire) then the accreditation project manager may also be the referencing scheme manager and the scheme will only need additional administration assistance.

However, where the project is stand-alone, a dedicated project manager and direct team will be required for the referencing project. In Burnley, this currently equates to a full-time project manager supported by two full-time and one part-time customer services officers. The Manchester scheme is also stand-alone with management split between MLIS and the Bond Scheme (Rentwise). However, staffing levels are currently under review.

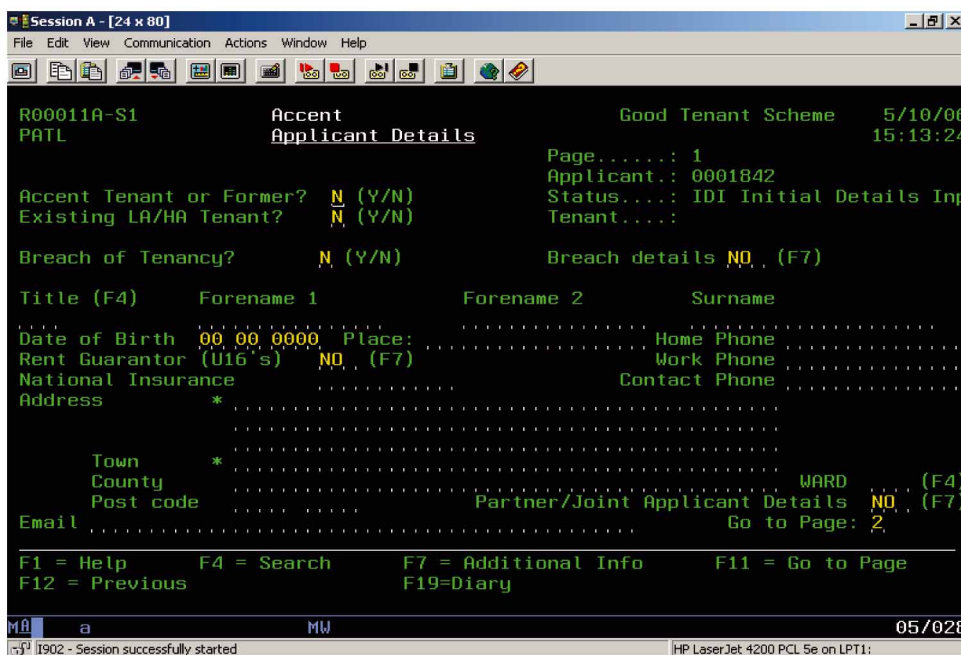
The level of support as the scheme develops, will be very much determined by the success and demands placed upon the scheme. Much of the work may be seen to be of an administrative nature; maintaining the tenant database, carrying out referencing checks and dealing with all relevant correspondence.

A sample job description and personnel specification for a project manager is included in Appendix Two.

f) Systems and databases

It is important to have a set of policies and procedures in place before the scheme starts; what to do when there happens to be exceptions to the model etc. These can, and probably will, change as the scheme gains momentum. Each of the authorities in the study group said that their schemes had their own dedicated policies and procedures.

For example, 33% in the study group have policies in place to deal with tenants who fail the reference checks and 86% have a database which contains information about tenants.



Example: Accent Good Tenants database screen

Do you have a database and what information does it hold?

Local authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Yes- includes Names Date of birth Place of birth National Insurance numbers 3 year tenancy history Previous and current landlords details Employment and income details (where applicable)
Easington District Council	Yes – for both landlord accreditation and tenant referencing
Leeds City Council	It is part of the landlord accreditation scheme database
Manchester City Council	Stand-alone system that records Names Addresses Date of birth National Insurance numbers (optional) Incidents Evidence of incidents Landlords' names and addresses and properties owned.
North Lincolnshire Council	Not for tenant referencing

g) Publicity

It is important to market and publicise the scheme to its target audience in an effective and professional way. This will involve the production of brochures and leaflets, the design of project administration documentation, the production and display of scheme posters and the production of a scheme logo, which will give it its own identity.

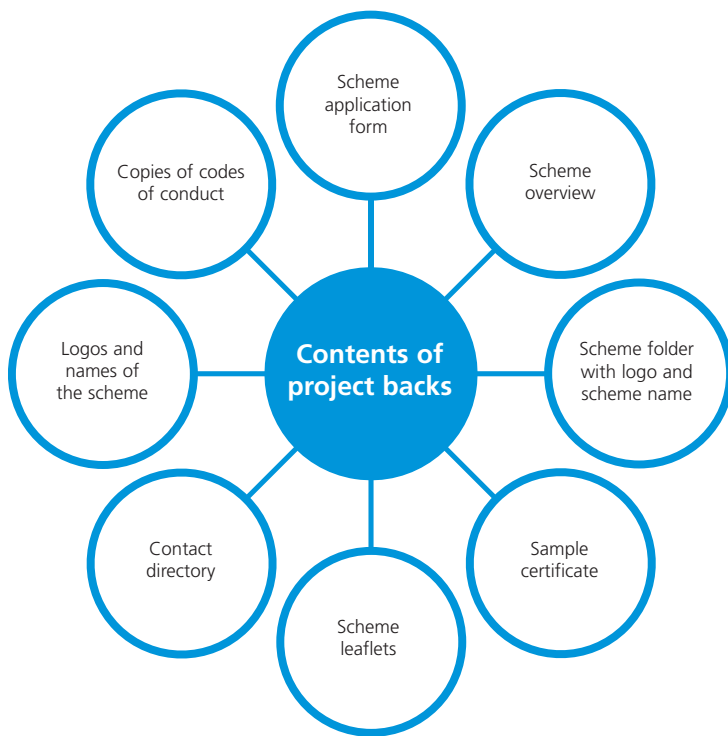
Where schemes are operating in partnership with existing well-established landlord accreditation schemes, profiles and logos may already be in place and the referencing scheme may only need to adopt the existing brand/emblem into its project literature.

There will be a need to ensure that sufficient funding is allowed for the effective marketing of the project both for the above requirements and also for publicity launches with the local press, open days and scheme launch events.



One effective way of introducing and delivering the scheme is via project packs. (left)

DIAGRAM 4.2 – Items a Project Pack May Include



Some projects have also developed their own dedicated web sites to publicise and in some instances help to deliver their scheme. An example of this can be seen at: www.goodtenants.org

Good Tenants Scheme

HOME CRITERIA FAQS CONTACT

The Good Tenants Scheme

The Good Tenants' Scheme is a free referencing service for landlords and residents of Burnley. The scheme is a voluntary service and has been launched in response to requests for a 'good tenants' register for private rented landlords and other social housing providers. We aim to promote the scheme as a recognised general standard for referencing.

Reference checks are taken from the Police, Housing Benefit Department, Anti Social Behaviour Department and landlords and the applicant receives a membership pass if accreditation is awarded.

The scheme also works with local people to help build and sustain new and existing communities affected by clearance and decline and suffering from increased levels of crime and anti social behaviour.

Ultimately we aim to promote the tenants' responsibilities, towards both landlords and the community as a whole.

Since its launch in May 2005, the scheme has been very successful. Hundreds of applications have already been received and many more are coming through daily.

Useful links: ANUK, ELLA, Burnley, Our partners: European Regional Development Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Action Communities

Good Tenants' Scheme Copyright 2006

The Manchester MLIS scheme is currently developing an E-zone for scheme users.

Details of how the study group publicised their schemes are shown below.

How was the scheme publicised/ marketed and launched?

Local authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Via local media/LA web site/local events
Easington District Council	As part of the accreditation scheme
Leeds City Council	Newsletters and forums as part of landlord accreditation scheme
Manchester City Council	Launched at City of Manchester Stadium – publicity is ongoing via local media, resident newsletters, local events, local and wide landlord forums and via local officers.
North Lincolnshire Council	Local media/LA website/landlords forum

h) Project delivery and sustainability

A key question when setting up a scheme is whether the project will operate purely for the duration of the funding source or if steps will be taken to achieve sustainability. Having a free service to both landlords and tenants but at the same time making it sustainable is a real challenge. In the study group, of the 33% who received national or European funding, all said that the sustainability was subject to securing further external funding. 16% are considering charging landlords and/or tenants to become accredited. One authority described the future of their scheme as 'uncertain', whilst 33% saw the extension of their scheme across the wider region and to a larger client group as the way forward.

'Dealing with 'Problem' Private Rented Housing' (DCLG 2006 – Crown Copyright)) found that successful steering groups influenced the longevity, growth and sustainability of the private rented sector.

4.3 Launching a Scheme

Each of the study group launched their schemes through the local media and it seems that this is the key to success.

It is generally good practice to launch a scheme via a specific event, which may be a press release with contributions made by stakeholders. By holding a publicity event that may involve a lunch, invited stakeholders are made to feel a part of the scheme and can gain recognition for their involvement.

It is also essential to request the attendance of senior local authority officers and housing committee members in order to demonstrate their backing for the scheme.

In preparation for the launch event it will be necessary to produce and distribute scheme publicity material/leaflets/information packs and marketing 'goodies', pens, key rings, mouse mats etc.

4.4 Implementing and Piloting a Scheme – Methods of Improving a Scheme

Confidence is a major component in the success of a new scheme and this can only be achieved through experience. Operating a scheme initially as a pilot with a limited number of partners and clients will help to develop confidence and credibility in the scheme and address any teething troubles before the scheme is launched to a wider audience.

Involving initial partner and client groups in the pilot stages of the scheme will help to create scheme “champions” who can publicise the benefits of the scheme to others.

Which aspects of the scheme have been successful?

Local authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Demand Police support RSL support Tenant/resident group support Reduced ASB
Easington District Council	Demand and outputs Partnership with landlords Reductions in area decline Reduced voids Reduced ASB
Leeds City Council	Response of landlords to scheme launch Landlords recommending the scheme to others
Manchester City Council	Challenging ASB Sharing of ASB information Reinforces the use of referencing procedure for landlords Improved standards in the private rented sector Repayment of debts to the City Council
North Lincolnshire Council	No response

4.5 Troubleshooting

Even the most successful scheme has problems. Those shown below are problems which the study group highlighted.

What are the main difficulties or problems with scheme set up and delivery?

Local authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Difficulties in accessing funding and financial monitoring Managing demand Sustainability
Easington District Council	Limitations due to scheme being voluntary Scheme not open to RSL or ALMO tenants Need more funding to increase staffing
Leeds City Council	Initial feelings that the scheme gave tenants a "licence to complain". A big failing was having no built in monitoring of accredited tenants e.g. a means of checking if accredited landlords were offering the scheme to tenants
Manchester City Council	Initial RSL engagement Landlords signing up but not then using the scheme (under review) Software company charging for amendments to the database
North Lincolnshire Council	Obtaining tenant interest

Hindsight is a wonderful thing and the study group is no different. Their comments will hopefully help other authorities to be even more successful with their schemes.

If you had to set up the scheme again, what would you do differently?

Local authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Lack of availability of previously tested policies and procedures or best practice guidance Availability of scheme borough wide rather than restricted to funding boundaries
Easington District Council	Provision of more incentives Mandatory scheme
Leeds City Council	Try to get scheme to be better publicised by landlords and more actively marketed
Manchester City Council	Consider in-house IT development Develop more formal contract with the RSLs so that they have to use the service as part of a wider framework agreement
North Lincolnshire Council	Would possibly offer the scheme to all tenants, not just those of accredited landlords

4.6 Data Protection and Freedom of Information

The Data Protection Act 1998 (© Crown Copyright) received Royal assent on 16th July 1998 and came fully into force in 1999. It is designed to cover the collation, storage, processing and distribution of personal data. It gives rights to individuals about whom information is recorded. This applies to all individuals whether they are an employee, elected member or a member of the public. Each individual has the right to access personal data, prevent processing likely to cause damage or distress, and prevent processing for the purposes of direct marketing.

They also have rights in relation to automated decision taking, to take action for compensation if they suffer damage by any contravention of the Act by the data controller, to rectify, block, erase or destroy inaccurate data and to make a request to the Data Protection Commissioner for an assessment to be made of the data controller if they feel that the Act has been contravened.

A record of accredited tenants shall be maintained by the scheme manager. It should be noted that if information is supplied to other parties, that supply must be carried out in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act.

Source: Extract from Dorset Wide Accreditation Model 2003

In terms of tenant accreditation schemes, the protection of data about or from tenants must be considered. It must be made clear to the tenant what use will be made of the data collected about them, both from other referencing agencies or from the information they have supplied on their application form. Officers working on such schemes need to consult their legal teams or Data Protection Officers to determine process and wording. It is important that tenants are aware of the criteria against which they will be judged before the completion of the application.

“Declaration of Consent” for the Burnley’s Good Tenants Scheme.

I can confirm that I have read the detail of the Good Tenants’ Scheme criteria and I understand that enquiries will be carried out concerning my past character and conduct of any present or previous tenancies or occupations of the property.

I am aware that enquiries may be made to Housing Associations, Private Landlords, Local Authorities and the Police and by signing this declaration I give my permission and consent for the Good Tenants’ Scheme to obtain any relevant information.

I understand that the reference information requested by the Good Tenants’ Scheme will relate to rent arrears, Housing Benefit claims/overpayments, damage to property, nuisance/anti-social behaviour, abandonment or other breach of tenancy condition and any relevant criminal activity.

I understand that the reference information and personal data will be used for the SOLE purpose of assessing suitability and inclusion in the Good Tenants’ Scheme and will be held in the strictest confidence under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1988.

This information may also be used for prevention and detection of a crime, to protect public files and for debt tracing.

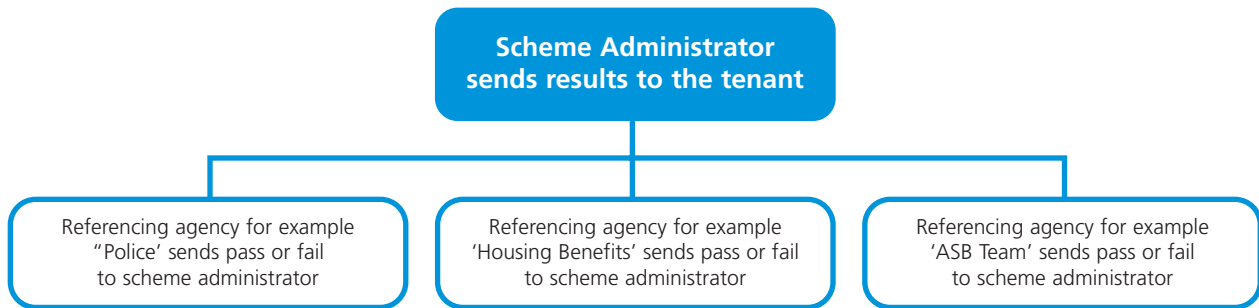
Name:

Signature:

Date:

Often the scheme administrator does not deal with confidential data from the referencing agencies. The referencing agencies will inform the scheme administrator whether or not an applicant has passed or failed the check against the agreed criteria, with the exception of a previous landlord or employment check, where sensitive data may not be passed to the scheme administrator. If a tenant fails on any part of the check, he/she should be given the right of appeal, where he can request the information in respect of why he/she failed direct from the referencing agency or agencies.

DIAGRAM 4.3 – Potential Data Flow Between Scheme Administrator and Referencing Agencies



In addition to the Data Protection Act, scheme operators need to consider the implications from The Freedom of Information Act (© Crown Copyright), which gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities. It sets out exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on public authorities.

Individuals already have the right of access to information about themselves under the Data Protection Act 1998. As far as public authorities are concerned, the Freedom of Information Act has extended this right to allow public access to all types of information held.

Every public authority has published and maintains a publication scheme setting out the classes of information it holds, the manner in which it intends to publish the information, and whether a charge will be made for the information.

Case Studies

The general survey results provide insight into the development and delivery of tenant accreditation schemes, the benefits they can provide and their links to landlord accreditation. However, the following Case Studies give a more detailed view of selected schemes.

- Study 1** Burnley Good Tenants' Scheme
- Study 2** Leeds Private Rented Residential Accredited Tenant Scheme
- Study 3** North Lincolnshire Accredited Tenant Scheme
- Study 4** Manchester Landlord Information Service
- Study 5** Dorset wide Model Accreditation Scheme

STUDY 1 – Burnley Good Tenants' Scheme

Background

This scheme is available to private landlords, managing agents, prospective and existing tenants, agencies and housing associations in Burnley.

The scheme was established in May 2005 as a private rented sector initiative to promote responsible lettings within defined intervention areas in Burnley. The need for the scheme was originally identified through a decline in the neighbourhood housing market and to work in partnership with crime, disorder and anti social behaviour strategies within the Borough.

The scheme was funded for the first year through ERDF/NRF. Currently the funding is through ERDF/SRB6.

Aims

The Good Tenants' Scheme was required to establish a reference service for private landlords and housing associations. The register would provide a comprehensive referencing service that is widely recognised in all sectors as the general standard. The scheme includes registration as a Good Tenant; this prevents landlords from establishing their own blacklist of unsuitable tenants without any appeals process to contest the information.

How the scheme operates

Under the scheme, potential tenants undergo reference checks with the Police, Housing Benefits and Anti Social Behaviour Departments and other landlords. If the references are acceptable, accreditation is awarded and the applicant receives a membership pass known as a Good Tenants' Scheme passport. This contains a photograph of the applicant which can be shown to landlords as proof of accreditation.

The categories are detailed as follows:

Suitable for Immediate Accreditation – The applicant and/or dependants have no criminal convictions or records relating to housing that would make them unsuitable for the scheme.

Not Fully Suitable for Accreditation – The applicant and/or dependants have a record which would technically disqualify them from the scheme, but it is of a minor or historical nature – 6 months probationary accreditation would be issued.



Not Suitable for Accreditation – Subject to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, accreditation will not be awarded to those who have criminal convictions or cautions relating to supply of drugs, racism, serious sexual offences, anti social behaviour or offences that have a serious affect on the community, e.g. burglary, auto-crime and a problematic re-housing history. An appeals procedure is issued to any applicant who has not been successful with the referencing process.

Deferred Membership – The applicant and/or dependants are under investigation for matters that would result in 'not suitable status' if found to be guilty of an offence. Also if information is needed, for example, support package information or if the housing benefit appeal procedure is being utilised.

The benefits of the scheme

- Landlords will benefit by re-housing accredited tenants from the register.
- The project promotes the Good Landlord and Agent Scheme by encouraging landlords and managing agents to become accredited.
- Tenants are empowering themselves to find better quality accommodation and extend their choice.
- The scheme is linking into crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour initiatives to complement existing strategies to provide more sustainable communities within the regeneration areas of Burnley.
- It links into housing renewal initiatives and in the longer term working alongside the preferred partners for defined local neighbourhood management areas.
- The scheme has been successful in attracting a furniture resource centre to complement the activities of the Good Tenants' Scheme.
- It allows people on benefits and low income to access the rent deposit scheme if they have accreditation status.



An example of a Good Tenant Passport.

Information given to applicant	What this means	Accreditation Type
Suitable for Immediate Accreditation	The applicant and/or dependants have no criminal convictions or records relative to housing that would make them unsuitable for the Scheme.	Full Accreditation status issued, initially for 12 months. This may be extended to 2 years on renewal (subject to any change in criminal or other records relevant to the scheme) at the time of application.
Not Fully Suitable for Accreditation	<p>The applicant and/or dependants have a record, which would technically disqualify them from the Scheme, but is of a minor or historical nature. The Scheme administrators reserve the right to award Probationary Accreditation in the following circumstances:</p> <p>Where the applicant has an outstanding Housing benefit overpayment but the amount is under £500; or</p> <p>Where the applicant has an outstanding Housing benefit overpayment of over £500 but has been making regular payments to reduce the debt: or</p> <p>If the applicant is under 21 years old with no referencing history.</p>	Probationary Accreditation for 6 months whilst applicant works towards Full Accreditation. During this period the applicant will receive tenancy support and encouragement from the Good Tenants' Scheme towards becoming fully accredited.
Not suitable for Accreditation	<p>Subject to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, Accreditation will not be awarded to those who have criminal convictions or cautions relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism/hate crime • Serious sexual offences • Anti-Social Behaviour • Offences that have a serious affect on the community eg burglary and autocrime <p>Accreditation will also not be awarded to those who have Housing Benefit overpayments above £500 or rent arrears over £500 and no regular repayments have been received to reduce the debt. Where a person is likely to become suitable within the next 6 months under the Act then the date when they can reapply will be indicated on their decision letter.</p>	No Accreditation Awarded.
Deferred Membership	The applicant and/or dependant are under investigation for matters that would result in a 'not suitable' status if found to be guilty of an offence or whom the Police has cautioned. Deferred membership can also be applied where more information is needed for an applicant e.g support package information for mental health or substance misuse issues or Housing Benefit appeal being processed.	Deferred Accreditation application to be reviewed where the results of the investigation are known, or when all relevant details of support are known to the satisfaction of the Scheme administrators. The application, if successful, will be re-issued in the appropriate classification described above.

STUDY 2 – Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) – Accredited Tenant Scheme

This scheme is made available to private tenants of members of LLAS who look after their rented accommodation responsibly, honour their tenancy agreement and show respect to their neighbours.

“Private renting is becoming increasingly popular in Leeds and landlords look out for responsible tenants to rent to. The Accredited Tenant Scheme gives a tenant a competitive advantage when seeking new privately rented accommodation.”

“Accredited tenant status may also be used as a good character reference when seeking new opportunities in life.”

Source: Extracts from the Council's scheme publicity leaflet

The Leeds scheme is part of the Leeds Landlords Accreditation Scheme and uses the same branding and logos.

Background

The landlord accreditation scheme has been in existence since 1997 and was extended in 2003 to include tenant accreditation.

Aims

The aim of the scheme is to encourage and acknowledge responsible tenants by providing them with an accreditation certificate that confirms adherence to a recognised code of standards. The code contains requirements obligating the tenant to show respect for their accommodation, their neighbours and their contract with their landlord.

How the scheme operates

- The scheme is operated by landlords who are members of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- The scheme is endorsed and funded by Leeds City Council
- It is voluntary for tenants
- All accredited landlords must offer Accredited Tenant Scheme participation to all prospective tenants
- The requirements of the accredited tenant scheme are contained within the tenants code
- Tenants who wish to take advantage of the scheme, together with their landlord, sign two copies of the scheme agreement, one kept by the landlord, one kept by the tenant
- A managing agent can sign on behalf of an accredited landlord
- The scheme will apply to individual occupiers in the case of a joint tenancy, although the landlord reserves the right to not issue certificates to particular, or all individuals, where particular individuals, or the group as a whole, have not complied with the tenant's code
- At the end of the tenancy, provided that the tenants code has been adhered to, the landlord completes the certificate of accreditation and gives it to the tenant
- Landlords must keep a record of certificates issued
- Where landlords are of the opinion that the code has not been complied with, thus making the tenant ineligible for a certificate, they shall, on request, provide the tenant with written details of their non compliance

- Leeds City Council will arbitrate on an informal basis in cases of dispute
- Referrals of disputes to Leeds City Council for arbitration must be in writing
- In cases where a dispute cannot be resolved informally, the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme Review Panel will arbitrate and their decision will be final

THE TENANT'S CODE

General Conduct – The tenant agrees to:

- 1.1 conduct the tenancy courteously and responsibly

Commencement of Tenancy – The tenant agrees to:

- 2.1 ensure all references provided are authentic
- 2.2 pay their rent on time in accordance with the agreed manner of payment
- 2.3 contact the gas, electricity and water companies to register supplies in their name, and Leeds City Council to register for Council Tax on the day that they commence occupancy of their accommodation
- 2.4 ensure that they read and understand the Tenancy Agreement and Tenant Rules
- 2.5 carry out an inspection of the property and inform the landlord in writing of any damage or defects at the commencement of the tenancy

During the Tenancy – The tenant agrees to:

- 3.1 behave in a reasonable manner and not to cause a nuisance to, or be anti social with their neighbours
- 3.2 not create excessive noise that causes a nuisance to neighbours, having regard to the time and location of sensitive areas within neighbouring premises
- 3.3 not to carry out any trade or profession, trade or business from the property without the landlords written consent
- 3.4 not sublet the property

Looking after the property – The tenant agrees to:

- 4.1 confirm in writing to the landlord all necessary repairs, and to keep a copy; urgent repairs must be notified immediately, reported verbally, in addition to be being confirmed in writing
- 4.2 on receipt of suitable notice, provide their landlord or any person authorised on their behalf, with access to their accommodation, to carry out an inspection or repair
- 4.3 with the exception of fair wear and tear, repair to a satisfactory standard, with the prior agreement of the landlord, or otherwise compensate the landlord for any damage to their accommodation including fixtures, fittings and furniture
- 4.4 maintain the property in a clean and tidy condition, especially the kitchen and bathroom
- 4.5 replace spent light bulbs
- 4.6 keep external drainage gullies free from debris
- 4.7 replace broken windows (unless caused by vandalism, reported to the police)

- 4.8 obtain their landlord's prior written permission to decorate any rooms, put up shelves, or make any other alterations to the fabric of their accommodation

Visual appearance – The tenant agrees to:

- 5.1 show respect for their accommodation, not cause any wilful damage and report any damages, defacement (including graffiti and fly-posting) promptly
- 5.2 keep gardens/yards free from refuse and in a tidy condition

Health and Safety – The tenant agrees to:

- 6.1 ensure all fixtures and fittings are used in a manner for which they were designed particularly gas and electrical appliances

Fire Safety – The tenant agrees to:

- 7.1 follow instructions for fire safety
- 7.2 ensure that fire doors are kept closed and not wedged open
- 7.3 not obstruct the stairway, landings and passageway which provide a route of escape in case of fire
- 7.4 not interfere with or remove any appliances or equipment provided for fire safety
- 7.5 take all necessary precautions with naked flames e.g. candles, T-lights, gas hobs, and not leave them unattended

Alarms – The tenant agrees to:

- 8.1 in co-operation with their landlord, ensure that key holder details are registered with the police and local authority if a burglar alarm is provided

Security – The tenant agrees to:

- 9.1 keep the property secure using all the facilities provided

Refuse – The tenant agrees to:

- 10.1 store refuse in a proper hygienic way and put out for collection on the day and in the manner required by the waste collection service

At the End of the Tenancy – The tenant agrees to:

- 11.1 give the required notice as required by the tenancy agreement
- 11.2 return all keys on termination of the tenancy
- 11.3 settle all outstanding accounts on termination of the tenancy
- 11.4 leave the dwelling in a reasonably clean condition on vacation of the property
- 11.5 leave the property in no worse condition having regard to fair wear and tear as at the commencement of the tenancy

Tenancy Disputes:

- 12.1 deal with disputes promptly and reasonably and recognise the authority of the Leeds' City Council Landlord Accreditation Scheme Review Panel

STUDY 3 – North Lincolnshire Accredited Tenant Scheme

Overview

This scheme supports a responsible private residential rented sector through the operation of Landlord and Tenant Accreditation Schemes.

The accreditation process acknowledges and encourages responsible private landlords and tenants and such schemes are supported by the Government.

Background

Responsible landlords who voluntarily join the accreditation scheme agree to provide quality accommodation services and for this are awarded accreditation status.

Aims

The scheme acknowledges and encourages responsible tenants by providing an Accredited Tenants Certificate to tenants who comply with the requirements of the Tenant's Code in addition to their normal contractual tenancy agreement requirements.

The Tenant's Code contains reasonable common sense requirements obligating tenants to show respect for their accommodation, their neighbours and their contract with their landlord.

TENANT'S CODE

General Conduct

I will make sure that:

- I have read and understood my tenancy agreement
- I will keep to all the terms and conditions in my tenancy agreement
- I will conduct my relationships with my landlord, his agent and fellow-tenants courteously throughout my tenancy
- I will behave in a 'tenant like manner' by carrying out day to day maintenance and not causing damage to the property
- I will respond to reasonable requests from the landlord in a timely manner

Start of the Tenancy

I will make sure that:

- Any references that might be required by the landlord or their agent are true to the best of my knowledge
- I contact all relevant utility companies to register supplies in my name
- I register with the local authority's council tax department or, where appropriate, provide exemption certificates
- I check the inventory and inform the landlord in writing of any damage, defects or inaccuracies. Copies should be signed by all parties

During my Tenancy

I will make sure that:

- I behave in a reasonable manner and do not cause a nuisance to my neighbours
- I do not create excessive noise which causes a nuisance to my neighbours
- I allow the landlord reasonable access to the property so he/she can carry out their landlord responsibilities

Looking after my Letting

I will make sure that:

- On receipt of reasonable notice, normally 24 hours minimum, I will provide the landlord or their agent or any person acting on their behalf access to the dwelling in order to carry out an inspection or make repairs
- I maintain the dwelling in a clean and tidy condition especially the kitchen and bathroom
- I replace all blown light bulbs
- I keep all external drain covers free from debris (for example leaves, litter and other items that stop surface water from flowing freely into the drains)
- I promptly inform the landlord of any defects to the property

Visual Appearance

I will make sure that:

- I keep all gardens and yards free from rubbish and in a tidy condition

Gas and Electrical Appliances

I will make sure that:

- All gas and electrical appliances are used only in a manner for which they were designed

Fire Safety

I will make sure that:

- I follow instructions for fire safety and that my visitors do so as well
- Fire doors are kept closed and not wedged open
- I do not obstruct stairways, landings and passageways which provide a route of escape in case of fire
- I do not interfere with or remove any appliances or equipment provided for health and safety
- I take all precautions with cooking equipment and naked flames e.g. candles, T-lights, gas hobs and that I do not leave them unattended
- I do not use or bring into the dwelling any portable gas or paraffin heaters

Security

I will make sure that:

- I keep the dwelling secure using all the facilities provided, for example door locks, window locks and security alarms

Rubbish

I will make sure that:

- I store rubbish and all recycling materials in a proper hygienic way and put it out for collection on the day and in the manner required by the waste collection and recycling service

At the end of my tenancy

I will make sure that:

- I give the required notice as stated in my tenancy agreement
- I return all keys
- I settle all outstanding accounts
- When I leave, the dwelling is in a reasonably clean condition and that all my belongings have been removed
- When I leave, the dwelling is in the same condition as at the start of my tenancy, allowing for fair wear and tear
- I am present at the final inspection unless otherwise agreed
- I make suitable arrangements for the forwarding of mail

Tenancy Disputes

I agree to:

- Deal with disputes promptly and reasonably and recognise the authority of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme Review Panel

How the Scheme Operates

- The Accredited Tenant Scheme is operated by North Lincolnshire Council, whose landlords are members of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- The Scheme is endorsed and funded by the North Lincolnshire Council
- The Accredited Tenant Scheme is voluntary for tenants
- All accredited landlords must offer participation in the Accredited Tenant Scheme to all prospective tenants
- The requirements of the Accredited Tenant Scheme are contained in the Tenants Code
- Tenants who wish to take advantage of the scheme, together with their landlord, sign two copies of the scheme agreement, one copy is retained by the landlord the other by the tenant
- A managing agent can sign on behalf of an accredited landlord
- The Scheme will apply to individual occupiers in the case of a joint tenancy, although the North Lincolnshire Council reserves the right to not issue Certificates to particular, or all individuals, where particular individuals, or the group as a whole, have not complied with the Tenant's Code
- At the end of the tenancy, provided that the Tenants Code has been complied with, the landlord recommends the tenant to North Lincolnshire Council who issue the Certificate of Accreditation to the tenant
- North Lincolnshire Council must keep a record of Certificates issued
- Where landlords are of the opinion that the Tenant's Code has not been complied with, thus making the tenant ineligible for recommendation as an Accredited Tenant, they shall, on request, provide the tenant with written details of their non-compliance
- North Lincolnshire Council will assist resolution on an informal basis in cases of dispute

- Referrals of disputes to North Lincolnshire Council for resolution must be in writing and without delay
- In cases where a dispute cannot be resolved informally, the Landlord Accreditation Scheme Review Panel will arbitrate and their decision will be final

STUDY 4 – Manchester Landlord Information Service (MLIS)

Protocols for Use of the Service

The Aim

The aim of the Manchester Landlord Information Service (MLIS) is to provide honest and accurate information to landlords seeking to verify the information provided to them by prospective tenants.

MLIS will speed up the process of referencing and allow landlords to seek accurate and honest references prior to letting a property.

The benefits of prompt service are twofold: MLIS allows a prospective tenant to secure an appropriate property quickly; and allows landlords to thoroughly investigate the housing history of prospective tenants.

The Principle

The information held on MLIS is not to be used for excluding people from the area but as a means of challenging anti-social behaviour and preventing people perpetrating anti-social behaviour from moving around the area. MLIS will direct landlords to a tenant's previous housing provider who will hold more information about the conduct of that individual or family during the period of their tenancy.

Gathering information to send to MLIS

All prospective tenants will give their consent, authorising references to be sought, and relevant checks to be made against MLIS.

All new tenants will give consent authorising details of their tenancy behaviour to be passed to MLIS.

Applicants' information will be recorded using the forms provided and then forwarded to MLIS by fax or post with the relevant covering documentation.

When passing information to MLIS supporting evidence will be gathered and appropriately stored in accordance with the data protection act. Files of supporting evidence will be kept until MLIS delete any records relating to the individual and advise destruction of the supporting evidence. All files relating to entries on the MLIS database will be made available to the MLIS team on request.

All information forwarded to MLIS will meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Requesting information from MLIS

All information requests will be made by fax or post using the relevant forms.

When making an information request the MLIS will be provided with all the available information e.g. names, dates of birth, previous addresses etc. and only submitted on the MLIS forms. All forms must be checked for accuracy before they are sent to MLIS.

Receiving information from MLIS

Upon receipt of the MLIS information, the necessary investigation will take place by contacting previous landlords and in accordance with the landlord's own policies.

Information from MLIS will not be disclosed to a third party. Anyone doing so will be liable for any breaches of the Data Protection Act and the subsequent consequences.

If a landlord decides not to grant a tenancy they should destroy all information received about an applicant no longer than six months after receipt.

Reviews and audits

All service users will be subject to an annual review to ensure that all information held meets the requirements of the Data Protection Act. MLIS may conduct a random audit of all records at any time, at one weeks notice. This will be done for each service user at least once a year.

Management Standards

As an MLIS member you are a stakeholder in the community. You have declared that you will manage your property in line with the MLIS standards and that all properties meet the required Health and Safety regulations.

MLIS may request an inspection of the property following complaints about MLIS users. This will ensure that standards are being adhered to.

Appeals

MLIS has an appeals procedure should an individual wish to challenge the information held about them on the database.

Any appeals against a decision not to offer accommodation will be dealt with through the housing providers' relevant policies and procedures. In the event of an appeal being lodged against MLIS, the service user who provided the information relating to the individual will co-operate with MLIS and supply all the supporting evidence relating to the entry.

Service Delivery

MLIS will endeavour to process information requests received by fax or post within two working days.

Any delays in the processing of information requests will be notified to the service user by telephone or e-mail.

Exclusion from MLIS

Once a member of MLIS a landlord may be excluded from the service on the following grounds:

- They have been prosecuted for illegal eviction or harassment
- They have been the subject of frequent and substantive complaints regarding the management of their properties
- Substantial amounts are owed to Manchester City Council e.g. from works carried out in default or in overpaid Housing Benefit and where an acceptable repayment plan has not been agreed
- The Landlord/Agent breaches the MLIS Property and Management Standards
- The Landlord/Agent breaches the Data Protection Act and/or MLIS Protocols

Any exclusion from the service will be investigated fully and discussed with the MLIS user. Advice and training may be given as a condition of remaining a member of MLIS. MLIS reserves the right to cancel or suspend access to the service at any time. All exclusions or conditions of membership will be confirmed in writing.

Information for Landlords

What is MLIS?

- A totally FREE service that...
- lets you check information on prospective tenants;
- stops nuisance neighbours moving too easily between all landlords;
- makes tenants more accountable for their actions;
- allows an information exchange between you and all other MLIS landlords including Housing Associations;
- lets you positively contribute towards the regeneration of North and East Manchester;
- Helps you get ready for Selective Licensing.

What you get

Become an MLIS landlord and, with a prospective tenants permission, you can use MLIS to check what they've told you is true and find out where to get honest and accurate references.

You get checks within two working days on whether they have had a history of:

- Rent arrears
- Damage to property
- Neighbour nuisance
- Abandonment
- Anti-social behaviour

Here's how MLIS works

- 1 Fill in our simple Pre-Tenancy Check (PTC) with the prospective tenant. This asks about where they've lived before and gives you permission to get MLIS information about them. Just fax or send us the completed form.
- 2 MLIS checks information on the PTC, reporting the results back to you within two working days.
- 3 Once you receive the PTC Report (we also send a copy to your prospective tenant) you can contact previous landlords for accurate references. You can now make an informed decision on whether to let.

What else do you get?

Besides this completely FREE, quick and easy to use information service you also get:

- extra help tackling anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance problems.
- FREE advice and guidance, when you need it, from Manchester City Council's Landlord Advisor.

Access to other incentives like discounted Licensing fees, insurance packages, building and security contractors, and much, much more.

Source: Extract from MLIS Landlord Leaflet

Licensing, MLIS and You

Under the Housing Act 2004 the Government has given Local Authorities the power to license private landlords in designated areas. These areas, of Selective Licensing, will be introduced in areas of low demand, likely to become low demand or where there is a problem with anti-social behaviour. All landlords with properties in any such designated scheme will need to meet certain standards of property management – including referencing prospective tenants and taking reasonable action to tackle anti-social behaviour.

To let property in these areas without a licence will be a criminal offence.

Manchester City Council is committed to using these powers in North and East Manchester.

By joining MLIS today you can get ready for licensing tomorrow and demonstrate you meet the required standards.

Playing your part

MLIS contributes to a wider partnership that regenerates housing and neighbourhoods to support and create thriving communities, where existing residents and newcomers can enjoy and play their part in the revitalisation of their local area.

As an MLIS Landlord you will be helping us to tackle wider problems that landlords and tenants want action on such as:

- residents moving away instead of settling;
- anti-social tenants moving too easily around the area;
- problem tenants ruining neighbours' lives;
- empty, hard to sell, vandalised homes;
- irresponsible private letting.

Information for Tenants

It's your service

MLIS will help to make your neighbourhood a better and safer place to live and work.

But we need your help and support. You are an important part of MLIS and by choosing to rent from an MLIS Landlord you are letting from a good landlord.

MLIS Landlords are looking after your neighbourhood by being responsible about who they let to, so by using MLIS you will be joining Manchester City Council and your landlord in saying NO to anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance.

MLIS will:

- Help to reduce anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance
- Maintain the peace and success of your new neighbourhood
- Encourage better standards from private landlords

Your future MLIS Landlord

You've applied for a house with an MLIS Landlord. This means you can be sure that they are a good landlord with high standards. You can be confident your new landlord will offer you a decent home and a quality service.

Each MLIS Landlord is fully checked to make sure they don't have any:

- Frequent, serious complaints about how they manage their homes;
- Prosecutions for illegally evicting or harassing tenants;
- Property that fails to meet fitness standards;
- Money owed to the Council such as bills for compulsory works to properties, or overpaid housing benefit, which they haven't paid back.

And they do:

- Let property responsibly
- Take action against nuisance tenants
- Work with the Council to improve North and East Manchester

Protecting your rights

You have a legal right to see, challenge and if the information is wrong have it put right. Just write to us.

Each time you use an MLIS Landlord you automatically get your own copy of any information that:

- MLIS sends to a landlord about you; and
- Your landlord sends to us about any problems during your tenancy.

The information you have given on the Pre Tenancy Check form will be used by MLIS and your landlord to check your references. Your information will only be used by participating MLIS Landlords and in accordance with the law.

All MLIS Landlords must demonstrate that they understand and keep to Data Protection rules, and we continually check each MLIS Landlord on a regular basis.

If you decide not to support MLIS your landlord may be unable to effectively verify references, this may affect their decision to offer you a tenancy.

All information held by MLIS aims to be accurate and up to date. But if you think it is wrong then you can get it changed. Your right to appeal gives you a clear, fair way to put right any wrong information. For information on how to comment on the information that MLIS holds about you or if you would like to discuss MLIS please contact the MLIS Team.

How does it work?

MLIS helps landlords to check references you have given them.

Step 1

You and your landlord will complete a Pre Tenancy Check form together. This asks about where you've lived before and asks if your landlord can use MLIS to process your application.

Step 2

We will tell MLIS Landlords about your previous tenancies. If there were no problems we will only tell them who to contact for a reference. If we've been told you behaved anti-socially, damaged or abandoned a property or had rent arrears we will pass this information on with details of where to get a full reference.

Step 3

Both you and your prospective landlord will receive a copy of the information MLIS holds about you. Your MLIS landlord should discuss any issues with you before they make a decision on whether they will offer you a tenancy.

We will strictly protect your details and they will only be seen by an MLIS Landlord. We will not send them to anyone else-even your family-without your written consent.

This is our promise to you. Keep reading to find out more.

Source: Extract from tenants information leaflet

STUDY 5 – Dorset wide Model Accreditation scheme

Overview and use of Dorset Model Accreditation Scheme

Extract Section 1.1 The Dorset Model Accreditation Scheme

The Dorset Model Scheme has been produced in consultation with the Local Authorities of Dorset and the Dorset Residential Landlords Association [DRLA]. It draws on examples of best practice that have been found in other schemes across the country and has been written with reference to the National Accreditation Model Scheme produced by The National Accreditation Network [ANUK].

The main objective of this scheme is to provide a basic foundation frame work for all accreditation schemes in Dorset, while allowing Local Authorities in Dorset in agreement with the DRLA to adapt aspects of their individual accreditation schemes to reflect the local needs of their area.

The setting of a common baseline in standards is intended to promote consistency between the different schemes in Dorset and help landlords improve the quality of the accommodation they provide across the County.

Extract Section 1.2 Use of the Dorset Model Accreditation Scheme

The Dorset Model Accreditation Scheme should be used as a guide to aid potential scheme managers to set up and/or run an accreditation scheme in their area. It gives base line standards that all accreditation schemes in Dorset should meet. It allows scheme managers to pick the aspects of the model that will best suit their area and local needs.

The Dorset model does not cover areas already explored in other publications and it is recommended that the Model should be read in conjunction with The DETR booklet 'Developing a voluntary accreditation Scheme for private landlords - a guide to good practice' [ISBN 1 85112 478 0]. This gives comprehensive guidance on developing and running an accreditation scheme.

The Dorset model covers three aspects of accreditation giving core standards that schemes must be based upon:

- A Property accreditation
- B Landlord accreditation
- C Tenant accreditation

Each of these areas can be used individually or in combination depending on local circumstances. There are core standards that must be met, and for some areas there are optional standards that in agreement with the DRLA can be adopted by the scheme manager to suit local requirements.

Extract Section 4.0 Accredited Tenant Scheme (Extract from Model Code)

The Accredited Tenants Scheme is a voluntary scheme run in cooperation with the landlords and the scheme manager. Accredited Tenants are those who maintain the core standards, which the scheme and their tenancy agreement require.

They are tenants who are recognised by the scheme manager/landlord as having conducted themselves in a courteous and considerate manner towards their landlord and other tenants during their tenancy.

The accreditation of a tenant under this scheme allows the tenant to use their accredited status as a reference when looking for new accommodation and/or in connection with other accommodation purposes e.g. mortgage applications.

A record of accredited tenants shall be maintained by the scheme manager. It should be noted that if information is supplied to other parties, that supply must be carried out in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act.

Extract Section 4.1 How the Tenant scheme operates

- A landlord who is a member of the (Property/Landlord) Accreditation Scheme as operated by the scheme manager may offer their tenants accredited status; this shall be made available to all tenants in a landlord's property.
- At the beginning or during an existing tenancy a tenant will be issued with a Tenants Code (See Appendix 4). This code sets out the core standards of this scheme as detailed below. The code is not intended to replace any requirements that are set out in the tenancy agreement as issued by the landlord.
- If a tenant wants to become accredited they must, together with their landlord, read and sign two copies of the scheme, one copy to be kept by each party.
- At the end of the tenancy or a period of six months which ever is sooner the landlord can recommend to the scheme manager that a tenant be accredited as they have complied with all requirements of the scheme. This recommendation must be in writing on an approved nomination form (Appendix 3) containing the following information.
 - Name of Tenant.
 - Address of property where tenant is/was resident.
 - Forwarding address of tenant if left property.
 - Name/address of Landlord.
 - Length of tenancy.
 - Statement of compliance with Tenants Code.
 - Statement of release of information on form to third parties, to be signed by tenant and landlord. It should be noted that if information is supplied to other parties, that supply must be carried out in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act.
 - In the case of a joint tenancy a separate nomination form must be completed for each tenant.
 - Where landlords are of the opinion that the Tenant's Code has not been complied with, thus making the tenant ineligible for recommendation as an Accredited Tenant, they shall, on request, provide the tenant with written details of their non-compliance.
 - In the case of dispute between landlord and tenant the matter can be referred to resolution service as operated by the scheme manager/landlord association.
 - Upon accreditation a tenant shall be issued with a valid certificate of compliance that can be used as a reference when seeking new accommodation/ loan facilities or employment.
 - To maintain accreditation status a tenant must continue to comply with the terms of the scheme as in accordance with the tenant's code (see Appendix 4).
 - If it is considered by a landlord that an individual's accreditation status should be reviewed this shall be done in full consultation with the tenant and scheme manager. This shall be carried out in writing and without delay.

Dorset Standards for Accredited Tenants Follows:

Extract Section 4.2 The Core Standards for Accredited Tenants

(As set out in the Tenant's Code Appendix 4)

Tenancy Agreement	Tenants shall have read and understood the tenancy agreement and shall abide by the tenancy agreement and comply with all legal requirements placed upon them in relation to the property and their tenancy.
Tenant conduct	Tenants must conduct themselves in a courteous and reasonable manner towards the landlord and other tenant during their tenancy Tenants shall not create excessive noise, or cause other nuisance to neighbours.
Utility Services and Council Tax	Tenants will ensure that at the beginning of their tenancy they contact all relevant utility companies to register supplies in their name, if applicable, and register with the local authority council tax department or, where appropriate, provide exemption certificates
Landlord Duties	Tenants will allow the landlord or their representative to discharge their duties. They shall not obstruct or impede the landlord in carrying out their duties.
Access	On receipt of a suitable notice by the landlord a tenant will provide the landlord/agent or any person acting on their behalf access to the property in order to carry out an inspection or make repairs.
Maintenance of Accommodation	A tenant shall maintain the property in a clean and tidy condition especially the kitchen and bathroom areas. They will use refuse containers for waste disposal and will place all waste out for collection and not store materials in the property that could be prejudicial to health or a nuisance They will promptly inform the landlord of any defects or faults with any appliance or structure within the let accommodation
Fire Safety	Tenants will not interfere with or remove any appliances or equipment provided for fire safety and they will not wedge open fire doors if fitted or obstruct stairways landings used as fire escape routes They must take all necessary precautions with naked flames e.g. candles, T-lights, gas hobs and not to leave them unattended They must not use or bring onto the premises any portable gas or paraffin heaters.
Complaints	Tenants will agree to abide by the scheme manager's complaint procedure
Health & Safety	Tenants will ensure that appliances including gas and electrical appliances are used only in the manner for which they were designed. Tenants will allow a landlord to inspect their accommodation with a view to them performing any legal or scheme requirements. Tenants will keep the property secure using all the facilities provided by the landlord
Inventory (if deposit required)	At the start of a tenancy tenants will carry out an inspection of the property with the landlord and, if in agreement with the inventory content, initial and sign said document with the landlord, noting any defects or inaccuracies. During the tenancy the tenant will inform the landlord of any damage. The tenant will be present at the check-out inspection unless otherwise agreed, and will, if in agreement with landlord, sign inventory as correct at termination of tenancy.
Notice of Tenancy	The tenant will ensure that they give the notice as required by the tenancy agreement. They will return all keys and settle all outstanding accounts on termination of the tenancy.

Extract Appendix 3 – Nomination Form for Tenant Accreditation

Full Name of Tenant:	
Address at which Tenancy took place:	
Forwarding address of tenant if they have now left premises:	
Landlord Name:	
Landlord Address:	
Details of Tenancy Date of commencement: Date of completion:	
Has tenant fully complied with all requirements of the Tenants Code	Yes / No

I (the landlord) wish to nominate the above tenant for accreditation status. They have been a tenant at the above property for a minimum of six months and have complied with all aspects of the tenants code and the tenancy agreement as issued at the start of the tenancy. I authorize the [insert scheme manager name] to reveal the details listed on this form for the purpose of verifying a request from a third party for information about this tenants accreditation status.

Signed Dated

I (The tenant) wish to be nominated for accreditation status under the tenant accreditation scheme as operated by (insert scheme manager name). I authorize the (insert scheme manager name) to reveal the details listed on this form for the purpose of verifying a request from a third party for information about this tenants accreditation status.

Signed Dated

Report Summary

This best practice guidance is based upon six schemes that currently operate around the country. Its intention is only to be a guide for those wanting to set up a scheme for themselves.

Tenant accreditation schemes are generally seen as the natural progression from landlord accreditation and on the premise that they are set up with the right funding, the right staff and linked to the ten main points below, any scheme has a good chance of success.

1.	Gain political support at the outset: to ensure support for the scheme to identify and gain support for sources of funding
2.	Produce and submit funding bid (if necessary) providing details on: the nature of the scheme why it is needed its objectives its outputs its milestones funding required duration sustainability
3.	Recruit the right staff
4.	Provide appropriate training
5.	Ensure partner involvement and support
6.	Establish working groups, forums, steering groups as necessary
7.	Develop systems, databases, forms and publicity material
8.	Organise official project launch and all beneficial publicity
9.	Ongoing project delivery and management
10.	Periodic project review and assessment of sustainability

Appendices

APPENDIX ONE

Survey Results

Why did you originally establish the scheme?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough	Council Landlord demand resulting from private rented sector research study
Easington District Council	From previous experience and via a request from landlords
Leeds City Council	At the request of members of the landlord accreditation scheme in order to improve tenant behaviour
Manchester City Council	At the request of residents and landlords in order to help address neighbour nuisance and to improve management conditions in the private rented sector
North Lincolnshire Council	To run alongside the established landlord accreditation scheme

Does the scheme have its own dedicated policies and procedures?

Local Authority	Response
Leeds City Council	Yes
Manchester City Council	Yes, inclusive of a Code of Standards
Easington District Council	Standard tenant packs and scheme forms
North Lincolnshire Council	Code of conduct
Burnley Borough Council	Yes

Do you charge a fee for the tenant referencing service?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	No, but under review
Easington District Council	No
Leeds City Council	No, but under review
Manchester City Council	No, under review. No charges made to tenants. However, MCC may consider charging private landlords and other housing providers
North Lincolnshire Council	No

How was the scheme publicised/marketed and launched?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Via local media/LA web site/local events
Easington District Council	As part of the accreditation scheme
Leeds City Council	Newsletters and forums as part of landlord accreditation scheme
Manchester City Council	Launched at City of Manchester Stadium. Publicity is an important and ongoing part of MLIS and includes local media, resident newsletters, local events, local and City wide landlord forums and via local officers
North Lincolnshire Council	Local media/LA web site/landlords forum

How was political support achieved?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	As part of the funding bid submission
Easington District Council	As part of the Landlord Accreditation scheme development
Leeds City Council	Not directly requested but presumed
Manchester City Council	Briefing to local councillors and via ongoing dialogue
North Lincolnshire Council	Supported by cabinet member for Housing

What other agencies are involved in the project?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Police, ASB Unit, council officers, East Lancashire Landlords Association, tenant and resident groups, RSLs.
Easington District Council	Police, Fire Service, private sector landlords, RSLs community, local authority staff and council members
Leeds City Council	None
Manchester City Council	Neighbourhood nuisance teams, resident groups, local tasking meetings, RSLs, estate management teams and private landlords.
North Lincolnshire Council	None

How is the project funded?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	ERDF (50%) and SRB (50%)
Easington District Council	Local authority resources plus part fee income
Leeds City Council	Low cost scheme administered by Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme, therefore no direct funding required
Manchester City Council	Housing Market Renewal fund
North Lincolnshire Council	Local Authority resources

What are the annual running costs?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	£120K per annum
Easington District Council	Not disclosed
Leeds City Council	Approximately £5,000 per annum for each for the five districts in West Yorkshire
Manchester City Council	Not disclosed
North Lincolnshire Council	Not available

How many staff work on the project?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Regeneration officer, 2 customer service officers, 1 administration assistant
Easington District Council	Private sector initiatives officer, project officer, part time administration support
Leeds City Council	Self administered
Manchester City Council	Programme manager, 2 project officers, 1 project assistant
North Lincolnshire Council	Environmental health officer

What are the advantages/disadvantages for landlords/managing agents?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free service Helping to reduce ASB Well-received by police Supported and used by RSLs <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible lack of sustainability due to external funding dependence
Easington District Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to good tenants Less evictions Reduction in ASB Improved area property values Sustainable communities Free service <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None
Leeds City Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved tenant behaviour Serves as a reference rather than the landlord having to write a bespoke reference on request <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The scheme is not widely recognised as a tenant reference The scheme is self administered by the landlord The student sector are not interested in the scheme
Manchester City Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to date information about anti social behaviour perpetrators Allows landlords easy access to information from council and RSL Free service More relevant information than a credit check Discourages informal blacklisting 1-2 day turn around time for processing pre tenancy checks The service raises standards in the private rented sector Provides increased awareness of MCC plans for selective licensing and help to ensure landlords meet these standards

What are the advantages/disadvantages for landlords/managing agents?

Local Authority	Response
Manchester City Council	<p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <p>Does not, at present cover the whole of Manchester</p> <p>Does not include the police in terms of a source of reference information</p> <p>Each landlord has to complete a new pre-tenancy check per application – (this is also considered as a benefit by MLIS as more up to date information can be made available to the landlord or RSL)</p>
North Lincolnshire Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <p>A quality tenant reference for landlords</p> <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <p>The information is only as good as what is provided and is not 100% guaranteed</p>

What are the advantages/disadvantages for tenants?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <p>Recognition as a good tenant</p> <p>Access to bond guarantee scheme</p> <p>Access to furniture store</p> <p>Access to quality RSL accommodation / private rented sector accommodation</p> <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <p>Alienates those who fail to pass the reference check 57</p>
Easington District Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <p>Access to quality accommodation</p> <p>Access to well managed properties</p> <p>Assistance in resolving disputes</p> <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <p>Alienating those not qualifying for a reference</p>
Leeds City Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <p>Gives a tenant a reference when moving on in the private rented sector</p> <p>Prevents an illegal blacklist where tenants could not challenge information held about them</p> <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <p>Reference not universally accepted in Leeds</p> <p>Lack of take up of the scheme</p> <p>Scheme may not be perceived as being impartial</p>
Manchester City Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <p>Verifies and checks landlords</p> <p>Prevents informal blacklisting</p> <p>Quick turn around of references (1 – 2 days)</p> <p>Free service</p> <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <p>Need to complete a new form each time a tenant moves</p> <p>Information is only as accurate as that provided</p>
North Lincolnshire Council	<p>ADVANTAGES</p> <p>Access to accredited property.</p> <p>Tenant can keep reference to prove compliance to other accredited landlords when relocating</p> <p>DISADVANTAGES</p> <p>Scheme should be open to all tenants, not just those in accredited landlord property</p>

What are your outputs and milestones?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	1600 tenants registered on the scheme in the first 15 months Potential award of continuity funding Potential financial assistance via landlord clients Support of police Establishment of furniture resource centre
Easington District Council	As part of accreditation scheme, not directly quantifiable
Leeds City Council	Level of landlord support Review being carried out and complete this in March 2007 Target figure of 50% of the 32,000 households set in initial 3-year business plan
Manchester City Council	Target of 100 landlords to engage with the scheme 5,000 properties covered by the scheme Expansion to cover North Manchester wards – July 2006 Extension to local services in North/East, Nov 2006 Four new RSL's using service Dec 2006 Expansion into South Wards, Jan 2007
North Lincolnshire Council	As part of accreditation scheme, not directly quantifiable

Do you have a database and what information does it hold?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Yes, it includes: Names • Date of birth • Place of birth • National Insurance numbers 3 year tenancy history • Previous and current landlords details Employment and income details (were applicable)
Easington District Council	Yes – for both landlord accreditation and tenant referencing
Leeds City Council	Part of the landlord accreditation scheme database.
Manchester City Council	Stand alone bespoke system developed by software company that records: Names • Addresses • D.O.B • Nat Insurance numbers (optional) Incidents • Evidence of incidents • Landlords names and addresses and properties owned.
North Lincolnshire Council	Not for tenant referencing

How does the scheme link into landlord accreditation and selective licensing?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Selective licensing not being pursued at present The good tenant scheme works in partnership with the local authorities landlord accreditation scheme
Easington District Council	It is a fundamental part of the scheme (landlord accreditation) Selective licensing not introduced yet
Leeds City Council	Landlord accreditation scheme members receive a 20% HMO licensing fee discount were applicable Selective licensing currently being assessed for introduction

How does the scheme link into landlord accreditation and selective licensing?

Local Authority	Response
Manchester City Council	<p>The landlord accreditation scheme links into the proposed licensing areas within the city and will allow landlords to demonstrate referencing for tenants within the legislation</p> <p>The service will complement the proposed licence areas</p> <p>It helps to tackle ASB and also mirrors the criteria for landlord accreditation and selective licensing</p> <p>MLIS is a separate stand alone service but the 'Code of Standards' are consistent with those of the Manchester Landlord Accreditation Scheme</p> <p>MLIS landlords on application can state that they wish to become accredited</p> <p>Non accredited landlords can use MLIS – accreditation is an optional extra</p> <p>MCC plan to introduce licensing in phases over the next 3 years and the roll out of MLIS to other areas will anticipate these phases</p>
North Lincolnshire Council	<p>No take up yet (tenancy reference wise) but tenants renting from accredited landlords have the opportunity to become accredited themselves</p> <p>Selective licensing not being pursued at present</p>

What are the main difficulties or problems with scheme set up and delivery?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	<p>Difficulties in accessing funding and financial monitoring</p> <p>Managing demand</p> <p>Sustainability</p>
Easington District Council	<p>Limitations due to scheme being voluntary</p> <p>Scheme not open to RSL or ALMO tenants</p> <p>Need more funding to increase staffing</p>
Leeds City Council	<p>Initial feelings that the scheme gave tenants a 'licence to complain'.</p> <p>A big failing was having no in-built monitoring of accredited tenants e.g. a means of checking if accredited landlords were offering the scheme to tenants</p>
Manchester City Council	<p>Initial RSL engagement</p> <p>Landlords signing up but not then using the scheme (under review)</p> <p>Software company charging for amendments to the data-base</p>
NorthLincolnshire Council	<p>Obtaining tenant interest</p>

What happens to tenants who do not pass reference checks?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	<p>14 day appeal procedure</p> <p>Passported on to other housing providers</p>
Easington District Council	<p>May qualify as statutory homeless</p> <p>May go to non accredited landlords for accommodation</p>
Leeds City Council	N/A
Manchester City Council	N/A
North Lincolnshire Council	N/A

How do you see sustainability of the project?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Subject to future external funding awards (after March 2007) May become part fee fund from RSL / landlord clients
Easington District Council	Ongoing and sustainable May grow as licensing if introduced
Leeds City Council	The landlord accreditation scheme (that includes tenant referencing) needs reviewing and re-launching The scheme needs wider support Also need to expand the scheme to the whole of West Yorkshire
Manchester City Council	To grow and expand with the introduction of licensing Scope to extend the scheme to the homeless section to provide a temporary accommodation tenancy Also expansion into the student forum
North Lincolnshire Council	Uncertain

If you had to set up the scheme again, what would you do differently?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	
Easington District Council	Provision of more incentives Mandatory scheme
Leeds City Council	Try to get scheme to be better publicised by landlords and more actively marketed
Manchester City Council	Consider in-house IT development Develop more formal contract with the RSL's so that they have to use the scheme
North Lincolnshire Council	Would possibly offer the scheme to all tenants, not just those of accredited landlords

What aspects of the scheme have been successful?

Local Authority	Response
Burnley Borough Council	Demand • Police support • RSL support Tenant/resident group support • Reduced ASB
Easington District Council	Demand and outputs • Partnership with landlords • Reductions in area decline Reduced voids • Reduced ASB
Leeds City Council	Response of landlords to scheme launch Landlords recommending the scheme to others
Manchester City Council	Challenging ASB Sharing of ASB information Reinforces the use of referencing procedure for landlords Improved standards in the private rented sector Repayment of debts to the City Council
North Lincolnshire Council	No response

APPENDIX TWO – Sample Job Description and Personnel Specification

Scheme Project Manager

The sample job description and person specification is shown below. This details the requirement characteristics for the recruitment of a tenant accreditation scheme project manager.

Job Description

Job Title: Project Manager

Supervisory Responsibility:

The post-holder will be responsible for the project support staff.

Overall Purpose and Objectives of the Post:

To promote, develop and deliver the tenancy referencing project in accordance with the objectives and aims of the scheme and in line with the approved agreed budget.

Principal Duties:

- Give direction and leadership to the team
- Manage and develop the individuals in the team
- Demonstrate effective communication
- Lead on the overall direction and management of the project
- Keep abreast of the legislation affecting landlord and tenant law
- Develop and deliver incentive packages for landlord and tenant participation in the scheme
- To liaise with all interested parties in the development and delivery of the scheme and to form steering/participation groups where necessary
- To maintain accurate and concise file records, especially where such records are required for financial monitoring purposes
- To organise and attend public meetings as and when required
- To produce, organise and arrange for the distribution of publicity material
- To develop and maintain an effective data-base of tenant records
- To research and develop new initiatives and sources of funding for scheme expansion and sustainability (if necessary)
- To produce and distribute project update reports at agreed intervals and to agreed individuals/groups
- Ensure that arrangements are in place to properly respond to, investigate and review complaints and feedback

Person Specification

Essential

- 3 years experience of management in a customer service environment
- Good standard of literacy and numeracy
- Staff management skills
- Strong awareness of current social issues
- Well developed knowledge of landlord and tenant law
- Computer literate
- Ability to resolve conflict situations
- Ability to motivate a team and achieve results
- Customer focused
- Able to make presentations to various groups
- Strong written and interpersonal skills

Desirable

- 2 years recent staff management experience
- Experience of housing management
- Knowledge of housing legislation
- Experience of budgetary control
- Experience of bidding for sources of capital and revenue funding
- A knowledge/understanding of local authority functions and procedures

APPENDIX THREE – Sample Scheme Budget

The sample budget on the next page is based upon the delivery of the Burnley Good Tenant Scheme. The project is externally funded using a combination of ERDF (Urban II) and SRB6 finance. For purposes of clarity the costs have been based upon the provision of a stand alone project, with its own dedicated central office base (not shared, subsidised accommodation).

Revenue Element	Amount (£)	Capital costs (One off)	Amount (£)
Salary project manager (Incl. NI and pension)	31000	Desk top pc x4	4000
Salary customer services officer (incl.NI and pension) x 2 staff	31600	Phone system	1500
Admin. Assistant – part time (incl.NI)	6000	Fax	500
Business travel	125	Desks, chairs and furnishings	2600
Car parking	550	Printers x 2	800
Rent incl. Service charges and insurance	10500	Sundries	400
Electricity, gas, cleaning (shared costs)	2000		
Repairs and maintenance	500	Total capital costs	9800
Office security	250		
Office health and safety	100		
Telephone calls	1500		
E mail and internet costs	1000		
Fax costs	200		
Minor equipment	300		
Photocopier lease	1600		
Copier copies	500		
External printing	2000		
Postage stamps	600		
Recruitment adverts	3000		
Publicity	500		
Training	600		
Catering	150		
Sundries	150		
Total revenue costs	94725		

Sources of Reference

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