

# **Rossendale Borough Council**

## **Housing Enforcement Policy**

### **2011**

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## 1. Introduction

One of the primary roles of the Council's Health, Housing and Regeneration Team is to maintain and improve the housing conditions of privately owned property across Rossendale as well as dealing with housing matters arising from privately owned and rented land. Functions of the service include the:-

- Licensing and inspection of Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- Enforcement of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- Investigating overcrowding of properties.
- Nuisance caused by adjacent property.
- Filthy and verminous property.
- Defective and/or blocked residential sewers or drains.
- Mobile home and park home sites licensing (see associated Strategy and Standards).
- Immigration inspections.
- Illegal eviction and harassment associated with privately rented accommodation.
- Dealing with Empty Properties (see Rossendale Borough Council's Vacant Property Strategy 2010).
- Dealing with property detrimental to the amenity of the area
- Public health matters.
- Localised environmental quality issues (including contaminated land).
- Inspections of landlord accreditation and bond scheme properties.

In order to achieve this priority the Council:-

- Will seek to ensure properties achieve the appropriate standards in co-operation with the owners / agents and tenants by the provision of clear advice, guidance, encouragement and planning of improvements.
- Will utilise all appropriate enforcement action to achieve the appropriate standards in properties found to be jeopardising the health, safety or welfare of individuals and will, where legislation allows, make an appropriate charge for doing so.
- Will regularly review its policy, standards, schemes and methods of assessing risk and will in doing so, consider the views of interested parties and individuals. All policies and standards will be made freely available.
- Will seek to carry out its responsibilities efficiently and effectively in a way, which is open, clear and helpful to owners and occupiers and affirms its commitment to achieving consistent, balanced and fair enforcement.
- Will ensure that provision is made for interpreting information where individuals have difficulty in understanding English.
- Will make arrangements to carry out visits outside of normal office hours where appropriate.

It is the Council's policy that enforcement action in relation to private sector housing and housing owned by Housing Associations will be related to risk. This policy will be implemented through visits and inspections and all enforcement decisions will be based on the risk to health and safety of the vulnerable group. Assessment of risk will be based on current research, legislation and specific guidance.

As in accordance with Rossendale's Enforcement Concordat, the Council's initial approach is to give informal advice, assistance and information when at all possible. However, where this approach fails or it is necessary to act to protect the health, safety and welfare of persons or the environment, then the Council will take enforcement action.

This policy promotes efficient and effective approaches to regulatory inspection and enforcement to improve regulatory outcomes without imposing unnecessary burdens. This policy is in accordance with the Government's Regulators Compliance Code 2007 and the Concordat on Good Enforcement previously adopted by the Council.

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The policy sets out the service’s transparent approach to enforcement so that customers can better understand how they will be dealt with by the Council in stated circumstances and what guidance and procedures will be followed by the Health, Housing and Regeneration enforcement officers. The policy states how the Council will use its powers to raise the profile of enforcement thus leading to increased public confidence, ensuring timely enforcement is carried out, while encouraging joint working across departments and agencies while addressing the issues raised through Central Government guidance on enforcement issues.

In certain circumstances it may be concluded that the provisions contained in this document or any other service document are either not relevant or outweighed by another provision. Any decision to depart from the Code or Concordat will be properly reasoned, based on material evidence and documented.

Rossendale Borough Council works closely with its partners across Pennine Lancashire and Lancashire to provide a safe environment; good quality housing; and to reduce health and well-being inequalities. This is undertaken through targeted enforcement activity; joint commissioning of activities; awareness raising projects and through shared data gathering and intelligence. Where there are shared enforcement roles e.g. with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, Health & Safety Executive, Lancashire Police etc., officers will take advice from the partner organisation, where appropriate, and/or will advise such agencies of any contraventions for which that agency is responsible for they will also provide supporting evidence and information to allow enforcement to proceed.

The main body of this document sets out the Health, Housing and Regeneration department’s policy on these issues. The appendices are designed to provide reference material that can provide additionality to the policy.

## 2. Aim of the Policy

The aims of the policy are to:-

- Secure effective compliance with legislation (Appendix A) while minimising the burden to the Council, individuals, organisations and businesses.
- Set out the legal responsibilities, policies principles and priorities that the Health, Housing and Regeneration Service will follow when enforcing legislation around private housing.
- Help provide safer and healthier Private Housing and Social Housing Sectors through improved standards.
- Increase public confidence in the quality of rented accommodation contributing to a vibrant Private Rented sector in both Rossendale and Pennine Lancashire.
- Raise the profile and increased transparency and consistency around enforcement in the Housing Sector.

The policy is based on the following principles:-

- Consistency - ensuring similar issues are dealt with in the same way across all tenures.
- Fairness - ensuring a fair and even handed approach.
- Transparency - ensuring that the enforcement action taken by the Council is easily understood by individuals, organisation and businesses.
- Objectivity - ensuring that decisions are not influenced by the gender, race, disability, culture, religious or political beliefs, age, sexuality, financial status, tenure or any disadvantage of the offender, victim or witness.

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### 3. Enforcement

#### 3.1 What is Enforcement Action?

Enforcement means an action carried out in exercise of, or against the background of statutory enforcement powers. This is not limited to formal enforcement action such as prosecution or service of legal notices. It includes inspections or investigations related to property or land and any relevant person where the purpose is checking compliance with legislation, to give advice to help comply with the law, when educating or gathering information. A list of the legislation covered is in Appendix A.

#### 3.2 Enforcement Objectives

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Service primarily covers all privately owned residential accommodation and privately owned or rented land in the borough. In general, enforcement action will be carried out with the objective of ensuring that:-

- Empty homes are not left empty where there is a housing need.
- Tenant’s of a private landlord or a Registered Provider live in homes free of significant risks to their health and safety.
- Owners or occupiers (including tenants), who are vulnerable and unable to support independent living, live in accommodation which is free from unacceptable risks to their health and safety.
- HMO licence conditions are met.
- Privately owned land or property does not present a statutory nuisance to other land owners, or does not directly or indirectly present an unacceptable risk to public health, safety or the environment.
- Persons are held responsible for their actions which are detrimental to local environmental quality or to the health safety and welfare of other residents.
- Persons are held responsible for their actions or anti social behaviour which affects the health safety and welfare of other persons in private rented accommodation or residents in the immediate vicinity of their house (as in accordance with the Council’s Anti Social Behaviour Policy).
- We meet our statutory duties as a public authority.

### 4. Service Users

All of the following groups will both use the Health, Housing and Regeneration service and potentially be subject to enforcement action.

Group who may be subject to enforcement action	Example scenario
Private Rented Sector Landlords Registered Providers	Improvement notice served under the Housing Act 2004 to improve insulation or heating measures such as providing new central heating.
Private Rented sector <i>Tenants</i> Registered Providers or Housing Association <i>Tenants</i>	
	Having to comply with a Prohibition Order served under the Housing Act 2004 requiring the numbers of occupants in a property to be reduced or to restrict use of a room. It is an offence not to comply with a Prohibition Order.

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Managing Agents of rented properties or HMOs.	Prosecution for failure to comply with the Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006 because the Fire Alarm in the common parts of a property is not working and no action has been taken to repair it.
Homeowners	Notice served under the Building Act 1984 requiring defective drainage serving their property to be repaired.

This is not a definitive or exhaustive list.

## 5. Links with other Council Strategies and Policies

### 5.1 Rossendale Borough Council Key Strategies and Policies

There are a number of key Rossendale and Pennine Lancashire Strategies and Policies that this policy will contribute to. The main priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan that this policy focuses on are:-

- Delivering Quality Services to our Customers.
- Delivering Regeneration across the Borough.
- Improving health and well being across the Borough.
- Keeping our Borough clean, green and safe.

These priorities will be met through:-

- Increasing affordable housing – through bringing empty homes back into use.
- Tackling inequality – working to ensure services are sensitive to the needs of different communities.
- Freedom from crime and antisocial behaviour – reducing burglary and the fear of burglary and tackling antisocial behaviour.
- Healthy lifestyles and healthy communities – improving the health and wellbeing of the population and the houses that people live in.
- Improving the health of those whose quality of life and health outcomes are the worst.

The Private Sector Housing Strategy also identifies that we should:-

- Strengthen partnership with private landlords to improve housing quality.
- Use enforcement powers especially in high-risk private properties.

### 5.2 Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy

Rossendale's current Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy sets out general principals of good enforcement practice that should be followed by any of Rossendale's regulatory services and their officers. It is based around the principles set out in the Government's Enforcement Concordat.

The Regulatory Services policy indicates that there would be more specific policies applying to different regulatory service areas and this policy is one of those.

The Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy has been reviewed to take into account wider issues in the Government's Better Regulation Agenda such as the Regulators Compliance Code. This policy sets out how the Residential function within the Health, Housing and Regeneration Team will carry out its work alongside the Regulatory Services Enforcement policy which will set out the updated more general issues on enforcement that cover all Enforcement services. This policy specifically relates to this service however, officers will also have to take into account the generality of the revised Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy when making enforcement decisions.

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### 5.3 Providing Assistance, Information and Educating

As a basic principal the Council wants to work with service users to meet our objectives rather than having to take enforcement action. This ranges from advice and information provided by case officers on site, over the telephone and in writing. Rossendale Borough Council's website provides a wide range of advice, and information including the Standards for Private Rented Accommodation across the borough and application forms for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing.

In addition we provide assistance and to help landlords, tenants and homeowners:-

- Working with neighbouring authorities towards a Pennine Lancashire Accreditation Scheme and a Good Tenant Scheme.
- Private Landlord's Forum – held to engage with landlords on service direction, standards, relevant legislation and topic areas.
- Dedicated resource support provided through the Health, Housing and Regeneration Service.
- Expansion of Pennine Lancashire Choice Based Lettings Scheme to include Private Rented Properties and a provision for a dedicated Enhanced Housing Options service.

## 6. Local Enforcement Priorities

In addition to setting national priorities for enforcement the Rogers Review of 2007 recommended to Government other areas which should be considered as local priorities:-

- Operation of the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS) Enforcement.
- HMO licensing.
- Local Environmental Quality.

Rogers' recommended that where the issues relating to the priorities cause significant harm in the Local Authority area or generate high levels of local concern and where the Council can make a difference to outcomes in that area of work and could do so independently of other councils if it would be appropriate to adopt them as local enforcement priorities.

### 6.1 HHSRS Enforcement and HMO Licensing

Rogers identified that where Councils had high levels of private rented accommodation that standards in this accommodation would make important contributions to Local Area Agreement themes in relation to Healthier Communities and Older People.

Rossendale is an area with relatively high levels of private rented accommodation - 14% of the private housing stock (10% of the overall total stock) which is in line with the overall average rental stock across Pennine Lancashire but higher than the National average of 12%. Source: 2006 English House Condition Survey.

Currently in Rossendale 36% of private rented properties fail the Decent Homes standard of which 28% of those tenants are classified as vulnerable (in receipt of a means tested benefit). Source: Rossendale Borough Council Stock Condition Survey 2009.

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## 6.2 Local Environmental Quality

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Service recognise these priorities as necessary to provide good quality private housing in Rossendale. These priorities will be balanced against the needs in Rossendale as they arise taking into account the Council's Strategies and policies in place at the time.

## 7. Targeting Enforcement Action

To ensure that we meet our policy and enforcement objectives effectively we will need to target our enforcement activity from time to time.

These are some examples of how we will target action.

By types of property and/or the way a property is occupied:-

- Empty properties – Door to door surveys, Vacant Property Group, Council Tax information or, by the Council's priority pointing system.
- Private landlord properties whose Tenants who are on Housing Benefit as they tend to be more vulnerable and the standards in those properties are more likely to be of a lower quality in terms of risks to health and safety to the occupiers compared to housing association properties.
- Unlicensed HMOs - using Council Tax and Housing Benefit information; GIS mapping and on street inspections.
- Construction type – Where there is a problem with a particular method of construction which creates hazards and deficiencies.

By Areas:-

- Where there are particular problems in a specific locality. This can be on a street-by-street basis or an area of Rossendale.
- Where an area of Rossendale is identified as having adverse health or socio economic indicators.
- Through shared intelligence with partner agencies where they are looking at area based enforcement due to problems in a specific location.

By Individual(s):-

- Where a particular individual or organisation is persistently committing offences or where their activities result in the need for us to work proactively to meet our enforcement objectives such as Letting / Management Agencies.

Please note that the above is not an exhaustive list of all the ways we will target action.

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## 7.1 Checks and balances

To ensure that there are checks and balances in our enforcement approach any targeted action will need to be agreed with a manager before it is undertaken. Our consultation on this policy identified that the checks should include:-

- A check to assess if there is a risk that equality groups are being adversely affected by the targeted action and if so what steps will be taken to mitigate those effects.
- Consideration of any support and assistance that should and can be provided alongside the targeted action.
- Whether there are groups that should be consulted before targeting action.
- That the targeted action will not damage the Private Rented Sector market disproportionately.
- Whether informal action is more appropriate.
- The general approach of a lighter enforcement touch to those seeking to comply with legislation is taken whilst a stronger enforcement approach is taken where there is a history of non compliance, refusal to carry out the necessary works informally or significant health and safety risks are found.

## 8. Specific Enforcement Issues

### 8.1 Mandatory HMO licensing

The 2004 Housing Act provided specific guidance around HMOs. A licence is required in HMOs of 3 or more storeys with 5 or more persons in 2 or more households sharing the facilities. Properties inspected will be assessed in accordance with the Council's currently approved standards for HMOs. These standards are available from the Health, Housing and Regeneration Team and on the Council's website.

On application for a licence the Council will assess each property as per the Council's standards (based on the 2004 Housing Act). It will endeavour to re-assess properties annually and owners, agents and occupiers will be encouraged to assess their own houses and to agree to carry out phased improvements.

The Council will endeavour to ensure that owners are fully aware of their responsibilities and do not unnecessarily expose themselves to enforcement action through lack of understanding or information. However, properties inspected which fail to meet the relevant standards will be subject to appropriate enforcement action to remedy all deficiencies.

### 8.2 Operating an unlicensed HMO

Rossendale Borough Council's focus of enforcing the HMO licensing provisions will be on detecting unlicensed HMOs and requiring landlords of those HMOs to apply for licences, at the same time consideration will be given to whether or not formal action is appropriate.

Systematic surveys using all relevant information held by the Council will be used to find unlicensed HMOs. Where unlicensed HMOs are found an additional charge of £100 will be added onto the licence fee to reflect the additional work carried out to licence the HMO.

If a landlord has approached the Council for a licence an informal approach will be adopted so long as the application is subsequently duly made within 14 days. There also may be exceptional circumstances that have resulted in application not being made, these will be considered. In other circumstances the Council will consider taking formal action in the form of a Simple Caution or a prosecution.

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Where landlords have been prosecuted for operating an unlicensed HMO the Council will use Rent Repayment Orders to claim back any Housing Benefit paid whilst the HMO was unlicensed as well as providing tenants with information and advice on how they can claim back the rent they paid whilst the HMO was unlicensed for up to a period of 12 months.

### **8.3 Breach of HMO licence conditions**

Breaches of licence conditions will be investigated in line with current enforcement objectives and priorities.

Informal action will be taken in relation to minor breaches of the licence conditions, for example not producing certificates on time as long as the breaches have not significantly affected a person's health safety or welfare.

Formal action will be considered where there have been serious and or persistent breaches of licence conditions.

Each case will be judged on its own merits and regard will be had for Code for Crown Prosecutors and Home Office Guidance on Simple Cautions.

### **8.4 Interim Management Orders**

These powers will only be used as a last resort where other attempts to ensure the health safety or welfare of occupiers or residents is at risk. Interim Management Orders (IMOs) can be made where there is no realistic prospect of an HMO licence being granted. Effectively the management and rental income from a property is taken away from the current landlord for up to a year. The Council can apply for a Final Management Order to be approved that can last for up to five years.

The Council will consider the advantages of establishing a protocol with a Registered Provider to manage any properties where an IMO is made.

### **8.5 Empty Properties**

Empty properties also can look undesirable, cause damage to adjoining properties and attract anti-social behaviour as well as impact on the long-term sustainability of a neighbourhood. The Health, Housing and Regeneration Service systematically identify long-term empty properties and will work with owners to bring them back into use. Rossendale's Vacant Property Strategy 2010 sets out the detail of our priorities and actions that we will undertake in this area action will be tailored to match housing need, nuisance issues and length of time the property has been empty as in accordance with the Vacant Property Strategy Priority Scoring Sheet.

As the overall aim is to provide more accommodation of the type required in Rossendale we will take action on empty properties within a the Vacant Property Strategy that could ultimately lead to the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs), Compulsory Purchase Orders or Enforced Sales to bring a property into use.

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Service in partnership with the Vacant Property Task Group will take enforcement action to deal with the symptoms that arise when a property is left empty where necessary.

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## 8.6 Overcrowding

The 2009 Stock Condition Survey highlights pockets of overcrowding in Rossendale centred around the west of the Valley.

We will investigate complaints from tenants about overcrowded living conditions, from other parties where they are concerned about children or vulnerable adults living in overcrowded conditions or where the overcrowding conditions are legitimately impacting on neighbours health safety or well being.

Officers from the Council's Housing Options Team will be involved where it is elected to take enforcement action that is likely to lead to a family moving out of their accommodation. The nature of the situation will depend on the action taken, and each case will be judged on its own merits, we may:-

- Consider taking action to improve the health and safety of vulnerable adults and children's living conditions whilst taking into account their views (where appropriate) as well as the views of parents, guardians or carers.
- Consider taking action where the overcrowding has a significant detrimental effect on neighbours of the overcrowded property.
- Only advise adults living in overcrowded living conditions that their health is at risk but will not require them to move out if they do not wish to do so. Where we suspect that the occupants are being exploited we will take this into account when deciding what action to take.
- Not take action where we believe that the complaint is motivated by prejudice or intended to harass the occupiers concerned.

## 8.7 Harassment and Unlawful Eviction

Rossendale Borough Council is the enforcing authority with regard to dealing with issues around harassment and unlawful evictions. Requests for service in connection with alleged harassment and/or unlawful eviction will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's agreed prioritised response policy.

## 9. Enforcement Action

This policy covers all types of enforcement action carried out by the Health, Housing and Regeneration Service. In order to achieve and maintain consistency in private sector housing enforcement the Council will use the following range of enforcement options as appropriate:-

- No action
- Informal Action
- Formal Action i.e. Statutory Notices
- Emergency Action
- Simple Caution
- Prosecution
- Works in Default

This policy may be supplemented by more specific guidance such as:-

- Rossendale Borough Council's Policy with regard to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System as part of the enforcement of the Housing Act 2004 which should be read in conjunction with this policy when dealing with enforcement issues that relate to a specific area of legislation.
- Rossendale Borough Council'
- Rossendale Borough Council's Landlord Guide – Housing Standards for Rented Homes.
- Rossendale Borough Council's Illegal Eviction and Harassment Policy.

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## 9.1 Informal Action

There is a presumption that in the first instance officers will seek the desired improvements or protection of the public's health and safety in relation to private housing by working informally with those involved. We will also work with landlords to help them improve and manage their properties by directing them to the National Landlord support networks and local forums across Pennine Lancashire.

Informal action will include verbal requests and general advice to take action to comply with legislative requirements. Informal action will be considered appropriate in the following circumstances:-

- In instances where the Council have discretion to take action to remedy breaches of housing legislation.
- The act or omission is not serious enough to warrant informal action.
- From the individual or company's past history it can be reasonably expected that informal action will achieve compliance.
- The consequences of non-compliance will not pose a significant risk to the health and safety of the public.

The above is not intended to be an exhaustive list and each case will be considered on its individual merits.

Any correspondence sent to individuals or companies will:-

- Indicate the legislation contravened (if appropriate) and the measures to be taken to ensure compliance with any legal requirements.
- Contain all the information necessary to understand what work is required and why it is necessary.
- Include an advisory warning that should it be necessary for the Council to take informal action in respect of the said matter that an enforcement charge may be incurred as determined by the 2004 Housing Act and /or costs associated with default work and officer time will be charged at a level within the Council's agreed charges, and that the Authority will take steps to recover debt incurred in this way. This warning will also indicate methods by which the debt may be recovered, including the use of rent sequestration.
- Give individuals or companies the opportunity to contact the appropriate officer to discuss the matter further.

All verbal advice and requests will be confirmed in writing.

## 9.2 Formal Action

Where the circumstances of the case justify it, officers will be expected to take a formal approach, i.e. use their legislative powers where:-

- There is a serious risk to health and safety. For example:-
  - No heating in cold weather.
  - No hot water to wash and prepare food safely.
  - Exposure to damaged asbestos insulation board which means occupiers are likely to inhale or ingest asbestos fibres.
  - Exposed live electrical wiring which people are likely to make contact with.
  - Raw sewerage surcharging in someone's home.
  - Or any other hazard identified through a HHSRS Inspection that would impact on the vulnerable group and require urgent remediation through emergency action.
- A person refuses or fails to carry out the works informally.
- There is a recent history of failure to meet requests to carry out legally required works.
- There is a recent history of non-compliance with informal action.
- There is a recent history of a failure to manage a property in line with legal requirements.

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- Standards are generally poor with little management awareness of statutory requirements.
- The consequences of non-compliance could be potentially serious to the public health.
- There are significant contraventions of legislation but prosecution is not appropriate.
- There is a lack of confidence that the individual or company will respond to an informal approach.
- That they are considered to be a persistent offender to the Council or Partner Authorities on a Pennine Lancashire footprint in failing to manage or undertake legally required works to Private Rented Properties in their ownership or trust.
- There is a record of criminal convictions for failure to comply with housing related offences (including offences that are likely to affect housing management) in the last 5 years or a simple caution has been issued in the last 2 years.
- It is necessary to safeguard and protect health and safety in the future.
- It is necessary to bring an empty property back into use when informal requests to do so have failed.

The above is not intended to be an exhaustive list and each case will be considered on its individual merits.

Officers serving statutory notices will be prepared to discuss the works specified with individuals or company representatives and will fully consider the availability and suitability of alternative solutions.

Where a formal notice is served, the method of appealing against the notice will be provided in writing at the same time. The notice will explain what is wrong, what is required to put things right (where appropriate) and what will happen if the notice is not complied with.

Failure to comply with a statutory notice will normally be documented and an assessment made on further action to be taken.

### 9.3 Emergency Action

The Council will take Emergency Action where the legislation allows it to do so, taking into account the following criteria:-

- The risk of harm to any occupier or visitor is significant and imminent.
- In the case of Remedial Action the works are easily achievable in a short period of time.
- In the case of Prohibition, the hazards are so extensive in nature that they are not easily removable.

The above is not intended to be an exhaustive list and each case will be considered on its individual merits and where this deviates from the legislation reasoning will be documented to evidence action.

### 9.4 Simple Cautions

Non-compliance with legislation in Private Housing can make people liable to be convicted of criminal offences. e.g.:-

Operating a licensable HMO without a licence can carry a fine of up to £20,000 or

Not complying with the requirements of an Improvement Notice under the Housing Act a fine of up to £5,000 plus costs.

Officers may use Simple Cautions where someone has committed a less serious crime. Simple Cautions warn people that their behaviour has been unacceptable and makes them aware of the legal consequences should they commit further offences. A Simple Caution is a serious matter. It is recorded on the Central Register of Convictions and may be used to influence any decision whether or not to institute proceedings if the person should offend again. Simple Cautions may also be referred to in subsequent court proceedings.

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Simple cautions are quick to process without the need to go to court and are aimed at preventing offenders re-offending.

Simple cautions can only be issued where:-

- there is evidence an offender is guilty; or
- the offender is eighteen years of age or over; or
- the use of a Simple Cautions is considered to be in the public interest; or
- the offender admits they committed an offence; and
- the offender agrees to be given a caution – if the offender does not agree to receive a caution then they are likely to be prosecuted instead.

Simple cautions are normally not appropriate where there is history of offending within the last 2 years or where the same type of offence has been committed before. In these circumstances prosecution is more appropriate. Simple cautions will not be used as a substitute for prosecutions, which would otherwise be defective.

Simple Cautions may not be appropriate where it would prevent a Compensation Order from being made through the Courts.

The procedure for deciding whether to prosecute offenders or issue a Simple Cautions should be followed by officers in making this decision.

The matrix in Appendix I should be completed and the recommendation of the officer should be documented. This document should then be passed to the Health and Housing Manager and the Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration Service for their consideration.

If the decision is taken to prosecute, a copy of the matrix must be placed in the prosecution file so that the advocate can indicate to the Court how the decision was arrived at, if necessary.

Simple cautions will be administered by a Senior Officer of the Council and will only be administered in the Council's offices except where the offender is elderly, infirm or otherwise vulnerable.

When considering the issuing of a Simple Cautions Rossendale's Legal Services Team will be consulted.

A central register of cautions issued will be maintained. One copy of each Simple Cautions will be sent to the Office of Fair Trading:-

Central Register of Convictions  
Office of Fair Trading  
Craven House  
40 Uxbridge Road  
London  
W5 2BS

Where an individual or company declines the offer of a Simple Cautions the Council will invariably instigate legal proceedings.

The rules covering Simple Cautions are provided on the [Home Office web site](#) or in [Home Office Circular 30/2005](#).

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## 9.5 Prosecution

The Council recognises that the decision to prosecute is significant and could have far reaching consequence upon the alleged offender therefore cases will be considered on a case by case basis. The Council will only instigate legal proceeding where there is sufficient, admissible and reliable evidence that an offence has been committed by an identifiable individual or company, there is a realistic prospect of conviction and that prosecution for the offence is in the public interest.

The case will be presented to the Council's legal department who will decide if the prosecution should be pursued.

Where criminal offences have been committed officers may consider prosecution is an appropriate way of dealing with the offence when:-

- a simple caution is not appropriate or the person accused has refused to accept the offer of a simple caution; or
- there is a risk to public health and safety or of environmental damage as a consequence of the breach; or
- it is appropriate in the circumstances as a way to draw general attention to the need for compliance with the law ; or
- the breach was as a result of a deliberate act or following recklessness or neglect; or
- the approach of the offender warrants it, e.g. repeated breaches, persistent poor standards; or
- a legal notice or order has not been complied with or no reasonable progress made in relation to its requirements; or
- obstruction of an officer in the course of their duty; or
- the provision of false information.

Please note this is not an exhaustive list and each case will be considered on its individual merits.

Officers will generally warn the person accused that their actions or lack of action has made them liable before considering a prosecution against them. However, officers may pursue prosecution without prior warning where, for example:-

- There is a serious risk to health and safety or the environment.
- There is a recent history of failure to meet requests to carry out legally required works or meet legal standards.
- That they are considered to be a persistent offender to the Council or Partner Authorities on a Pennine Lancashire footprint in failing to manage or undertake legally required works to Private Rented Properties in their ownership or trust.
- There is a record of criminal convictions for failure to comply with housing related offences (including offences that are likely to affect housing management) in the last 5 years or a simple caution has been issued in the last 2 years.
- It is necessary to safeguard health and safety in the future.

Any departure from this policy when making a decision with regard to prosecution will require justification and authorisation from the Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration Services.

The decision whether to prosecute or take an alternative course of action will be documented.

All prosecutions will be brought without unnecessary delay.

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Where prosecution is likely, the person or company committing the offence may be invited to attend a taped interview in order to have the opportunity to express their reasons for the offence. (Refer to the Council's Interview under caution procedure).

### 9.5.1 The Code for Crown Prosecutors

Before undertaking a prosecution officers must satisfy a senior officer that the case meets the requirements of The Code for Crown Prosecutors. Prosecutions will need to meet the Full Code Test that has two stages; "The Evidential Stage" and then the "Public Interest" test.

The Evidential Stage must be passed before proceeding to the Public Interest Stage however, important the case is.

Legal proceedings will only be instigated subject to the final approval of Legal Services.

## 9.6 Work in Default

The Council is given powers to carry out works in default where a person has been required to do works but has failed to do so. The work in default powers are provided in the legislation being used in relation to a case where:-

- there is an imminent risk to health/safety, such that the consequences of not taking immediate and decisive action
- statute does not permit prosecution for non-compliance with a statutory notice, e.g. Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 section 29, Public Health Act 1936 section 79; or
- in relation to any other relevant legislation, where a Senior Council Officer is satisfied that circumstances are such that default is the best course of action.

In most circumstances a person will be given notice of the Council's intention to carry out works in their default. Once the Council has started works it is an offence for that person to obstruct the Council or any of the contractors that have been employed to carry out the works.

The cost of the works will be recovered in accordance with the relevant statutory provisions as detailed through the Council's fees and charges which are reviewed annually and approved by Cabinet.

The Council will consider prosecution proceedings in addition to works in default.

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## 9.7 Charging for Enforcement Action

The Housing Act 2004 allows councils to recover certain costs associated with enforcement action. Rossendale Borough Council will therefore recover all applicable costs in respect of taking the following formal action:-

- Improvement Notice;
- Prohibition Order;
- Emergency Remedial Action Notice; and
- Emergency Prohibition Orders.

The cost of taking this action will be charged “as per the Services fees and charges” reviewed annually. However, there may be certain circumstances where the charge is waived and each case will be judged on its own merits.

Costs for external survey work or professional support to provide additional information to support Notices and Orders will be charged at cost to the owner.

Other legislation enforced by the Health, Housing and Regeneration Service also allows councils to recover costs relating to default work including the cost of the office’s time and other associated expenses.

## 9.8 Recovery of Debts

Where charges for enforcement action are levied they will be registered as a local land charge against the owner’s property.

This means that when the property is sold the debt has to be repaid including any interest accrued on the initial charge.

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Service will vigorously pursue all debts owed to it as a result of enforcement charges or charges for carrying out works in default (as well as any other charges). To recover debts the Council will use some of the following means:-

- Use tracing services to track down debtors and secure judgments to pay up debts.
- Demand rents are paid to the Council instead of the landlord to recover outstanding debts. (Where the legislation allows and it is appropriate to do so).
- Where applicable the Private Housing service will recover debts using the enforced sale procedure under the Law and Property Act 1925. This allows the Council to force the owner to sell their property in order to recover its costs. (This power will only normally be used where there is no other realistic likelihood of recovering debts owed to the Council.)

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## 9.9 Powers of Entry

In certain circumstances, Powers of Entry into a property are provided to authorised officers in accordance with the legislation under which we operate.

In general the powers will allow an officer at any reasonable time to:-

- enter a property to carry out an inspection and gather evidence;
- take someone with them;
- take equipment or materials with them;
- take measurements, photographs or make recordings;
- leave recording equipment for later collection;
- take samples of articles or substances; and
- in some cases to carry out works.

In most cases prior notice must be given to owners and to the occupiers. The notice given depends on the legislation being enforced and can range from 24 hours to 7 days.

Notice that powers of entry need to be carried out will normally be in writing or by email but can in some circumstances be given verbally, depending on the relevant statutory provision.

Powers of Entry can be enforced in the first instance where it is necessary to:-

- Protect and health safety of any person or to protect the environment without avoidable delay.
- Investigate an offence.
- Prevent the obstruction of officers.
- Carry out a statutory duty or power.

The Powers of entry can be enforced with a warrant. The Police will accompany officers where that is appropriate. It is an offence to obstruct an officer in the course of their duty.

Officers exercising their Power of Entry will carry identification and details of their authorisation to carry out their action.

## 9.10 Powers to Require Documents

Currently authorised officers have the power to require:-

- Documents to be provided to enable them to carry out their powers and duties under the Housing Act 2004.
- Electrical and gas safety certificates to be provided in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation or Private Rented Properties.
- Any person with an interest in a property to provide details about its ownership or occupation.

It is an offence not to produce the required information, where information is not provided formal action will be considered e.g. simple caution if appropriate or prosecution where there is sufficient evidence and it is in the public interest to do so.

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## 10. Guidance

There is a wide range of legislation as well as other sources of guidance that cover our enforcement activities from Central Government and its partner agencies. We will consider this guidance when formulating our policies and procedures. Officers will follow the Council's own policies and procedures and where appropriate will take the relevant government guidance into account on a case-by-case basis. See Appendix B and Appendix C for more information.

### 10.1 Protocols

Several protocols are currently being established to help clarify how the Health, Housing and Regeneration Service will work with other partner organisations or services in relation to private housing such as the Fire Service and the Housing Options Team. This is not an exhaustive list and these protocols may be added to or change over time.

## 11. Partners and consultation

The service works with a wide range of partners including stakeholders such as private sector landlords, other Council departments, Agencies such as Fire and Rescue Services, the Police and neighbouring local authorities across Pennine Lancashire and Lancashire. We will also look at sharing intelligence data and evidence where it can support and supplement other department and agency work around clients, premises and owners.

We value the partners we work with and will engage with them in relation to Enforcement Policies and procedures where the subject area is relevant and appropriate to them. Appendix D provides details of the partners we work with and the areas of work covered. **A list of people or organisations consulted in relation to this policy is provided in Appendix E.**

## 12. Powers under the Housing Act 2004

There are new powers in the Housing Act in relation to [Anti Social Behaviour](#), [Additional Licensing HMOs](#), [Selective Licensing](#), and [Discretionary and Special Interim Management Orders](#) . The links to the documents provide more information.

Antisocial behaviour linked to Private Rented Properties is a common occurrence and one of the areas that the service works with partners. Through the Crime Disorder Partnership of the Local Strategic Partnership the Council has developed a Multi Agency Antisocial Behaviour Policy to help tackle this issue.

## 13. Enforcement Tools and Techniques

In order to achieve our enforcement objectives we will use the full range of tools and techniques available that are appropriate in the circumstance of the case, taking into account the overall priorities and objectives of the Council particularly the policies and guidance referred to in this policy.

Please see Appendix F for some examples of the tools and techniques used.

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## 14. Authorisation of Officers

Any officer carrying out enforcement work should be authorised to do so by the Council. Each Authorised officer in the Health, Housing and Regeneration Service will carry an identity card and a paper copy of their authorisations. You are entitled to ask to see this card and paper authorisation at the time of their visit.

Please note once an officer has made it clear that they are authorised to carry out an enforcement activity it is normally an offence to obstruct them in their duties for which a person is liable to formal action such as prosecution.

## 15. Community Impact Assessment

In summary the policy aims to promote the Council's objectives of improving environmental quality, promoting prosperous communities, health and well-being. Care has been taken to ensure that the application of these policies will not result in discrimination against any of the equalities groups or communities within Rossendale and to that end; a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) has been carried out on this policy document and the service function.

## 16. Appeals and Complaints Procedures

This policy and associated guidance as well as supplementary policies referred to within, will be considered as relevant documents when reviewing complaints in relation to any enforcement activity undertaken by the Health, Housing and Regeneration Team. It is important to stress that they are not the definitive list of guidance available and there may be more relevant or up to date guidance that should be considered in relation to any complaint. Details of the complaints procedure to follow are detailed in Appendix G.

Where a formal notice is served, the method of appealing against the notice will be provided in writing at the same time. The notice will explain what is wrong, what is required to put things right (where appropriate) and what will happen if the notice is not complied with.

## 17. Scenarios of enforcement action

Appendix H provides examples of scenarios of cases that may be encountered (they do not relate to actual cases) but do reflect how such cases could be dealt with. The scenarios are included to give some context to the actions set out in this policy.

## 18. Policy implementation and review dates

This Policy was approved on xx/xx/xx by Rossendale's Cabinet / Full Council. This policy will be reviewed by XXXX it may be reviewed earlier if there are significant legislative or funding changes.

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## 19. Enquiries

Any enquires about this policy can be made by:

Email: [regeneration@rossendalebc.gov.uk](mailto:regeneration@rossendalebc.gov.uk)

Telephone: 01706 252402

Letter:

Health, Housing and Regeneration

The Business Centre

Futures Park

Newchurch Road

Bacup

OL13 0BB

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## Appendices



## **Appendix A - Primary legislation enforced by the Health, Housing and Regeneration Service**

Housing Act 2004 and The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005

Housing Act 1985 (As Amended)

Environmental Protection Act 1990 Statutory Nuisance

Building Act 1984

- Sections 59 and 60 are used to deal with defective drainage issues in existing buildings.
- Section 64 can be used to deal with separate dwellings without or with insufficient water closets.
- Section 70 can be used to deal with inadequate storage of food accommodation in a house.
- Section 74 can be used where a building or structure is dangerous but immediate action is not necessary.
- Section 76 where a building is found to be causing a nuisance and is prejudicial to health.
- Section 84 can be used to deal with yard surfaces which don't adequately drain.

Public Health Act 1936

- Section 45 can be used to deal with closets prejudicial to health or a nuisance.

Public Health Act 1961

- Section 17 (1) can be used to repair drain/waster pipe etc up to £250.
- Section 17 (3) can be used to remedy a stopped up drain, waste pipe etc.
- Section 35 can be used to clean out filthy and verminous property.

Public Health Act 2006

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976

- Section 35 can be used to deal with blocked private sewers.
- Section 16 can be used to formally request information about a person or premises.

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Acts 1982

- Section 29 can be used to board up open to access domestic property.

Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949

The Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006

Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – seriously detrimental to the amenity

Protection from Eviction Act 1977 and Housing Act 1988

Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

Defective Premises Act 1972

Land Compensation Act 1973

Rent Act 1977

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 / 1982

Housing Act 1980

Landlord and Tenant Act 1985

Housing Act 1988

Local Government and Housing Act 1989

Home Energy and Conservation Act 1995

Housing Act 1996

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

Gas Safety (installation and Use) Regulations 1998

Homelessness Act 2002

Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002

Housing and Regeneration Act 2008

The Licensing and Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation and Other Houses (Miscellaneous Provisions) (England) Regulations 2006

The Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Prescribed Descriptions) (England) Order 2006

This is not an exhaustive list of all legislation enforced by the Private Housing Service.

## **Appendix B- Government Guidance**

### **Communities and Local Government Guidance**

The main powers for enforcing standards in the Private Housing are contained in Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 (the Housing Act).

Guidance on this can be found at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/150940>

Guidance on Enforcing the Housing Act was issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in 2006. Councils are required to have regard to this guidance when using their powers under this part of the Housing Act.

CLG (previously ODPM) also produced a set of worked examples to consider when hazard rating properties using the HHSRS.

The Government's Housing Health and Safety Rating System Enforcement Guidance was used as a basis for Rossendale Borough Council's Policy on the Enforcement of the Housing Act 2004.

## **Appendix C - Other Guidance**

### **LACORS now LG Regulation**

Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORs) now Local Government Regulations (LGR) was set up to provide advice and guidance to help support local authorities regulatory and related services across the country.

It is principally covers enforcement services in Local Authorities and provides detailed advice guidance and good practice on issues including Private Housing and [Fire Safety within different housing types](#). More information can be found at [www.lacors.gov.uk](http://www.lacors.gov.uk).

The Health, Housing and Regeneration Service would consider relevant guidance issued by LACORs when carrying out enforcement work.

### **Warwick University, Bristol City Council, Decent and Safe Homes (DASH) East Midlands -worked examples**

In order to supplement the limited number of worked examples of scoring hazards using the HHSRS, Bristol City Council and the East Midlands DASH group have sent worked examples to Warwick University for ratification. The faculty of Law at Warwick University ratified these worked examples as they developed the scheme before it was incorporated into law and have been Government approved providers of HHSRS training in the country. Officers will take these worked examples into account when assessing hazards. Worked examples can be found at <http://www.eastmidlandsdash.org.uk/downloads.asp#hwe> and through the [LACORS website for Bristol City Council examples](#).

### **Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)**

The CIEH is the main professional body that covers enforcement in the private rented sector. The CIEH produces guidance from time to time on relevant issues. This guidance will normally be considered when officers make enforcement decisions. Officers are not bound by CIEH guidance.

## Appendix D – Summary of Partners

If it is in the public interest, matters concerning non-compliance may be shared, where appropriate, with other enforcement agencies including the Police, Lancashire Fire and Rescue, Health and Safety Executive and other council departments. The requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 will be followed in relation to use of personal data.

RBC Departments	Work Area
Council Tax and Housing Benefit	Using powers under the Housing Act to get information about a property in relation to enforcement issues such as tackling empty properties, identification of unlicensed HMOs and anti social behaviour.  We also share evidence we collect to reduce council tax and housing benefit fraud.
Crime Safety Officer	Sharing information to tackle anti social behaviour including calling and attending multi-agency case conferences to tackle anti social behaviour connected around persons and premises.
Street Scene and Area Action Teams	Collaborative working to tackle fly tipping, waste related offences and support on s215s to deal with privately owned properties that are detrimental to the amenity of the neighbourhood.
Building Control	Sharing information to tackle health and safety issues in privately owned and rented property.
Planning Enforcement	Sharing of information to deal with health and safety related issues.

Partner Organisation	Work area
Children and Young Persons and Adult Services Lancashire County Council	We will inform Children and Young Persons and Adult services where we believe a vulnerable person's health, safety or welfare is in danger.  Where we are aware we are dealing with vulnerable adults in relation to enforcement action will not take action without consulting Adult services and Community Care. We will co-ordinate our enforcement action with any care and support services available where possible.
Pennine Lancashire Local Authorities	Where possible we will work collaboratively with the other Councils in the Pennine Lancashire sub-region to formulate common approaches to issues that affect service users across our own boundaries. For example we are looking to establish a joint protocol for dealing with Fire Safety and the level of Fire precautions we expect in rented accommodation.
Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service	Promoting Fire Safety in Homes. Working together in relation to legal duties under the Fire Safety Regulatory Reform Order 2004.
Lancashire Police Service	Taking practical steps to improve security in homes and working together to tackle Anti Social Behaviour in Private Housing and cases of harassment and illegal eviction.

Stakeholders	Work Area
Private Sector Landlords Forum	Wider issues such and HMO Licensing and Enforcement approach as well as specific issues affecting landlords in Rossendale.

Landlords organisations	Wider issues that affect landlords generally; HMO Licensing approach, Enforcement Policy
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**Appendix E – List of people consulted in relation to this policy**

## Appendix F – Enforcement Tools and Techniques

The following are an example of some of the means available to the Health, Housing and Regeneration Service:-

<b>Tools or technique</b>	<b>Objective</b>
Details of Housing Benefits	To find out who owns a property, who is claiming benefit
Details from Council Tax	To find out who owns a property, whether it is occupied and who is liable for Council tax payments
Land Registry Search	To find out who is the registered owner of a property or piece of land.
Interviews under caution	To record where an offence is suspected further evidence and to give the suspect the opportunity to formally explain the circumstances around the suspected offence.
Company's House Search	To identify the details of a registered company, who the directors and company secretary are and their registered address.
Notice Requesting for Information about a property	To legally require a person to provide details about ownership and occupation of a property or piece of land
Warrant to Enter a property by force if necessary	To identify if a house is being occupied contrary to a Prohibition Order, if it is and unlicensed HMO or to carry out works in default or if any action is required under the Housing Act.
Testing of Fire Alarms, Electrical Installations, and Gas installations; or A structural survey	To determine if any action is required under the Housing Act.
Require Gas Safety Certificate or Electrical Installation Inspection certificates to be produced.	To confirm that the document is in existence and whether any further action under the Housing Act is required
Require documents to be produced – such as tenancy agreements or management contracts.	To identify who are the tenants of a property, who has management responsibility to identify whether any action under the Housing Act is required.

The requirements of the Data Protection Act 1984 will be followed in relation to use of personal data.

Please note this not a definitive or exhaustive list of tools, techniques and objectives.



## **Appendix G - Appeals and Complaints Procedures**

### **Informal Action**

Where informal action has been taken at which a person wants a review of the action then representations should be made to the named officer who has been the main correspondent about the matter as soon as possible or within the time limits stated.

Where it is possible to resolve the issue informally the Council will endeavour to do so. Where that is not possible you will be informed of what will happen if the informal request to do something is not followed such as the service of a formal legal notice.

### **Formal Legal Action**

In most cases where formal legal action is taken there will be a statutory framework for appealing any decision made by an officer. Where this is the case the relevant appeals procedure should be followed. Where formal action is taken by the Council such as serving a formal notice the details of where to appeal will be provided as well as the time limits for any appeal.

Anyone considering an appeal is encouraged to immediately discuss the matter with the officer concerned to see if the points of issue can be resolved without the need for a formal appeal where that is possible. This **must be carried** out before any time limits for an appeal expire otherwise the right to appeal may be lost.

### **Complaints about action taken or an Enforcement Officer**

If a person is unhappy about the way action the Council has dealt with an issue or the way an officer has acted you can make a complaint under the [Complaints Procedure](#). In summary the complaint procedure has two stages.

Stage 1 – Complaint reviewed by the officer concerned, line manager or supervisor and written response given within 10 days.

Stage 2 – If you are unsatisfied with a response you can make a Stage 2 complaint. A stage 2 complaint is reviewed by a Head of Service Manager or Director and a written response provided.

Please note that the subject of a complaint should not include any aspect that it would be more appropriate to make representations on or which a formal appeal should be made.

### **Ombudsman Complaints**

If you are unhappy with the Councils response to your complaints you can complain to the [Local Government Ombudsman](#). The Ombudsman will normally only accept a complaint when you have exhausted the Councils own internal complaints procedure.

## Appendix H - Scenarios of enforcement action.

Please note not all cases are the same and may not necessarily follow the same procedure as indicated below. Each case is judged on its own merits.

<b>Scenario</b>	Complaint from tenant that their roof is leaking.
<b>Action</b>	A tenant telephones and says that there is a leak in their roof. When asked it's apparent that the tenants have not talked to their landlord about it. We would advise them to contact their landlord to ask them to carry out the necessary repairs but to ring if the repairs are not carried out promptly.

<b>Scenario</b>	Landlord asks to have property accredited.
<b>Action</b>	We would provide details of what is expected for a property to be accredited with the Council so the landlord has a good idea of any improvements or repairs that will be required. We would also identify if there was a need for some security improvements or energy efficiency measures such as loft insulation. We would ask for up to date Fire Alarm Test Certificates. Following an inspection if we found repair issues such as several spindles of a banister missing (potential risk that someone could fall through) we would write an informal letter to the landlord asking for them to be repaired within a month. On completion of works, provision of up to date alarm certificates and potential security works and loft insulation provision then the property would be accredited.

<b>Scenario</b>	Complaints about lack of heating, damp and mould in a property.
<b>Action</b>	<p>The tenant of a house emails the Council and complains that their home is cold as there is only a gas fire in the lounge and electric panel heater in the hallway of their Victorian two bedroom house. The tenants have asked the landlord several time to provide better heating as there is black mould forming on the walls even though they have the heating on as much as possible and are ventilating rooms to prevent the build up of moisture.</p> <p>An officer inspects the property and confirms what the tenant has said as well as finding that there is no loft insulation, that there are solid walls and that there are metal framed single glazed windows which are badly warped and letting in draughts and water sometimes when it rains. The officer carries out an assessment and identifies that action is required under the Housing Act. The landlord had previously complied with informal requests to carry out work by Environmental Health and as such a letter and schedule of works was sent to the landlord asking for the provision of central heating to the flat, insulation to the roof and that the windows were replaced with new double glazed units. The landlord was given a month to start the works and 3 months to complete the works. After, 9 weeks the landlord had not started the works and when contacted said that they hadn't organised for any contractors to carry out the works and intended to leave the works until the New Year. As winter was approaching and there was no reasonable prospect of the works being carried out in time a formal improvement notice was served requiring all the works to be carried out and a charge of £300 was made as the works had not been carried out after an informal request to do so. The Landlord then carried out the works within the timescales required in the Improvement Notice.</p>

<b>Scenario</b>	Tenants complain about a dangerous spiral staircase.
<b>Action</b>	<p>Tenants contacted us about a spiral staircase in the property they were renting. The landlord had installed the staircase to access the loft room he had built. The tenant was concerned because the staircase moved around as you walked up it, had no hand rail and there was no balustrade at the top to stop someone falling off. The tenant was over 60 and his 4 year old grandson regularly came to stay.</p> <p>An officer visited the same day and found the staircase was so dangerous that there was an imminent risk of personal injury from the staircase collapsing as well as the risk of someone falling down the unguarded edge in the loft room. The officer tried to contact the landlord but he denied there was a problem so the officer carried out Emergency Remedial Action under the Housing Act. They employed a contractor to come out the same morning and remove the dangerous staircase. A Prohibition Order was then made which prohibited the use of the loft room for sleeping or living accommodation until the conversion was brought up to current Building Regulations. The landlord was recharged for the works carried out by the contractor, and for the service of the Prohibition Order.</p>

<b>Scenario</b>	Complaint about sewage backing up into someone's house.
<b>Action</b>	<p>A complaint about sewage overflowing from someone's toilet identified that there is a blockage in a private sewer which three house's waste drains into. As there is a public health risk a legal notice is served on all three house owners requiring them to clear the blockage within 48 hours. The 3 homeowners were unable to agree on appointing a contractor so the works were carried out in their default by the Council. The cost of jetting the drains and the Councils time for organising the work was recharged equally between the 3 occupiers. A couple of weeks later the toilet blocked again. The same procedure was followed and at the time the sewer was unblocked a camera survey was carried out which identified that part of the sewer had collapsed and needed relining. The owners were informed and a legal notice was served requiring them to get the sewer relined within 6 weeks. The owners then organised for the repair works to be carried out and split the costs between them They repaid the cost of the CCT survey and the notice was cancelled.</p>

<b>Scenario</b>	Complaint that a HMO property was unlicensed and that the fire alarm and electrical installation had been vandalised and not repaired.
<b>Action</b>	<p>A tenant living in a large 3 storey HMO complained that other tenants had vandalised the fire alarm and smashed electrical sockets leaving live wires exposed in the hallway. They had told the landlord and the landlord had seen the damage but that was 2 weeks before hand and nothing had been done about it. From checking our records we were aware that the landlord had signed a simple caution for not licensing an HMO 2 years ago. An inspection was carried out and it confirmed that the property should have an HMO license and that the damage to the Fire Alarm and the Electrical installation in the common parts contravened the regulations in relation to the</p>

management of HMOs.

The landlord was then prosecuted in the magistrates' court for operating an HMO without a licence and for contraventions of the management regulations. A Formal Improvement Notice was served requiring the works to make the property safe. As the landlord had committed offences in relation to renting houses he was found not to be fit and proper and the licence his licence application for this house and the other he held on another HMO was revoked and the application fees retained. The landlord then had to pay managing agents to run his licensed HMOs.

## Appendix I Simple Caution Assessment Scoring Scheme

CRITERION	SCORE	TOTAL
<b>Risk to Health &amp; Safety</b>		
No risk to health and safety	5	
Risk to health possible, but unlikely	10	
Caused minor ill effect, potential for more serious effect in more vulnerable groups	15	
Identified or potential serious medical effect	20	
<b>Previous history</b>		
No previous history with Local Authority	0	
Have reacted to previous advice, change usually effective	4	
Do react to advice, change not always effective, confidence in management is moderate	8	
Compliance with previous advice is patchy, confidence in management is low	12	
Failure to respond to previous advice	16	
<b>Ability of witnesses</b>		
Witness would rather not attend court but might be persuaded	1	
Witness would require witness summons to attend	2	
Witness willing to attend but may not be effective under cross examination	3	
Witness willing to attend and will be effective	4	
<b>Willingness to prevent recurrence</b>		
Steps taken to prevent recurrence, confidence that these will be effective	2	
Steps taken to prevent recurrence, doubts that these will be effective	4	
Steps promised to prevent recurrence but confidence is low that promise will be fulfilled	6	
Not willing to prevent recurrence, no confidence that proprietor is capable of preventing recurrence	8	

CRITERION	SCORE	TOTAL
<b>Probable public benefit</b>		
Negative publicity generated by case	1	
Penalty / publicity will have very limited value	2	
Penalty / publicity will ensure improvement in the case in question	3	
Penalty / publicity will prevent other similar offences	4	
<b>Explanation offered by defendant</b>		
Explanation satisfactory, factors appear to have been beyond defendant's control	3	
Explanation shows that prevention was possible but that necessary steps had not been taken	6	
Explanation poor, blatant failure to control circumstances leading to offence	9	
No explanation offered, wilful disregard for public health	12	

The total score will determine the course of action to be taken.

Decision	Score
Informal Action	16-24
Formal Action	25-64

Recommendation of Investigating Officer Informal / Formal Action\*

Signed..... Date .... / .... / ....

Decision of Health and Housing Manager / Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration\* Informal / Formal Action\*

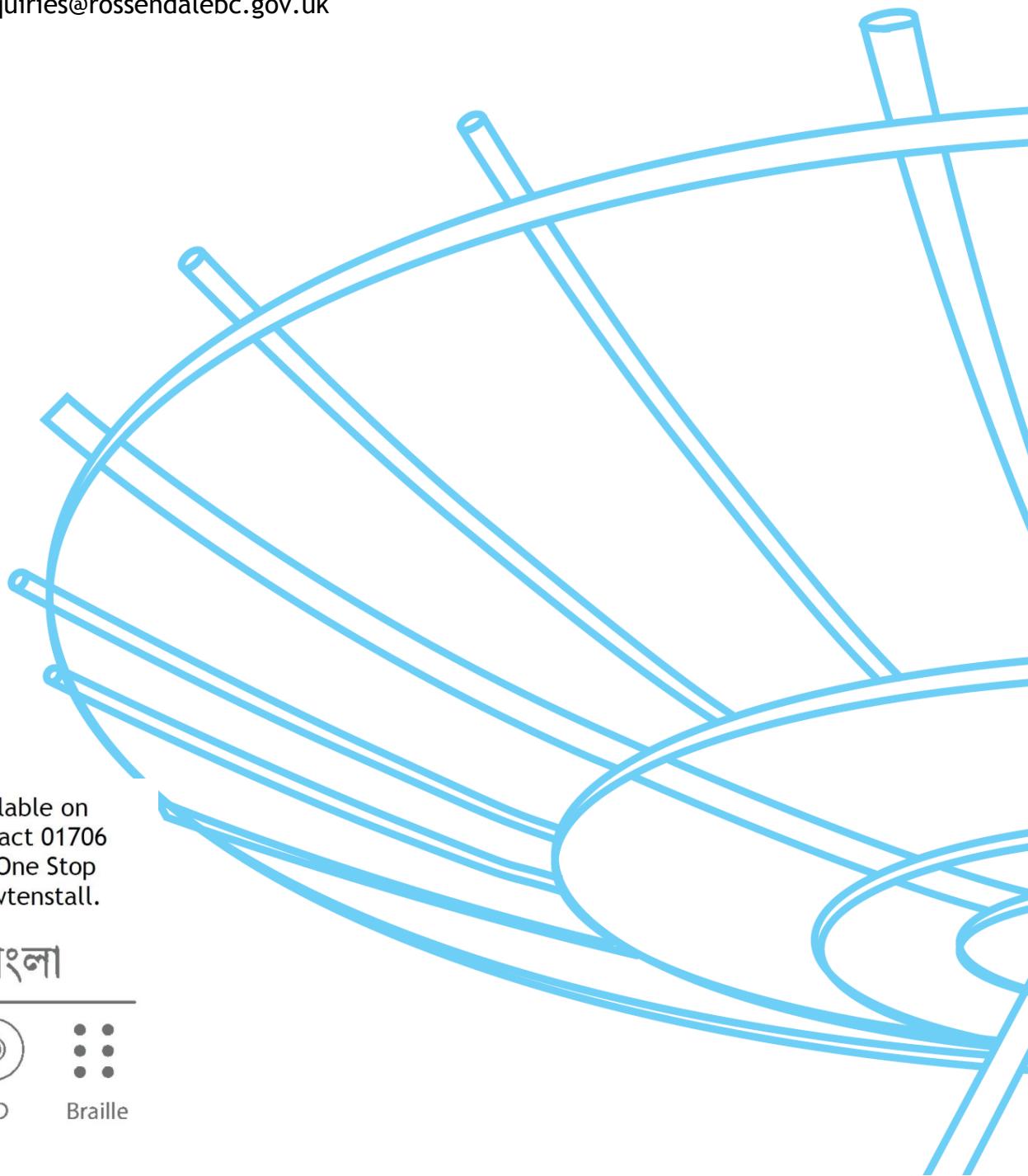
Signed..... Date .... / .... / ....

\*Delete as appropriate

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