



Department for Communities and Local Government

Local Housing Authority Leaders in
East and South East London,
Greater Manchester
and East Sussex

Kris Hopkins MP
Minister for Housing

***Department for Communities and Local
Government***

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Dear Leader

I am writing further to the publication of a joint report, *A Roof Over My Head*, by the housing charities, Shelter and Crisis, on 26 February, about the experience of 128 people over a period of 19 months who had been rehoused in the private rented sector following a period of homelessness. I was very concerned to learn that while some of the individuals involved had a positive experience and were placed in accommodation that met their needs, a significant number ended up being housed in properties that were of very poor quality and had significant defects.

The study was carried out in three regions of England; East and South East London, Greater Manchester and East Sussex. The local authorities that were actually involved in placing these individuals in the private rented sector were not identified in the report. I am therefore writing to all local housing authorities in these areas so that they are aware of my concerns. I will also be making a copy of this letter available on the Department's website.

From November 2012, local authorities have had new powers under the Localism Act to use good-quality private rented sector accommodation to meet the main homelessness duty. This sensible reform can help councils respond more flexibly to the housing needs of local people. At the same time, we put in place extra protection for the most vulnerable. The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 set out important provisions, including the requirements that properties used to accommodate homeless households should be in reasonable physical condition, with a valid gas safety certificate, and should adhere to electrical safety standards.

Local authorities also have powers to ensure properties in their areas do not present health and safety risks to their occupants. These powers range from issuing an improvement notice to taking emergency action to fix a hazard where there is an immediate risk. I am concerned that there may be instances where a local authority is placing a homeless household in a property that contains such hazards. We expect councils to make full use of these powers and help to drive up the standard of privately rented accommodation, protect tenants and to crack down on the rogue landlords who rent out unsafe and overcrowded accommodation. We have also strongly supported the 'Gold Standard' scheme, which aims to help local authorities raise the standard of their services to homeless people. I have been encouraged to see that the great majority of local

authorities have committed to pursuing the Gold Standard. The ten challenges within the Standard include a commitment to developing a suitable private sector offer for households, with a focus on the quality of stock available.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kris Hopkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

KRIS HOPKINS MP