Housing Services newsletter



Issued by Slough Borough Council for our tenants and leaseholders

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ISSUE 64 January 2025

Welcome from Cllr Paul Kelly

Lead Member for Housing, Highways, Planning and Transport

You may have noticed the newsletter is now published on a quarterly basis. We are hoping to make the newsletter more informative and are keen to get your ideas for articles and topics you feel would be relevant to include. Please contact the team by emailing getinvolved@slough.gov.uk

Housing Highlights has long served as a useful way for the council to keep residents informed about housing news. We had a busy 2024 and made progress in several key areas.

Resident safety remains our top priority. We are conducting regular checks that include gas safety inspections, fire risk assessments, emergency lighting tests, asbestos surveys, boiler replacements, and water safety tests.

Additionally, the council has made progress in implementing the action plan for our Resident Involvement Strategy. This plan aims to foster a culture of resident involvement, strengthen the Resident Board, and provide the necessary resources and support for effective participation.

We are also working to ensure that the Right to Buy (RTB) process is as smooth and straightforward as possible for residents wishing to purchase their homes. I am pleased to report progress on sites like Clarendon Court and Brammas and Spackmans. At Clarendon Court, we have replaced several windows and doors, which will help reduce energy costs and improve the overall appearance of the building. Addressing the roof issues reported at Brammas and Spackmans has also been a priority.

As many readers will know, damp and mould remain a significant concern, affecting 27% of properties. We are implementing long-term solutions - including the installation of sensors to identify problems, Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) systems, and upgrades to loft insulation and extractor systems. These efforts will continue throughout this year to help reduce damp and mould in homes.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of homelessness in our borough, especially with the colder

nights we have had. In Slough, we are witnessing an increasing number of individuals at risk of becoming homeless, which highlights the urgent need for a strong prevention strategy. Last year, we successfully prevented hundreds of cases of homelessness, but it remains a constant challenge. We are actively utilising the Homeless Prevention Grant funding, and our team is working diligently to maximise our stock of Temporary Accommodation to prevent homelessness whenever possible. If you do see a rough sleeper, please report them via https://thestreetlink.org.uk/ as this connects reports to local services.

While we, of course, face challenges, we also have a dedicated team that actively addresses the difficulties faced in the borough each day. They are committed to building on the positive progress we have made.

Resident involvement update

Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 is one of the most significant changes over the last decade. The Act sets out the standards that social housing landlords have to adhere to. It strengthens residents' voices and gives more powers to the Regulator and Housing Ombudsman to hold landlords to account.

In line with the above, last year Slough's Resident Involvement Strategy was agreed by cabinet and is now in the implementation phase.

We are currently in the process of recruiting a team to work with the Resident Board and wider residents to increase resident involvement, giving residents an opportunity to feed into service improvements.

In the year ahead we plan to get more residents to <u>sign up to our</u> <u>database</u> (forms.office.com/e/ Fm2C5js5ZG) of involved residents, as well as recruit and train new members to the Resident Board. The board training plan will enable members to fulfil their roles more effectively.



Some of our existing members have had a tour of Slough, visiting local areas to understand some of the issues across the borough, as well as visiting a void property. They have attended a training session by <u>Four</u> <u>Million Homes</u>, (www.fourmillion homes.org) as well a Housing Quality Network event.

I signed up to the Four Million Homes website and have attended a couple of training sessions, one of which was a webinar on Decent homes that was very interesting. I would encourage people to sign up.

Christine

Attended the evening session of the Housing Quality Network event; it was very insightful and entertaining at times! It was very inspirational and thought provoking, I found it useful and got a lot from it. I even took notes and asked for slides.

Tanieque

Housing crisis

The lack of social housing is a common theme in the media, as well as families struggling financially. The council has published cost of living support and a resource pack to support residents struggling due to financial pressure and say: The council has a list of cost of living support online at www.slough.gov.uk/ costofliving to help those struggling due to financial pressure. We have also signed up to Lightning Reach, where residents can fill in their details and see if there are any matching financial grants available. See page 5 for more details.

There has been an increase in homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation and a lot of pressure on councils across the country.

The resident board has been monitoring performance and one aspect is around void turnarounds. They wanted to get an understanding of how this works, so the housing team took a couple of our members out to visit a void property and talk them through the process.

Two of the members talk us through what they experienced.

Christine's viewpoint

We visited a ground floor one bedroom maisonette. The property was empty and there were no soft furnishings on floors as it's the council's policy to remove these before any new tenant comes in.

The housing officer explained the voids are turned around in either 20 or 60 days according to the state the previous tenant has left them and if there is major work needed, such as new kitchens or bathroom or heating etc. This is so that contractors can be obtained to work on the property to bring it up to the standard required.

All electrics and gas boiler are serviced before a new tenant takes over.

The Langley void appeared in good condition so I would expect it to go into the category of 20 days turn around.

We were told that incoming tenants do not have the chance to refuse the property and view another.

I enjoyed the experience of being able to view this void as it gave me an understanding of the condition of the property, the category of turn around it fell into and what work was needed before it was let again.

Bushra's visit

As a board member, I was interested in seeing a void property before it was given to a new tenant.

On 4 November Christine and I viewed a one bedroom flat in Langley.

The tenant must give the council four weeks' notice to end a tenancy. They will be advised to take all their belongings and leave the property in an acceptable state, ensuring it is left in a clean and tidy state. The tenant must take out the flooring and carpeting before handing back the keys. They must fix any damages and clear their belongings or there could potentially be an additional charge.

There are four stages when a property is returned to the council.

- Stage 1 keys returned on termination.
- Stage 2 the property is handed over to the voids team.
- Stage 3 the team goes in to categorise the property. A standard property with minimal repairs would be completed in 20 days. The gas and the electrics will be checked. The minimum requirement is that the property is painted to a basic standard.
- Stage 4 this is where major repairs are required such as new kitchen, bathrooms or electrical repairs This can take up to 60 days.

A new tenant will only be offered one property which they must accept.

Thank you to the team at SBC housing for facilitating the visit and for their extensive knowledge.

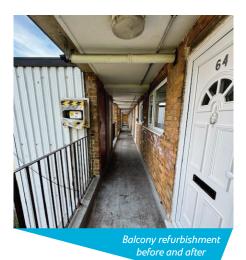
Housing development updates

Brammas Close and Spackmans Way

Work has been completed here over the past three months, including a communal refurbishment and flat roofing/balcony work.

There has also been new flooring, wall decorations, stair nosings and painting of cupboard doors to enhance and brighten the communal spaces.

In addition, many of the groundfloor residents have faced leaks caused by failing roof coverings and damaged drainage systems on the balcony areas. To address this, Cardo has replaced the old failing coverings with a Restec system and repaired drainage outlets on the balconies to provide a long-lasting solution to these issues.





Ullswater Close

The renewal of roofs and insulation on 12 bungalows at Ullswater Close has been completed. Alongside this, PV battery systems have been installed to enhance energy efficiency and reduce heating costs for residents. These improvements have resulted in significant upgrades of the EPC ratings. Similar work is currently underway at Birley Close.



Bathroom refurbishment before and after

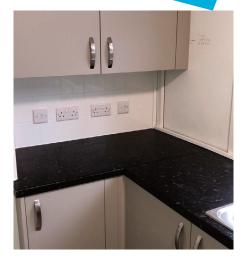


Folkestone Court and Borderside

At two properties, a complete kitchen and bathroom refurbishment has been undertaken, including asbestos surveys, kitchen remodelling, tiling, and new flooring, along with the installation of a new bathroom. The result is a substantial improvement in the residents' facilities.



Kitchen refurbishment before and after



Garrick House refurbishment update

Following planning approval, refurbishment work has begun at Garrick House. Originally a highdependency care home, this building of nine flats has been vacant for more than a year. Cardo, in partnership with the council, is converting it into 10 flats - six twobedroom and four one-bedroom units. Nine of these homes are expected to achieve an EPC A rating.

Groundworks, including drainage and car park improvements are well underway and the building has been stripped back to its shell to facilitate the conversion. A rear infill extension is finished with internal structural work also progressing. Plans for a ground source heat pump are in development. Further updates will be shared in the next issue of Housing Highlights as the project advances toward completion.

Apply for **financial support grants** in one place

We know that rising heating bills can be a worry for many. To help ease this pressure, we've partnered with Lightning Reach, a financial support portal where residents can easily find and apply for a range of help.

Individuals can complete a profile by answering a simple 10–15-minute questionnaire.

Once the profile is complete, they will be able to see the available support they may be eligible for in one place, get updated when more support is added, and apply for multiple sources of support directly through the portal.

You can get support with:

- Energy and utility bills
- Home improvements and energysaving upgrades
- Warm clothing and essentials
- Furniture and white goods.

Almost $\pounds 1$ million has already been given out to households this winter, with successful applicants receiving an average of $\pounds 1,070$. With more than 2,500 financial support schemes available, there's something for everyone, so please don't miss out on help you could be eligible for.

The council is training some of its housing officers on the system, so they can use it for their clients, or direct them to try the portal themselves.

Councillor Paul Kelly, lead member for housing, highways, planning and transport, said: "It is fantastic to have such a portal where residents can find out about a variety of support and only need to make one profile to be able to start applying.

"Our housing team is taking part in a six-month trial with Lightning Reach

and we hope it will help a lot of residents to get some extra financial help,

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particularly around energy bills in these colder months."

The Lightning Reach portal features more than 2,500 support schemes including grants from charities, local council funding and support with utility bills, including social tariffs.

Anyone who needs financial support to help pay for an unaffordable or unexpected cost, for example, utility bills, disability adaptations or replacement furniture/white goods, can be signposted to use the portal.

To find out more about making a profile, visit the <u>Lightning Reach</u> website (lightningreach.org).

Contact information

Housing Management

- North Slough email: northteam@slough.gov.uk
- South Slough email: southteam@slough.gov.uk
- East Slough email: eastteam@slough.gov.uk

North team:

- Haris Syed
 Sam Sharif
- Hanna Irfan
- Caroline Shannon (TSO)

South team:

- Sundeep Sharma
- Neil Weightman
- Lauren Hamilton
- Julia Costello (TSO)

East team:

- Rachel Fox
 Ilona Chomiak
- Razwan Khan Ayan Ali
- Toni-Marie Happe
- Jessica Bunyan (TSO)

James Elliman Homes

Officers: Nadia Marhri/Ade Naiwo

• Email: jehomes@slough.gov.uk

Rent queries

- Queries about your rent direct debits, or refunds: rentaccounting@slough.gov.uk
- Queries about rent arrears: rentrecovery@slough.gov.uk

Leaseholder enquiries

- Day to day issues email: Homeownership@slough.gov.uk
- Service charge invoices and payment queries email: revenues@slough.gov.uk

- Service charge costs/calculation queries email: neighbourhoodrecharges@slough. gov.uk
- Right to Buy* queries emil: rtb@slough.gov.uk

Repair reporting and caretaking

- Call Cardo: 0800 9151215
- Email: booking.slough@cardogroup.co.uk
- Web: <u>www.slough.gov.uk/xfp/</u> <u>form/177</u>
- Follow up enquiry relating to repair/caretaking: _RMIComplaints@slough.gov.uk

*see page 9 for a Right to Buy update



HOUSING SURGERIES TWEL Britwell Centre, Wentworth Avenue, SL2 2DS

10am-4pm Dates:

This is a drop-in session for council tenants and leaseholders to discuss enquiries about their property, tenancy or neighbourhood with a senior neighbourhood officer.

• 23 January • 27 February • 27 March • 24 April • 22 May • 26 June

- 24 July
- 28 August
- 25 September • 23 October
- 27 November
- 18 December

Scan to register your interest for opportunities to monitor and influence service improvements

Slough



HOUSING SURGERIES Langley Library, Trelawney Avenue, SL3 7UF

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10am-4pm

This is a drop-in session for council tenants and leaseholders to discuss enquiries about their property, tenancy or neighbourhood with a senior

neighbourhood officer.



Dates:

Scan to register your interest for opportunities to monitor and influence service improvements

Slough

Slough's **Children's Centres/** Family Hubs are here to help!

- **er:** stay and play sessions
 - parenting support
 - breast feeding and infant weaning support
 - oral health information
 - food bank vitamins/healthy start vouchers
 - support with debt and finance
 - pre and post natal health support pre and post natal exercise
 - early years provision adult learning
 - support for your family ask us anything!

Chalvey Grove • SL1 2TE • 01753 574387 Penn Road • SL2 1PG • 01753 574420 Romsey Close • SL3 8PE • 01753 540797

Email: childrens.centres@slough.gov.uk Follow us on Facebook: Slough Early Years For more info: Scan the code >>> Visit: www.sloughfamilyservices.org.uk



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Electrical fire safety

In partnership with the national Fire Kills campaign, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) is encouraging residents across the county to pay attention to their electrical appliances.

The Electrical Fire Safety campaign draws attention to the fact that unsafe and faulty appliances continue to be a serious fire risk in homes.

Paul Scott, Central Hub Prevention Manager for RBFRS says: "Many accidental electric fires can be prevented by doing a few routine checks and taking care of our appliances.

"Simple steps such as not overcharging battery-operated appliances, regularly removing lint from tumble dryers, and never placing phones or other electrical devices under pillows or blankets while charging, can significantly reduce the risk of fires caused by electricals. "If an electrical fire should occur, remember to get out, stay out, and call 999. Pull out the plug and switch off the power only if it is safe to do so, and never pour water onto an electrical fire."

Follow these steps to reduce the risk of electrical fires:

- Ensure you register your electrical appliances so that you are the first to know of any safety repairs or recalls. You can do this through the manufacturers' websites, or through the <u>Register My</u> <u>Appliance</u> website (www.register myappliance.org.uk).
- Do not overload plug sockets extension leads and adaptors have a limit to how many amps it can take, so be careful not to overload them.
- Keep electrical appliances clean and in good working order look

out for any dangerous signs such as flickering lights, hot plugs/sockets, blown fuses, scorch marks, etc.

- Regularly check for frayed or worn cables and wires.
- Switch off your appliances at the socket when not in use.
- Buy your electrical chargers from a reputable source - always check that they adhere to UK safety regulations.
- Avoid placing phones or other electric devices under pillows or blankets whilst charging.
- Avoid overcharging your batteries.
- If you own an e-bike or e-scooter, do not try to add extra batteries to try to make it go faster.

For more electrical fire safety advice, visit the <u>RBFRS website</u> (www.rbfrs.co.uk/your-safety/ safety-at-home/electrical).

Stop smoking support

More than five million adults in England still smoke. Approximately 15,542 adults in Slough smoke.

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health. If you quit smoking for 28 days, you're five times more likely to quit for good.

When you stop smoking good things start to happen - quitting will allow you to start moving better, breathe more easily and give you more money to spend. The health benefits start straightaway:

 within 20 minutes of stopping, your heart rate and blood pressure drop

- after 12 hours, the carbon monoxide level in your blood returns to normal
- long-term benefits include a reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

There is lots of support available.

Take advantage of <u>Health and</u> <u>Wellbeing Slough</u> (healthandwellbeingslough.co.uk/se rvices/stop-smoking), the local Stop Smoking Service, which offers free advice, support, and nicotine replacement therapies. Or you can contact them by:

- Telephone: 0800 0614734 / 01753 373646
- Text QUIT to 66777
- Quit with Bella app <u>www.quitwithbella.co.uk</u>
- Online referral form healthandwellbeingslough.co. uk/referral-form/

Visit the <u>Better Health</u> website (www.nhs.uk/better-health/quitsmoking) to sign up and receive daily support emails, download the free NHS quit smoking app, and get a free Personal Quit Plan.

Community equipment returns

The council has two new drop-off sites for small to medium sized community equipment. These facilities are part of our ongoing commitment to improving community social care services and enhancing accessibility for our residents.

When equipment is dropped off at the allocated sites, NRS Healthcare will collect, clean, repair and recycle/reuse it by providing it to others in need.

Locations of drop-off sites

- 1. Observatory House Car Park, 25 Windsor Road, Slough SL1 2EL. Opening times: Monday-Friday 9am-5.30pm. To access, please speak to reception to be let through the gate.
- 2. Chalvey Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC), White Hart Road, off Spackmans Way, SL1 2SF. Open 7 days a week. Access by vehicle only. For opening times and access requirements click <u>here</u> (www.slough.gov.uk/householdwaste-recycling-centres-wastetransfer-station/opening-hourschalvey-household-wasterecycling-centre).

At both locations, residents will find a dedicated container clearly labelled for the return of community equipment.

Items accepted:

- adjustable bed rails
- adjustable shower chairs
- bathing equipment
- commodes
- perching stools
- rollators
- toilet frames
- other similar small community equipment.



Items not accepted

Please note that due to size and safety restrictions, the following items cannot be accepted at these drop-off sites:

- mattresses
- profiling beds
- mobile hoists
- wheelchairs
- any other large community equipment.

This is to make sure the containers can be used efficiently and remain accessible to all users who need to return smaller items. You can return larger items by calling NRS on 0344 893 6960 who will be happy to arrange collection.

Cllr Anna Wright, cabinet member for adult social care, mental health and learning disabilities, said: "By reusing and recycling equipment, access to items needed is improved for our residents, as well as being kinder to the environment. All equipment is cleaned, repaired, and stored by NRS Healthcare ready for the next user."

If you have any questions about what can be dropped off, or if you need further information about the new community equipment drop-off sites, please do get in touch by:

- email:
- reablementadmin@slough.gov.uk
- phone: 01753 475111, option 1 for Adult Social Care.

CO-WORKING

Enjoy a free week of flexible working and breakfast this January.

Whether you're an established business seeking fresh space for your team, a growing startup looking to take your next big leap, or a freelancer building your dreams, Plus X Innovation Slough is the place to unlock your full potential.

Take this opportunity to immerse yourself in a space where ideas flow, collaboration thrives, and success is just around the corner.

Enjoy 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday access to their state-of-the-art innovation hub.

- Access to a range of coworking, breakout, and communal spaces to work from.
- Private offices for teams to brainstorm, create and collaborate.
- Exclusive opportunity to join member-only events.
- Enjoy unlimited, complimentary hot and cold drinks.
- Enjoy a nourishing, healthy lunch from their in-house Café.
- Stay connected with their premium, super-fast WiFi.

Sign up now:

eu1.hubs.ly/H0fhnWC0 and join Plus X Innovation from 27-31 January.



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CARDO activities

Two Langley trades college students, Adam and Marwan, completed two-week work experience placements with Cardo Slough. Cardo has recently also taken on two new apprentices, who were past work experience students.

Along with other businesses organisations, Cardo Slough supported the Slough Youth awards 2024, hosted at the Lynch Hill Enterprise Academy. Cardo sponsored the 'going green' award, which was won by Slough Young Beekeepers.





Cardo also supported local litter picks, including one with council teams in Langley as part of Anti-Social Behaviour Action Week.

Using their community support day, Cardo Trades Apprentice Owen, Repairs Supervisor Helen and Voids Coordinator Laura joined the Colnbrook community tidy up along with the council and other organisations and business who sent along volunteers to help.



Right to Buy

The Right to Buy team have been extremely busy over the past few months.

Following the government's announcement on 30 October about the changes to Right to Buy Discount, we have received an influx of applications. The increased volume of application in a short period of time has impacted our response times. Please bear with us, while we deal with your applications. Thank you for your patience.



Public consultation on proposed changes to Slough libraries

Have Your

A consultation is open on the future of how library services are provided.

The recommended proposal suggests condensing library services into fewer buildings, stopping services from Cippenham and Langley libraries. These would continue to be provided at Britwell and The Curve, which are two of the council's key operational sites for public facing services.

The reduction in staffing budget would be achieved by not recruiting to two vacant posts.

In the council's current financial situation, keeping four libraries open is not considered affordable and making no changes is a risk to the council's financial sustainability. This is the reason for considering alternative options.

Currently, operating hours in Cippenham and Langley are limited. Reducing to two libraries would maximise the use of the buildings and enable Britwell library to become a staffed library, rather than self-service. It would also mean the publications budget would be spread across two buildings, instead of four and the proportion of the publications budget spent on online resources would increase. No decision on changes to the library service will be made until Members discuss all options with feedback in Spring 2025.

The consultation asks for a range of feedback, looking in detail at how the options being put forward could make an impact and what alternative models for the library service could look like.

The public consultation is for current library users, or those who access services in Cippenham and Langley buildings, and people who do not currently use libraries but may do in the future.

There have been several drop-in sessions already, and these are the remaining dates for residents to ask questions and find out more.

In-person events

February

- Wednesday 19, Cippenham Library, 11am-1pm
- Wednesday 19, Langley Library, 3-5pm

Online session

• Tuesday 11 February, 6.30-7.30pm

To attend this, <u>reserve a place via</u> <u>Eventbrite</u> (www.eventbrite.co.uk/ e/library-consultation-onlinediscussion-tickets-1113632929069) Councillor Puja Bedi, lead member for education and children's services, said: "We are committed to providing our valued library service, to the benefit of our residents and to enable access to books from a young age.

Say

"This opens a discussion on what we believe is an opportunity to improve the library service by using resources to best effect.

"There needs to be a consultation about these ideas, to give plenty of time for residents to share their feedback before results are presented back to Cabinet in the spring."

There will always be a <u>24/7 online</u> offer, where books can be renewed, and e-resources can be accessed. (www.slough.gov.uk/libraries/eread ing)

The consultation is open until 25 February.

Find out more information and the online survey on the <u>consultation</u> <u>webpage</u> or at <u>www.slough.gov.uk/</u><u>libraryconsultation</u>



Winter Blues? You are not alone

Many of us find winter a difficult time of year.

Here are some top tips to brighten the darker days!



There are people and places to visit if you need help, advice or someone to talk to.

- Visit Safe Haven for emotional support and information if you are in crisis. Calls and messages are monitored during opening hours. Messages can be left outside these times and will be responded to. Call: 07790 772863 (5-11pm daily). Email: east.berkshirehaven@nhs.net Opening hours: Thursday-Sunday, 5-11pm. Address: 54 High Street, Slough, SL1 1EL.
- **Samaritans** who provide a free 24-hour telephone support service. Call: 116 123.
- 5 Ways to wellbeing: Visit <u>www.mind.org.uk</u> for information and support about looking after your mental health.
- Talking Therapies offer support with common challenges like low mood, stress and anxiety. Call 0300 365 2000 or visit talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk. Your GP can also refer you.
- Contact Slough Community Connectors for information and help to find community activities and support. Call: 01753 251387 (Mon-Fri 8am-4pm).
 Email: communityconnectors@sloughcvs.org.uk
- Slough Community Directory provides lots of information about local community groups and services to help you stay connected including singing, gardening, exercise and litter picking groups. <u>sloughhealth.org</u>

- Slough Treatment, Advice and Recovery Team (START) is a free, confidential service for anyone who is concerned about their own or someone else's substance use. The service is dedicated to promoting wellbeing and recovery from addiction when you feel ready to take those steps. START also provides evening, weekend as well as drop in sessions in various locations across Slough. Address: 27 Pursers Court, Slough SL2 5DL. Call: 01753 692548 Email: START@turning-point.co.uk Website: www.turning-point.co.uk/services/slough
- Contact Citizens Advice East Berkshire if you are worried about benefits, work or need support with debt and money management or want housing information. The Slough Advice line: Freephone 0808 812 7022 Mon-Fri 10am to 4pm. Alternatively, you can use National Citizens Advice Webchat www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contactus/contact-us/web-chat-service/ usually available 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. If there are no advisors available, the option to send an email instead becomes available.
- Contact Health and Wellbeing Slough for support and help to stop smoking, for weight management, to prevent falls for older people, and to access free NHS health checks. Call 01753 373646 or 0800 0614734 Email: info.hws@nhs.net Web: <u>healthandwellbeingslough.co.uk</u> or <u>healthandwellbeingslough.co.uk/referral-form/</u>



Housing Ombudsman Service

We can help if you live in social housing and have a problem complaining to your landlord.

Our statutory Complaint Handling Code sets out how a landlord must respond to a complaint, including timescales.

We are free, fair, and impartial and can make orders to landlords to put things right.

Contact us via our online webform at **www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk** or send an email to **info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk**



You can call **0300 111 3000** or write to us at: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Preston, PR2 0ET

