

A guide to supporting Tower Hamlets residents with housing issues

This guide aims to help those working with Tower Hamlets residents with housing issues to steer them towards the right sources of support in the context of a national housing shortage. It was developed with the Tower Hamlets Health and Housing Task and Finish Group with health professionals in mind, but may be useful for a range of services.

NB much of the information in this guide is specific to Tower Hamlets. It is correct as of *July 2024* but details may change with legislation expected from the new Government.

Key points:

- There is a **national shortage** of housing. Social housing - housing rented from the council or a housing association - which offers lower rents and security of tenure, is in exceptionally **high demand** in Tower Hamlets.
- Residents can apply to join the waiting list for social housing (the '**Common Housing Register**') and if they qualify, be placed into a band, dependent on their circumstances. However, there are @25,000 households on the Tower Hamlets housing waiting list. Even those in top priority band face **waiting times of many years** for social housing. Some will never be successful.
- **Highest priority** (Band 1) is awarded to households in emergency situations, as well as those with priority **medical need** (such as a severe and long-term limiting illness or permanent disability) which is **worsened by their housing situation**.
- High priority is also given to those who are **under occupying homes** that could be freed up to relieve overcrowding.
- Many households in Tower Hamlets live in **overcrowded** conditions. Over-crowded households are awarded **Band 2** priority, along with those who are homeless or who have other priority needs but no connection to the Borough.
- In the current housing situation, the **average waiting time** for a two bed property for those in priority Band 1 is five years. It is much longer for bigger properties. Many households in lower bands will never be offered social housing.
- More details of the allocations scheme can be found here: [The Common Housing Register Partnership Allocations Scheme \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://towerhamlets.gov.uk/the-common-housing-register-partnership-allocations-scheme)
- Problems with housing conditions such as **damp and mould** are a concern in Tower Hamlets as elsewhere. All rented accommodation should be fit for human habitation and tenants should have a means of redress against landlords if not.
- **Environmental Health** departments are responsible for ensuring homes are safe.
- This guide contains the **pathways** which tenants should follow when there are hazards in the home, such as damp and mould, and the point at which to involve others.
- It also contains links to **other organisations** which may be able to provide advice and support to Tower Hamlets residents.

How to support residents with medical needs who want rehousing

If a residents would like to apply for medical priority and already have an active housing application, they should **contact their lettings officer** or the council's Housing Options service by calling 0800 376 1637 or 0207 364 7474. They will be sent a questionnaire which they should fill in themselves. Form filling support can be provided by the [Tower Hamlets advice services](#).

Those who have a **severe and long-term limiting illness or permanent disability**, which is worsened by their housing situation may qualify for Band 1 on the housing register, but still wait a long time for rehousing.

If a resident is struggling with activities of daily living, they may be suitable for an **Occupational Therapy assessment**. Referrals can be made by health and social care professionals, or residents can self-refer on the council website [here](#) or by searching 'occupational therapy assessment' on the council website.

What information should healthcare professionals provide about health?

If the council needs information from a healthcare professional about a resident who is applying for medical priority, the council will **request and pay for** the letter directly. There is **no benefit** in sending a letter before one is requested. It is more effective to **support residents to self-advocate**, ensuring they explain their health issues thoroughly and include a list of medications they take (which can be obtained free from their GP.)

How to support residents facing damp, mould and other problems with the condition of rented housing

Both private and social landlords must adhere to legislation in relation to damp and mould or face prosecution or financial penalties. The [Council website](#) contains a great deal of advice on preventing and dealing with damp and mould to prevent this spreading and becoming hazardous to health.

The process for reporting hazards for council tenants, housing association tenants and tenants of private landlords are different and are summarised in the diagram overleaf. If a health or social care professional is concerned that the timeframes listed would put the resident at risk, or that appropriate action has not been taken in relation to a health and safety hazard in the home, they can write a letter for the tenant, stating their concerns. For **council tenants**, the tenant should upload this to the myhome portal (by searching on 'report a repair' on the council website.) The letter would form part of the information used to prioritise repairs. **Housing association tenants** should give the letter to their housing association or to Environmental Health. For **private** tenants the letter should go to environmental.health@towerhamlets.gov.uk. Letter to Environmental Health should include the resident's name and address, who they pay their rent to, how many people occupy the property and landlord details. Letters are added to case files and could influence the support offered to the tenant.

Pathways for reporting hazards in rented properties

Check whether landlord or tenant has responsibility for the hazard

Encourage the tenant to check [here](#) or search 'house repairs' on the council website www.towerhamlets.gov.uk. Proceed if landlord is responsible.

Tower Hamlets
Council tenants

Housing Association
tenants

Private tenants

Tenant **reports repair** to council via Housing Service Centre* on 0800 376 1637 OR website (www.towerhamlets.gov.uk) OR Residents Hub at Town Hall*
*Translation service available. Residents can nominate third party to communicate

Tenant **reports repair** to Housing Association

Tenant **reports repair** to private landlord

Tenant can use sample letter on council website if required

Repairs are dealt with in priority order: emergencies within 24 hours; non-emergencies within 20 working days; mould reports within 10 working days. Mould visits will be prioritised if a resident has respiratory illness, immuno-suppression, is under 14 or 65+

Landlord should investigate and respond within 14 days, then complete any required repairs within a reasonable time period

If no response within 10 working days or issue not resolved, email environmental.health@towerhamlets.gov.uk to receive a call back, or contact them on 0207 364 2965/5008 (ask for health and housing)

If urgent (eg serious risk to health) EH officer contacts resident within 24 hours. If non-urgent, resident must provide further written details; landlord is given 14 days to remedy problem

If not resolved Council tenant can
- call the service centre on 0800 376 1637
- complain online: search 'make a complaint' on www.towerhamlets.gov.uk
- contact **Housing Ombudsman Service** (housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

If repair not completed tenant can complain
- to their housing association (search Council website for 'council and housing association tenant complaints')
- to environmental.health@towerhamlets.gov.uk or 0207 364 2965/5008 (ask for housing and health)
Or contact **Housing Ombudsman Service** (housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

If no progress after 14 days, EH Officer will assess nature, extent and urgency of the problem and arrange an inspection to carry out an assessment and take action to ensure all private sector homes are safe, habitable and free from Category 1 hazards

If unhappy with the way the council has dealt with the issue, the resident can complain by searching 'complaints process' on council website.

How to support residents to find alternative accommodation

1. If there has been a **change in circumstances** since the housing application was made, such as a new medical condition or a change in household size, encourage the resident to inform the council ([Change of circumstances \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://towerhamlets.gov.uk)) or search 'change of circumstance' on the Council website.

2. Pass on these **top tips for successful bidding**:

- Do bid for homes **actively and regularly**; use your three bids for all suitable homes
- Don't just bid for a particular **property type**
- Only bid for **ground floor** properties if there is a medical need these are high demand
- Do widen your search to different **areas and landlords**
- Don't forget to bid on **new build homes** – these are sometimes grouped as a single advert and classed as one of your three bids.
- Residents can be set up to **auto bid**, which may be particularly useful for those unable to regularly bid for themselves and needing support

3. Encourage residents to **be realistic** about the housing they need now in the context of a national and local housing shortage. To assess if social housing is realistic and look at other options such as **shared ownership** or **mutual exchanges**, residents may wish to search [Ways to move - Homeseekers \(thhs.org.uk\)](https://www.thhs.org.uk).

4. Signpost residents to other agencies may be useful. Some are listed below.

Housing Advice Team (private sector) Housing.Advice@towerhamlets.gov.uk 0207 364 7474

[Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network](#)

[Citizens Advice Tower Hamlets – Citizens Advice East End \(eastendcab.org.uk\)](#)

[Local and national advice services](#)

[Shelter: housing charity](#)

[Non-Profit Free Advice and Representation For Tenants \(justicefortenants.org\)](https://www.justicefortenants.org)

[Tower Hamlets Renters Union](#) – community of renters, campaigning for better housing

Search approved local affordable housing providers on the Council website for a full list of housing associations

Information on damp and mould

[Understanding and addressing the health risks of damp and mould in the home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Citizens advice: Damp and mould guidance](#)

[Tower Hamlets Council damp and mould advice](#)

Other

[Social prescribers | Tower Hamlets Connect](#)

[Tower Hamlets support with the cost of living, including food and fuel poverty and benefits advice](#)

[Real: Disabled People's Charity](#) – independent, confidential service, offering one-to-one and group support for disabled people living and working in Tower Hamlets

[Reporting a rogue landlord to the Greater London Authority](#) – reporting form for landlords who do not have a property licence, may be holding an incorrect licence or breaching the terms of their licence

This guide was produced by the Health and Housing Task and Finish group

We are interested in any **feedback** you have about to inform the next version of this guide. Please email matthew.quin@towerhamlets.gov.uk