

Mansfield District Council's guide to

Standards for Supported Exempt Accommodation



Mansfield
District Council

Contents

Introduction	3
Core principles of good supported accommodation	4
Support to tenants	6
The housing benefit claim	11
Housing and property standards	13
Common housing standards issues	14

See separate publication of “Supported Exempt Accommodation Templates and Documents”, for relevant documents identified below.

Introduction

Supported housing covers a wide range of accommodations but can generally be defined as housing with support attached to it, whether that be 24/7 carers or support workers who help people gain independence in everyday life.

This accommodation can be provided by the council, housing association, registered charity, or voluntary organisation where that body, or person acting on their behalf, provides the claimant with care, support, or supervision on more than a minimal basis.

The rent for these accommodations is also usually paid for by an exempt housing benefit from the local authority. The key part of this for housing benefit purposes is 'support', and the tenant should not be living in supported accommodation if the support provided is not needed.

Mansfield District Council accepted funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government to help drive up standards of private-supported accommodation for tenants with complex needs in Mansfield. This has allowed the council to create a small team to assess, improve, and enforce standards in supported housing in line with the new Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023.

It also helps to ensure that the taxpayer gets good value for money when it comes to the amount of rent that providers can charge for supported housing, which is paid for through housing benefits, by scrutinising housing benefit claims.

The team is part of the council's Healthy Homes Hub project, focusing on supporting people with complex needs and improving poor property conditions. They inspect properties, ensuring compliance with legislative standards in regards to repairs, hazards, and licensing requirements. They also draw up the required standards for offering supported housing, which focuses on safeguarding tenants with detailed support plans and a pre-eviction protocol. The team also works with Nottinghamshire County Council on commissioned contracts to align quality standards across the district.

This document has been produced to help our supported accommodation providers and tenants. It aims to make sure that provision within Mansfield meets local needs, is being delivered to a high standard, and represents value for money based upon regulation, guidance, good practice, and the views of supported tenants.

The standards set out in this document define Mansfield District Council's core principles and expectations of operationally supported accommodation providers in the district and will detail specific requirements for the three key areas:

- The support for tenants
- The housing benefit claim
- Housing and property standards

This document will be an active working document, providing an opportunity for review and updating of new information or further legislation, regulations, and recognised good practices. If you would like to comment on this document, please email: [**healthyhomeshub@mansfield.gov.uk**](mailto:healthyhomeshub@mansfield.gov.uk).

Core principals of good supported accommodation

Core Principles can help define an outstanding supported accommodation provider and establish their organisation's values and ethos. These principles can include but are not limited to:

- Tenants have a right to be treated with dignity and respect, and a right to live free from harassment, neglect, fear, or abuse. Support providers should aim to promote and encourage the independence and wellbeing of the individual tenant by delivering the best quality support.
- Support should be person centred and a holistic approach through strengths-based practice. *See document B - Support Plan Template.*
- Service provision should be consistent and fair, with strong principles of anti-discrimination, taking into account (but not limited to) gender, race, age, culture, religion, belief, language spoken, sexual orientation (LGBTI) or disability.
- Providers must take full responsibility to ensure the health and safety and safeguarding of tenants, staff and others. Risk management and safeguarding policies are of paramount importance. *See document C - Risk Management Policy Template, document D - Safeguarding Policy Template and document E - Health & Safety Policy Template.*
- Supported accommodation should be suitably located, well managed and maintained, to work towards an improved quality of the neighbourhood. Living environments should be secure, safe, well-managed and promote good health and wellbeing. Each tenant's needs should be assessed to ensure they match these appropriately to both the property, local environment and other residents.
- Providers should conduct their business and their interactions with tenants in a fair, open, and transparent way. Provision must be transparent about any failings and open to improvements.
- Providers should display a keen willingness to continually adapt and improve their practice, and ensure tenants have the right to participate in decisions about the service provided to them and be regularly consulted about whether it meets their needs. Managers should use this to review support plans on a regular basis. This includes effective and clear mechanisms for complaints handling in line with the new Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. *See document G - Complaints Policy Template.*

- The journey towards independent living is encouraged, and transition into independent accommodation is actively facilitated to help tenants to progress with their lives and improve their housing situations.
 - Tenants should be provided with opportunities and support to integrate into both their accommodation and their communities.
 - Ensure that the organisation is clear what it offers to tenants in terms of 'care, support or supervision'. This should be explained clearly to tenants and referring agencies and be available in simple, clear formats and in a variety of ways to cater for language and literacy needs.
 - Tenants' rights to privacy, dignity and confidentiality must always be respected and upheld.
 - Supported Accommodation Providers should commit to working in partnership, collaborating with a range of agencies to enhance tenant experience and ensure safety, wellbeing, and progression. This will help them to deliver the best quality support, promote the best quality experience and outcomes for their tenants.
 - Assist tenants to complete benefit applications in a timely manner that facilitates smooth transition into the accommodation.
 - Support and work with tenants to secure their own independent accommodation once they are ready to move on and also provide resettlement support and visits.
- See document H - Move On Policy Template.*



Support to tenants

The council, tenants, supported accommodation providers and its partners should be working together towards meeting the following standards for suitably located, safe, well managed and maintained accommodation.

Tenancy support provides targeted, personalised support to maximise independence and facilitates move on to independent accommodation.

Referrals and assessments

Although referrals are not limited it should be recognised that preference should be given to applications who have a local connection to the Mansfield District in order to support Mansfield's residents. Effective referral and assessment mechanisms can reduce risk, enhance resident and neighbourhood experiences, aid household stability, reduce abandonment's, and evictions.

Providers of supported accommodation should make their ethos and vision known, and make clear what specific support is offered and to what specific client group. Referral forms should be designed with this in mind and should be detailed to capture all relevant information to make it easier to assess each client and should include risk management information. *See document I - Referral Form Template.*

Detailed initial assessments should be conducted to identify each individual's specific needs. This can then ensure that the provider matches the individual's tenant needs appropriately to both the local environment and other residents within the accommodation. Face to face assessments, wherever possible, are best practice.

Providers must have and strictly adhere to appropriate confidentiality and data sharing and GDPR policies and protocols. Information shared between services or agencies to facilitate the transition of a tenant to other support services should be shared or transferred in a secure and confidential manner. Further information on data protection: [Data Protection Act 2018 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/data-protection-act-2018). *See document K - Signed consent form for data protection and data sharing agreement and document L – Data Protection GDPR Policy Template.*

Tenants introduction / welcome packs / tenancy agreement / rules / regulations

The tenant's entry to the service should be fully informative, considerate to their current circumstances and responsive to their needs.

Tenants should be welcomed to the accommodation by a staff member and introduced, as far as possible, to other residents.

An agreement should be explained clearly to a tenant before they sign it, and tenants should be made aware of the consequences of any breach of the agreement.

Creating shorter or simplified and easier to read versions of the agreements, alongside the full signed copy may help tenants understand their rights and responsibilities and can be referred back to at a later date.

Tenancy and licence agreements take many forms and the law in this area can be complex. However, it is important you are aware that tenancy agreements give residents much stronger rights around notice to leave / eviction and there are several things a landlord must have put in place before they can legally serve a notice of eviction on a tenant.

Tenancy agreements give residents much more security than licence agreements. However, it is important your organisation and staff know **why** you are using a particular type of agreement and it is good practice to regularly review this to ensure it is best meeting resident and organisational needs.

Tenants who have limited English or who experience verbal communication difficulties, should be provided with appropriate mechanisms to make sure they understand everything from the outset and enable their full participation in the support.

This might include support with appropriate language skills, community members, or translation services etc. Support should be made available in different formats such as pictures, video and braille dependent upon the individual's needs.

Welcome packs or handbooks which should include details on local amenities and services such as job centres, community centres, leisure centres and parks, health centres, colleges, places of worship, foodbanks, and charities.

Tenants are supported to engage and contribute to their chosen communities. This should be central to the plan to maximise independence and achieve fully independent living. **See document P - Database of Local Services.**

Organisations should ensure tenants have one named worker that they can contact. We do appreciate that due to various reasons including staff turnover, it is not always possible to have the same worker but it is best practice for tenants to have one allocated worker so they can build up a trusting and productive relationship with them.

An out of hours number should be made available for emergencies (evenings and/or weekends). It is important that organisations are able to connect with vulnerable residents after weekends and follow up promptly on any issues that may have arisen.

Essential phone numbers should also be displayed prominently in a communal area such as a hallway or kitchen.

Support plan / bespoke holistic approach / realistic

Individual support plans should be created and tailored to the specific areas of support and may require ongoing intensive support to regain independence. Providers should assist tenants to engage with a range of support agencies where appropriate to deal with these issues.

Support should be person centered and bespoke. Staff should take a holistic approach and work to the principles of trauma informed care (TIC), especially when working within homelessness. Support should be of a good quality, informed, flexible, consistent and reliable.

Plans should set clear goals and outcomes; however these should be realistic goals and based on strengths. Tenants should be involved in planning their support and asked what is useful for them and information provided on how to be a good neighbour. **See document N - Tips on how to be a good neighbour.**

There should be a minimum level of support identified and the tenant advised on how this support will be delivered, for example will this be face to face or via a telephone call. Scheduled support sessions should wherever possible be met and at the specified date/days and times scheduled.

Plans should focus on independent living skills and should allow for positive risk taking, allowing service users to learn from their choices. Organisations should provide regular forums to encourage a two-way communication channel between the organisation and the tenant. As well as being good practice, tenant involvement schemes can help to minimise complaints and enhance resident experience.

Support plans should be re-assessed regularly and adapted or updated if needed based upon each success no matter how small this may be.

Workforce / support staff

Providers should ensure that staff delivering the support and anyone engaging directly with tenants, should be appropriately trained to carry out their role and be experienced and skilled. In addition, anyone working with vulnerable adults should be DBS checked with the Disclosure and Barring Service. They must also be able to manage a caseload safely and effectively, and have a good awareness of professional boundaries, lone working, conflict management, and mediation. Staff training records should be kept accurate and up to date.

The service should be delivered by staff with local knowledge including (but not limited to) knowledge of access routes to settled accommodation, local agencies delivering support and housing services and health and social care services.

Providers should have committed leadership. Management should be effective and supportive and enable support staff to have supervision and support. Staff should be provided with opportunities to continually develop their skills and practice and have access to any relevant training and development needs.

- ✓ Basic Staff Training should include but is not limited to:
- ✓ First Aid (medical)
- ✓ Health and Safety
- ✓ Mental Health
- ✓ Safeguarding / managing risk
- ✓ Managing difficult situations / mediation
- ✓ Positive interviewing / risk assessment techniques
- ✓ Suicide Awareness
- ✓ Substance misuse and recovery awareness
- ✓ Blood-borne viruses (e.g. HIV; Hepatitis B and C)
- ✓ Notifiable Diseases (e.g. TB; measles, acute meningitis, COVID)

Providers should attend networking events and work with Mansfield District Council and other partners to share, understand and deploy best practices.

Providers should take ownership of the quality of their service and recognise the importance of working with others across all services/voluntary sector to drive quality alongside co-operation with support staff and tenants.

Policies and procedures

All providers should have relevant Policies and Procedures in place. Health and safety policies should cover how to keep people safe in their accommodation, e.g. fire alarm, extinguisher, maintenance and upkeep of accommodation, frequency of health and safety checks and how they are recorded. Liaison with Environmental Health should also be documented. **See document E – Health & Safety Policy Template.**

A policy should be in place that covers who can make complaints, how they will be reviewed, resolved and recorded. Procedures should include who to complain to, time scales and routes for escalation. Your organisation should ensure residents are aware that they can speak to staff, formally or informally, if they have any issues, complaints, or concerns. You should aim to create a culture of openness and responsiveness and assert to residents their right to complain without consequence. **See document G – Complaints Policy Template.**

Pre-Eviction protocols should be in place and include circumstances which determine whether eviction takes places, legal requirements, warning procedure, notice periods, abandonment, non-payment of rent/support charges and exclusions. Early liaison with the relevant local authority including the Housing Solutions and Housing Benefit Teams. **See document O- Pre-Eviction Protocols Template and document M – Non-Engagement Policy Template.**

Anti-social behaviour policy should include descriptions of what constitutes anti-social behaviour, warning stages, methods to resolve and escalate action. **See document J – Anti-Social Behaviour Policy Template.**

All providers to have relevant policies in place such as:

Referral and assessment procedures	HR policy / staff handbook
Complaints policy and procedure	Anti-social behaviour policy
Health and safety policy / first aid	Safeguarding and vulnerable adults policy
Substance misuse	Fire safety / emergency escape
Room allocation policies	Risk assessments
Tenancy / license agreements and resident handbook	Recording of past and present members of staff and volunteers and also DBS certificates
Bespoke support plans for all residents	Financial safeguarding
Domestic abuse	Equality and diversity
Confidentiality and data handling	Lone working

Safeguarding / risk management

It is essential that the tenant's support and the environment is safe, appropriately managed and responsive to their changing needs and circumstances. The provider should understand and be committed to their safeguarding requirements and responsibilities.

Providers must have specific internal safeguarding policy and procedures. Staff and volunteers should be provided training upon induction and should be regularly updated and reviewed. All safeguarding referrals must be logged, and outcomes recorded. **See document D - Safeguarding Policy Template and document F - Domestic Abuse Policy Template.**

Providers must hold a record confirming that all members of staff and volunteers have relevant Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates, which is in line with standard practice for those working with vulnerable adults. Enhanced DBS certificates must be vetted to ensure that no unacceptable risks are identified. All DBS documentation should be reviewed annually.

A risk assessment policy should include how risk will be assessed, what level of risk will be acceptable and how risk will be managed including risk reduction factors.

Resettlement support

An organisation should be able to meet the tenant's needs, help them achieve their aspirations and enable them to make any necessary positive changes.

Ongoing support may not be required at the move-on address. However, where appropriate, the following may be required:

- Ensuring that the property is set up to aid living sustainably with or without support
- Property provides a safe, healthy and secure environment
- Utilities are in place
- Applying for Universal Credit and any other eligible benefits/or completing change of circumstances documents for Housing Benefit purposes if not already claiming universal credit as their primary income
- Budgeting plans are in place
- Support in sourcing furniture and essential items
- Assisting with information regarding local GPs
- Compile a local info pack – transport, community and leisure information
- Handover to any new support service including a handover meeting involving the client, out-going support worker and the incoming support worker
- Production of an after-support plan that addresses individual needs
- Ensuring that key community support is in place dependent on need

The above objectives are to encourage positive move-on outcomes.

Resettlement support is also crucial to ensure that there is a greater likelihood that settled arrangements will be sustained in the future, and in turn a greater likelihood that citizens may access employment or training opportunities in Mansfield. **See document H - Move-On Policy Template.**



The Housing Benefit claim

The Housing Benefit Department will work with the Supported Housing Improvement Team in carrying out a dual approach to the review of Supported Accommodation.

New providers

Any new providers should initially complete our New Supported Accommodation Provider Questionnaire which can be found on our website, [See document A](#).

The Supported Housing Improvement Team will then make initial contact in response to this questionnaire and extra information may be requested to ensure that the services and support provided is consistent with the stated provision, and to provide an opportunity for schemes which do not meet minimum standards to work with the council and relevant partners to make appropriate improvements.

This may include visits in person to the proposed scheme offices, meeting the scheme management and key support personnel, an assessment of the scheme's ability to provide adequate support to tenants, and visits to scheme accommodation to assess the condition of the property and to speak to the tenants regarding the support they receive.

Determining whether a scheme can be classed as specified or exempt accommodation can be quite a lengthy process and it is imperative that providers consult with the Housing Benefit department at the earliest opportunity to avoid any delays in the process. This is because, until a decision is reached, tenants may have to claim universal credit or meet their own housing costs.

The Housing Benefit Department will then determine the eligibility of the scheme in accordance with the Housing Benefit regulations.

Intensive housing management

Intensive Housing Management (IHM) is not defined in regulations, but case law has considered it as housing management tasks carried out above and beyond the normal management tasks a landlord would be expected to perform. Examples of this include helping tenants maintain their accommodation, helping with budgeting, and arranging for repairs to be carried out. These are tasks which a tenant would be expected to carry out themselves in general needs accommodation.

Landlords seeking to be classed as 'exempt' accommodation based on the provision of IHM, rather than any additional support functions must note that this cannot be guaranteed, and the exempt status will be under closer scrutiny to confirm that this additional support is being provided to the individual tenants.

The housing benefit claim

The landlord should assist their tenants to complete their application for Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Reduction (CTR) and forward this, with any additional original documentation available within the first benefit week of moving into the property.

It is important the form is submitted at this stage as backdating of HB entitlement is limited to one month and conditional upon there being continuous good reason for it not being completed on time.

Under a leased-based model Housing Benefit will expect to receive the following:

1. A lease agreement between the Freeholder/Owner and the Supported Housing Provider; and
2. A tenancy or licence between the Supported Housing Provider and the tenant.

Leases

These should ideally be on a basis of three years or longer.

Any lease which exceeds seven years need to be registered at the Land Registry. The leases should permit sub-letting, (for the purpose of providing Supported Housing), and ideally would be on full repairing insuring terms, meaning the landlord will be responsible for ensuring repairs and insuring the property.

Tenancy agreement / license

The Tenancy Agreement or Licence is required to establish rental liability and occupation. Where a tenant does not have capacity to sign such an agreement, evidence from the landlord confirming their rental liability and occupation, along with confirmation from the person's social worker with respect to their capacity can be accepted for HB purposes.

Change in circumstances

The landlord will make tenants aware that changes in circumstances may have an immediate effect on HB entitlement and they are expected to actively engage and encourage the tenant to inform them of any change in their circumstances that may affect the benefit they are receiving.

The landlord must immediately report any changes in circumstances that they are made aware of.

Landlords will engage in regular communication, with the Housing Benefit Team to inform of current occupation and movement in and out of their accommodation and should contact Housing Benefit prior to issuing the tenant with an eviction notice or proceeding with court action.

The supported housing team

The team will be carrying out a series of reviews on existing Supported Accommodation properties to ensure that the details provided in the Housing Benefit submission are still correct.

Each month a number of supported accommodation properties will be selected for a visit. The tenant will be visited in their property and a discussion will take place regarding the support they are receiving. In addition, tenants may also be consulted at other premises frequented by tenants such as local soup kitchens and food provisions.

Once this information has been received the team will consider the evidence provided to confirm that the tenant needs the services provided, that the services are being received, and that the support provided is 'more than minimal'. In the case of 'Exempt' schemes considered under 'Intensive Housing Management' particular attention will be given to confirm that the support provided is more than would be expected of a landlord of general needs accommodation.

Following the visit, advice and guidance may be provided to the provider relating to the suitability of support provision.

If a provider is unable to provide the details requested by the Supported Housing Improvement Team or make requested improvements in support provision, it may be assumed that suitable support is not being provided.

Review findings relating to a single property/ tenant may indicate further investigation of other associated scheme properties is required. A report to the Housing Benefit Department will detail the review team's recommendations if further action is required.

Housing and property standards

Our Private Sector Housing team assess the condition of rented properties in the area, including supported housing. Housing standards are enforced using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Standards are also maintained by mandatory HMO licensing and licensing conditions.

The Private Sector Housing team also offer advice and guidance on compliance.

HHSRS

The HHSRS was introduced with the Housing Act 2004 and it is used to identify hazards within the home that could affect the health of any of the residents in the property. There are 29 hazards that any property is assessed against.

The HHSRS will consider:

- The chance of harm.
- How serious it will be.
- Whether there is any extra risk to children, older or vulnerable people.

Using the HHSRS operating guidance any hazards are then rated as a Category 1 or Category 2.

The hazards



Excess cold	VOCs	Personal hygiene	Fire
Dampness and mould growth	Crowding and space	Water supply	Flames and hot surfaces
Excess heat	Entry by intruders	Falls with baths	Collision and entrapment
Asbestos	Lighting	Falls on level surfaces	Explosions
Biocides	Noise	Falls on stairs	Position of amenities
Uncombusted fuel	Food safety	Electrical hazards	



Common housing standards issues

Dampness and mould growth

The causes of damp and mould growth are lack of ventilation, heating and insulation, it can also be from water egress.

How to reduce the risk:

- The property needs to be watertight.
- The property needs to have adequate heating and heating controls.
- It needs insulation of the roof space and cavity walls.
- It also needs sufficient ventilation both natural and mechanical.
- Tenants to be given advice on moisture build up.

Fire safety

The common issues around fire safety are inadequate smoke alarm and heat detector systems, and inadequate escape routes.

To reduce the risk of fire, it is important to ensure that an appropriate alarm system is installed for example a Grade D, LD3 system in a single-family house and a Grade D, LD2 system in a multiply occupied house. Not a standalone battery detector.

There should be 30-minute fire doors on escape routes for larger shared houses, and an alternative escape route when the escape route enters a 'high risk' room such as a kitchen.

Houses in multiple occupation

A House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) consists of three (3) or more occupants in two (2) or more households.

All HMO's are subject to The Management of House in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006, unless the HMO is managed by a Registered Provider. The HMO Management Regulations place a responsibility on managers of HMO's to ensure standards relating to fire safety, maintenance of living accommodation and gas/electrical safety checks are carried out.

Where there are breaches of the regulations the council can prosecute a manager for non-compliance or issue a civil penalty up to £30,000 per offence.

In HMOs where there are five (5) or more tenants consisting of two (2) or more households the property will need a licence, unless managed by a Registered Provider.

There are approximately 150 licensed HMOs within the Mansfield area, and the properties must operate under licence conditions. There are also minimum room sizes and amenity standards that supported housing providers need to be aware of.

Enforcement powers

Enforcement is always the last resort and officers will always seek to work with landlords and providers in the first instance where appropriate.

The process starts with informal action. This is a conversation and a written schedule of works with the provider about what works are required to remove or reduce any hazards identified.


If the work isn't carried out in a timely manner formal action may be taken such as the service of an improvement notice or the making of a prohibition order. Prohibition orders can prohibit individual rooms from use or whole properties depending on the outcome of the risk assessment.

Where hazards have been identified that are imminently dangerous to the occupants', emergency action can be taken by the Council such as making an Emergency Prohibition Order to prohibit a bedroom from use with immediate effect. And finally Emergency action.


Further information

Private Sector Housing

 adminpsh@mansfield.gov.uk

 01623 463702

HHSRS Guidance for Landlords

 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-health-and-safety-rating-system-guidance-for-landlords-and-property-related-professionals>

Amenity Standards in HMO's

 <https://www.mansfield.gov.uk/HMO>

If a provider wants to become a registered provider please see the published regulatory standards:- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/regulatory-standards>

Providers should consider how they can demonstrate compliance with these standards, and must be able to show it understands the nature of it's business, the skills required to manage the business, and know the stakeholders.

Benefits of becoming a registered provider or working with a registered provider can include:

- Liaising with local authorities to claim enhanced housing benefit
- Opportunities to work more closely with the local authority
- Landlords have more security as registered providers usually more established
- Registered providers take on the property management. Intensive housing management isn't easy and registered providers have the experience to help with this
- Peace of mind with a clear separation between care and tenancy
- Good reputation which can reassure investors and other stakeholders
- Showing that you are financially viable, properly governed and providing decent well managed homes
- Promotes investment in social housing
- Exempt status for housing benefit purposes for not-for-profit providers