



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Civic Centre
Tannery Lane
Ashford
Kent TN23 1PL
01233 331111

www.ashford.gov.uk



@ashfordcouncil



AshfordBoroughCouncil

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Dear

Audit of our housing service - update

We recently informed you that due to new regulations for housing providers, we were looking to carry out an independent assessment from an external specialist, to ensure that we were prepared for these changes. This letter provides an update on the audit and to let you know the next steps we are taking to meet the new requirements.

The audit was extremely thorough and has highlighted some key areas where further work is required to provide the assurance and high standards required of the council as your landlord.

Currently, we are not able to demonstrate that we meet the requirements required of us of the Decent Homes Standard, set by the Regulator of Social Housing. Decent Homes is the standard that the Council aspires to and for many years could demonstrate. However, the audit has highlighted that our last full stock condition survey is out of date and the way in which we store data across multiple systems makes it difficult for the Council to demonstrate that we still meet the Decent Homes Standard. This is not to say that our homes are not of a decent standard, just that we cannot demonstrate this at this current time.

We would like to reassure you that plans are now in place to address this, and we have already started on improvement actions.

What are we doing?

A full stock condition survey of all 5,000+ homes will take place. This will involve a visit to your home for it to be assessed, including a review of the condition of major items such as kitchens, bathrooms, and roofs. The survey will inform our Asset Management Plan helping



us to prioritise maintenance and improvements based on the urgency or severity of issues. It is crucial to ensuring that homes are habitable, safe, and comfortable. Appointments will be made with tenants, and surveys should take around an hour to carry out. We will get in touch with further details very soon.

We have introduced a new module within our IT systems, following the introduction of our in-house responsive repairs team. We will continue to roll out improvements in our digital systems to improve the quality and accessibility of data, which should aid the process when you get in touch to discuss your property and any works associated with it.

We have referred ourselves to the Regulator of Social Housing, the government appointed body that oversees landlords, like us. This self-referral demonstrates that we are clear about the need to make improvements.

What happens next?

The Regulator will review our approach to ensure that we can demonstrate that we meet the Decent Homes Standard, and we will keep in touch with you to let you know how we are progressing with our improvement work.

Further information

We understand that you might have some questions about this news and our letter. Please find some frequently asked questions enclosed. Further information can be found on our website www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-homes-survey. You can also contact us by email at housing.compliance@ashford.gov.uk or by calling the main council telephone number at the top of this letter.

Yours sincerely



Tracey Kerly
Chief Executive



Homes Survey - Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Decent Homes Standard?

The Decent Homes Standard sets minimum standards for the condition of all social housing in England and Northern Ireland. There are many factors involved in ensuring a property meets minimum standards, including ensuring that a property is in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonable modern facilities and services, and provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort (efficient heating and effective insulation).

2. If my home is safe, why did you write to me?

We are writing to every council tenant or leaseholder advising that we have decided to review the standard of our properties to ensure they continue to be a decent standard. We will continue to check your property on a regular basis. In the meantime, if you have any concerns, please let us know.

3. Is there anything that I need to do?

You do not need to take any action, we wanted to keep you informed of our news and we will contact you in the coming months to arrange a time to check your property. In the meantime, we will keep our dedicated webpage www.ashford.gov.uk/housing-homes-survey updated with any developments and include updates in our regular tenant newsletter.

4. Does it affect me, as I don't live in a block?

Yes, we will need to check all our properties to understand their current condition.

5. Can you tell me if my home is safe?

Yes, we believe all our homes are safe however, your safety and wellbeing are our priority, and we are working on a detailed survey of all our homes so that we have more detail about the conditions of our properties. If we need to inspect your home further, we will be in direct contact with you.

6. Why did you feel the need to do these checks?

We arranged the independent audit to help us understand how we can improve our policies and processes to give us and you the assurance that we are meeting our legal obligations and best practice.

We wanted to make sure that we had a good understanding of where we needed to focus our efforts in preparation for some tougher monitoring from the housing regulator.

7. What will you do when you have completed the condition survey?

The outcome will help us develop a comprehensive maintenance plan that ensures your home has regular upgrades and replacements, helping to keep it safe, modern and energy efficient.



8. Will I need to leave my home?

You will not need to move out of your home. If an item in your home does need checking, or we need to make any specific improvement, we will be in touch with you directly to organise this.

9. Can I refuse to have my home assessed?

No, this is important both for you and us to know if there are any area that require immediate improvement.

10. What if I have an outstanding request for repairs?

Carrying out our regular maintenance and repair work is still really important to us, and this will not change, please use our website to request a general council housing repair www.ashford.gov.uk/report-a-repair or call 01233 330366. Alternatively, repairs can be requested via the My Ashford app or Tenants Portal.

11. How long does this go on for?

We expect the condition survey to take around a year, and then we may need to visit you once we understand if there is any important maintenance we need to carry out. Some maintenance or repairs may be urgent, and these will be prioritised based on safety, but non-safety critical issues may take a bit longer.

12. Will my rent be reduced during this period, or if you find something you need to update?

No, your rent goes towards paying for the upkeep of your home and for the services that you receive. If you do not keep up with your rent payments, you could risk losing your home.

13. I am a council leaseholder; will I have to pay more for these works?

You will not need to pay more than you do already for the routine general servicing and maintenance. You *may* be required to contribute to additional works required to the communal areas of the building where you lease a property. This will be dependent on the nature of the works and statutory consultation will be undertaken in advance in this case.