



GUIDANCE BOOKLET

Guidance on applying for, and how to comply with the conditions of, the Runnymede Accreditation Scheme



Supported by



**Surrey
Fire & Rescue**



**SURREY
POLICE**

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
How the scheme operates	3
Guidance on the Accreditation Standards	6
The Tenant Code of Practice	11
Complaints Procedure	11
Contacts List	12

The advice and guidance given in this booklet is based on legislation and guidance in force as at April 2009 which will be subject to revision. The advice given is not intended to be a definitive guide. Independent legal advice should be sought where appropriate. Only the Courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

INTRODUCTION

The Runnymede Accreditation Scheme is designed to recognise and promote good quality, well managed private sector accommodation let to students in the Borough. Landlords are invited to apply for Accreditation of individual properties through compliance with the 20 Accreditation 'Standards'. The Standards require that the physical conditions of dwellings are fair and reasonable, and not liable to be prejudicial to the health, safety and welfare of the tenants or the surrounding neighbourhood. The standards also require the tenancy to be well managed. The standards should not be onerous to achieve as many of the standards reflect the minimum legal requirements.

The scheme encourages responsible behaviour by tenants through a 'Tenant Code of Practice'. This code of practice provides guidance to tenants on how to conduct themselves in the property in order to help landlords maintain the property and help them participate in the community in a positive way.

The scheme comprises of an element of self-regulation and accordingly relies on a degree of goodwill and trust on the parts of the landlords, tenants and the Council.

As well as complying with the standards of the scheme, Landlords, of course, still retain the responsibility for complying with any other legal requirements relating to the property and its management.

Why is Accreditation Important?

- Landlords, tenants and community members enjoy the benefit of good dwelling conditions, competent management and considerate neighbourly behaviour.
- Tenants are given a 'guide' that their accommodation is well maintained and safe and that the landlord will treat them fairly.
- Disputes and misunderstandings can be reduced.
- Problems that do occur can be promptly resolved.
- Tenants are able to make a more informed choice when choosing their home.
- The profile of responsible landlords is raised.

Why Should Landlords Consider Accreditation?

- There is no fee to join the scheme
- To distance themselves from incompetent or unscrupulous landlords.
- To be publicly identified as a good landlord.
- Improved access to information on proposals that may affect landlords, such as changes to legislation or local housing strategies.
- Free subscription to the Accreditation Newsletter.
- To gain the right to display an accredited landlord certificate within their property and to use the Accredited Landlord Logo when advertising their property.
- To benefit from the dispute resolution service being offered by the University.

HOW THE SCHEME OPERATES

1. The application stage

The first stage is for the landlord to apply and provide details of the property to be accredited in a questionnaire. If a landlord has more than one property, each property that is to be accredited must be assessed separately. The questionnaire enables landlords to certify that each individual property is safe and managed responsibly. Landlords must have read and understood the Accreditation Standards and be confident that they are meeting the standards before completing their application.

Where a property is managed by a Managing Agent both the landlord/property owner and the Managing Agent should complete the Application as the standards being assessed will relate to matters for which the property owner may still be responsible for as well as management standards which will be the responsibility of the Managing Agent. The term 'landlord' is used throughout this document but could mean Managing Agent in the case of managed property or property owner depending on the standard.

Once the application is received, an Officer from Runnymede's Private Sector Housing Team will examine it. Some clarification or further information maybe sought by telephone or letter. If the application is satisfactory a property inspection will then be arranged with the landlord. If the application is not found to be satisfactory the application will be rejected and feedback will be given in writing.

On application, landlords will be expected to:

- Commit themselves to partnership working
- Participate in and promote the Tenant Code of Practice
- Provide access to the dwelling for the purposes of inspection by Runnymede Borough Council.
- Ensure that the dwelling meets the requirements of the scheme or apply for approval of an Improvement Plan to undertake outstanding minor works within a reasonable timescale.

2. Inspection Stage

The second stage involves a full inspection of the property and confirmation that relevant conditions are met. A property inspection will be offered as soon as possible but will not be later than 3 months from the application date.

The Runnymede Accreditation Scheme is based on minimum legal standards, physical dwelling standards and management standards of landlords. An assessment of both aspects of the standards will be undertaken. Runnymede Borough Council will ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that the landlord is responsible, competent and suitable to be a member of the scheme in addition to assessing the condition and amenity standards within the property.

It is possible that the inspection and assessment stage will identify issues that were not apparent at the application stage and further work may be required before the standards can be met. Significant work affecting the health and safety of occupants should be carried out within 3 months of the inspection. If works are not completed within this time then an improvement notice may be served and a timescale imposed.

3. Decision Stage

Landlords will be advised in writing of the council's decision on whether to issue Accreditation to the property.

Successful Applications

A successful application is one where the property and its management are believed to be in full compliance with the standards of the scheme. An application can be successful even if the full conditions are not met as long as there is an approved Improvement Plan covering completion of any outstanding minor items.

Accreditation certificates will be issued by post. Certificates will apply to specific properties (not to a landlord's entire portfolio and will normally be valid for a maximum of 5 years). These certificates should be displayed in the property.

Pending Applications

Applications may be put 'on hold' if work to the property is required or changes required to the management standards (over and above minor items that could be covered by the Improvement Plan) and the landlord has indicated a willingness to make such changes. This ensures that the landlord does not have to re-apply for Accreditation.

4. Post Accreditation Stage

Runnymede Borough Council will maintain a database of Accredited Properties and will monitor standards in these properties and the completion of any works set out in Improvement Plans.

Requests for updated information

When requested by the Council, landlords must produce evidence that the electrical, gas and where applicable, fire alarm installations have been tested and are in safe working order. (The Fire Gas and Electrical Safety Logbook will help you to fulfil this requirement).

Landlords will also be required to complete further forms from time to time to self-certify that the property continues to meet the required physical standards and continues to be managed in the appropriate way.

Spot Checks / Routine Inspections

To ensure that standards are being maintained any property may be subject to spot checks. Visits may also be made if complaints are received from tenants or neighbours. All premises will be included in the council's proactive inspection system and will be re-inspected to check that requirements are being met.

Breaches of the Accreditation Standards conditions and suspension/withdrawal of Accreditation

The procedure for identifying and dealing with any breaches of the 20 Accreditation Standards is available on request. Tenants will, in the first instance, be expected to raise any complaints about possible breaches of the Standards with the landlord first and give them a reasonable period to respond before reporting it to the council. The council will then investigate complaints or reports that the standards are not being met. If a breach of the standards is identified or confirmed then action will need to be taken to ensure compliance with the standards or Accreditation is withdrawn. The aim will always be to seek compliance with the standards and withdrawal of Accreditation will be the last resort.

Landlords who do not implement any agreed Improvement Plan will also be treated as being in breach of the Accreditation Standards and their Accreditation may have to be withdrawn.

The Council will consider re-instatement of accreditation if the landlord can demonstrate that following remedial action, they are capable of meeting the requirements of the scheme.

Where necessary the Council retains its right to undertake other housing enforcement action for non-compliance with the law.

Withdrawal Procedure

If, in the opinion of the Private Sector Housing Section of the Council, a breach of standards occurs and has not been put right in adequate time or is so serious that the health of any tenants has been prejudiced, the accreditation status will be withdrawn. This will be done in writing and there will be an opportunity to appeal against such a decision.

Use of Information

A list of properties that have been awarded accreditation will be available to the public on the council's website. The only information available will be the address of the property. Full information on applications submitted for Accreditation and the progress of applications will be shared with the Royal Holloway University of London Accommodation Office. This information will be used by Royal Holloway for the purposes of identifying vacancies in accredited properties. Any advertising of vacancies undertaken by the Accommodation Office for students will involve the separation of Accredited properties and non accredited properties. Some acknowledgement will also be given where Accreditation has been applied for.

GUIDANCE ON THE ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The standards which must be met for Accreditation are set out in a separate document. These should be read alongside this guidance. The following guidance explains some of the steps that can be taken to ensure the health and safety of your tenants and how to meet the Accreditation standards. The guidance is not exhaustive and some additional measures may need to be taken to comply with the scheme and relevant legislation.

Reasonable condition

This has many aspects including:

(i) Free from Disrepair

A house or a flat is not suitable for occupation and will fail the repair standard if, in the council's view, it is in serious disrepair. A house or flat should be free from items of disrepair which either individually, or due to their combined effect, is so severe and/or extensive that they present a risk to health and safety, or cause serious inconvenience to any occupants.

(ii) Lighting and Ventilation

All dwellings should be provided with adequate natural and artificial lighting and ventilation. There should be provision of sufficient natural lighting in habitable rooms to enable the normal activities of a household to be carried out, safely and conveniently, without the use of artificial light in normal daytime conditions.

There should be adequate provision of artificial lighting in all habitable rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, WC and circulation spaces to enable the normal activities of a household to be carried out safely and conveniently and to permit the normal passage of an occupant without the risk of an accident.

(iii) Energy Efficiency

Dwellings should be provided with a reasonable level of energy efficiency measures (for example - a hot water tank jacket and/or pipe lagging and/or loft insulation). An energy performance certificate may be required, please contact trading standards for more information.

(iv) Heating

All habitable rooms should be provided with efficient and safe heating appliances such as central heating radiators or fixed gas or electrical heating appliances which are capable of adequately heating the property.

(v) Internal Layout

The internal layout should not be prejudicial to the health, safety for well being of the tenants e.g. shared WC's and bathrooms should be entered from a common passage or hallway.

Rooms should have an adequate floor to ceiling height. There is no prescribed minimum height, but seven feet (2.1 meters) would normally be considered to be satisfactory.

(vi) Home Security Measures

The dwelling should be capable of being secured against unauthorized entry, which will both delay and deter intruders and will make the occupants feel safer. The use of approved

deadlocks and burglar alarms can reduce the risk of an occurrence considerably. However, there is a balance to be made between security features and any associated increased risk from other hazards, for example, security measures can hamper or obstruct means of escape in case of fire, and may result in windows not being readily openable interfering with ventilation. In multi-occupied buildings there have been reductions in crime and fear of crime where entry-phone controls have been introduced.

Gas & electricity appliances and installations & use of log book

All means of use and supply of mains gas and alterations and repairs to gas installations must comply with current Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations. All electrical installations provided by the landlord must be certified as safe in accordance with the current relevant legislation by a competent electrician. Reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that all electrical appliances provided are functioning effectively, in accordance with manufacturers' operational limits, and in a safe manner.

The Accreditation Scheme Log Book should be used to record all checks and servicing of appliances and installations.

The Log Book also provides some brief advice on gas and electrical safety issues which should be read in full. This includes legal requirements which must be followed if your property is an HMO.

Kitchen facilities

Kitchens should be suitably located in relation to the living accommodation and of such a layout and size and equipped with such facilities so as to adequately enable those sharing the facilities to store, prepare and cook food.

A one four ring cooker with a grill and oven and a sink with drainer per five occupants is normally sufficient. A dishwasher may be used to replace the second sink where required.

There should be sufficient worktop space provided in relation to the number of occupants.

Each occupant should have a minimum of 1 cupboard for storage of dry food stuffs and one shelf or drawer in both a fridge and a freezer. In addition there should be adequate storage space for cooking utensils, crockery and cutlery.

Refuse disposal facilities should be provided.

There must be a sufficient number of electrical sockets in relation to the number of people sharing those facilities.

Bathroom facilities

As well as meeting the minimum ratio standard in relation to bathroom facilities, the facilities should include:

- A wash-hand basin with a continuous supply of hot and cold water and W.C. and a tiled splashback to each wash hand basin;
- Where a house requires 2 or more W.C.s, at least one should be separate to any bathing facilities (where practicable);

- Bathrooms and shower rooms should be readily accessible (i.e. not located off a bedroom for example);
- Baths should have a suitably sized splashback. The floor surface should be slip resistant and easily cleaned. The walls and ceiling surfaces should be suitably decorated and readily cleansable;
- Showers should have a water resistant shower curtain or door to the cubicle.

Fire Safety & use of log book

The Accreditation scheme **log book** can be used for recording all checks and servicing of fire safety measures in the property. Set out below is some general guidance on the provision and maintenance of fire safety measures. Further detailed guidance is also provided in the log book regarding the provision and maintenance of fire safety measures for properties which are HMO's. Log books are available to download from our website. Hard copies are available on request from Private Sector Housing.

In all cases clear guidance on fire safety should be provided to residents at the commencement of the tenancy.

A) PROVISION OF FIRE SAFETY MEASURES

Properties should be provided with fire safety measures which include both a means of escape and fire safety equipment, in accordance with current legislation. If you are not clear of the requirements for your property then guidance should be sought from the council's Private Sector Housing Team. This is likely to include:

- A fire escape route with a minimum of 30 minutes fire resistance;
- An automatic fire alarm system; and
- An emergency lighting system sited to protect the route of escape; and
- Fire extinguishers.

The design and detail of the measures are determined in accordance with a fire safety risk assessment and in consideration of the local authority's HMO standards.

In high risk HMO properties, to help avoid delay in escaping in case of fire, all accommodation doors, final exit doors and any other doors through which a person may have to pass should be so fastened and maintained that they can be easily and immediately opened from the inside **without the use of a key**.

B) MAINTENANCE OF FIRE SAFETY MEASURES

Fire alarm and emergency lighting systems installed in HMOs must be properly checked and maintained by a competent approved electrician, not less than every 12 months. Inspection certificates must be retained and made available on request.

All exit routes within a dwelling such as hallways, landings and staircases, so far as they are under the control of the landlord and as far as reasonably practicable, must be maintained safe, unobstructed and free of fixtures and fittings to enable evacuation of the dwelling in the event of fire.

Tenants should be informed of their responsibilities not to tamper with fire alarm systems and to promptly report any observed defects.

Deposits & Inventories

All deposits should be held and administered through one of the government backed schemes. Further information can be found on www.communities.gov.uk/tenancydeposit. Landlords who fail to protect the deposit could be liable for repayment of three times the deposit if their tenants take a successful case against them

Gardens

It is a requirement of the HMO management regulations that all gardens are maintained. In particular front gardens and front driveways/forecourts should be kept tidy. Also trees & hedges which obstruct the footpath or obscure the light from street lights should be cut back and kept to a manageable level. These are a major source of complaints and dissatisfaction with neighbours and local residents. Where the duty to deal with this, is passed onto tenants in the Tenancy Agreement, landlords should regularly check that this is being done. Where this is not being done, Landlords should make every attempt to seek the tenants compliance by enforcing the condition of the tenancy. It may be that as Landlord you can arrange with tenants to use a gardening contractor and recharge this to the tenants. Alternatively it may be preferable to take back responsibility for maintaining some or all the gardens and recover reasonable costs through the rent.

Furniture and Furnishings

From 1st March 1993, furniture, whether new or second hand, provided in rented accommodation has had to comply with the Furniture and Fire Safety Regulations. The regulations therefore apply to landlords, estate agents and letting agents.

The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 control the safety of upholstered furniture supplied in rented accommodation. These regulations were introduced to reduce the number of people killed and injured by toxic fumes given off when some upholstery materials burn. This includes any furniture which includes upholstery, (unless it was made before 1950) for example three piece suites and armchairs, beds, headboards and mattresses, sofa-beds, futons, loose and stretch covers for furniture, scatter cushions and seat pads.

Upholstered furniture generally must have covers which resist ignition from a match flame test, upholstery which resists ignition from a smouldering cigarette test, filling materials which pass an appropriate ignitability test and permanent labelling to show compliance. Labelling is one of the best ways of showing compliance. Most furniture should have a permanent label, an example is given below:

<p style="text-align: center;">CARELESSNESS CAUSES FIRE Batch / ID No: AX1234 To comply with the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire)(Safety) Regulations:</p> <p>This article does (or does not) include a Schedule 3 interliner. All foams, fillings and composites have been tested to ensure compliance with the relevant ignitability test. All covers and fillings have been tested to ensure they are cigarette resistant. All covers have been tested to ensure they are match resistant. Further details are available from your retailer</p>
--

Mattresses and bed bases are not required to have this type of label, but to show that they comply with the ignitability tests they may have a label stating compliance with BS7177. This label has a blue border with white lettering and black cigarette and flame symbols.

It is not compulsory for second-hand furniture supplied in rented accommodation to bear a permanent label but for your own safety and peace of mind, it is advisable to only provide furniture and furnishings which are labelled.

Further information is available from Surrey County Council Trading Standards.

TENANT CODE OF PRACTICE

The Tenants' Code of Practice sets the basic minimum requirements for tenant behaviour. These may also be covered within the terms of the letting contract but are nonetheless set out separately in order to give them special attention. The aim is to influence the way a tenant occupies a dwelling. There are 7 conditions to the Code of Practice that tenants must sign up to. Landlords are required to make tenants aware of them and to seek a signature from the tenants to the code. The landlord can then refer back to this code should the need arise throughout the course of the tenancy.

It is expected that a landlord will take all reasonable steps at their disposal, and act in co-ordination with the Council, the local Police and the University where appropriate, to resolve situations where a tenant, or group of tenants are not complying with the Code of Practice.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Appeals

The following constitute grounds for appeal:

- 1) A landlord believes that there has been an unfair refusal to award Accreditation.
- 2) A landlord believes that there has been unfair withdrawal of Accreditation

Procedure for Appeals

The appeal procedure has two stages:

- 1) An appeal should be submitted in writing to the Private Sector Housing Manager, citing the reason for appeal. The case will be reviewed, and a decision will be made. The landlord will be notified of a decision within 21 days of appeal.
- 2) If the landlord is not satisfied with the outcome of the review they may seek a further appeal. This will then be referred to a Review Panel, who will consider the case again and a decision will be made and issued in writing within a further 21 days. The Review Panel will be made up of 3 senior representatives from Runnymede Borough Council, Royal Holloway Students Union and Royal Holloway Student Services/Accommodation Services. The Review Panel's decision is final.

ACCREDITATION SCHEME CONTACT LIST

Contact	Services Provided	Contact Details
Runnymede Borough Council. Private Sector Housing	Housing standards enforcement & Accreditation Scheme enquiries	01932 425886/425888 housing@runnymede.gov.uk
Royal Holloway Accommodation Office	Provides Campus Accommodation and has a list of Landlords that register with the College.	01784 443338 accommodation-office@rhul.ac.uk
Vice President Education and Welfare, Student's Union Royal Holloway	Guidance for students who are looking for or have problems with private sector housing.	01784 486300 vpedwelfare@su.rhul.ac.uk
Surrey County Trading Standards	A dedicated business advice line, (10am until 5pm Monday to Friday). Access to a wide range of information. A Landlord pack is available.	01372 371 700 (Ask for the duty officer). Business.advice@surreycc.gov.uk
Surrey Fire and Rescue Service	Provides Free Home Fire Safety Advice to Students and other Tenants	01737 733557 waltonfiresafety@surrey-fire.gov.uk
Surrey Police	For all non-emergency police matters. In a genuine emergency, however, always call 999 .	Report crimes or anti-social behaviour directly to the Police on 0845 125 2222 Egham Police Station 1 High Street Egham Surrey TW20 9HJ Tel: 01932 845544 (Basic opening times Mon- Wed 8.30 – 15.30 and Thursday – Friday 8.30 – 17.45 however these times can vary so attempt to telephone prior to visiting). www.surrey.police.uk
British Standards Institute (BSI)	Business Information.	020 8996 9000 cservices@bsi-global.com www.bsi-global.com
National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC)	NICEIC aims to protect everyone who uses electricity from unsafe electrical installations in homes, places of work and leisure time. In order to achieve this, they maintain a register of electrical contractors that have been assessed as complying with the Council's rules. They also investigate complaints about their members' work.	0207 564 2323. To find out more visit: www.niceic.org.uk

<p>Health & Safety Executive (HSE)</p>	<p>Any information relating to work carried out by non-registered installers or unsafe gas work carried out by registered installers can be passed to the HSE for possible enforcement action. If you are concerned about gas safety, visit the HSE Gas Safety website.</p>	<p>Call the HSE Gas Safety Advice Line FREE on 0800 300 363.</p> <p>www.hse.gov.uk/gas</p>
<p>Citizens Advice Bureau.</p>	<p>Offers free, confidential, impartial and independent advice on all housing, debt and consumer matters.</p>	<p>01932 842666 (Addlestone). 01932 827187 (Egham).</p> <p>www.runnymedecab.org.uk</p> <p>www.citizensadvice.org.uk</p>
<p>Runnymede Borough Council Housing Advice Service</p>	<p>Landlord/tenant issues, prevention of homelessness, advice on housing options, relationship breakdown advice.</p>	<p>01932 425811 (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 10am – 4pm) (Friday 10am – 3pm)</p> <p>housing.advice@runnymede.gov.uk</p>
<p>Trading Standards – ‘Buy with confidence scheme’</p>	<p>‘Buy with confidence’ is an approved trader register where Trading Standards have thoroughly vetted the businesses that are now members of the scheme</p>	<p>www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk</p>
<p>Gas Safe Register (replaces CORGI registration)</p>	<p>Gas Safe is the only official list of gas engineers legally able to perform gas work on boilers, hobs, ovens, fires and all other gas appliances.</p>	<p>Gas Safe Register PO BOX 6804 Basingstoke RG24 4NB</p> <p>0800 408 5500 www.gassaferegister.co.uk</p>
<p>Electrical Contractors Association</p>	<p>Founded over 100 years ago, the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) is the UK's largest and leading trade association representing electrical, electronic, installation engineering and building services companies.</p>	<p>ECA ESCA House 34 Palace Court London W2 4HY</p> <p>Tel: 020 7313 4800 Fax: 020 7221 7344 info@eca.co.uk</p>
<p>Electrical Safety Council</p>	<p>The Electrical Safety Council (ESC) is an independent charity committed to reducing deaths and injuries through electrical accidents at home and at work.</p>	<p>Electrical Safety Council Unit 1.10 Canterbury Court 1 - 3 Brixton Road London SW9 6DE</p> <p>Tel: 0870 040 0561 Fax: 0870 040 0560 enquiries@electricalsafetycouncil.org.uk www.esc.org.uk</p>

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR ACCREDITATION APPLICANTS AND TENANTS

1. Runnymede Borough Council does not accept any liability for actions or decisions taken by landlords or tenants as a result of the awarding of Accreditation Status. Accreditation should be used as a general guide only that the property and the landlord are likely to meet certain minimum standards in relation to physical condition, amenity standards and general management standards and practices.
2. The council reserves the right to alter or suspend the Accreditation scheme and there maybe a waiting list in place when arranging property inspections. The Council does not guarantee to deal with Accreditation applications within a set time due to unforeseen fluctuations in demand and /or staffing resources within the Private Sector Housing Team.
3. Accreditation does not prove compliance with the law and nor does it protect landlords or tenants from other types of enforcement action resulting from non-compliance with the law which may or may not fall within the remit of Runnymede Borough Council.
4. Runnymede Borough Council does not accept responsibility for dealing with any other matters or problems between landlords and tenants of Accredited properties. Even where matters or problems are reported that relate to non compliance with the Accreditation standards, the Council's remit of involvement only extends to withdrawal of Accreditation status. It does not extend to dealing with matters in any further detail except where other types of enforcement action due to non compliance with legislation for which the Council is responsible for enforcing, exist.