



Managing Agent Accreditation

Scheme Model

1. Managing Agent Accreditation Scheme (adapted from the North West Landlord Accreditation Model)

- The aims of the scheme are to encourage, acknowledge, raise awareness and actively promote good standards and management practice by letting agents, and to assist agents and tenants to undertake their respective responsibilities to each other.
- The scheme operator (here after known as the Local Authority) will give guidance on compliance on request
- The scheme also encourages and acknowledges responsible behaviour by tenants.
- The scheme comprises an element of self-regulation and accordingly relies on a degree of goodwill and trust on the parts of the managing agents, tenants and Local Authority.
- It is a requirement of the scheme that the physical condition of dwellings, the level of provision of basic amenities and management practices, are fair and reasonable, and not liable to be prejudicial to the health, safety and welfare of tenants or the surrounding neighbourhood.
- Signatories to the scheme must ensure that in addition to complying with the requirements of the scheme, they also comply with their legal obligations.
- In the provision and letting of housing or associated services, the letting of contracts for services and in all aspects of operations of the scheme by any participants no person or group of persons will be treated less favourably than any other person or group of persons because of their ethnic or national origin, gender, disability or sexual orientation.
- Compliance with the scheme will ensure that:
 - Managing agents, tenants and community members enjoy the benefit of good dwelling conditions, competent management and considerate neighbourly behaviour
 - Misunderstandings and disputes are reduced
 - Where problems do occur they are promptly resolved

2. What is the scheme seeking to address / achieve?

The scheme aims to directly address issues as identified in Housing Strategy for Halton 2013-16 (draft) including:

- Reduced mortgage availability
- Poorest conditions in the private rented sector
- New power to discharge statutory homeless duty through an offer of private rented accommodation
- Fuel poverty increasing

3. How does this fit in with the aims of the Council's housing strategy?

A Landlord Accreditation Scheme will help to fulfil the following aims as identified in the Housing Strategy for Halton 2013-16 (draft):

- To develop the private rented sector as a viable alternative to meeting housing need
- To improve energy efficiency of housing and tackle fuel poverty

4. Scheme operators responsibilities (taken from North West Accreditation Model)

- The Local Authority will work in close partnership with landlords, the local bona fide landlord associations and other key private rented sector stakeholders.
- The Local Authority will administer and monitor the scheme including undertaking compliance audits
- Maintain a database record of accredited managing agents and the properties they manage

- Be responsible for the issuing, administration, suspension and revocation of accredited status
- Provide general help and advice e.g. standards
- Provide information on changes and likely pending changes in legislation by such means as landlord forums, newsletters and through local landlord associations.
- Assist managing agents to achieve accreditation status.
- Provide advice on energy efficiency measures
- By agreement with agents provide a public list of accredited managing agents
- Actively promote the accreditation scheme across its geographical area
- Provide incentives to joining the scheme
- Provide a resolution service for tenant / agents disputes or signpost to named arbitration services.
- Regularly consult with accreditation scheme stakeholders and act positively on feedback.

5. Does the managing agent or the property receive accreditation?

The managing agent will receive accreditation. It is thought that this way, the code of standards can put particular emphasis on management practices as well as property standards. Furthermore, it is felt that the scheme would be more reputable with agents being accredited and so not providing the opportunity to omit certain properties from having to comply with the standards of the scheme. It is also felt that if the agent receives accreditation rather than the property it will reinforce the idea of partnership working and reduce perception of the scheme being a way of “checking up on” rental properties.

6. Standards

The code of standards, which will have full approval from local managing agents before implementation, have been developed to complement the standards of other schemes within the North West. It is hoped that this will make it much easier for an agent who has property across council boundaries to apply for accreditation, as the standards will be consistent. In order to make the scheme accessible / attainable to the maximum number of agents, temporary or provisional accreditation can be awarded at the Local Authority’s discretion.

Provisional accreditation

This will help ensure agents are not put off if all requirements for the scheme are not met at the time of application.

NB - this will only be awarded to Managing Agents where improvements needed are minor and where the landlord agrees to undertake them within a fixed period. Also a set policy/procedure for this will be needed in order to ensure consistency.

Accredited Status

Accredited status will be awarded to those agents who declare that they meet all Accreditation Standards as stated in the Code of Standards and whose properties are deemed free from Category One hazards at the time of inspection by Halton Borough Council Officers.

7. Consultation

Full consultation with local managing agents will take place regarding the standards expected of the scheme and the incentives that will be offered. This will take place by way of a focus group comprised of locally operating managing agents. This allows for consultation on all proposed details of the scheme as and when they develop and so will ensure prompt implementation or elimination.

8. What does accreditation cover?

8.1 Area

The scheme is applicable to properties across the whole of the borough. Privately rented property is not sufficiently concentrated in any area to warrant a pilot scheme being initially introduced.

8.2 Type of property

All types of, fully managed, residentially let properties (with the exception of holiday lets and purpose built residential care homes) can be included in an accredited managing agents portfolio.

8.3 Type of landlord

All managing agents (with the exception of Registered Social Landlords) who manage a residentially let property (as stated in 8.2) can apply to join the landlord accreditation scheme.

9. How will compliance with standards be determined?

Compliance with the management standards of the scheme would be self-certified by signing a declaration upon application.

Determination of compliance with property standards will involve a random sample of properties would be inspected. What percentage of the property portfolio this will be will depend on scheme take up and officer capacity. The North West Landlord Accreditation Scheme model suggests a 10% sample of the total management portfolio.

An agents accreditation will be advertised and tenants are encouraged to contact the Local Authority with any unresolved problems they have with their landlord. This would help to highlight any non-compliance with the standards of the scheme.

10. What incentives will be provided to encourage landlords to join?

The following are proposed incentives, which will require approval from local landlords before introduction:

10.1 Discounted insurance

Endsleigh insurance and Elliott Garden insurance offer specially tailored policies for residential landlords. Discounts on the price of these policies are available to landlords who are members of a local authority led Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

10.2 Housing Benefit Service Level Agreement

To provide commitment and clarity on the creation, processing and maintenance of housing benefit claims.

10.3 Discount from local Gas and Electrical Contractors

Reduction in cost of services offered by local contractors

10.4 Property Marketing service

Accredited managing agents can advertise properties they have available to rent free of charge on Property Pool Plus (Merseyside's choice based lettings system)

10.5 Training

Discounted or free of charge training can be made available to accredited managing agents. This will serve to educate and / or keep landlords up to speed with procedures carried out as part of their management role.

11. Disciplinary Matters

- Complaints can be made under the code of standards about agents who are members of the Accreditation scheme.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved informally the complainant will be asked to put the matter in writing
- The Local Authority will consider if continuation or revocation of membership is appropriate
- The agent will have the right of appeal through an agreed appeals panel. It is suggested that this panel be comprised of:
 - Elected member for housing (to Chair)
 - Two representative landlords from the scheme
 - A member from the Housing Solutions Team
- Managing Agents who lose their accredited status will no longer be participants of or eligible for any benefits of the scheme
- The Local Authority will consider reinstatement of accreditation status if the agent is able to demonstrate that, following remedial action they are capable of meeting the requirements of the scheme.
- A managing agent may make a formal complaint in writing about the operation of a scheme to the Local Authority. If this is not satisfactorily resolved the agent may pursue the complaint through the Corporate Complaints Process.

12. How will success be monitored?

A suggested method of monitoring would be to use performance indicators, recorded on a monthly basis and including:

- Number of members signed up to the scheme (provisional and accredited)
- Number of accredited managing agent properties
- Number of members left the scheme through dissatisfaction
- Number of inspections carried out as a percentage of accreditation portfolio
- Number of complaints
- Number of long term empty properties brought back into use through the scheme

An annual membership survey can also be carried out to determine landlord satisfaction with the scheme.