

All About It – Decent Homes

What is it?

The Government has set a target that the vast majority of Housing is to meet a set standard of Decency by 2010. The Government provides additional funding for Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) working on behalf of Local Authorities to enable this work to be carried out. Residents of The London Borough of Sutton voted overwhelmingly in favour of the creation of an ALMO which we all know as Sutton Housing Partnership in order to access this funding.

Before funding can be provided, Sutton Housing Partnership must satisfy the Audit Commission, the government's watchdog, that it has the right strategies for dealing with repairs and improvement and that it provides a good overall service to its residents. Only then can we undertake the 5 year programme of works to bring all our non-decent homes up to the Decent Homes Standard.

Decent Homes Programme

Your copy of the 5 year Decent Homes programme will show when we intend to look into carrying out major improvement works in your street or estate. We also hold Decent Homes information on a computer data-base which tells us what year we should expect each property to fail the Decent Home standard. An independent survey is carried out before we order any works to ensure that it is reasonable to carry out the work at that time and we use this information to instruct the contractor.

The 5 year Decent Homes programme funding from The Government does not allow for every street, estate, flat or house to have works carried out if the property is deemed unlikely to fail the Decent Homes standard in the near future. The properties in most need are targeted which may mean that some neighbourhoods receive less work than others.

What makes a property fail the Decent Homes Standard?

A. It must meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing. These are rules related to basic health, safety and hygiene and are determined by a risk assessment carried out by a surveyor trained in collecting this information.

B. It must be in a reasonable state of repair-
If one or more key building components are old and in poor condition such as the roof, windows, doors, electrics or gas boiler then it would fail.

If two or more of any other component are old and in poor condition such as the kitchen, bathroom or central heating system then it would fail.

C. It must have reasonably modern facilities and services. The property fails if it has three or more of the following:

- ◆ A kitchen more than 20 years old
- ◆ Kitchen with in-adequate space and layout
- ◆ A Bathroom more than 30 years old
- ◆ In-inappropriately located WC or bathroom
- ◆ In-adequate insulation against external problem noise such as an airport or factory.
- ◆ In-adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats (would not fail if the improvement is impossible due to planning or physical constraints).

D. It must have a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

Gas or oil central heating with at least 50mm of loft insulation

Electric storage heating with at least 200mm of loft insulation and cavity wall insulation

This is the minimum; however we would always install the loft insulation to the thickness prescribed by Building Regulations which is 250mm. We also intend to carry out a full programme of cavity wall insulation regardless of what type of heating system you have.

What happens next?

Independent surveyors are used to assess what parts of your home fail or are about to fail the Decent Homes Standard. Residents will receive a letter to say when surveys are to take place which includes an opportunity to make an appointment and to take part in a prize draw. The survey will take about half an hour. The information will be used to instruct the contractors which will be carrying out the work.

If work is recommended in your home we will write to you again to tell you what to expect but don't worry as you will be given plenty of notice and there will be plenty of help and advice from staff at SHP and the contractor's representative. Information about the projects can also be found in any one of our 'All About It' booklets which are available from our reception area in Sutton Gate or can be found on our website.

Your right to appeal

All residents will have the opportunity to have Decent Homes works regardless of background, religion or culture where they are necessary but it will be found that some property is not recommended for works and might fall outside the programme.

If residents feel strongly that works in their home or block are necessary but are not featured within the 5 year programme or perhaps feel that works that are featured in the plan should be done sooner, then they should refer to the appeals process. This process is detailed in our 'All About It' booklet - 'Your Right to Appeal' available from our reception area at Sutton Gate or via our website.

Would you like to get involved?

The selection of contractors, details about resident choice and the specifications of work have all been scrutinised by our Decent Homes Group which includes residents and staff from SHP. We would like representation from as many neighbourhoods as possible to help shape the programme, prior, during and after projects are completed to ensure that we continue to improve the services provided by both SHP and our contractors. You could be involved in:

- ◆ Site inspections with contractors and consultants
- ◆ Attending regular meetings with the contractor
- ◆ Helping the contractor to improve the service
- ◆ Speaking to residents to see that everything's ok
- ◆ Finding out how satisfied residents are in your area when work is complete
- ◆ Providing interpreter services if you are skilled in a foreign language
- ◆ Helping us to understand disability if you or those you care for are disabled
- ◆ Helping us to understand religious, racial or cultural issues.

Please contact our Customer Care Team on **Freephone 0800 195 5552** or from your mobile on **020 8915 2000** (*call charges may vary depending on your network*) who will put you through to a member of our team.