

## Annex A

### Iain Wright at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

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#### **Introduction: Joining Up**

Rationing, rubble and bombsites.

This was the front page of the Times last month, comparing today's economic conditions to 1947.

It is true that today's Government - like Clement Attlee's - is facing serious challenges: and, like them, we are straining every sinew to help people get through these tough times.

I want to start by drawing a comparison with 1947, too. But for a different reason.

Back then, Nye Bevan was at the height of his powers.

He was a towering figure, the architect of the NHS.

He used to joke that, after a week wrestling with the medical profession, he used to unwind with a spot of housing policy - taking no more than ten minutes out of his weekend...

There's a serious point behind the joke. For all that we think "joined-up government" is modern jargon, it's been around for decades.

Bevan knew that homes and health go hand in hand.

He knew that bad homes make people ill; that good homes keep them fit and happy; and that Government policy has to recognise that.

It's a point that as is true and relevant today as it ever was.

So it's a pleasure to be here with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. I would also like to acknowledge the excellent work that Stephen and colleagues at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health have been doing to drive forward this agenda – the links between health and poor housing are, of course, well established but that isn't where it ends and so the work and commitment of the CIEH can make a real difference by giving colleagues the tools and evidence to tackle these important issues.

And it's great to see so many people from local housing authorities and primary care trusts.

Through your hard work, you help keep hundreds of thousands of people safer, healthier and happier:

- by investing in the new roofs, windows and stairs they need;
- by making sure all landlords know the standards they have to meet; and
- by getting tough with the small minority who refuse to play by the rules.

I want to put on record my admiration for your achievements.

Recent years have seen steady progress in bringing homes in the private sector up to a decent standard. Especially for needy and vulnerable people.

The English Home Condition Survey showed that in 1997, 57% of vulnerable households in the private rented sector lived in decent homes.

By 2006, that figure was up to 68%.

This was ahead of our trajectory and ambition of increasing that figure to 70% by 2010.

Now we have the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, and an updated decent standard, which makes the challenge a little bit harder.

At first glance a drop in the number of homes rated as “decent” might seem dispiriting. But you know that if we’ve been able to raise the bar, it’s because of the sector has been achieving great things over the past decade.

And let me say that the sector has handled the switch from one regulatory system to another with aplomb.

There was some anxiety about moving on from the old “fitness standard” to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

Some said it was unnecessary. Burdensome. Complex.

But the fact is that the new Rating System was about getting smarter at tackling environmental health hazards in the home.

And, as the Institute’s survey of last February has shown, housing authorities have been taking more action, not less, against unacceptable standards - from damp, to mould, to dodgy stairs - since the Rating System came in.

Another factor in the success we’ve seen in recent years is the powerful partnerships that been developing at a local level:

- between local authorities and primary care trusts;

- between councils and energy companies; and
- between elected councillors and residents' groups.

This kind of partnership working is the essence of what we're trying to achieve with local area agreements and all the rest of the local government performance framework. Not different people sitting in different offices and ticking boxes, doing things the way they've always been done. But everyone getting together in the same room and being creative about how to join forces, pooling expertise, and sometimes resources, to make life better for local people.

The same arguments apply in equal measure to the Government where policies again need to be joined up. Success in reducing rough sleeping over the past 10 years have been achieved because of strong partnerships across Government with health and housing working together. Our new homelessness strategy - 'No One Left Out' which was launched in the autumn links in with the drive for greater integration of health, housing and social care. £200m has been invested to prevent homelessness but perhaps more importantly is the joint planning and commitment shown by those partners to end rough sleeping once and for all.

The Institute's booklet "Good Housing Leads to Good Health" brings together powerful stories of what different partners have achieved in different places - from Birmingham to Bristol, Nottingham to Islington.

And I know you've heard today from Mandy [Flinley], from Walsall, about how over 100 health visitors and other key workers there have got training to point people in the right direction for grants, practical advice and support when poor housing is making them ill.

I welcome the booklet. I think it's a great piece of work. I hope it's going to encourage many more people to be imaginative and ambitious about what they could do to improve people's homes and health.

And I very much welcome today's conference. A chance to swap stories and lessons about what works.

Because as we look ahead, there is no room whatsoever for complacency.

- 61 per cent of vulnerable households in the private rented sector may now be living in decent homes - but that still leaves 39 per cent we urgently need to reach.
- In total, there are 6.6 million non-decent homes in the private sector.
- And 4.2 million of those have an unacceptable health and safety hazard.

Those figures highlight the scale of the challenge.

To show we're serious - a billion pounds' worth has been invested over three years.

Money isn't everything, though. To build on the successes to date we need to learn from the experiences so far, to think hard about how we can do things more effectively. So I want to make three points about where we go from here.

First, the next steps need to be about unlocking the full potential of the Housing and Health Safety Rating System. Some places are using it strategically, thinking ahead, planning for how it can be used to address the big issues that we all now face - climate change, fuel poverty, or poor health - and spotting the places and homes where they need to step in.

**For example** - in Liverpool I know the Primary Care Trust has invested a significant amount of money to help reduce preventable deaths and ill health due

to poor quality housing conditions by identifying approximately 30,000 rented properties for initial surveying, and then prioritising approximately 5500 for full health and safety inspections. This programme has only just started and so the results have yet to show: but this is precisely how authorities should be using the Rating System. Not waiting for the problems to appear, but looking across the board and thinking through how and where they can make a difference.

Second, the next steps are about building on the partnerships we have seen already, making the links between policy areas such as climate change and poor housing to get more players acting in concert. We know that threadbare insulation and creaking boilers cost more money, and leave tenants more susceptible to illnesses from coughs and colds to arthritis. Those same dodgy boilers and insulation are carbon culprits, wasting energy and needlessly pumping out excess greenhouse gas. With energy companies increasingly expected not just by government but by the general public to play a greater role in helping us all live more greenly, there is ample scope for more local partnerships between authorities and energy firms.

For example - I'm aware that in the Greater Manchester area there is a far-reaching review of how local authorities, Primary Care Trusts, energy suppliers and other partners can work together to optimise the contribution they make to improving housing conditions for vulnerable people and reduce health inequalities. The UK Public Health Association & Greater Manchester Fuel Poverty Initiative is again at a relatively early stage: but the early results are encouraging and which is precisely why this is the sort of innovative action that authorities and their partners should be taking.

Needless to say, the pursuit of partnerships such as these cannot be an excuse to forget about the needs of the most vulnerable: but I think housing authorities have the maturity and the good judgement to find a sensible balance.

Third, Professor Julie Rugg's review kicked off a much wider debate about the future of the private rented sector. I am pleased to see the warm welcome that people across whole sector gave to the report. The Government is considering its response and will announce how it intends to react in due course, this will need to reflect the implications of the review for the future direction- particularly in these more turbulent times.

Though of course, the full implications are yet to unfold, it's likely that demand for private rentals will only increase over the coming months.

Many people who would have expected to own their own home find they can no longer afford it, and so will be looking elsewhere – often to the private rented sector.

At the same time, traditional demand will continue – from students, from career changers and commuters, from young professionals just starting out in independent; adult living.

Each of them, whatever their particular circumstances, expects and deserves a decent place to live.

But we have to be honest enough to acknowledge the challenges. The worst housing is still found in the private rented sector.

And this has a disproportionate effect on low income families and vulnerable households. Local authorities have extensive powers to tackle these problems; but they need to target these powers effectively.

But of course, even where problems do arise, this is largely not because landlords are going out of their way to be wilfully negligent.

More often than not, landlords simply aren't aware of the relevant legislation, or their own obligations. Many don't know about the sensible precautions they might take at the beginning of tenancies which could help problems developing later.

So when I talk about the improvements that are needed to the sector, its about helping both tenants and landlords.

Julie Rugg mentioned in her review that it's critical that local authorities, and registered social landlords too, are helping to support the growth of the sector.

The review mentioned the thorny issue of licensing. I know that some people are concerned about additional burdens from this area. What she is actually suggesting is simple registration, with no additional hurdles – a light touch approach.

None of the recommendations have been set in stone.

Quite the contrary: we are currently considering all the suggestions she made and hope that you will continue to work with us to shape a stronger sector.

But let me reinforce something I said on the day the review was published. For too long the private rented sector was the Cinderella of housing. Today - especially with more and more people choosing to rent, in part because of the tough economic conditions - we simply cannot afford for the private rented sector to be a "second-best". That's why we will keep up the pressure and keep improving our regulatory framework so that everyone gets the safe, warm and weatherproof place to live that they deserve.

## **Conclusion**

I'm interested to hear your reactions today. For the future, my officials are always keen to hear about what you're doing, how we can support you to do it better. Our door is open.

## Annex B

### **HOUSING, HEALTH & RATING SAFETY SYSTEM (HHSRS)**

#### **Key messages**

- The Housing Health and Safety Rating System is a key component of the Government's drive to tackle homes in poor condition.
- HHSRS helps identify and protect against hazards not covered by the old Fitness Standard (such as the risk from falling down unsafe stairs).
- For the first time in housing we are using risk assessment. This will help improve conditions and make homes decent, in particular for those most vulnerable to hazards.
- The HHSRS is the basis for action against unacceptable housing conditions. Action by local authorities will follow a three-stage process:
  - (a) the hazard rating determined under HHSRS;
  - (b) whether the authority has a duty or discretion to act, determined by the presence of a hazard above or below a threshold set in Regulations; and
  - (c) the authority's judgement as to which is the best means of dealing with the hazard.Local authorities have a number of options available to them to deal with hazards.

#### **Regulations and Guidance**

- Regulations prescribe the use of HHSRS as the means to determine the severity of hazards. They prescribe the method for evaluating the potential effects of faults in dwellings on the health and safety of potential occupants. The Regulations also specify the hazards that can be assessed.
- The enforcement guidance looks at general issues, such as the need for authorities to take a strategic approach. It discusses the assessment of hazards under the HHSRS technical system, and the concept of the most vulnerable potential occupant as the basis of the hazard rating. It also gives an account of local authorities' duties and powers under the Bill - improvement notices, prohibition orders, hazard awareness notices, demolition and clearance - and the circumstances in which they can be used.

#### **Defensive Q&A**

#### **HHSRS Technical system**

### **What was wrong with the Fitness Standard?**

The old Fitness Standard had two main failings. It did not cover all the major health and safety problems found in a home and did not give any indication of how serious the problem is.

### **The HHSRS is more time-consuming for authorities.**

This may have been the case initially, but inspection time will depend on the condition of the property. This will vary widely. Most properties are likely to contain only one hazard. Environmental Health Officers will be able to use their discretion on the extent to which they need to examine a property. Councils will need to ensure that they are able to fulfil their statutory functions.

### **There is still opposition to HHSRS as a replacement for fitness**

We have been consulting on the new system since 1998. The Local Government Association and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, among others, have welcomed the underlying principles. The BMA is also supportive. Agree there are some concerns over the practical operation of HHSRS. But we believe that HHSRS is an important step forward in improving conditions and making homes safe. It will provide a more effective basis for enforcement against unacceptable housing conditions and will improve housing conditions for most vulnerable people.

### **HHSRS is over-complicated and is not be easily understood by anyone – local authorities or landlords. It is more cumbersome than old housing fitness standard.**

The principles of HHSRS are not over complicated. HHSRS is an important step forward to improve housing conditions and make homes safer. We do understand that it is a new system and have therefore issued thorough and easy to use guidance to local authorities and private landlords. This will help ensure that they understand the principles of the system and are able to inspect their property and identify and broadly assess the risk associated with any hazards present.

### **The system does not work for health risks because it does not relate conditions in a house to actual health outcomes.**

The system does not claim to do this for individual houses, and it would be extremely difficult to do so, if not impossible. HHSRS gives information about hazards in dwellings, the likelihood of a health impact from these hazards, and how severe that impact is likely to be. There is evidence that people go for treatment for illnesses and health problems that can be traced back to housing conditions. That evidence helps to provide the statistical backing for HHSRS. This is a major step forward from the fitness standard. Which, for example, did not take into account the risks from minor building defects, such as falling down unsafe stairs and conditions which can give rise to poor health eg damp and mould growth.

### **Local authority officers will find it difficult to justify "quantitative estimates" of the likelihood of a harmful occurrence in court. Qualitative rather than quantitative judgements are required.**

The numerical hazard score generated by HHSRS is just the first step. The officer then has to decide what to do in the light of the score, and the occupier's vulnerability to the hazard – using not only the HHSRS guidance but also his or her judgement. So the justification will not be in

academic terms, but in terms of the real-world health or safety impact of the hazard in question, as assessed by a professional.

**As it is evidence-based, won't the guidance soon become out of date?**

The guidance will be kept under review. We are aiming to review how the HHSRS is operating in 2009.

**The enforcement proposals assume an acceptable level of risk (local authorities have discretion to act but do not have a duty to act on scores below 1000). Does this mean the Government is prepared to accept housing related injuries and deaths?**

The hazard rating relates to the equivalent annual risk of death. A score of 1000 (a risk of 1:1000) does not mean that one person in every 1000 incidents will die. It is generally less. This is because the risk assessment assumes 1000 non-fatal stair falls causing severe bruising are equivalent to one fatal accident.

**Implications of HHSRS**

**HHSRS does not deal with disrepair**

This is incorrect. Local Authorities will be able to take enforcement action where disrepair presents a risk to the health and safety of occupants. In addition, most leases will contain repairing obligations on the part of the landlord. Subject to the length and provision of their lease tenants will also have private law remedies available to them in cases of disrepair.

HHSRS is an evidence-based tool that will help local authorities to prioritise their interventions to focus on the most severe hazards in terms of the risk to the occupants' health and safety.

**The effect of HHSRS could be to discourage landlords from renting properties to vulnerable people, for example, elderly people**

The guidance advises local authorities to consider the possibility of excluding people from housing when deciding what action to take against a hazard.

The Government is committed to raising housing standards in the private sector. The aim of HHSRS is to provide increased health and safety protection, particularly to vulnerable occupants. Vulnerable people should not be housed in dwellings that pose a threat to their health and safety.

In parallel to HHSRS, government is committed to increasing the proportion of private housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable groups.

**How will the HHSRS help improve conditions for the most vulnerable?**

The HHSRS is an important step forward because it is the first time that risk assessment has been used in housing. It will improve conditions by taking into account that minor building defects can have a major impact on vulnerable occupiers/visitors to a property.

## **LAs will no longer be able to consider the overall condition of the property – will always have to focus on specific hazards**

For each hazard there is an assessment of all the defects contributing to the hazard. As there is scope for a considerable number of hazards to be assessed, we believe that HHSRS will generate a pretty comprehensive picture of the condition of a property.

## **Decent Homes**

### **How has the HHSRS affected the Decent Home commitment?**

Following the introduction of HHSRS, the standard includes a requirement that a decent home should be free of Category 1 hazards – that is, the hazards serious enough to trigger a duty on local authorities to take enforcement action.

### **What will be the implications for local authorities?**

Local authority inspection for enforcement purposes is primarily focussed on the private rented sector. There are around 0.8 million homes with category 1 hazards in the sector as a whole (0.3 million of which house vulnerable households).

### **Notes:**

It is important to note that the Decent Home standard, with its four criteria, catches many more properties than the fitness standard. About 7 million properties failed the Decent Home standard, as against 885,000 which failed the fitness standard. All the figures quoted above are taken from the 2001 English House Condition Survey.

## **Private Sector Decent Homes**

### **Lines to take**

Government committed to improving house conditions, particularly for those in greatest need. One of our Departmental Strategic Objective's is to increase the number of vulnerable private sector households in decent homes.

Great progress has been made to date with the proportion of vulnerable households living in decent homes increasing from 42.9% in 1996 to, currently 68%.

Resources and a Regulatory framework are in place to enable local authorities to deliver these improvements. Over £1billion over the CSR07 period of 2008-11, is available to local authorities from the Regional Housing Pot to help. Guidance issued to Regional Assemblies asks them to continue to prioritise those most in need with the expectation that packages of assistance are made available to individual homeowners.

Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) help vulnerable people to maintain their independence and to help them get repairs or adaptation made and they provide a range of measures to help them achieve this. Foundations are the national coordinating body for HIAs and represent the sector in negotiations with Government.

Regions are at various stages of developing equity release and loan products with those in the West Midlands and South West most advanced. The South East and London have a sub regional approach.

## **Background Information**

In 2002 the Decent Homes Standard was extended to include the private sector with the focus on reducing the proportion of vulnerable households living in non-decent homes.

The Decent Homes Definition and guidance for implementation was updated in June 2006 following the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This stated that while 1 million properties were estimated as unfit under the 'fitness standard' in 2003, those containing category 1 hazards, irrespective of the risk, would be closer to 4 million, and that more detail would be available when the 2006 EHCS reports were published. To be decent, a dwelling must be free of category 1 hazards

The introduction of the HHSRS to the decent homes standard has a greater effect in the private sector that compared with the social sector and has resulted in a disproportionate increase in the number of non-decent homes in the private sector. The number of non-decent private sector homes increases from 4.8 million (26%) to 6.8 million (38%).

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002 gives local authorities wide ranging powers to provide assistance to owners and tenants for repairs and improvements to their homes. We expect that new means of providing assistance, such as low cost loans and equity release, will be developed, alongside grants. Such new schemes will enable more people to be assisted, either through providing a receipt to the authority that can be recycled, or by leveraging in private sector finance. Authorities can provide this assistance direct, or through third parties such as housing associations or community development finance initiatives. Local authorities will now have policies in place setting out how they will use these new powers.

For the private sector decent homes, regeneration and mixed communities element of the pot we expect regions to continue to give priority to those most in need and to co-ordinate funding streams, both public and private, including the Warm Front programme and measures delivered by the energy suppliers under the Energy Efficiency Commitment to maximise outputs.

Any loans scheme receiving public funding should have the long-term objective of becoming self-financing. Schemes would not necessarily operate within a single government office geographical region but should build on existing good practice, and have regional or sub-regional coverage such as the Kickstart programme in the West Midlands where groups of local authorities are working in partnership to maximise the available resources and their impact. We expect such approaches to be replicated in every region to accelerate the transition from grants to loans. Suggested delivery models can be found in the CLG report *Loan finance to improve housing conditions for vulnerable owner occupiers*.

### Vulnerable households

Vulnerable households are those who are in receipt of at least one of the principal means tested or disability related benefits.

In 2005 there were 280 thousand vulnerable owner occupied households living in homes which failed the renewal components (fitness, repair or modernisations) of the decent homes standard.

Of these 280 thousand households;

- 140 thousand include at least one person who is 60 or over,
- 84 include at least one person under the age of 16,
- 33 thousand are lone parents with dependent children,
- 86 thousand are made up of single person households,
- 164 thousand include a person with a long term illness or disability

113 thousand are located in the northern regions, 54 thousand are in the south east regions and 112 thousand are found in the rest of England.

**The EHCS shows there are 1.3 million vulnerable households in the private sector living in non-decent homes. How is the Government targeting support to help vulnerable households?**

It is important to recognise that maintaining privately-owned homes is primarily the responsibility of the owner. Nevertheless, local authorities have powers to assist vulnerable households living in the very worst conditions. Since the 2002 Regulatory Reform Order, local authorities have had increased discretion to develop their own approaches for improving housing conditions in the private sector. The aim of these powers is to encourage local authorities to develop flexible approaches to respond to locally specific conditions, and to find ways to make their resources go further through the use of loans and equity release schemes. Around 60 per cent of older vulnerable households have more than £120,000 or more equity in their homes.

## **How can you justify the reduced resources available to local authorities to address private sector renewal?**

Well over £1 billion over the CSR07 period is available to local authorities from the Regional Housing Pot to help. In our guidance to Regional Assemblies we have asked them to continue to prioritise those most in need and we expect that packages of assistance made available to individual homeowners should have the objective of ensuring that resources can be used more efficiently and effectively to help more people with reduced reliance on funding from public resources, such as loans or equity release schemes.

The GLA under its previous administration had recognised the benefits of this activity but it is unclear how the new Mayor of London will take this forward.

## **Why have you dropped the PSA target for private sector decent homes when there is evidence of such a great problem?**

Whilst Private Sector Decent Homes isn't one of the national indicator set it isn't to say this area of work doesn't remain a priority for the government. It is in one of our Departmental Strategic Objectives- to continue to increase the number of vulnerable people in decent homes but on the new measurement through HHSRS.

It also, of course, contributes to a range of other indicators such as fuel poverty and reductions in carbon emissions which I know a large number of authorities have adopted.

## **Review of the Private Rented Sector**

### Lines to take

- The Government is keen to promote a strong and well-managed Private Rented Sector that contributes to the vitality of the housing market. We announced in January that we had commissioned Julie Rugg and David Rhodes at the Centre for Housing Policy at York University to carry out an independent policy review of the sector.
- We are not in a position to say what will come out of the review. The researchers presented their draft report to Ministers at the end of July. While this is currently being considered internally, the findings will not be shared outside the Department until the final report is published in October this year. It is likely that recommendations arising from the review will be taken forward in the Housing Reform Green Paper.

### Background

- The review, which will report in October, was commissioned to improve policy understanding of the sector, providing evidence of the barriers that exist to ensuring the sector consistently offers a fit for purpose product, the role it has into the future and the actions that could be taken to influence and support that role. The review will cover:
  - The characteristics of the sector, regional variations, its providers and users;
  - Impact of demographic and social change on supply and demand in the sector;
  - Whether more regulation or intervention is necessary to ensure a decent supply of quality homes in the sector;
  - Whether more needs to be done to improve the experiences of both landlords and tenants in the sector in relation to their rights and responsibilities.

## **Stock condition in the Private Rented Sector**

### Lines to take

- Conditions in the private rented sector are getting better. The English House Condition Survey found that 49% of private rented sector dwellings were non-decent in 2001, which reduced to 43% in 2004 (compared to 29% of all dwellings). With the increase in the proportion of vulnerable households in the private sector who have a decent home rising from 57% in 2001 to 66% in 2005 - we are ahead of our target to increase the proportion to 70% by 2010.

### Background

#### Landlords' responsibilities and local authority powers

- The Government works with local authorities, through the Government Offices, to assist them with the development of their housing strategies. We are keen that local authorities work closely with the private landlords to achieve high standards and that they should be aware of the condition of the privately rented housing stock in their area. An effective monitoring process will enable local authorities to make more effective use of their existing powers.
- Local authorities have a range of powers they can use to force property owners to deal with problems relating to the condition or appearance of a property.
- The Housing Act 2004 introduced a wide-ranging package of reforms for improving the condition of rented housing. Under the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) local authority inspectors assess 29 categories of housing hazards, such as electrical hazards, cold, falls, fire etc and if a property is found to contain serious, "category 1", hazards, the

local council has a duty to take the most appropriate action in relation to the hazard. This could include, for example, serving a notice for the landlord to carry out improvements.

- Landlords are also legally responsible for repairs to the structure and exterior of their properties and for keeping in proper working order basins, sinks, baths and other sanitary installations as well as heating and hot water. Other matters are dependent on the terms of the tenancy agreement.
- If a landlord fails to carry out repairs the tenant can take him to court. The court can award damages and order repairs to be done. Local authorities also have powers to require landlords to carry out repairs. Landlords, owners or managing agents face fines of up to £5,000 for not complying with a statutory notice to carry out repairs.

### Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing

- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are a key source of housing for significant and often vulnerable groups of people in society. The properties are often in poor condition, poorly managed and represent a much higher risk to the safety and welfare of the occupants
- Part 2 of the Housing Act 2004 introduced licensing of HMOs. Mandatory licensing is designed to address the type of properties where we know that conditions are worst. The potentially higher risk HMOs, which local authorities have a duty to licence, are all privately rented HMOs of three or more storeys which are occupied by five or more people who form more than one household.
- The 2004 Act also enables local authorities to establish discretionary licensing schemes known as Additional HMO Licensing or Selective Licensing. Local authorities may introduce additional licensing schemes to cover smaller HMOs where they have identified problems with the management of those types, for example, two-storey HMOs housing four persons. They may introduce selective licensing schemes to cover all privately rented property in areas which suffer or are likely to suffer from low housing demand and also to those that suffer from significant and persistent anti-social behaviour. These provisions are aimed more at the management of the properties than their condition.
- The use of these discretionary powers is subject to local consultation and the consent of the Secretary of State. On approval a scheme can last for a maximum of five years.
- CLG monitors HMO licensing through the National Register of Licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation (ROLHMO) database, under which local authorities make data returns on a range of fields such as the number of

licence applications and licences issued. The Department has also commissioned the Building Research Establishment to conduct a study on the practical implication, effectiveness and impact of the HMO licensing regime since implementation. This report is expected to be published in Spring 2009.

#### Landlord accreditation

- Many local authorities operate voluntary accreditation schemes for private landlords who agree to adhere to certain standards. Such recognition can give landlords a market advantage with tenants. Local authorities and tenants can also benefit from having a pool of trusted landlords and properties.