

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SECTION

HOUSING & COMMUNITY SERVICES

2023 REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Health Section at Dublin City Council is responsible for ensuring compliance with the minimum standards for rental accommodation through inspection and enforcement.

Inspections of private rented accommodation are undertaken in a number of ways; on a proactive basis, in response to complaints and referrals, where a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) or Homeless Housing Assistance Payment (HHAP) has commenced and of properties on the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

The Environmental Health Section also carry out a range of other functions, which include:

- The enforcement of Sanitary Services Legislation, which covers nuisances and instances injurious to health
- Outdoor Event Management (with regard to supervision / inspection of drinking water provision and sanitary facilities at the events).
- Consultation on licence applications for exhumations and attendance on site.

2023 highlights

- 6,611 inspections carried out in 5,608 private rented dwellings comprising 8,385 tenancies.
- 3,042 Improvement Letters in respect of non-complaint properties served.
- 946 Improvement Notices served in respect of non-complaint properties.
- 106 Prohibition Notices served and 4 legal proceedings recommended.
- 3,235 properties brought into compliance with the Regulations.
- Virtual inspections and live streaming inspections continued.
- Four TU Dublin EHO students completed three months of their professional practice within the section

Team structure

The Environmental Health section has a complement of 28 Environmental Health Officers, 4 Senior Environmental Health Officers and a Principal Environmental Health Officer, together with an Admin Team with a complement of 1 Administrative Officer, 1 Staff Officer, 2 Assistant Staff Officers and 1 Clerical Officer

There are three inspection teams in the section;

The Rapid Response Team deals with urgent requests in relation to gross overcrowding & fire safety, complaints from private rented tenants and political & media representations, along with proactive inspections.

The **North Side Team and South Side Team** who deal with inspections and tenant complaints relating to HAP, HHAP & RAS tenancies and proactive inspections on the North and South sides of the city.

A number of vacancies exist within the Section and it is anticipated that these vacancies will continue to be filled in 2024.

The administration team are responsible for all HR matters e.g. leave, mileage, expenses and for purchasing equipment and stationary, the preparation and monitoring of annual budgets, quarterly and yearly statistical reports, managing and responding to all FOI/ data protection incidents, data inputting and local IT matters.

PRIVATE RENTED DWELLING INSPECTIONS

Inspections of private rented houses were undertaken physically and virtually either on a proactive basis, or in response to complaints or referrals, or of houses in relation to the Rental Accommodation Scheme and in houses where tenancies are on the Housing Assistance Payment and Homeless Housing Assistance Payment schemes. The number of inspections of private rented houses for 2023 was 6,611. In 2023 the total number of private rented dwellings inspected was 5,608 comprising 8,385 tenancies.

The number of houses inspected which were determined to be non-compliant with the Regulations on first inspection was 3,015. It should be noted that where an inspection determines the property to be non-compliant with the Regulations it does not infer that the property is unfit or unsuitable for habitation, it means that works are required to bring the house into compliance with the Regulations.

It is the procedure of the Environmental Health Section that where a house is considered to be non-compliant with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019 that appropriate enforcement action is taken. The aim of the action is to ensure the landlord brings the house into compliance with the Regulations.

Where an Environmental Health Officer determines a house is non-compliant either an Improvement Letter or an Improvement Notice is served on the landlord in the first instance. An Improvement Letter is issued where the Officer considers the contraventions to the Regulations less numerous and that the contraventions can be readily remedied. In cases of more numerous or more serious contraventions of the Regulations, or where an Improvement Letter has not been complied with, an Improvement Notice is served on the landlord.

For both letters and Notices an appropriate time period is given to the landlord for them to bring the house into compliance with the Regulations.

In 2023 a total of 3,042 improvement letters and 946 Improvement Notices were issued. A total of 3,235 houses were deemed compliant with the Regulations during 2023.

In cases where compliance with the Regulations is not achieved through the service of an Improvement Notice, a Prohibition Notice may be served. It requires that a house shall not be re-let until the Improvement Notice has been complied with. The service of a Prohibition Notice does not require the tenant to vacate the property nor can it be used as a reason for the landlord to terminate a tenancy. In 2023, 106 Prohibition Notices were served by the unit.

Prosecutions can be taken against landlords who failed to comply with the provisions of the Regulations. There were 4 legal actions initiated in 2023.

Virtual inspections

In 2023 all inspections relating to HAP, HHAP & RAS tenancies were actioned initially through the online virtual inspection portal. The initial action invited landlord to complete a virtual inspection via a link to the portal which was sent to all landlords by email. This portal allowed landlords to self-assess their property by completing a questionnaire, submit further relevant documentation and upload photographs.

In 2023, 377 virtual inspections were conducted. Of these, 305 completed virtual inspection forms were submitted by landlords and 72 were carried out by video call.

AUDITS

Internal Audits

In 2022 a system of internal audits was introduced into the Section and continued to be implemented in 2023. The aim of this is to check that work is being carried out as per the standard operating procedures and to highlight any issues which may need attention and review any changes which may be required to the standard operating procedures.

The Senior Environmental Health Officers conduct an internal audit on a monthly basis and report their findings to the management team. Any issues requiring attention are identified and rectified.

Dublin City Council Internal Audit

In 2023, a Dublin City Council Internal Audit was conducted in the section. The scope of the audit was to review Dublin City Councils compliance with regulatory obligations for the inspection of private rented dwellings and implementation of the inspection programme.

The Internal Audit recommendations will be actioned in 2024.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

In 2023, 6 exhumation licences were issued and 3 exhumations were completed.

There was no involvement in cases of unfit housing last year.

In 2023, the section made recommendations to the Planning Department in relation to 34 outdoor events and carried out inspections at 17 of these as part of an inspection service provided to the Planning and Property Development Department and Events Unit.

TRAINING

Dublin City Council, and the Environmental Health section has a strong commitment to ongoing professional development and, through 2023, training both collectively as a team and individually was undertaken.

As a team of Environmental Health Officers, the following training courses were completed:

- Safe Pass
- Health & Safety Statement training
- Child Safe Guarding

Individually, a number of the officers have completed or are currently undertaking courses and research in the following areas:

- An Environmental Health Officer was awarded a M.Sc. in Environmental Health and Safety
- Another Environmental Health Officer is currently studying for an M.Sc. in Event Management

FOCUS FOR 2024

The main focus of the work of the Environmental Health Section for 2024 will be to continue to inspect and, most importantly, bring properties into compliance with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019.

In order to encourage engagement in the inspection process and ultimately increase compliance within the private rented market, Environmental Health are seeking new and innovative ways to reach out and actively engage with landlords and other stakeholders within the private rental industry. This will be a focus for 2024 and beyond.

The rental market in Dublin City is vast and a focus for this year will be to continue to ensure that all types of rental accommodation are inspected to check for compliance with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES FOR 2024

There are a number of vacancies in the Section, both Environmental Health Officers and Administrative staff which we hope will be filled during 2024.

Any increase in our inspection and administrative staff corresponds to an increase in inspections and enforcement capabilities.

APPENDIX 1 - PRIVATE RENTED HOUSES DWELLINGS STATISTICS 2023

DCC Environmental Health - Private Rented Houses - Statistics	2023 TOTAL
DWELLINGS Inspected	5,608
1st INSPECTION - NON-COMPLIANT (i.e. Total number of Dwellings inspected that were NON-COMPLIANT after the 1st Inspection)	3015
1st INSPECTION - COMPLIANT (i.e. Total number of Dwellings inspected that were COMPLIANT after the 1st Inspection)	1,288
COMPLIANT (i.e. Total number of Dwellings inspected that were deemed COMPLIANT, including those where initial inspection was carried out in the previous year but compliance was achieved in the current year)	3,235
IMPROVEMENT LETTER (i.e. Total number of Dwellings where an Improvement Letter was issued)	3,042
IMPROVEMENT NOTICE (i.e. Total number of Dwellings where an Improvement Notice was served)	946
PROHIBITION NOTICE (i.e. Total number of Dwellings where a prohibition notice was served)	106
LEGAL (i.e. Total number of Dwellings where Legal Action was Initiated)	4
Total Inspections	6,611

