

## **Brighton & Hove Ethical Standards for Landlords Charter**

Example document

### **Background**

Brighton and Hove has a housing crisis. House prices are amongst the highest in the UK, and the council housing waiting list is in its thousands. This shortage of affordable housing has left almost a third of Brighton residents reliant upon private landlords for a place to live. UK housing law currently allows private landlords to charge the highest possible rent they can get and evict tenants without reason. Unfortunately, many Brighton landlords have taken advantage of this and prioritise making money over the safety and security of tenants. This has caused a housing crisis where Brighton rents are now the highest in the UK and evictions are rife. This needs to change.

Landlords have a responsibility to provide safe, affordable homes to tenants. This charter is designed to guide responsible landlords in their duty. This charter is inspired by ACORN Brighton members who have consulted hundreds of renters across the city including at our 'Big Renters Meeting and approved by branch members at our Annual General Meeting on November 2, 2019.

### **Ethical Standards for Landlords in Brighton**

#### **Rent**

Landlords who prioritise maximising their rent returns over affordability for tenants have made Brighton now the most expensive place to rent in the UK (based on a wage to rent ratio.) This has left many working-class single people and families struggling to find a home in the city, and many renters now suffer a reduced quality of life due to paying most of their wages to their landlord. The situation is often worse for low-income tenants who rely upon Local Housing Allowance to help with high rent costs. Most rents in Brighton now exceed the Local Housing Allowance which discriminates against tenants on low incomes, resulting in homelessness, and gentrification and social cleansing of our city.

The Local Housing Allowance is set by the UK government based upon what they view as a fair rent within the local broad rental market area. A landlord who charges rents that are above the Local Housing Allowance does this in the knowledge that they are disregarding the UK government's assessment of what the maximum rent should be for tenants on income support in Brighton, and are therefore wilfully discriminating against low-income tenants.

The widely accepted 'affordability rule' for rents is that they should be no more than 30% of net income. The Brighton Living wage, as endorsed by Brighton and Hove City Council as the minimum wage a worker should receive to have a reasonable standard of living. Landlords should honour the spirit of the Brighton & Hove Living Wage campaign by keeping rents at below the 30% net income.

## **Tenancies and evictions**

Current UK housing law entitles tenants to a minimum tenancy of 6 months. However, once this 6-month period is over, landlords can evict tenants without giving a reason under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988. This insecurity of tenure leaves tenants vulnerable to rent increases, tenants are often scared to ask for repairs for fear of being 'revenge' evicted under Section 21, which is also a leading cause of homelessness across the UK.

Landlord should commit to-

- Offer all tenants a minimum 2 year assured shorthold tenancy with a 6-month break clause for the tenant. This allows the tenant to have increased security in their home, yet also offers a break-clause so they are not legally responsible for the rent for the full two years if they should need to vacate the property.
- Refrain from issuing Section 21 evictions immediately.
- No winter evictions. Landlords should not serve any eviction notices under any circumstances during winter months.

It is recognised that there are occasions where landlords may need to take back possession of the property for valid reasons. If a landlord seeks to evict a tenant through no fault of the tenant, then the landlord should

- Provide a minimum of 3 months' notice
- Assist the tenant in finding suitable alternative accommodation and
- Help with relocating costs.

## **Repairs and service**

A common concern amongst renters across Brighton is problems requesting repairs from landlords. Common complaints from renters include issues with damp and mould, emergency repairs not being treated seriously, cleanliness of properties at the beginning of their tenancy,

and also serious structural issues resulting in dangerous conditions. One of the main concerns from tenants is that there is no accountability or transparency in how repairs are carried out and how complaints are responded to.

Landlords should commit to the following ethical standards:

- Respond to all emergency repairs (any repair issue which threatens to harm persons or property including no hot water) within 24 hours.
- Respond to all non-emergency repair requests within 48 hours to acknowledge receipt of the request and give a timeline of when the repair issue will be dealt with.
- Landlords to keep a log of all repairs for up to 5 years which is accessible to tenants in the interests of transparency.
- All maintenance and repairs to be carried out by certified contractors.
- Tenant to be given name and contact details of any contractor carrying out repair work on their property.
- Mandatory deep clean of properties before the start of a new tenancy at no cost to the former tenants.

Everyone deserves a safe & well-maintained home

Landlords who take their responsibility to ensure their tenants have a safe and comfortable home. Landlords should;

- Ensure properties are safe and secure
- Ensure properties are regularly decorated to a reasonable standard, and respect the rights of their tenant to decorate their own home to their taste.

## **Discrimination**

It is important to emphasize a landlord's responsibility to treat all tenants fairly and in line with the Equalities Act 2019. Landlords and their agent must commit to not discriminating against tenants and prospective tenants based upon their age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status or disability. Landlords should commit to not discriminating against tenants due to their employment status, and should respect a tenant right to a family life and not discriminate against tenants who have children or tenants who have pets.

