



Supporting residents with housing issues in Tower Hamlets: **A quick guide for health and care professionals**

2025



This guide aims to help health and care professionals steer Tower Hamlets residents with housing issues towards appropriate sources of support.

It was developed with health professionals in mind but may be useful to professionals in a range of services.

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Key points: Housing in Tower Hamlets

Social housing demand and access

- As of October 2025, there are **around 28,469 households** on the Tower Hamlets housing waiting list.
- Currently, the **average wait** for a **two-bed property for those in priority Band 1** is **five years**, and for a three-bed it is **seven years**. Waits for larger homes are even longer.
- There is a **national shortage** of housing and social housing (rented from the council or housing associations) is in **exceptionally high demand** in Tower Hamlets due to issues such as overcrowding, low wages and an unaffordable private rental market.
- Residents can apply to join the waiting list for social housing (the '**Common Housing Register**'). If they qualify, they are placed into a priority band based on their circumstances.
- Despite Tower Hamlets' social house-building programme, **many households in lower bands may never receive social housing**.

Priority bands explained

- **Band 1 (highest priority):** Households in emergency situations, and those with priority **medical need** (such as a severe and long-term limiting illness/disability) **worsened by their housing situation**.
- **Band 2: Overcrowded households**, people who are homeless, or those with other priority needs but no local connection to Tower Hamlets.
- **Band 3:** Households with housing needs that are **less urgent**.
- More details of the allocations scheme can be found here: [The Common Housing Register Partnership Allocations Scheme \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Housing conditions and legal protections

- Problems with housing conditions such as **cold, disrepair (e.g. leaks / pests / electrical faults), damp and mould** are a concern in Tower Hamlets.
- As a local authority, the Council has a duty to improve housing standards in its own housing stock, and to enforce standards in the private rented sector.
- Although the Council does not regulate social housing providers, it strongly encourages all social landlords to offer the highest possible standards of accommodation for residents wherever feasible.
- Rented homes must be **fit for human habitation** under the **Homes Act (2018)**, and free from health hazards under the **Health and Housing Safety Rating System (Housing Act, 2004)**.
- Tenants have a legal right to challenge unsafe housing conditions.

Enforcement and complaints

- **Council Environmental Health teams** are responsible for ensuring homes are safe and can take enforcement action against **private landlords and housing associations** who fail to meet legal standards.
- **The Housing Ombudsman** is responsible for complaint resolution for social housing providers, including housing associations and local authorities.

About Awaab's Law

From **27 October 2025**, social landlords must address all emergency hazards and all damp and mould hazards that present a significant risk of harm to tenants to **fixed timeframes**.

In **2026**, regulations will be extended to cover more health-related housing hazards, such as cold, heat, fire risks, and structural safety.

In **2027**, regulations will be extended to all remaining Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards (apart from overcrowding) where they present a significant risk of harm.

Read government guidance on Awaab's law [**here**](#).

How to support residents with medical needs who want rehousing

Applying for medical priority

Some residents may qualify for medical priority on the housing register if their health is significantly affected by their current housing and they have a permanent and long-term limiting illness.

If a resident **has** an active housing application:

- They should contact their lettings officer or the council's Housing Options Service by calling **0207 364 7474**.
- They will be sent a medical questionnaire which they should fill in themselves, explaining clearly how their current housing affects their household's health and quality of life.
- If needed, they can get help with form-filling from **Tower Hamlets Advice Services**.

Residents with severe and long-term limiting illness or disability that is worsened by their housing situation may qualify for Band 1 -the highest priority. However, even with Band 1 status, waiting times for rehousing can still be long.

If a resident **does not have** an active housing application:

- After **checking eligibility** and **other housing options first**, they should apply to join the housing register online via the council's **Housing Options Service**.
- Once their application is submitted, they can then follow the steps outlined above to request medical priority.

What information should healthcare professionals provide about health?

If the council needs further medical evidence:

- They will request and pay for a letter directly from the healthcare professional
- There is no need to send a letter in advance

Occupational therapy referrals

If a resident is struggling with everyday tasks (e.g. climbing stairs, bathing, cooking) they may benefit from an Occupational Therapy assessment.

Referrals can be made by:

- Health and social care professionals
- Residents themselves via the council website **here** or by searching 'occupational therapy assessment' on the **council website**

How to support residents in rented homes facing damp, mould, and disrepair

Both private and social landlords must adhere to legislation in relation to health hazards such as damp, mould and disrepair. Failure to comply can result in prosecution or financial penalties.

The [Tower Hamlets Council website](#) provides practical advice for residents on preventing and managing damp and mould.

How tenants report housing repairs

The process for tenants to report repairs depends on the type of tenancy. See the diagram titled '**Pathways for reporting repairs in rented properties**' on page 7.

When a supporting letter from a health or social care professional may be needed

If a health or social care professional is concerned that:

- The response time to a reported repair puts the resident at risk, or
- No appropriate action has been taken to address a health and safety issue in the home

...they can write a **supporting letter** for the tenant, **outlining their concerns**.

Supporting letters should also include the following details:

- Resident's name and address
- Who the resident pays their rent to
- Number of people occupying the property and number of rooms
- If possible, photos of the health and safety issue

In these cases, health professionals should also:

- Signpost tenants to relevant advice, advocacy, and representation services (see page 9) that can explain their legal rights and provide representation if needed
- In GP practices, staff can also refer directly to the on-site social welfare legal advice worker

Where tenants should send the supporting letter from their health or social care professional

Council tenants

- Tenants should upload the letter via the MyHome portal [here](#) (or via '[report a repair](#)' page on the council website)
- The letter will help the council prioritise repairs

Housing Association tenants

- Tenants should give the letter to their housing association
- They should also be encouraged to raise an official complaint with the housing association and request a complaint reference number - this reference number is essential for escalation and for involving the Housing Ombudsman if needed.

Private tenants

- Tenants should email the letter to their landlord

Contacting Environmental Health (tenant)

If a tenant needs to contact the council's Environmental Health team (see pathways 2 and 3 on page 7) they should include the following information in their email or phone call:

- Resident's name and address
- Who resident pays their rent to
- Number of people occupying the property and number of rooms
- If possible, photos and videos of the health and safety issue

This helps Environmental Health assess the situation and respond appropriately.

Pathways for reporting repairs in rented properties

Check whether the landlord or tenant is responsible for the repair

Tenant can check [here](#) or search 'house repairs' on the [council website: www.towerhamlets.gov.uk](#).

If the landlord is responsible, report the hazard via the relevant pathway below.

Pathway 1: Tower Hamlets Council tenants

Council tenants can report repairs via:

📞 Council service centre: **0800 376 1637**

💻 Council website 'report a repair': towerhamlets.gov.uk

🏡 Residents Hub at Town Hall

💬 Translation services available. Tenants can nominate someone to speak on their behalf.

The Council must:

Address damp and mould within set timeframes-see [here](#)

Investigate emergency repairs (any risk) within **24 hours**.

Complete other repairs within set timeframes, in line with national guidance and the council's repairs policy.

If the issue isn't resolved tenants can:

📞 Call the Council Service Centre again: **0800 376 1637**

💻 [Submit a complaint online](#) (search 'make a complaint' on [council website](#))

✉️ Contact the Housing Ombudsman: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Pathway 2: Housing Association tenants

Housing association tenants can report repairs by:

👤 Reporting the repair to their housing association

✉️ A sample letter for the tenant to use is available on the council website if needed (search '[House repairs](#)' and scroll down)

The Housing Association must:

Address damp and mould within set timeframes-see [here](#)

Investigate emergency repairs (any risk) within **24 hours**.

Complete other repairs within set timeframes, in line with national guidance.

If the issue isn't resolved tenants can:

Make an **official complaint** to their housing association and obtain a **complaint reference number** (see [here](#) or search 'council and housing association tenant complaints')

✉️ Contact Environmental Health: environmental.health@towerhamlets.gov.uk or [0207 364 5008](tel:02073645008) (ask for Health and Housing)

✉️ Contact the Housing Ombudsman: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

📄 Seek legal advice if needed

Pathway 3: Private tenants

Private tenants can report repairs by:

👤 Contacting their landlord or letting agent directly

✉️ A sample letter for the tenant to use is available on the council website if needed (search '[House repairs](#)' and scroll down)

If there's no response within 10 working days:

Tenant should contact Environmental Health: environmental.health@towerhamlets.gov.uk (request a call back) or [0207 364 5008](tel:02073645008) (ask for Health and Housing)

Environmental Health (EH) response:

If urgent (serious health risk): EH officer will contact tenant within **24 hours**

If **non-urgent**: tenant must provide written details; landlord is given **14 days** to fix the issue

If no progress after 14 days, the EH officer will:

Assess the problem; arrange an inspection; take action to ensure the home is safe and free from **Category 1 hazards**

If unhappy with council's response:

Tenants can complain by searching '[council housing complaints](#)' on the council website.

How to support residents to find alternative accommodation

When circumstances change

If a resident's situation has changed since they applied for housing (e.g. new medical condition, change in household size), encourage them to inform the council:

Change of circumstances (towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Or search 'change of circumstances' on the council website.

If a resident's situation has changed and they do not yet have an active housing application, see the guidance on page 4 under **'If a resident does not yet have an active housing application'**.

Tips for successful bidding

Share these practical tips to help residents make the most of their housing bids:

- Bid regularly and use all three bids for suitable homes
- Don't limit bids to one property type
- Only bid for ground floor homes if medically necessary -they're in high demand
- Consider different areas and landlords
- Don't overlook new builds – they may appear as a single grouped advert
- Residents can be set up to auto bid, if they struggle to bid regularly and need support. For support, contact the council's Housing Options Service on **0207 364 7474**, visit the Resident's Hub at the Town Hall, or search '**Bidding for Homes**' on the [council website](#)

Explore other housing options

Help residents assess whether social housing is realistic now in the context of a national and local housing shortage, and explore alternatives like:

- Mutual exchange (swap homes with another tenant – search '**Mutual home exchange**' on the [council website](#))
- Search local affordable housing providers [here](#)
- The **key worker housing scheme** (may offer additional housing priority for selected public sector workers such as nurses)
- **Homes for Londoners portal** (a platform to help Londoners find affordable homes to rent or buy)
- Shared ownership (part rent, part buy)

Residents may also wish to search **Ways to move - Homesseekers (thhs.org.uk)** for more support.

Agencies and support services

Signpost residents to organisations that offer advice and support:

Housing advice and advocacy

- Housing Advice Team (private sector):
Housing.Advice@towerhamlets.gov.uk 0207 364 7474
- Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network: thcan.org.uk
- Citizens Advice East End: eastendcab.org.uk
- Shelter (housing charity): shelter.org.uk
- Justice for Tenants (free advice and representation):
justicefortenants.org
- **Tower Hamlets Renters Union** (community of renters, campaigning for better housing): londonrentersunion.org

Affordable housing providers

Search the council website for approved local affordable housing providers [here](#).

Additional resources

Damp, mould and disrepair

- Gov.uk: [health risks of damp and mould](#)
- Citizen's Advice: [Damp and mould advice](#)
- Tower Hamlets Council: [Damp and mould advice](#)
- Shelter: [Compensation for poor repairs and conditions](#)

Other support

- Social prescribers: [Tower Hamlets Connect](#)
- Tower Hamlets Council: [Cost of Living Support](#): inc. food, fuel and benefits advice
- [Real: Disabled People's Charity](#): Independent, confidential support for disabled people in Tower Hamlets, including one-to-one and group sessions.
- Report rogue landlords: Greater London Authority [reporting form](#): Use the GLA form to report landlords without a valid licence or breaching licence terms.

Advisory

Tenants should be directed to independent, non-commercial advice services such as local law centres, Citizens Advice, or THCAN partners.

Commercial claims companies may charge fees and may limit tenants' legal options.

This guide was produced by the **Health and Housing Task and Finish Group**.