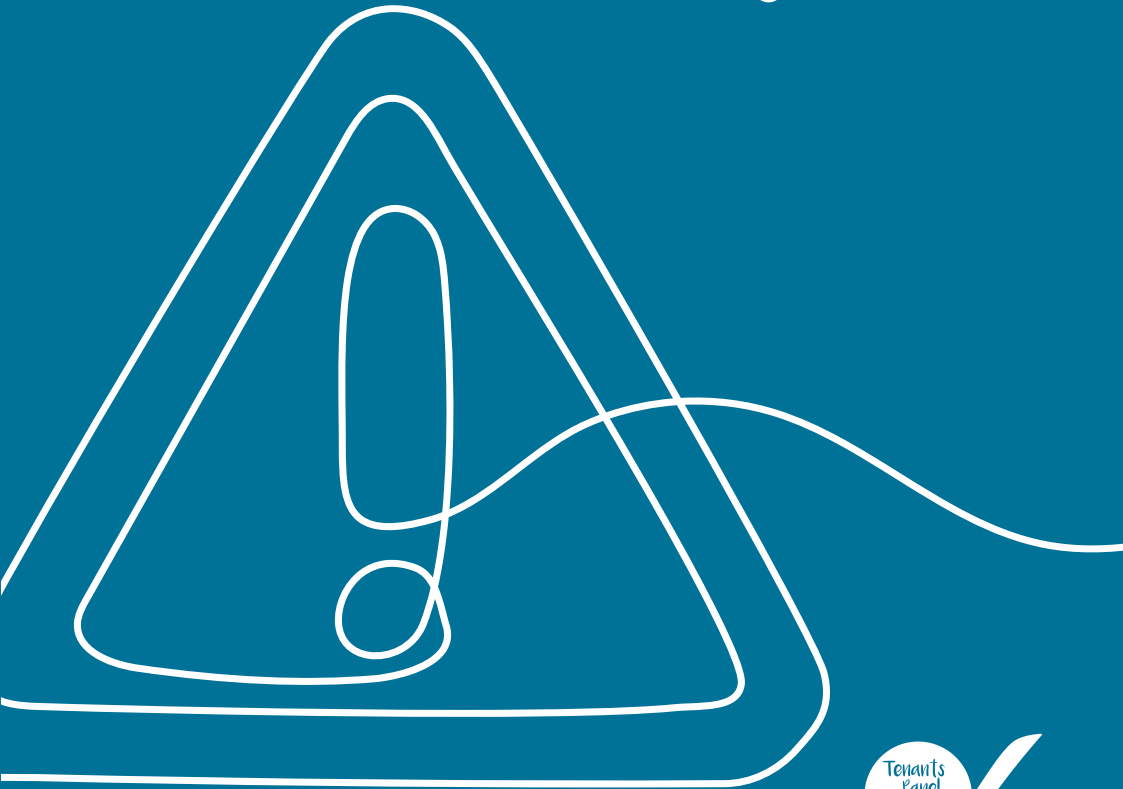




DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Housing Services Tackling social housing fraud



Council housing fraud is a very serious crime, and every tenancy obtained dishonestly deprives others of a home.

If you are found guilty of social housing fraud you may lose your home, your right to council housing in the future, receive a large fine and/or be imprisoned..

What is social housing fraud?

Social Housing Fraud is an offence that relates to people misusing the provision of social housing.

We take social housing fraud extremely seriously as it prevents our homes being used by those with a genuine need. We want to make the best use of the homes we own and ensure that the people living there are legally entitled to be there.

People who are already in need of social housing and on the waiting list will have to wait even longer if homes continue to be occupied by people who have no right to live there.

Common types of social housing fraud include:

- Not telling the truth when applying for a property.
- Sub-letting a Council home without permission including using it as an Airbnb.
- Living in a property after someone has died or the person who's name the tenancy is in without the right to do so.
- Not living in the property as your only or main home.
- Giving false information when applying to buy a Council home under the Right to Buy or Rent to Buy schemes.
- Giving false information to us when applying to succeed a tenancy, such as giving false information about living in a property.
- Key-selling where a tenant is paid to pass on their keys in return for a one-off payment.
- Unauthorised mutual exchanges between tenants..



What action can you take?

The action we take will depend on the type and scale of the fraud committed. Some of the options open to us are:

- Possession orders to recover the property and evict anyone living in our property who has committed fraud. Someone who has been evicted because they committed tenancy fraud is very unlikely to be given a social housing tenancy again.
- Criminal prosecution usually under the Fraud Act 2006 or the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013. This can result in a prison sentence of up to two years. Money orders including Unlawful Profit Orders, which recover profits made from the fraud, and Compensation orders, which recover money lost by the council as a result of the tenancy fraud

We can choose to pursue more than one of these options.

We will investigate all reports of housing fraud and act against offenders.

If you have made money from unlawful subletting, we will seek an order to ensure that you will be made to pay this back, and all court costs incurred, to the Council if you are convicted

Why do you tackle housing fraud?

We are in a national housing crisis and Darlington is no exception. There are currently over 2,100 households on our housing register waiting to access social housing and we have a very limited number of properties to let each year.

Households may wait for a long time for an offer of suitable accommodation, often in expensive temporary accommodation which puts a huge strain on Council budgets. Housing fraud reduces the availability of social housing at a time of extreme demand. Every property subject to housing fraud is a property that could potentially be used to house a person or family on the waiting list.

How do you investigate housing fraud?

If we suspect housing fraud, we will begin an investigation to gather evidence, this can include speaking with neighbours, carrying out visits to your home, checking records, speaking to other internal departments and gathering evidence from other sources such as banks and social media.

We also take part in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) which is an exercise that matches electronic data within and between public and private sector bodies to prevent and detect fraud. Any data matches help to highlight potential fraud and allow us to investigate fraud proactively.

Since April 2014, we have been able to compel listed organisations to provide us with information where it is reasonably required for the purpose of preventing, detecting or securing evidence for the conviction of an offence of social housing fraud.

The listed organisations are:

- Banks.
- Building societies.
- Other providers of credit.
- Telecommunications providers.
- Utility companies

The power to require information from listed organisations covers investigations into:

- Unlawful subletting of social housing.
- Fraudulent applications for social housing under Part 6 or 7 Housing Act 1996.
- Fraudulent applications for the right to buy

Courts can order companies such as Airbnb to share information with a local authority about payments they had received for short-term lets to help identify cases of social housing fraud.



What anti-fraud measures do you take?

We carry out a number of checks before and during your tenancy to reduce social housing fraud, these include (not exhaustive):

- Taking a photo of you when you sign up for a new tenancy so we can check this when we visit you.
- Asking you security questions that only the tenant would know when you contact us so we can check we are talking to the tenant and avoid any personal disclosure of information.
- Asking for written evidence of occupation when completing succession investigations.
- Carrying out tenancy visits to check who is living in our homes.
- Acting on properties that seem to be empty when someone should be living there

Checks can happen at any time during a tenancy, without any warning.



What can I do to help?

If you suspect someone of social housing fraud you should contact us and give us as much detail as you can so we can start an investigation. You can give us this information anonymously, we won't be able to give you direct feedback, but rest assured we will look into it.

Your help in reporting fraud is important because you can see what is happening in your community.

- You might know that someone has a home that we don't know about or if they have given false information in their housing application.
- You might suspect someone of housing fraud if you have seen them collect rent from your neighbours.
- You might be suspicious because the tenants of a property keep changing.

If you suspect someone is a housing cheat, please let us know. It could make a big difference to people in real need.

If you have a tenancy with us, you can also help by making sure that you keep all your information up to date. If there have been any changes in your household, we need to know.

The sort of changes we need to know about include:

- Someone has moved out.
- Someone has moved in.
- You have got married.
- You have changed your name.
- Your circumstances have changed.
- You are moving out.
- Any other changes along these lines.

You can report suspected housing fraud to us by contacting us, contact details can be found on the back page of this leaflet.

If you would like to find out more about our policies, strategies or useful information please use the QR code below. You can also find more information about social housing fraud at www.darlington.gov.uk/housing and www.tenancyfraudforum.org.uk/what-is-tenancy-fraud.





Housing Services contact details



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