

**Cllr Helen Dennis**  
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Dear Landlord,

### **Preventing homelessness in the private rented sector in Southwark**

Southwark Council records indicate that you are a private landlord, or work on behalf of one, operating in Southwark. We are writing to ask you to stand by your tenants and prevent homelessness, as the coronavirus pandemic continues and the cold winter months arrive.

Many private landlords have already been understanding and flexible with tenants and if that is the case for you, thank you. Unfortunately, reports from across the country suggest a small minority of landlords have attempted to carry out illegal evictions during the pandemic. Illegal eviction is a criminal offence and Southwark Council will take action against landlords who break the law. For most assured shorthold tenancies, [the notice period landlords must give tenants before they can evict is now six months](#).

Sadly, the worsening economic and public health situation means that more private tenants are likely to experience financial difficulties. The council has called on central government to increase Universal Credit payments to match average rents in Southwark. We also back the calls by many, including the National Residential Landlords Association and Generation Rent, for an emergency grant and loan package to support private renters who have fallen into arrears during the pandemic.

We are aware that this has also been a difficult time for landlords. For those with mortgage repayments to make, [lenders have extended the window for repayment holiday applications until 31st October](#). As a social landlord, it is disappointing that greater central government support for all landlords has not been more forthcoming. It is worth noting that we are not asking you to avoid all evictions. The courts will rightly prioritise evictions for perpetrators of antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse. However, the vast majority of tenants who are experiencing financial difficulties currently are doing so through no fault of their own, as a result of the pandemic. Here are some steps you can take to help these tenants:

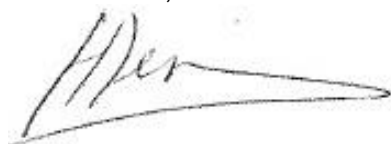
- **Stand by your tenants.** You may be aware of the action plan from the National Residential Landlords Association for [managing arrears and avoiding possession claims](#), which we would urge you to follow. The economic and public health situation will, we hope, improve in 2021. A tsunami of evictions in the private sector would undermine the

economic recovery – a recovery which in the long term will benefit both tenants and landlords.

- **Signpost tenants.** If you are worried that your tenants in Southwark may not be able to make their rent due to the pandemic affecting their finances, you should encourage them to [get in touch with the council's financial inclusion team](#). Limited funding from central government means we will not be able to help all those with arrears, but in exceptional circumstances support could include an emergency grant to pay off arrears or discretionary payments to top up rent. This could be the case for very vulnerable tenants or where a landlord's financial position is extremely precarious. If your tenant receives Universal Credit towards their rent, you may also be able to [apply for housing payments to be paid to you directly](#).
- **Use empty properties to help end homelessness.** If you have any empty properties as a result of the pandemic, the council may be able to house a local homeless person or family in there. The council can [guarantee you rental income for leases under this scheme](#).
- **Respond to the private rented sector licensing scheme consultation.** Southwark Council wants to end homelessness in the borough. Part of how we aim to achieve this is by raising standards in the private rented sector. We will need your help to do this. In the coming months, we are planning to launch a consultation on some changes to the council's private rented sector licensing scheme. The proposed changes to the scheme will be accompanied by a 'Southwark Gold Standard' to recognise and reward landlord good practice. The consultation will be available at <https://consultations.southwark.gov.uk/>. Please let us know what you think when the consultation goes live.

The pandemic has been difficult for so many sectors of society and the economy. By following the above steps, you will be helping to prevent homelessness at this time of national crisis.

Best wishes,



**Cllr Helen Dennis**  
Cabinet Member for Social Support &  
Homelessness



**Cllr Leo Pollak**  
Cabinet Member for Housing