

Frequently Asked Questions

Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS)

1. I am a property owner interested in the new scheme; what should I do?

Owners of houses or apartments that have been vacant for at least one year, and which require repairs to bring the property to the required standard for rented properties, should contact their local authority and express an interest in the scheme.

2. What is the main benefit for property owners?

If a property requires repairs to bring it up to standard for letting, a local authority or Approved Housing Body (AHB) will pay for this repair work up-front in return for the property being made available for social housing through a lease with a local authority or AHB for a period of at least 10 years.

3. What are the terms and conditions?

There are a number of requirements in relation to the scheme:

- the property has to be vacant for at least 12 months prior to submission: proof of vacancy will be required;
- there has to be a social housing demand for the property;
- the property has to be assessed as being viable to provide social housing.

If the property meets these requirements it will be inspected by local authority or AHB staff who will identify the works that are required to bring the house up to the required standard.

If the owner wishes to enter into a lease arrangement to make the property available for social housing with the local authority or Approved Housing Body, the following conditions will apply -

- the lease term must be between 10 and 20 years, depending on the cost of the upgrade works;
- the lease payments to the property owner will be based on:
 - the general terms of social leasing which is set at 80% (85% for apartments) of the current market rental rates in the property location;
 - a further adjustment to the lease payment to off-set the cost of the repair/upgrade work until the cost of the work has been repaid.

The scope and cost of the works required to meet the Standards, and the recoupment of the works cost through the lease payments, will be agreed between the owner and the local authority/ AHB.

4. What is the minimum standard required?

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Each local authority will set out its own specific requirements for properties. However, the following will apply in all areas:

- Properties must be in good structural condition and will be subject to inspection by the local authority or the AHB;
- Properties must be compliant with the **Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017** (see link <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/private-rented-housing/inspections/minimum-standards-rented-accommodation>);
- BER certificates will be required for all properties. Minimum BER criteria may apply in some local authority areas.

Property owners will also be required to prove ownership of the house and tax compliance. It will be the responsibility of the owner to ensure that they consult with their finance/mortgage provider and get consent to enter into a leasing arrangement, if required.

5. What will the role of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) be?

AHBs are independent, not-for-profit organisations. They provide affordable rented housing for people who cannot afford to pay private sector rents or buy their own homes; or for particular groups, such as older people or homeless people.

AHBs will be working with local authorities and property owners by both identifying properties and working with property owners to bring the properties up to the required standard.

AHBs may sign lease arrangements with property owners on behalf of, and with the agreement of, local authorities. These properties will then be managed by the AHBs on behalf of the local authorities.

6. Who will inspect the property?

If the property is deemed to be suitable for social housing and in an area where there is demand for social housing, the local authority or AHB will arrange for a site visit of the property to determine the condition of the property and assess the level of repairs that may be required to bring the property to the required standard.

At the end of the site visit, the local authority or AHB will provide the property owners with a checklist list based on the Standards for Rented Houses (see above).

7. Will the property owner have to arrange a contractor to complete the work?

If the property owner wishes to make the property available under a lease arrangement with a local authority or AHB, then both parties sign an Agreement to Lease. This signals the property owner's agreement to the length of the lease arrangement, the rent of the property and a schedule of the works required.

There are two options for the completion of the necessary works.

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- A. Property owner arranges a contractor, or**
- B. Local authority/AHB engages a contractor**

Option A:

Following the initial site visit by the local authority/AHB, the property owner will be responsible for the preparation of a schedule of works and must then arrange for a quote for the works and this must be agreed with the local authority/AHB before work begins. The repair works must be carried out by an approved contractor who is fully tax compliant and has furnished all necessary evidence of same to the local authority/AHB as required.

On completion of the works, the property owner should arrange for an invoice from the contractor and present this to the local authority/AHB. The local authority/AHB will arrange for a site visit to the property and if all works have been carried out to the standard required, will provide the property owner with the agreed amount to settle the invoice. Proof of payment to the contractor must be provided to the local authority/AHB within 10 working days.

Option B:

For property owners who may not be in a position to engage a contractor, the repair works may be carried out by, or on behalf of, the local authority/AHB. In advance of the works commencing the property owner will be required to complete a Homeowners Agreement and License which gives authority to the Local Authority/AHB to conduct works on the property.

8. Is there a maximum value of works allowed under the scheme?

The purpose of the initiative is to restore suitable properties to the required standard for long-term leasing as outlined in No. 4 above. The local authority or AHB will agree with a property owner the specific works and associated costs on a case by case basis having regard to the condition of the property. Not all properties will require significant works to bring them up to standard. However it is recognised that others, especially those that may have been vacant for a longer period, may require more extensive repair. The maximum costs of repairs allowable under the initiative will be €40,000, inclusive of VAT. As the property owner is paying for these repairs through an offset against rental income, it is in the interests of the property owner that repair costs are not excessive.

9. Is the property required to be furnished?

Yes, the property must be furnished and include certain appliances. Rent is typically agreed on the basis of a furnished property. The furnishings and appliances provided within a property are a factor in agreeing the rent level. The cost of providing the necessary furniture may be included in the ceiling cost of €40,000 subject to agreement with the local authority on what furniture is required, appropriate costs and evidence of purchase receipts. In some cases where works are being carried out by a contractor it may be possible to request a "furniture pack" as part of the contract.

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The list below is an indicative guide to the furniture that is required:

- a. All rooms or parts of the property must have an appropriate floor covering. All windows should have appropriate window coverings e.g. blinds and/or curtains.
- b. Each bathroom/en-suite should include a bathroom cabinet and the shower unit should have an adequate shower screen. Floor coverings in these areas should be water resistant.
- c. Each bedroom should include an appropriate sized bed for that room. Each bed should include a minimum of a bed base and a mattress. One wardrobe (integrated or free standing) per room should be provided as a minimum.
- d. The dining area should have a table and an adequate number of chairs to suit the expected occupancy level. The living area should include a minimum of a suite of furniture appropriate to the room size.
- e. The kitchen should include the following items as a minimum:
 - A cooker/oven and 4 ring hob;
 - Fridge-freezer unit or separate fridge and freezer;
 - Washing Machine(a dryer may also be required in some circumstances);
 - Cooker hood or an extractor fan.

10. How much can the property owner expect to receive in rent?

Rents will be agreed through negotiation with the local authority/AHB. The maximum rent to be agreed under the terms of social leasing will be 80% (85% in the case of apartments) of the current market rent. Rent reviews will usually take place every 3 or 4 years.

The cost of the repairs will be offset against the agreed rental payment until the value of the works is repaid. The local authority/ AHB will agree with the property owner on a case by case basis what the appropriate offset period will be on the capital amount advanced. These arrangements may include scenarios whereby the offset is by way of a rent-free period; a consistent reduction over the duration of the lease or a term which is scaled against the duration of the lease as set out in the examples in the table below.

Cost of repairs	Minimum duration of lease	Offset to be cleared by
Up to 10,000	10 years	Year 8
Up to 20,000	15 years	Year 12
In excess of 20,000	20 years	Year 15

Overall, the benefits of the long-term lease arrangement to the property owner include -

- Guaranteed rent;
- Avoid losing rent during vacant periods;

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- No dealing with tenants and day-to-day maintenance;
- No need to collect rent or finding a new tenant;
- Avoid advertising costs.

11. What is the minimum length of a lease?

The minimum length of the lease is ten years. Depending on the value of the repairs, the local authority/AHB may require the lease period to be up to 20 years. This will ensure that the value of the repairs is repaid in a gradual fashion. See example in the table below.

Cost of repairs	Minimum duration of lease	Offset to be cleared by
Up to 10,000	10 years	Year 8
Up to 20,000	15 years	Year 12
In excess of 20,000	20 years	Year 15

12. How is the cost of the repairs repaid?

The local authority/AHB will agree with the property owner on a case by case basis what the appropriate offset period will be. These arrangements may include scenarios whereby the offset is by way of a rent-free period; a consistent reduction over the duration of the lease or a term which is scaled against the duration of the lease as in the table above.

The local authority/AHB will agree with the property owner on a case by case basis what the appropriate offset period will be.

13. Who will be responsible for maintaining the property?

The owner will retain responsibility for structural insurance, structural maintenance and structural repair. The owner will also retain responsibility for the payment of any management company service charge (usually apartments only), and any other charges for which the property owner is liable e.g. Local Property Tax (LPT) and Non-Principal Private Residence Charge (NPPR).

The local authority or AHB will manage and provide support to its tenants. The local authority or AHB will maintain the property internally for the term of the lease.

Properties will be returned to the property owner in good condition at the end of the lease term, subject to normal wear and tear. In some instances the property owner may agree with the local authority to include an 'option to purchase' as a condition of the lease. This gives the local authority the option to buy the property during the term of the lease. Both parties must be in agreement to include this condition and the specific terms can be negotiated.

It will be the responsibility of the property owner to consult with their finance provider/lender and to obtain consent to enter into a leasing arrangement if required.

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14. Will the property owner be the landlord?

No. The properties acquired under this arrangement will be offered by the local authority or the AHB as accommodation to households who have been approved by the local authority for social housing. The local authority or AHB will be the landlord and tenants will sign a tenancy agreement with the local authority or the AHB. These houses will not be available to private tenants.

15. Will these units be available to HAP and RAS tenants?

No. While these properties will be offered by the local authority or the AHB as accommodation to households who have been approved by the local authority for housing, tenants will sign a tenancy agreement with the local authority or the AHB. These houses will not be available to private tenants.

16. What if I want my property back before the end of the lease term?

Under the long term lease arrangement, the lease term will be for a minimum of 10 years.

In all cases a clawback clause will be included in the lease agreement if the property is withdrawn or becomes unavailable before the end of the offset period of the lease. This is to ensure the value of the works already paid for by the Local Authority/AHB is fully repaid with the appropriate interest amount.

17. Can I sell the property during the term?

Under the long term leasing arrangement the property can be sold by the property owner during the term, on the condition that the lease agreement is transferred to the new owner and the local authority or AHB are notified in advance.

18. What happens if the tenant damages the property?

Under the long term leasing arrangements the property must be returned to the property owner at the end of the term in good repair order and condition, save for fair wear and tear. The local authority or AHB will be responsible for internal maintenance and repairs during the term of the lease.

When entering into a leasing agreement, property owners accept that, at the end of the lease term, furnishings and appliances may not be returned. Any furniture and appliances that are left in the property will revert to the ownership of the property owner and are not subject to the requirement to have them in the same condition as at the outset of the lease, subject to fair wear and tear.

19. Is the scheme available nationally?

The scheme was initially piloted in Carlow County Council and Waterford City and County Council from 6 October 2016. The scheme was extended to all local authorities in February

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and is now available nationwide. Property owners interested in the scheme should contact their local authority for more information.

20. How much money has been allocated to the scheme?

As part of the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland, €140m million has been allocated towards the cost of funding the necessary repairs to properties out to 2021.

May 2017

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