

Appendix 1

Note for OSC Report

- 1 Since March 2011 when the Scrutiny Panel Review on Lettings Agents was reported, Citizens Advice Bureau clients continue to receive complaints about difficulties with letting agents and landlords, particularly around repairs not being carried out on the property, misleading advertising, surprising and high charges, (charges "bear no relation to the cost of the work involved"), and confusion about holding deposits.
- 2 One of the biggest problems reported was getting repairs dealt with. Many tenants reported difficulties getting through to the agent and said when they finally did they were met with an unprofessional and uncooperative response. Clients often reported feeling helpless in getting any action. The effects of poor standards on tenants and their families can affect their physical and mental health, safety and security—and sometimes all of these.
- 3 In response to complaints about the actions of some letting agents, the Government has put in place regulation requiring all letting agents to sign up to one of three approved redress scheme allowing tenants to hold them to account and make requests for compensation. The schemes are run by The Property Ombudsman, Ombudsman Services and the Property Redress Scheme. They had until 1st October to comply. Failure to do so lays them open to a fine of £5000. Tenants with a grievance can go for redress and possibly get compensation.
- 4 Forcing all letting agents to join a redress scheme is undoubtedly a positive move but the new legislation stops short of full regulation or forcing agents to belong to a code of practice. The schemes do not cover complaints about the amount of fees charged or their reasonableness, tenancy deposits or issues which are the landlord's responsibility.
- 5 Given that Brighton and Hove has one of the highest proportion of renters in the country with almost three in 10 of the city's private housing stock on the rental market, and the evidence of problems reported to advice centres, there is strong justification for revisiting the recommendations of the review.

