

Private Sector Landlords Newsletter

Issue 1

Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of Stafford Borough Council's Private Sector Landlords newsletter. This newsletter is designed to complement the information that we provide at our Private Sector Landlords Forums. We aim to provide you with useful information and advice on private sector housing and landlord issues as well as updates when legislation changes.

In this edition we will look at the Government's response to the Rugg Review and how it may directly affect you. Also included is practical advice for dealing with tenants in rent arrears and details about forthcoming drop-in sessions for landlords.

We welcome any feedback that you have on the newsletter, including any ideas for topics you would like to see covered in future editions.

Landlord Forum 14 October 2009

Private Landlords Forum

14th October 2009

Civic Centre, Riverside

From 5.00 pm—8.00 pm.

You are invited to our Autumn Private Landlords Forum
with presentations from 6.00 pm including:-

Ian Williamson (Health & Safety Executive) — Gas Safety in rented homes
Sue Hallett (Drug and Alcohol Action Team) - Support for tenants
Lisa Deans (Staffordshire Police) - Anti-Social Behaviour.

Officers from Housing Options, Housing Standards and Revenues/Benefits
will be available between 5.00 pm and 6.00 pm for individual discussions.

The Rugg Review: The Private Rented Sector: Professionalism and Quality

The Rugg Report has introduced proposals for a major new package of measures to strengthen consumer protection for tenants living in private rented accommodation. These new measures are intended to increase professionalism, drive out bad landlords and strengthen protection for tenants affected by unnecessary repossessions.

The new proposals as recommended in Julie Rugg's Independent Review of the Private Rented Sector, have been subject to recent consultation and includes:

- The introduction of a light-touch national register of every private landlord in England to increase protection for both vulnerable tenants and good landlords. Landlords may need to include their registration number on all tenancy agreements and could be removed from the register for persistent poor performance like failing to carry out essential repairs, or not protecting tenants' deposits
- Full regulation for private sector letting agents. Letting and managing agents do not currently need to have professional credentials. This means that both tenants and landlords have no realistic redress when things go wrong. To tackle these problems, the government proposes creating an independent regulator for all letting and managing agents
- An improved complaints and redress procedure. For the first time, the Government will look to set up a mechanism whereby tenants are able to register official complaints about landlords, and if these complaints are proven, landlords could be removed from the national register
- Greater local authority support for good landlords.

The Government has also announced its intention to change the law to ensure that tenants have a minimum two months' notice if they have to leave their home because their landlord's property has been repossessed. At present, a gap in legal protection means that some tenants could be evicted at short notice if their landlord's property is repossessed - sometimes with less than two weeks to move their belongings and find somewhere new to live. These changes are part of a wider package of support the Government has put in place to support households at risk of repossession in the current economic climate.

Support for Private Landlords During the Economic Downturn

We are looking to support landlords and tenants during the economic downturn . A recent BBC report found that buy to let landlords are losing their properties at over 3 times the rate of other homeowners, according to the Council of Mortgage Lenders. As the downturn bites lenders are appointing more receivers of rent in order to allow the tenant to remain in the property. It is also reported that many landlords found themselves in difficulty after paying too much for buy to let flats only to find that rents have often not lived up to expectations.

In the light of this our Housing Options Team are urging local landlords whose tenants may be experiencing difficulty in paying their rent, perhaps because they have been made redundant, to contact us to see if any further support can be given. This can be in the form of applying for Housing Benefit, Crisis Loans, Floating Support and access to our Deposit Guarantee Scheme. Advice may also be available to help tenants pay off small amounts of arrears, the help available would be assessed on a case by case basis.

The Housing Options Team will be holding a drop in surgery, at the Civic Centre, on 3rd, 4th and 5th of November 2009 between 11.30 and 13.30 for landlords and lettings agents to call in and discuss any problems that they may have. A member of the Housing Benefits Team will also be available.

North Staffordshire Landlord Accreditation Scheme

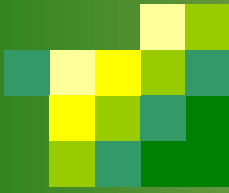
Stafford Borough Council is proud to be a partner in the North Staffordshire Accreditation Scheme. The aim of the Scheme is to improve both the physical and management standards of the private rented sector within North Staffordshire. The scheme provides encouragement, support and incentives for landlords, as well as actively working with and publicly recognising those landlords who are willing to attain and adhere to good property standards and management. The scheme is **FREE** to join and there are many members benefits such as free advertisement and promotion of vacant properties, heavily discounted training events, improved access to other Local Authority Services including grants and support from the scheme operators including a quarterly newsletter on current events.

Stafford has 50 members with 157 properties registered on the scheme. We are encouraging more landlords to come forward and become members, showing that Stafford landlords are committed to providing good quality accommodation!

Call Laura Lightfoot on 01785 619385 for more information on the scheme!

Introducing — Netrent

Netrent is a website aimed at helping landlords run their businesses safely and profitably. The website has a Landlord Resource Centre which has a lot of helpful information for landlords which includes advice on setting up tenancies, ending a tenancy, housing benefit procedure advice, a practical check list for landlords and much more. The website is freely accessible and open to all landlords. It can be used in conjunction with the services offered by the Council. Visit the website at www.netrent.co.uk.



Useful Websites.

North Staffordshire Landlords Association
www.landlordaccreditation.co.uk/

National Landlords Association
www.landlord.org.uk

Residential Landlords Association
www.rla.org.uk

Landlord Law
www.landlordlaw.co.uk

Communities and Local Government
www.communities.gov.uk/housing

Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme
www.ihos.org.uk

Chartered Institute of Housing
www.cih.org

Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
www.rics.org

Acts of Parliament
www.opsi.gov.uk/acts

Empty Homes Agency
www.emptyhomes.com

Shelter
www.shelter.org.uk

Corgi
www.trustcorgi.com

Energy Saving Trust
www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

National Energy Foundation
www.nef.org.uk

Warm Front
www.warmfront.co.uk

Association of Residential Letting Agents
www.arla.co.uk

The National Approved Lettings Scheme
www.nalscheme.co.uk

Netrent website—Landlord Resource Centre
www.netrent.co.uk

The Electrical Safety Council has produced a Landlords Guide to Electrical Safety which is supported by Lacors.

Following the tragic death of a mother of two, who was electrocuted while running a bath, the Electrical Safety Council is calling on tenants and landlords to undertake basic but essential checks to ensure their rented homes are electrically safe. Each year there are over 30 deaths and nearly 4,000 injuries from electricity in UK homes. **The guide can be downloaded at <http://esc.org.uk/pdfs/business-and-community/guidance-for/ESClandlords-June09.pdf>.**

If you would like a copy to be sent to you please call Housing Standards on 01785 619000.

The North Staffordshire Landlord Association has created a new booklet 'Keep Your Home Free From Damp, Condensation and Mould'. We are making this available for all landlords to give to tenants to help prevent any problems arising.

If you would like a copy to be sent to you please call Housing Standards on 01785 619000.

To improve communication, save paper and postage costs, we would prefer to send you the newsletter by email. Please send a request to ehadmin@staffordbc.gov.uk

Next issue — December 2009

Including:

**Feedback following the October Landlord Forum,
An update on our Empty Homes Work.**