

MINUTES OF LANDLORDS FORUM MEETING

HELD ON 13th January 2009 (Lister room) 2pm – 4pm

Present: Mr Chahal, Mr Kunabalasingham, K Chowdry, J Olasupo, M Linzalone, R Turner, T Scrutton, L Osunyemi, S Shah, N Khan, G Nagalingam, M Collins, Mr Baig, A Ranjit, L Mann, W Arden, E Okyere, D Andreou, M Choudhary, Mr Saleh, Dig Property, S Kaur, Jack, A Sangar, T Mudhar, G Gahir, A Karim, M Ahmed, A Sadiq.

London
Borough of
Newham

(LBN): Speakers : Peter Williams-Strategic Manager Policy & Performance, Fred Baxter-Housing Options Manager, Christine Lyons-Enforcement Team Leader, David Bingham-Senior Council Tax and Benefits Manager, Ian Dick-Housing Service Standards Strategic Manager, Moses Nyaunu-Principle Prevention & Advice Manager.

Chaired by: Alex Rocke – Interim Housing Options Manager

Minutes by: Rajesh Patel – Landlords & Initiative Officer

Apologies: Sharon Webb – Initiative Team Manager
Modesta Anucha – Strategic Housing Needs Manager

Minutes will be Posted on the Newham Website

<p><u>Introduction</u></p> <p>The meeting started at 2.00pm and was chaired by Alex Roche who introduced himself followed by other officers that were present.</p> <p><u>Matters arising from previous Meetings</u></p> <p>None</p>	<p><u>ACTION</u></p> <p>All</p>
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<p><u>Newham’s refreshed housing strategy - Strategic Manager Policy & Performance – Peter Williams.</u></p> <p>Peter Williams introduced himself. He talked about the refreshed housing strategy as follows</p> <p style="text-align: center;">WHY A HOUSING STRATEGY NOW?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We did one in 1999 • Refreshed it in 2004/5 • We need to look at it again • But it is not an easy time to write one • The goalposts are shifting • More dramatically than at any time in the last 18-20 years. • General housing market has a big impact on us <p>The presentation was part of our consultations with people and groups who have an interest in our housing plans</p> <p style="text-align: center;">LBN SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES STRATEGY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing in young people • Improving health and wellbeing • Making Newham safer • Building an active and inclusive community • Shaping sustainable communities • Meeting people’s housing needs • Increasing employment and business growth <p><u>Note</u>: housing was added this year to the list. Newham Mayor has a real interest in housing</p>	
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CURRENT MARKET CONDITIONS

- credit crunch and general economic downturn
- affordable homes are normally delivered as part of Section 106 agreements with developers
- To get planning permission from the council they have to provide public benefits like housing
- Very few new schemes seem to be proceeding
- Olympic village affordable elements are proceeding uninterrupted with govt. money
- It is not completely clear what is happening in East London in terms of sale prices and rents

OPPORTUNITIES

- Not all doom and gloom – publicly funded housing associations may acquire housing stock that developers cannot sell
- Govt recently published a review of private rented sector
- This is the so called Rugg review
- Private rented sector used to meet housing need
- Newham Council increasing uses PRS to deal with households who apply as homeless (500-600pa)
- The government want to promote the responsible PRS
- These kind of forums cover a minority of landlords
- We want to reach other landlords and agents

STANDARDS - DECENT HOMES

- Issues about standards in the private rented sector, with only about 40% meeting the decency standard, & concerns about cat. 1 hazards in HMO's
- The council will continue to enforce standards
- But it cannot be one way traffic.....
- Council also needs to offer something to PRS
- Whether that is a package of support round EPC, fuel poverty, training, HB, mediation
- good insulation major council priority /climate change
- Impact of cold and damp homes on health of people
- Council needs to know more about the stock
- So BRE consultants will do survey for us in 2009

THE FUTURE

- PRS is 21,000 properties and growing
- RSLs own nearly as much as LBN (13,500 v 17,700) and it is them who build new homes with developers
- Mayor Boris wants more affordable housing in E London
- Homeless temporary is another 5000 homes but we have a major target from the govt. to reduce it
- Housing Green paper in Spring 2009: reform agenda?

- Govt Inspection of our private sector housing service in 2009
- Olympic legacy – planning benefits that really deliver for local people, jobs, homes, parks, sports, transport
- But Olympics will also create pressures, particularly in PRS with influx of construction and other workers (??)

QUESTIONS - COMMENTS

Contact me at 0208 430 5470

peter.williams@newham.gov.uk

Housing Benefits Updates by David Bingham – Senior Council Tax and Benefits Manager

David provided the landlords with an update on some changes that were coming to effect from October 2008.

Changes to Incapacity Benefit – long term off work

New benefit being introduced on 27th Oct 2008. Different emphasis - old claims looks at what the claimant can't do and the new one looks at what the claimant can do. Only effects new claims made after 27th Oct 2008. Claimant will need to take a work capability test and attend a work focused interview to get benefit and the aim will be to get them back to work.

No major impact on council tax or housing benefit at present, unless the claim is stopped.

Backdating- From 6th October 2008 the period of backdating will be reduced from 52 weeks to 3 months. Therefore maximum backdating will be limited to 13 weeks and under no circumstances will the claim be allowed to be backdated for more than 13 weeks.

David reminded landlords of the LHA rates which are being used to determine rent levels.

Rent payment schedules are not sent out to tenants at present and there are no plans to give rent schedules to landlords for clients claiming LHA. Tenants are paid every two weeks. If tenants on the bond scheme fall into 4 weeks rent arrears, landlord must then contact the Initiatives team who will liaise with housing benefits. If tenants are receiving benefits and not passing it on to landlord/agent then Prevention team will get tenants into the housing options centre to investigate of non payment of rent. If tenants fall into more than 8 weeks rent arrears, then landlord can request housing benefits to be paid

directly to them. New Housing benefits system will be phased in over the next two years.

There are about 50% new H/B claims compared to last year due to the recession.

Accommodation dept moving from Broadway Chambers Stratford to the new Dockland offices Building 1000 from March 2009.

Planning Permission and your flat conversion – Christine Lyons- Enforcement Team Leader.

Christine Lyons introduced herself. The topics she had covered are as below :-

Flat conversions

What is a flat conversion?

Subdivision of a dwelling house into two or more residential units.

And.....

- the creation of a new residential unit requires planning permission
- dwelling houses that have been converted into more than one unit do not have any permitted development rights, therefore any alterations to the property would require planning permission

Determining a planning application for a flat conversion

- the aim of planning is to ensure that there is a good supply of high quality homes.
- also to ensure that there is an efficient use of land.
- the creation of more than one residential unit needs to uphold these two principles.
- cost - each additional unit created will attract a planning fee of £335
- also the sub-division may require building regulations

What should you look for when considering a conversion?

- the property is not in a saturated street – that is a street where more than 25% of the properties have already been converted.
- the original property is in excess of 120sqm metres.
- The property should be within a street where there is capacity for on-street parking or has off-road parking.

What else do you have to consider?

Each unit must:

- be more than 45sq metres
- be self contained
- have a separate entrance
- be developed to ensure careful stacking of rooms
- have adequate daylight to habitable rooms
- have adequately sized rooms

What else?

- external stairs should be avoided
- family units should have direct access to some open garden area
- existing gardens should not be split up
- provision made for bin and cycle storage
- The use of outbuildings as residential units is not acceptable.

What will we do if you do not seek the relevant consent?

- there will be site inspections to assess the conversion
- should the property comply with the guidance then a planning will be required
- Should the property not comply.....

.... formal action will be taken.

- an enforcement notice will be served on you and your bank or building society
- you will be required to convert the property back to a single dwelling house

What if you do not comply with the notice.....?

- a prosecution case will be brought against you in the magistrates court
- the fine if you are found guilty can be up to £20,000 plus costs
- the conversion works can be carried out by the Council
- The money lender may call in the loan.

Where can I find out about flat conversions

- Supplementary planning guidance note "Flat Conversions" dated June 2001 - www.newham.gov.uk
- Pre-Application Advice - e-mail: alison.joyce@newham.gov.uk or gareth.barnett@newham.gov.uk
- Professional advice from a good quality planning agent - <http://www.rtpiconsultants.com/index.php>

- Planning Portal at <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>
- Policies within the London Borough of Newham Unitary Development Plan
- Planning Enforcement at planning.enforcement@newham.gov.uk

Licensing of Rental Accommodation & Private Sector Housing Service

Standards - Ian Dick-Strategic Manager

Ian Dick introduced himself and went over some topics - here are some points from the meeting.

Private Sector Housing Group – Our Strategic Aims are to –

Protect the health, safety and welfare of Newham residents renting privately, or with a registered social landlord.

Promote quality, choice and opportunity in all rented housing across the borough.

PSHG - invited views on our new service standards which will be published on the Web shortly.

Please return any completed questionnaires to PSHG c/o Housing & Public Protection - Bridge House, 320 High Street, Stratford London E15 1EP or comment by email to [www.ENV - Private Sector Housing@newham.gov.uk](mailto:www.ENV-PrivateSectorHousing@newham.gov.uk).

Landlord & Agents Survey - as part of stakeholder consultation we want to hear the views of the Landlord Community in Newham and hope to commission a survey during 2009. If you are selected to take part we do hope you will spare the time to provide information and tell us what you think and make suggestions for improvements.

A Neighbourhood Improvement Zone Pilot will be launched in the Summer of 2009. This will involve a small area probably in Manor Park where private landlords will be required to apply for a licence to let property. The aim will be to improve the area overall to ensure all homes meet the decency standard, are energy efficient and environmental problems are tackled. The Council will be asked to give their approval in March 2009. Further information can be obtained from Neil Coles - HMO Team Manager 0208 430 3798.

In response to the Olympic & regeneration activity in the borough we are doing a survey in 2009 of all hotels, hostels and B & B accommodation with the fire brigade and other agencies to ensure safety and standards are being maintained.

Further information from Neil Coles - HMO Team Manager 0208 4303798.

Know an empty property, land or building please ring our Empty Property Hot Line on 0208 4304436 and let us have details.

Ian requested any one who filled in the questionnaires that had been handed out at the forum please send them directly to Initiatives Team or directly to himself.

Ian Dick x 35011

Housing Options Centre Recent Changes of Restructure – Moses Nyaunu – Principle Prevention & Advice Manager

Moses introduced himself and stated the changes as follows, any queries regards to (bond scheme tenants) of non payment of rent which was previously dealt by Scott Sangha now must be directed to Moses and his prevention & advice officers email address moses.nyaunu@newham.gov.uk

Any issues and queries regards to bond scheme tenants with dis-repair concerns must be sent to Maria Vardon email address maria.vardon@newham.gov.uk if dis-repair not resolved by prevention team,, then referral will be passed to enforcement team to take action to get situation resolved.

Moses as per Sharon Webb (Initiatives Team Manager) reminded landlords that converted properties must have planning permission and that any properties advertised with Newham under the Bond Scheme must be vacant and ready to let. In order for Housing benefits to be processed quickly for rent payments, all agents/landlords must put down the full name and address of the owner of the property clearly on the housing benefit and tenancy agreement forms.

Moses reminded landlords of the forthcoming LLAS Training Date **Thursday 11th March 2009 time 9.15-4.30pm** at the Credon Centre.

Moses reminded landlords/agents what they need to provide (Paper work) to avoid delay in receiving their incentive payments also they could lose entitlement for not providing these documents within the 28 days.

Ensure Energy Performance Certificates (EPC's) are also provided from 1st Oct along with Gas cert and Electrical report.

Alex thanked forum members for attending and reminded landlords that the next meeting will be on the **Wednesday 13th May 2009, 2-4pm Lister Room East Ham** and the agenda will be sent nearer to the time. Meeting closed at 16.00

Any other Items for discussion at the next forum

Some landlords requested a rep from Environmental Health/Newham Homes – pest control – orange bags and refuse bins, foxes ripping bags and littering streets.

Reduction of Incentive payments on the bond scheme

Landlord charter – Ian Dick London accreditation scheme

Housing benefits delays

Newham lord mayor – increase council tax . Hence council offering free Environmental Health Service.

