

MINUTES OF LANDLORDS FORUM MEETING

HELD ON 28th September 2010 (Lister room) 2pm – 4pm

Present: Landlords, Agents and LBN Staff

Chaired by: Moses Nyaunu/Fred Baxter – Housing Options Manager

Minutes by: Sonia Tavares – Assessment Officer

Apologies: Modesta Anucha – Strategic Housing Needs Manager

Minutes will be posted on the Newham Website

<p><u>Introduction</u> The meeting started at 2.00pm chaired initially by Moses Nyaunu who introduced himself followed by other officers that were present. Fred Baxter who introduced himself.</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>David Bingham – Senior Housing Benefits Manger</u></p> <p>David Bingham reported on Housing Benefit issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Housing Benefits changes within the next 18 – 24 months b) New IT system c) Re-organisation <p>a) <u>Local Housing Allowances</u> – there will be a change to the way LHA is calculated. This will become effective by October 2011. LHA looks at middle rent. There will be a drop in rent that is presently being paid. 30% LHA will be based on lower rents. This will affect all tenants on yearly review. The second change which will be effective by Aril 2011 – all 5 bed properties will be based on 4 bed properties. This will affect approximately 133 households. Benefits will reduce.</p> <p><u>Non Dependant Deduction</u> – If there is another adult, child/ren a further deduction will be made – this will become affective April 2011. Another reason for less benefit. There may be a discretionary payment to help. Carer awarded for additional bed room if have a carer. Change in Social Sector Benefit to families in larger houses. Tax credit will be changed. Tax credit will be reduced. Housing Benefit will go up.</p> <p>All changes mean less benefit available.</p> <p>2013 April – will change – freeze LHA. When this increases will go up in line with inflation.</p> <p>JSA claimed for more than 12 months will be reduced to 90% after 12 months</p> <p>DB facilitated questions :</p> <p><i>What do we do with tenants – any property let up until Sept/Oct should the rent be changed/increased</i></p> <p>National change - significant difference</p> <p>4/5 bedroom – some tenants on HB. LHA rate for 4 bed properties. 5 bed properties will only get the rate of 4 bed properties –this affects approximately 133 people in LBN.</p> <p><i>What will happen if unable to meet mortgage payments</i></p>	<p>DB to circulate changes</p>
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<p><i>Does this mean we will have to break up large families?</i></p> <p>If homeless burden will fall to Local Authority</p> <p>Large families have implications. Overcrowding in properties with large families. Different with private section than LA.</p> <p>If people are unable to find accommodation in private section will come to LBN/LA</p> <p>b) <u>New IT System</u> changes to the assessment system come in to effect January 2011. Moving all too new IT System. Will mean no IT system for up to 2-3 weeks will try to clear back log before this happens Before old system down, anyone in receipt of HB payments will still go out. Case where there is no HB will cause problems.</p> <p>c) <u>Re-organisation</u> having a major re-organisation. Changes to how telephone calls are handled. Changes to face to face service. Possible change of location. This may all happen in/by December 2010. This should make it easier to be able to contact staff members. No details released as yet. Have to inform staff in the first instance followed by stakeholders. This is one of the initiatives of the Government – wanting to save money. Less staff – expectation to be more efficient. Will be looking at how we respond to staff face to face, and on the telephone.</p> <p>Questions to Chair</p> <p><u>Tenancy Sustainment</u></p> <p>Financial sustainment of the council. There is a massive restructure to save money with less staff. Tenancy Sustainment Team not going ahead due to lack of funding Homeless Prevention Advisors will be dealing with issues. There is a delay at present. Continue to write. Book appointments to see an Officer regarding tenancy sustainment. Landlords not receiving support/information</p> <p>Questions/statements from guests</p> <p><i>If HB reduced are we able to move tenants to cheaper property, will Bond be sustained</i></p> <p><i>Unable to get reply from officer's telephone extensions. Voice box always full – No reply from MN.</i> <i>Officer begun writing – relationship between client and tenant broke down due to lack of response from officer _ML</i></p>	<p>More details next meeting December 2010</p> <p>Will update at next meeting</p> <p>All queries to be passed to FB via ST</p>
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<p>Customer service broken down. Being transferred from one dept to another. Forum not appropriate place for individual cases. Prevention officer will advise tenants. Housing Advisors are there to protect the rights of tenants. Sustainment would be to intervene where they are problems with tenants. FB acknowledged difficulty of Landlords. Past six months they have not received efficient service.</p> <p>FB – unable to allow Forum to continue about individual cases</p> <p>All landlords take a risk whether provided by LNB or private. Thousands of tenants on Bond Scheme some will be troublesome who have been provided by LBN. Unable to sustain due to lack of Tenancy Sustainment Team</p> <p><u>Sue Walker – Home Insulation Scheme</u></p> <p>Home insulation has been re-launched. This is compulsory. This scheme is under represented. There is no funding ceiling as they find it hard to get customers. Landlords paying approximately £35.00 per year toward this scheme, they are therefore encouraged to get benefits from it.</p> <p>Insulation important to save energy. Heat loss unable to be seen – invisible loss – loft insulation cavity insulation Home assessor will carry out comprehensive check – no charge. A major aim is to client. Helps residents cut fuel bills. If residents fulfil any of the eligibility criteria will be entitled. Either can apply – Landlord or Tenant. However best to involve the tenant from the beginning. Only able to use assigned installers. Unable to use own Contact London Warm Zone direct who will be able to tell you which areas are covered. No scheme to insulate solid walls – very expensive and difficult. This is the Government's initiative to try and improve carbon emissions. This is being lobbied within the Government at present.</p> <p><u>Pilot Improvement Zone</u> – HMO Team deliver interventions. Mainly private sector based.</p> <p>Antisocial Tenants causing problems in the local area and properties.</p> <p>Little Ilford came out as the highest. Significant events – social issues. Problems with tenant. Anti social behaviour and issues regarding fly tipping.</p> <p>Key to this is licensing with HMO. Landlords are on board with this. Some landlords not licensed still outstanding. Discussion took place on improving front gardens – free hanging baskets. This had a knock on effect. Where awarded B&Q vouchers.</p>	<p>Queries to FB via ST</p> <p>SW available during the break if any questions. Presentation available</p>
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<p>Anti-Social Behaviour – children roaming in gangs. Unregulated skips, litter on highways – co-ordinating with Street Scene Team. Fly tipping spots – speaking to residents. Free bulky collection – success clean up</p> <p><u>Pest Control</u></p> <p>Rats - terrace of 24 properties in the Zone. Accessed 20 out of the 24. 14 had 1 active infestation out of the 24 Mice Cockroaches Infestation of bedbugs – bedbugs travel in removal vans, this may be explanation as to why new furniture infested. Public health and drainage – gullies cleared out. Draining defects private property – this has been resolved amicably.</p> <p>Accredited Landlords – very good properties. Some not so good – at lower end of market. Fees not representative of council tax £300.00 to landlord who engage - delays increases to £500.00</p> <p>Pilot project due to economic client will not be rolled out across the Borough this is not feasible. HMO's need a licence – Housing Act 2002 – owns a home in HMO with 3 people sharing. Smaller houses in multi occupancy – 2 storey Victorian properties. Over-crowding is a difficult area – LBN do not want people to live in high risk housing</p> <p>Public Protection Housing Review – the message is about saving money</p> <p><u>FAQ – Stella Okeke</u></p> <p>HB paid 4 weeks in arrears – even though completed immediately funds will not be released until 4 weeks.</p> <p>Name on form – Owner of the property to be written, then the agents name. This will prevent delays</p> <p>HB paid from date tenant moves into the property.</p> <p>Do not give keys to tenants before receiving HB receipt</p> <p>HB means tested - £207.00 rent only receiving £107.00. Income may affect this</p> <p>HB payment direct to landlord. If there is a change to this contact HB – if on Bond Scheme and not receiving money chase this up</p> <p>Complete returns in a timely fashion. Unable to deal with client if agent involved. If accredited landlord can deal with you – will need proof of this</p>	<p>Further update on improvement at next meeting</p>
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<p>that the agent is no longer involved.</p> <p>Check with HB if there is a charge. LBN not obliged to inform you Ensure tenant give consent.</p> <p>Once property has been inspected will given written confirmation via letter Once tenancy agreement has been signed unable/lawful to withhold keys</p> <p>HB will only accept signed tenancy Unable to assess a claim without Tenancy Agreement.</p> <p>Legally obliged to given tenants keys Key in the office Tenancy unable to get out of</p> <p>HB regulations strictly applied</p> <p>Systems set up to minimise risk. Ensure documents are signed. In house HB team are able to assess/deal with. As agency we set out a charge for a holding deposit. Cannot hold this because landlords receive an incentive</p> <p>Will advise tenant not to given agency any money if LBN giving Landlords incentive.</p> <p>Re-structure less risk – Assess HB, then tenants. Be better for everyone</p> <p>FB acknowledged things will be getting worse with the re-structure. Concerns re way HB calculated,</p> <p>AOB</p> <p>Landlord complaining re standard in Bond</p> <p>Increased no. of inspections – this will speed up inspections. Re-inspections. Increased from 2 Visiting Officers to 4. This is being monitored</p> <p>Accreditation – if not accredited would encourage Landlords to do so.</p> <p>There is someone offering Landlords assistance, i.e. EPC, Gas Safety checks - including Bond Scheme, if approached please email FB direct. This is a very serious fraud matter which is presently being investigated. Fred.Baxter@newham.gov.uk</p> <p>Damage on Bond scheme properties – there will be on procedure – Officers have been issued with cameras.</p>	<p>FB will take concerns to DB</p> <p>Emails direct to FB</p> <p>FB to discuss with SS</p>
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Once re-structure completed, Stakeholders will be informed/updated.

Concerns regarding the length of time bed bug infestation being dealt with.

Documented cases where new beds and furniture affected due to bugs in removal vans used to dispose of old furniture. Bed bugs decrease as cold weather approaches.