

MINUTES OF LANDLORDS FORUM MEETING

HELD ON 8th January 2008 (Lister room) 2pm – 4pm

Present: Urmila Mohan, Sandeep Mohan, K. Kunabalasingham, Carolyn Fang, Warren Arden, Michelle Amato, Sunny Patel, Abu Rouf, C. Hussain, S. Ali, H. Khan, Sarb Sanger, Guy Toto, Harvey Juttla, Jay Junjua, M. Chaudhury, Josie Lebile-Holo, A.R Chowdhury, Peter Brown, Pat Dunphey, S.A Shah, T, Scrutton, S. Faturoti, A Khalik, Stephen Akinsomya, Abbas Raja, Ernest Obi, Simi Shallon, L. Gambini, D Cutts, Naveed, Sabbir, Raj Singh, Kelly Mitchell, Ravir Salih, H Juttla, M Wadrind

London
Borough of
Newham

(LBN): Sharon Webb, Scott Sangha, Dave Buxton, Shannon Forte, Shona Pollock, Graham Hishmurgh, , Kamal Siraj, Helga Cumberbatch, Moses Nyaunu

The Rent Service: Sandra Williams, John Cruddock

Chaired by: Sharon Webb

Apologies: Modester Anucha

Minutes by: Kamal Siraj

Posted on the Newham Website

<u>Matters arising from previous Meetings</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
None	

<p><u>The Canning Town Regeneration Project – Shona Pollock (Project Officer)</u></p> <p>Shona explained the history of the Custom House and Canning Town area and the change in demographics over the years. She went to explain how the area had been neglected and the 15 year plan to regenerate the area, in</p>	
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similar lines to LDDC developments to the Docklands area in Tower Hamlets.

There are plans for an additional 9,300 modern homes to be built and a proposed new town centre, around Rathbone Market. Of these new homes 6,200 will be for private ownership and the idea is to have more housing in the Town Centre. There are 20 development sites altogether ranging from new developments to improvements including planned open space, park areas and improved transport infrastructure.

After several workshops, focus groups and community consultation programmes, the outcome was that people wanted this regeneration and believe it is long overdue. Shona then went on to say that this was a great opportunity for people to invest in the area.

Advice on reducing landlords Council Tax liability – Graham Hishmurch (Head of Council Tax and Benefits)

Graham started off with some background information on Council Tax and how Newham has one of the worst council tax collections in the country, around 91%. This should be nearer the national average of 97%. Newham has a massive turnover of accounts due to large rented sector, transient population and short tenancies which contribute to the difficulty in collecting council tax. This creates unnecessary work for the officers and for landlords / agents.

The benefits departments have proposed an online form for landlords and agents as a solution to this problem. The form will ask for everything that is needed;

New tenants

- Full first name (not just initial) and surname
- Contact details (mob telephone number and email address)
- Previous address if known
- Lengthy of tenancy

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furnished or unfurnished • Student tenants? • Name, email and telephone number of person completing form <p><u>Previous Tenants</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full name • Contact details (mob telephone number, email, address) • Forwarding address <p>This should lead to more accurate liability details leading to quicker bills and better collection, less work chasing and tracing bills and less periods when landlords incorrectly held liable. This new online form should be available in 1 -2 weeks and would require feedback from users to determine effectiveness. Landlords will be contacted personally once the service is ready.</p>	
<p><u>Local Housing Allowance (LHA) – how it may affect you? – Shannon Forte (Benefits Liaison Officer)</u></p> <p>Shannon started off explaining that the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was a new way of working out Housing Benefit for tenants who live in the deregulated private sector. It is a flat rate rent level based on the size of the accommodation required by a household and the area in which they live.</p> <p>She explained the background of Housing Benefits and stated that the reason for the introduction of LHA is because the Government felt changes in HB was required and that claimants need to take responsibility for their own affairs including financial arrangements. It does not replace the HB scheme.</p> <p>This will affect tenancies that are pre 1989 tenancies, mobile homes and caravans, housing associations, board and lodge and supported accommodation provided by a charitable or voluntary organisation. The LHA will be introduced on the 7th April 2008 for new claims and changes of address. Existing claims will continue under the old rules until break in claim or a move.</p> <p>Shannon then explained that the LHA works around a Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) which is set each month and rates are published so tenants and</p>	<p><u>ACTION</u></p>

landlords know how much rent the LHA will cover. This is clearer for both tenants and landlords.

The LHA will also be paid directly to the claimant and it is not an option to request payment to landlords. However there are safeguards put in place for landlords and the Local Authority have the discretion to pay rent direct to landlords in the following circumstances:

- If the tenant has built up rent arrears of eight weeks or more
- If the Local Authority consider the tenant may have difficulty managing their affairs
- If the Local Authority think the tenant is unlikely to use their LHA to pay their rent
- If the tenant is having deductions from their Income Support or Jobseekers Allowance to pay off rent arrears

Tenants will need to have a clean bank account for LHA payments. There is support for tenants in the form of money management advice and information about bank accounts.

Landlords are encouraged to inform the Local Authority know in advance about tenants building up rent arrears so that the matter can be looked into. For more information about the LHA, Shannon can be emailed at Shannon.Forte@newham.gov.uk

Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) – Sandra Williams & John Cruddock (The Rent Services)

John spoke about the role of the rent services in Local Housing Allowance, which includes setting the BRMA, collecting lettings information and setting the LHA. He then followed on from what Shannon had to say about LHA. These figures for LHA will be generated automatically without rent officers making a valuation.

Some of the factors considered when setting the BRMA are access and standards to Health, Education, Recreation, Banking and Shopping. Other factors include distance of travel by public and private transport.

John explained that the aim of the BRMA is for tenants to identify and consider alternative places to live. The BRMAs will be regularly reviewed and published. Once the BRMA is set, the LHA figure for each category is calculated and this is based on the median figure from a list of rents collected.

These lists of rents are collected by the Lettings Research Team and their aim is to ensure that the database reflects the volume and range of properties within the Private Rented Sector. Landlords are the best source of lettings data which can reflect the market and landlords / agents can help by providing more lettings data. The more data that is gathered, the more robust and reflective the LHA figures will be.

The BRMA will mean there will be no pre-tenancy determinations and there will be a fixed rate of benefit.

Where to look for more information:

The Rent Services website: www.therentservice.gov.uk

Email completed letting forms: lettingsresearch@therentservice.gov.uk

Call the local office to contact a lettings research rent officer

Update on HMO licensing in Newham – Dave Buxton (Environmental Health)

Dave first explained that HMO licensing was required to protect tenants and to raise standards of housing, so to deal with higher risk properties. There are two types of licensing schemes for HMO's in Newham, additional licensing and mandatory licensing. Additional licensing applies to some roads and smaller HMO's in Forest Gate North and South and Green Street West. Mandatory licensing applies to all larger HMO's that meet the criteria below:

- The property is three or more storeys high (includes occupied basements, attic rooms and business premises), and
- Has five or more people, living as more than one household, and
- Share amenities such as bathrooms, toilets and cooking facilities.

Dave talked about a recent case about an unlicensed HMO where rent repayment order was made and prosecution is pending and it was these types of higher risk properties which are being targeted and showed pictures of cases of unlicensed properties and the poor condition of these properties.

For more information visit the Department for Communities and Local Government website and view the Housing Act 2004.

Contact the HMO Team for a license application form, or if you need advice about houses in multiple occupation:

Phone: **020 8430 2000** on extension **25238**

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<p><u>Update on the Bond Scheme</u> <u>-Scott Sangha –Landlord Officer</u></p> <p>Scott presented the figures for 2007 for the number of families housed under the Bond Scheme, which totalled 405. Scott also re-iterated the new incentive payments (one-off non refundable fee) that have been offered to landlords since October 2007. Limited period only.</p> <p>Dates for the next landlords training days were announced and invitations will be sent out to all accredited landlords. Scott requested that landlords should contact Scott for any particular topics they would be interested in so that the course content can be tailored to the landlord's demands.</p>	
<p><u>Any other Items for discussion at the next forum</u></p> <p>None</p>	ACTION