

Minutes

For: Landlord Forum

Date: 26th January 2011

Time: 2.00pm to 4.00pm

Location: Lister Room, East Ham Town Hall

Present: Stella Okeke, Tony Jemmott, John Craddock, Steven Jakar, Joshua, Olasopo, Malcom Peet, Mr Manunta, Sue Walker, M. Conway, S. Olumehu, Laura Mann, Ray Page, A. Rehman, A. Shah, Aldin Myni, Amos Fifo, Lisa Lindo, Ronjon Bagachi, Hafa Begum, Segun Oinaike, Mr Phillip, Micheal Cai, Gabar Sing, Amit Sanger, L H Smith, Thomas Badu, Syed Shah, Debbt Lawrence, Sophie Kaur, Raj Arora, Philip Megriskin, Mike Bowles, M Sabir, T. Wisman, T. Morgan, A. Garalinick, G. Mack, B. Islam, Kaiser Shah, Abdul Khauk, John Ogunyandwo, Mostaque Ahmed, Valnie Givas, Joyce Mend, Peter Adenuga, Sam Adelowtan, Kemi Adeloluwa, Mr Adil Hussan Shah, Ms Sumara Zafar, Shabril Master.

Chaired by: Fred Baxter – Minutes by: Teng Cheung

Apologies: Modesta Anucha – Strategic Housing Needs Manager

Matters arising from previous minutes

None

First speaker - David Bingham:

a) Discussed the changes to the Newham housing benefit system. The changes will not affect existing housing benefit claims however there will be a delay in assessing new claims.

b) Changes in the administration of the housing benefit system:

1. Plans to relocate service centres – there will be a dedicated housing benefit and council tax benefit office. The exact location is yet to be decided, an announcement should be made in June/ July.
2. Intention to move to a more appointment based system.
3. David Bingham confirmed claims will start from the date the information is received.
4. There is a problem of phone calls taking a long time to be

answered. This should be rectified with the new contact centre as there will be more dedicated staff.

5. Changes in April – some changes have been deferred. Some boroughs will not be affected by the caps. Newham will not be affected as the rents are relatively low.
6. They are looking at ways to minimise the need to call in to offices. The new system to be put into place will provide more information on line which can be accessed by landlords ie. Schedule of payments.

Questions from the audience:

- 1) Who is entitled to DHP? (discretionary housing payment) - allocation can be used to top up housing benefit shortfall in cases of hardship. The government is providing additional money to compensate for the housing benefit changes. Assessment for DHP will be based on individual cases.
- 2) Housing Associations reducing rents? – new subsidy regime in April. Central government are no longer willing to pay high rents. This will affect housing association leased properties. The situation has arisen because of central government funding cuts.

Second speaker - John Craddock:

Discussed how **Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** is set up, the changes that will come into effect in April and other proposals.

- 1) The LHA is set from rental information collected from the private rented sector in the area.
- 2) The LHA rates are produced by rent officers each month. Officers will collect transaction information which are the actual property rent rather than the advertised rent.
- 3) The rates are set by an automated system based on information collected to produce monthly rate figure. Each month the rate is updated
- 4) The personal entitlement is based on property size, number of bedrooms, where the old system was based on number of rooms in the property.

Changes: From April (will affect new claims) cap to be introduced as follows:

1 bedroom	-	£250
2 bedroom	-	£290
3 bedroom	-	£340

4 bedroom - £400

There will no longer be a 5 bedroom rate. Some areas of London will be affected. Details of these will be on the LHA website lha-direct.voa.gov.uk

5) The maximum £15 excess that tenants renting below LHA will not apply anymore.

6) LHA – Long term reform. Single people under 25 are only entitled to 1 room rate. From April 2012 this will change to affect all under 35 year olds

7) From 2013/14 LHA rates will be CPI (consumer price index) linked. This means only 3 in 10 properties will be affordable under the LHA as opposed to 5 in 10 currently.

Questions from the audience:

- 1) What is the minimum bedroom size requirement? Tony Jemmott stated this to be 6.5sm.
- 2) What will happen to rent after expiry of 1 year contract? - intention of housing benefit/ LHA, after 1 year there will be a review. Intention at present is for the existing rent to be paid for another 9 months after expiry of 12 month contract. However the tenant will need to be in continuous receipt of housing benefit. If there is a change in circumstances during that year and benefit is reassessed then this will be assessed at the current rate.
- 3) How long does tenant have to supply information requested? – By law housing benefit have to allow 1 month for the receipt of information.
- 4) Is everyone entitled to DHP? – DHP will not be made across the board to make up for LHA shortfalls. Cases will be assessed on individual basis as DHP is limited. More DHP money will go to authorities affected by the cap. Some authorities have looked into placing people in other areas.

Fred Baxter confirmed that housing benefit will be put on the agenda for the next forum meeting.

Third speaker – Tony Jemmott:

Discussed the **Newham Landlord Accreditation Scheme**.

There are currently 2 schemes - Newham landlord accreditation scheme

- London landlord accreditation

scheme (LASS)

Tony Jemmott said there will be an amalgamation of the 2 schemes. There will just be the Newham Landlord Accreditation Scheme which will take the best from both schemes. Tony produced a leaflet about the new scheme which has an application form on the back. It is also available on the Newham website with a downloadable PDF. There are details on this about accommodation standards.

The proposed fee will be £155 to join the scheme. The current cost to join the Bond scheme is £75. £79 will go towards training. If landlords do not wish to join the Bond scheme, they can just do the training.

New scheme contacts will be: Tony Jemmott and for the Bond scheme: Scott Sangha

The aim of the amalgamation is to promote more training.

Questions from audience:

1) Some landlords requested more training. There is currently a basic 1 day training course which Newham will pay for. Tony said they are currently looking for venues in Newham to hold these. Some landlords requested refresher training.

2) Landlords requested more help with managing tenancy. Fred Baxter said previously there was a proposal to employ a tenancy sustainment team, however due to funding cuts, this will no longer be possible.

Fourth speaker – Fred Baxter

Bond Update:

Fred stated that there has been a slow down in the supply of properties. He asked the audience why?

Responses:

- 1) No rent guarantee, they prefer PSL schemes and have received contacts from other authorities for properties.
- 2) Restrictions on room sizes has been a factor. The landlord asked for a more leniency in this.
- 3) Rent being paid to the tenant. Problem with tenants not passing on the rent to the landlord. There is no cover from the Bond for rent arrears.
- 4) For insurance claims against rent loss, companies require rent to be paid monthly. When it is paid 4 weekly it is not covered.
- 5) Claims against the Bond – experiencing delays in receiving payments.

- 6) More checks to ensure tenants applicable? – Fred stated that housing benefit require more information than housing officers when assessing cases. Sometimes a tenant will qualify as accepted homeless but not qualify for housing benefit because the criteria are different. Fred advised landlords to serve a Notice as soon as the tenant goes into arrears to avoid delays. They can also contact the Initiatives team when the tenant goes into arrears. Fred reiterated that we need to operate within a legal framework and the council has limited powers when it comes to getting tenants to co-operate.

Final speaker – Sue Walker:

Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme. There is still funding available for loft and cavity wall insulation schemes. Landlords can access this funding via the tenant, if the tenant falls into the following 4 groups:

- over 70
- over 60 and not in full time employment
- in receipt of incapacity benefit
- if they have children under 16 and are on a low income

Everyone who applies can get a discount of £200 for all landlords.

The government will soon be making this insulation compulsory. In 2 years time funding may no longer be available. Sue wanted to remind everyone to consider this.

The meeting finished at 4.00pm