

Islington Landlord's Forum Minutes

Thursday 3 September 2009 – Committee Room 1, Town Hall

1. Welcome from Councillor Barbara Smith, portfolio holder for Housing and Community Safety.
2. Fire safety protocol – Paul Mishkin, Senior Environmental Health Officer, L.B.Islington.

Paul outlined the protocol that has been agreed by Islington Council and the London Fire Brigade regarding responsibility for inspecting residential premises for fire safety. Essentially this splits responsibilities for inspections with large hostels being inspected by the Fire Brigade and Houses in Multiple Occupation are the responsibility of the Council.

Furthermore the Fire Brigade enforce the Regulatory Reform Order, which applies to the common parts of Houses in Multiple Occupation (i.e. all shared 'common' areas such as hallways, stairways etc.). This law also requires landlords to risk assess fire safety in these properties – a leaflet was provided in the pack with further details. The following fire safety guidance may also be useful for landlords in carrying out a fire risk assessment: <http://www.lacors.gov.uk/lacors/upload/19175.pdf>

Paul also suggested that landlords of single occupancy properties would also be well advised to carry out a fire safety risk assessment on those properties.

Paul.mishkin@islington.gov.uk

3. Empty Property Strategy Consultation 2010-13 – Hitesh Tailor, Policy Officer, L.B.Islington

Hitesh summarised the three main objectives of the previous strategy, being:

- Improving the Council's database of empty properties
- Having a clear strategic approach
- Providing pathways, such as grants, to bring empty properties back into use.

An overview of the statistics relating to the proportion of empty homes showed that Islington has a lower than average number of long term (over three years) empty properties (1.35 % of the total private sector housing stock) when compared both regionally and nationally, although there has been a noticeable increase since the previous year. The Draft London Housing Strategy has a target of 1%.

Hitesh then discussed proposed items in the updated Strategy. These included:

- Reducing long and medium term empty properties;
- Encouraging owners to keep properties occupied rather than becoming empty and being a future burden both on the owners and the Council – this being a preventative, proactive approach;
- Explore the potential for empty commercial properties to be brought back into use as residential property.

A discussion followed relating to the issue of Council Tax rebate on empty properties and the provision of grants to encourage empty properties being brought back into use.

All delegates were provided with a brief consultation questionnaire in their packs, which Hitesh asked them to complete and return to him. Delegates were also invited to feed comments through to the Private Housing Partnerships section by telephone or email.

Hitesh.tailor@islington.gov.uk

4. Your view – Questions and Answers from the floor

- Query regarding Council Tax when converting commercial premises to residential – to be passed on to Council Tax section for response.
- Is the council in need of large properties? This is demand led, so it fluctuates. Generally the council is mostly in need of one and two bed properties for its private housing schemes, with a much lower need for large properties.
- Query regarding condition for empty grant eligibility – property has to have been empty for six months or more and have been in the same ownership for at least six months.
- Leaseholder bills in HFI properties, query raised on whether Islington Council would consider a full scale stock transfer. – Not under consideration currently.
- Queries relating to local housing allowance (Housing Benefit), is it payable to the landlord or tenant? - Generally to the tenant, unless they specifically state on the form that they wish the HB to be paid direct to the LL and for what reasons.

5. Private Sector Stock Condition Survey – Graham Field, Fordhams Research

A presentation from Fordhams Research, who carried out a stock condition survey of the borough's private housing stock in 08/09. 1000 surveys were undertaken as a representative sample out of the 64000 dwellings in the borough. This found that 15% of properties had a Category one hazard present (the most serious type of hazard as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System). It would take an average of £4,400 to remedy these hazards in each property in the private rented sector.

The most common hazard would be that of excess cold. The mean SAP (a measure of thermal efficiency of buildings, out of 100 with a score of 100 being the most efficient possible) was 59, higher than the national or regional averages, but 85% of those properties could be improved even further.

The survey also looked at different types of property in the sector and found that there are a large number of HMOs, of which approximately 758 would be licensable (HMOs with three or more storeys and five or more unrelated occupants).

Finally the survey also assessed the levels of non decency and the proportion affecting the private sector. It was found that 36% of vulnerable households live in non decent accommodation.

gfield@fordhamsresearch.com

6. A fairer deal for key and card meter users – Lauren Ottley, Ebico Energy

Lauren explained that her company has been set up to tackle fuel poverty and to combat the price differentials that exist for key and card meter users. She explained that tenants can save a lot of money by switching from pre-payment meters as her company average out all of their tariffs into one standardised rate. Ebico rates for both electricity and gas compare very favourably with the large companies, mostly as they are a not for profit company. There are no tie-ins and no standing charges. Landlords also receive a payment for every property switched.

Green Living Centre officer John Kolm-Murray also stated that their Energy Doctor is available to carry out home surveys and provide tips for saving energy in the home.

Jill Ellenby, Service Manager for Residential Environmental Health, also reminded landlords that there are grants available for energy efficiency measures in rented properties.

Lauren.ottley@ebico.co.uk