

Islington Landlord Forum
Thursday 16 July 2010, assembly hall rooms

1. Opening by Councillor James Murray (Chair)

The new Executive member for housing, Councillor James Murray introduced himself and welcomed all the landlords to the forum.

Councillor James Murray reported housing was a top priority for the new Labour administration, both in the private rented and social rented sector. He introduced the speakers and thanked the National Landlords Association for working in partnership with the council in the organisation of the landlord's forum.

2. Beverly Robb, Envirovent Ltd
A cost effective solution to mould and condensation

- Practical solutions for dealing with damp and mould were presented to the forum.
- Damp still prevails in modern and older homes as double glazing, insulation and draught proofing measure houses have created dwellings that can be described as well sealed boxes.
- The more sealed the house is the more that moisture generated has nowhere to go and when this condenses on cold surfaces it can cause damp and mould.
- It was felt that extract fans and dry lining wall insulation were not a complete solution.
- Envirovent sell a product known as a positive input ventilation system. The product works by sucking air from outside into the house pushing moisture laden air back out through naturally occurring gaps and cracks. Cost savings can be made with reduced heating bills as the thermostat can be turned down thus recapturing warm air. Windows can be opened but the system relies on windows to be shut for the positive input ventilation to work effectively.
- Envirovent can offer free surveys to landlords. The benefits include happier tenants, no complaints to the local authority and ultimately no condensation or mould.
- A money back guarantee can be offered if mould returns but does not cover rising or penetrating dampness. Conditions include that the product must be left to run and envirovent surveyor's advice followed.
- The cost is approximately £500 plus VAT including the National Landlords Association discount.
- The models were described as quiet and it transpired that the display models on show were operating.
- A 10mm gap from the floor to door is required for air to be sucked in so moisture laden air can then be passed out through natural cracks. The system can be adaptable for homes without lofts.
- The maintenance costs are covered by a five year warranty but servicing is required afterwards
- The electricity costs are approximately 1.5p-2p a day, with additional £40-45 a year for heater element.

Contact: Beverly Robb landlord liaison manager at Envirovent on 01423 810810.
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3. Ian Tagg, procurement manager, Islington council

Private sector update

- Ian Tagg detailed and summarised the key achievements and future plans regarding the private sector, these included;
- An improved database for empty properties, closer partnership working with the police and fire brigade, bringing empty properties back into use and grant aiding adaptations for vulnerable people. Other achievements included completing street surveys, service standards and grant information online, reporting empty properties online and approving properties for compulsory purchase.
- Private sector achievements included the number of properties let and assisted in letting, progress being made on the inspection of licensed houses in multiple occupation, high customer satisfaction and progress with the Islington accredited landlord scheme. Landlords were updated on the creation of the new eco grant, the ongoing landlord newsletter, a private tenant's newsletter and remodelling of the private sector opportunities scheme.
- 379 houses in multiple occupation have been licensed in Islington.
- The empty property strategy is anticipated to be re-launched in September with more publicity and there may be a smaller pot of money allocated to this area of work.

Contact: Ian Tagg, procurement manager, Islington council
ian.tagg@islington.gov.uk, 020-7527-6078

4. James Hardie, Islington police, counter terrorism

- James Hardie described the different types of terrorists and terrorism, and what tell-tale signs to look at for that may suggest terrorist activity taking place in homes.
- The Police are on an enhanced alert in the Kings Cross area as a large laboratory will soon be operating behind St Pancras station. The laboratory will specialise in animal research.
- Landlords should be alert for any suspicious characters or behaviour and report this to the police. Experience from the police is that terrorists prefer to use cash and may insist on using cash (eg to pay rent). They may try to avoid face to face contact and prefer contact through the telephone, or through a third party. They may also make changes to kitchen fittings and units.
- Terrorists may appear aloof and non committal. They may also want to rent or have access to a lock up or garage. They maybe reluctant to have landlords visit them and often make sure that they are out during any visit. They will appear to be model tenants and not make any complaints to landlords.
- If you have any doubts ring anti terrorist hot line

Contact: anti terrorist hot line 0800-789-321

5. David Cox, National Landlords Association

Response to new government's position on the private sector

- David Cox summarised the impact of the government's emergency budget, changes to planning law regarding houses in multiple occupation, the administration of the house in multiple occupation licensing scheme and increase in the rental threshold of assured short term short tenancies.
- The coalition's emergency budget has made changes to the capital gains tax rules. The N.L.A. will be pressing the government to enhance relief for landlords who have long term investments and not to enhance relief for landlords who focus on short term rental investments.
- The rate of VAT will increase to 20% from 17.5% after the 4 of January 2011, there are still six months remaining for landlords to pay 17.5% VAT on works and renovations.
- From April 2011, the local housing allowance (housing benefit for private rented sector) will be capped. It is thought that this will affect homes in the south east and London the most. This is because of the way housing allowance is worked out and due to the fact that rents are generally higher in the south east and in London.
- The new caps are £250 (one bedroom property), £290 (two bedrooms), £340 (three bedrooms) and £400 (four bedrooms).
- From 1 October 2010, the Assured Short hold Tenancy threshold will increase from £25k to £100k per annum. This means that tenancies whose annual rent is below £100k will from then on be protected by the provisions of an assured short hold tenancy agreement. These tenancies will also be covered by the tenancy deposit scheme from 1 October 2010.
- From the 6 April 2010 planning permission is required for a change of use for dwellings that after the 6 April became houses in multiple occupation. This requirement for planning permission is not retrospective but just for new lets. The burden of proof is on landlords to be able to demonstrate it was an house in multiple occupation on or before 5 April 2010 to avoid the requirement for planning permission. The government has announced that they are minded to change this legislation.
- The National Landlords Association have surveyed all local authorities in England and Wales to establish the cost of administering the licensing scheme for Houses of multiple occupation. No firm conclusions have been formed and not all local authorities have responded to the freedom of information request.
- The government has no current plans to further regulate the private rented sector neither do they intend to implement some of the recommendations of the Rugg review.

Contact: David Cox, national landlords association, 020 7840 8900, info@landlords.org.uk

6. Irna van der Palen, head of private housing partnerships, Islington council

Consultation on changes to the private sector opportunities scheme

- Local authorities are under increasing financial pressure to review budgets and make savings including Islington and the other north London councils.
- The North London boroughs are working together to establish common pricing structures and accommodation standards.

- Islington are proposing to withdraw the 6 weeks rent incentive payment for landlords in the private sector opportunities scheme, as it is no longer affordable.
- The council is consulting landlords and agents about feasible alternatives to the current scheme, and landlords present were invited to share their views and feedback using the consultation feedback forms in the pack.

**Contact: Irna van der Palen, head of private housing partnerships,
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