

Islington Landlords' Forum
Wednesday 15 December 2010
Islington Town Hall, Committee Room One
Upper Street, N1 2UD

Forum Opening

- 1 The meeting was opened by Patrick Odling-Smee, Service Director for Housing at Islington council who thanked everyone for attending. He then went on to introduce each speaker and the topics they would be presenting for the evening.
- 2 **HMO Licensing Renewals, Godwin Omogbehin, Residential Environmental Health, Islington council**

Godwin gave a short briefing on the next round of HMO licensing renewals and outlined the following points:

- HMO Licences normally last for 5 years
- The Council is offering discounted renewal fees for existing licences
- The new fee structure details can be found on the Council's website <http://www.islington.gov.uk/Housing/PrivateHousing/hmolicensing.asp>

All information is listed under the 'downloadable documents' section at the bottom of the page.

- Existing licence holders will receive reminder letters, the 1st of these will be going out in January 2011.
- HMO renewal will involve an inspection to check conditions and to ensure HMO standards for amenities etc are complied with. The council will work with landlords to achieve compliance. If landlords do not co-operate the council will use its enforcement powers as a last resort.
- The council has a new improved database on line for existing HMO licences: <http://www.islington.gov.uk/Housing/PrivateHousing/hmolicensing.asp>
See Licence Search under Related Information heading at near bottom right of web page
- The key point of this briefing is that the council wants existing Licence Holders to re-apply upon receipt of their HMO renewal letters so please fill in and return the application form with all relevant certificates & fees.

Contact: Duty Officer, Residential Environmental Health
Tel: 020 7527 3083
Fax: 020 7527 3097
Email: residential.envh@islington.gov.uk

2 Private Sector Opportunities Review, Ian Tagg, Private Housing Partnerships, Islington council

Ian Tagg gave an update of the Private Sector Opportunities Scheme so far:

- Over 740 clients prevented from homelessness since inception
- 1387 properties procured since 2008
- 821 properties let since 2008 (72 % in the borough)
- 33 assisted through the Time out (reducing overcrowding) scheme (2009-10)
- Generated potential rental income of 4,245,808 for landlords (2009-10)

All these achievements were done through strong teamwork which produced quick turnaround of properties, reduced void times and prevented homelessness.

Local Housing Allowance changes will probably lead to a reduction in procurement in the borough with more clients moving out, an increase in overcrowding and greater demand for HMO type accommodation.

Ian then went on to discuss the way forward; the current scheme which offers a 6 week rent incentive will be replaced by a Rent Guarantee/Bond Scheme. The scheme covers rental loss/damage for up 8 weeks rental price, it offers better property tenant management, has client background information and will be valid for the duration of the tenancy

The Rent Bond scheme drew a lot of interest from landlords, so for more information about the scheme please contact:

**Ian Tagg, Private Housing Partnerships, ian.tagg@islington.gov.uk
02075276078**

3 Empty Property Strategy 2010-2013 launch, Irna van der Palen, Head of Private Housing Partnerships, Islington Council

Irna spoke about the new strategy and outlined why the Empty Property Strategy was necessary:

- Increase housing supply
- Improve standards
- Regenerate communities

Irna also talked about the number of empty properties in the borough from the months of March 2009 and March 2010 suggesting an increase in the number of empty properties over that period. She also discussed the reasons for properties being left empty, including:

- Insufficient funds for renovation by owner
- Owner purchasing property for investment purposes only
- Owner is abroad
- Probate or other legal proceedings
- Awaiting planning permission
- Owner in institutional care
- Indifference of owners

The new strategy will have 3 main objectives:

Objective 1 will be to 'develop and implement a targeted approach to tackling empty properties'. This will involve targeting empty leasehold properties on estates, empty units over shops and converting empty commercial units into residential dwellings.

Objective 2: Reduce time taken to bring longer term empty properties back into use through appropriate enforcement measures such as: Compulsory Purchase Orders, Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Enforced Sales.

Objective 3: Raise awareness of the need to tackle empty properties through greater promotion and publicity. This objective will be met by providing clear information to the public on how to report empties and what will happen, providing clear information to owners and what they can expect from the council and informing local residents of empty property action in their area.

For more information on the strategy contact Irna van der Palen by email or telephone:

Irna.vanderpalen@islington.gov.uk
0207 527 6079

4 Changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), John Craddock, Valuers Office

From 1 April 2011, maximum Local Housing Allowance rates in all areas will be reduced so that only three out of ten properties for rent in any area will be affordable for people claiming local housing allowance. Affordable properties may be concentrated in certain places, and some places may have none.

John summarised the main changes;

- There will be a cap for all **new** claims. LHA levels will be **restricted to the 4 bedroom** rate and a new upper limit will be introduced for each property size, with upper limits (capping) set at:
 - **£250 a week for a 1 bedroom LHA rate**
 - **£290 a week for a 2 bedroom LHA rate**
 - **£340 a week for a 3 bedroom LHA rate**
 - **£400 a week for a 4 bedroom LHA rate (maximum)**
- The Government will **end the maximum £15 weekly Housing Benefit excess** that some people now receive. This means you will not be able get more money from Housing Benefit than you pay in rent.

- John advised that all the information regarding LHA rates and Islington's Broad Rental Market Rate data (BRMA) can be found on their website: <https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/>

There are further proposed changes in April 2012 which relate to increasing the age limit from 25 to 35 for reductions to single peoples LHA in the private sector. The result of the age increase will mean a reduction in the money received by single people who rent self contained flats and a more likely move to shared housing.