

**Islington Landlords' Forum
Wednesday 27 March 2007
Islington Town Hall, Committee Room five and six
Upper Street, N1**

Minutes of meeting

1. Introduction

Cllr Jyoti Vaja (chair in place of Terry Stacy) welcomed landlords and said was pleased to see so many attendees. She noted a slight change to the agenda as Duwaine Brown from Council Tax was unable to attend due to other urgent commitments.

2. Islington Accredited Landlords Association

Michael Deufemia introduced the new Islington Accredited Landlords Association and explained the reasons for its creation which were mainly

- to strengthen the relationship between the council and private landlords
- promoting good practice among private landlords and
- rewarding good landlords by providing them with more incentives and benefits

Other noted membership benefits (given in landlords pack at end of forum) were:

- preferential places on training courses run by Islington Business Partnership
- free energy saving light bulbs
- free surveys and fire safety referrals for vulnerable tenants
- discounts & savings on goods and services by local businesses

The Islington Accredited Landlords Association have so far secured discounts for landlords with 22 businesses, including builders' merchants, furniture, bathrooms and carpets stores, glaziers, insurance companies and locksmiths.

Michael outlined what the future plans are being considered by the IALA, eg, that Islington Accredited Landlords Association accredited landlords can earn development points from London Landlords Accredited Scheme run training sessions and seminars as well as giving rewards for the most energy efficient

landlords via competitions and prizes. Special recognition will be given to landlords who house the council's vulnerable clientele.

For further information or queries you can contact the Landlord advisor on 020 7527 6073 or e-mail michael.deufemia@islington.gov.uk

3. Grants 2008 – 2009

Jill Ellenby (Service Manager) of the Residential Environmental Health Team gave a presentation on grant changes for 2008 - 2009.

Empty Property Grants

No interim payments will be made to landlords if the grant value is less than £20,000.

Interim payments will be made on grants values over £20,000; however, interim payments are limited to 40% of the total cost of the works. The grant balance or final payment will only be paid on receipt of all completion certificates plus completion of the works.

Houses Multiple Occupation Grants

Grants under Houses in Multiple Occupation are for amenity provision as required by conditions attached to a House in Multiple Occupation licence. The works must be completed within the agreed timescales on the licence to attract a grant. A maximum of £20,000 is available for this.

New Grant for category One Hazards

This is a newly introduced grant for landlords related to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

The grant covers fire (provision of fire precautions) and electrical hazards only.

Grant money up to maximum of £10,000 of the reasonable cost of the works for each of these hazards is available, £20,000 in total.

There is a grant condition attached to this: The property must be available for letting three years after receipt of the final grant payment.

Home Repairs grants

This is an existing grant of up to £10,000 for owner occupiers. The changes here to the time for repaying the grant if the property is sold – this has been reduced from five years to three years.

Disabled Facilities Grants (Mandatory)

The maximum amount for this individual Disabled Facilities Grants has increased from £25,000 to £30,000. Other changes include inclusion of property charges – council can now reclaim grants from owner occupiers if property sold. There are

also means test changes to help speed up the process and make it fairer. Working and Child Tax Credit will no longer be counted as income.

Solar Grants

Jill advised that these grants are no longer available from the Residential Grants Team as the take up was minimal. The Green Living Centre will now be dealing with enquiries from landlords about this. Landlords were encouraged to access these funds through them.

Training for Landlords

There is planned training for landlords in Russell Square in London on Landlord and Tenant Law and Environmental Health Law relating to private sector housing. Both sessions will be run by an experienced solicitor and housing Environmental Health Officer respectively.

The training is free of charge so interested landlords can add their names to the list after session today.

For further details on grants or training contact Jill Ellenby on 020 7527 3327 or www.islington.gov.uk/Housing/PrivateHousing

Empty property grants

New grants for first time buyers introduced to try to encourage people to bring empty properties back into use.

- for prospective owner-occupiers a grant of up to a maximum of £25,000 is available to help them towards the work
- for workers who are Islington residents and who earn a maximum (single income) of £30,000 or £60,000 (joint income) a grant of up to £50,000 maximum is available

There are grant conditions:

- grant recipients to own and occupy the property for five years as a minimum

Empty properties above shops

- maximum of £15,000 is available for this, however, the owner must retain ownership of the property for five years

Jill also stated that under the Rent Deposit scheme, the deposit paid by the council would be equivalent to nine weeks' rent as determined by the Rent Officer.

HMO Grants

Grants under Houses in Multiple Occupation are for amenity provision as required by conditions attached to a House in Multiple Occupation licence. A maximum of £20,000 is available for this.

Home repairs assistance

This grant is for owner-occupiers and certain leaseholders. The applicant must be on benefits. Grant to be increased from £5,000 to £10,000.

Safe and Warm Grants

This fits in with our climate change agenda.

- new owner-occupiers remain in their property for two years after receipt of the grant

Where insulation is provided grant recipients will be offered the option of the installation of solar panels for the provision of hot water.

The council is currently piloting solar grants. More information can be obtained from its website: www.islington.gov.uk/Housing/PrivateHousing

4. Local Housing Allowance

Brian Demby, Principal Policy and Training Officer, Housing Benefits for Islington Council introduced and explained the Local Housing Allowance to the attendees. Mr Demby went through an overview and the background leading up to its proposed introduction on 7 April 2008.

Local Housing Allowance is the new name for housing benefit for tenants in privately rented accommodation. Several Councils have already implemented and tested the scheme on a trial basis.

The idea is to simplify the rules and to allow tenants more freedom, both financially, and to choose where they live.

The fundamental aims of the LHA scheme are to promote:

- **Fairness:** LHA bases the maximum amount paid to tenants on the size, composition and location of the household. Therefore, two households in similar circumstances in the same area will be entitled to similar amount of benefits.
- **Choice:** tenants are able to take on greater responsibility and choose how to spend their income in a similar way to tenants who are not in receipt of benefits. Like other tenants they are able to choose whether to rent a larger property, or spend less on housing and increase their available income.
- **Transparency:** The current link between Housing Benefit and individual rents is complex and does not set out clearly what level of state support is available for people on low incomes. A clear and transparent set of allowance rates helps tenants and landlords know how much financial help is available from the state. Tenants are able to compare how much support is available towards their housing costs in different areas and for different property sizes.
- **Personal responsibility:** Empowering people to budget for and to pay their rent themselves, rather than having it paid for them, helps develop the skills unemployed tenants will need as they move back into work. Currently around 40% of Housing Benefit payments in the private rented sector are made to tenants, with the remainder paid straight to landlords. The Government

believes that, where possible, local housing allowance should be paid to tenants, as are most other benefits and tax credits.

- **Financial inclusion:** Ideally, we want people to have their housing payments paid into a bank account and to set up a standing order to pay the rent to their landlord. This has the advantage of being a safe and secure method of payment and provides certainty for landlords that rent will be paid.
- **Improved administration:** For working age tenants, the Local Housing Allowance provides a simpler system and also helps speed up administration of housing payments, giving tenants more confidence when starting a job that any in-work benefit will be paid quickly. A more transparent system may also improve the ability of individuals to move between areas and to take advantage of employment opportunities.

A further discussion followed on how the Local Housing Allowance is calculated, how the Broad Rental Market areas have been established, rates of Local Housing Allowance and its duration for tenants (one year review) and how Local Housing Allowance is paid.

Please refer to landlord forum pack for more information on the above points or www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/lha/ .

5. **Housing Strategy Consultation**

The council is writing its new Housing Strategy for 2009 – 2014, and is undertaking consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including private sector landlords, agents and tenants. Attendees were asked to read 'Your Home Your Future' document in pack and fill in questionnaire sending completed survey back by 25 April 2008. Form can also be completed online.

6. **AOB**

None

7. **Meeting close**

Attendees were advised to fill in evaluation sheets and list future topics for discussion.