



ISLINGTON

Islington Landlords' and Tenants' Forum

WEDNESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2006

MINUTES OF MEETING

1. INTRODUCTION

Irna van der Palen, Private Sector Partnerships Manager, welcomed back Mayor Jyoti Vaja as temporary chair, due to the permanent chair, Councillor Terry Stacey, being unable to attend this forum.

2. EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY

Shahin Bakth and Neville Archer, from the Council's Strategy and Policy Team gave an update on the work they're undertaking to produce a new Empty Property Strategy.

Since 2003, the aim is to reduce the number of empty properties mainly in the private sector. There are 1606 empty properties in Islington and 699 of these have been empty for more than six months. Dilapidation can lead to anti social behaviour. The Council are keen to increase the level of occupation of empty properties and manage the local housing stock more efficiently.

Objectives for Empty Property 2007-10 strategy.

- Improve database, provide more information, have more of a strategic focus, and improve partnership working.
- Before considering the use of Empty Dwellings Management Orders LBI need to understand the reasons that premises become empty, but would prefer to bring property back into use through encouragement rather than enforcement.
- Landlords may be reluctant to take on vulnerable tenants, and better partnership working is needed between the council, owners and support agencies to ensure a more focused approach
- Some owners may want help to renovate their properties. The council cannot provide a list of reputable building companies, but is tendering for an Empty Property Improvement service. The successful company will be able to assist owners with the whole process of bringing a property back into use, including dealing with planning, building control, building contractors etc.

- An extensive Mori survey has been commissioned by the North London Sub Region To find out why owners leave properties empty and what their future plans for the properties are. The results are to be analysed and publicised.
- There are grants available to owners of empty properties and these can be reviewed and changed in line with the annual review of the Grants Policy.

The landlords' working group has also been discussing priorities for the new strategy. Neville Archer asked for any further feedback or comments from landlords to be given to him in this forum or through contacting him later.

Contact details: Telephone: 0207 527 4055/4438.

E-mail: neville.archer@islington.gov.uk, shahin.bakth@islington.gov.uk

3. LANDLORD OBLIGATIONS

David Smith from Pain Smith Solicitors gave a presentation.

Tenants rights of security

All tenants have security of tenure, Assured tenants and Rent Act tenants have greater rights of tenancy than those on assured shorthold tenancies. LL's are encouraged to seek legal advice when granting or ending tenancies, to ensure they comply with the law.

Gas Safety (Installations Use) Regulations 95.

Gas appliances and Installations must be checked before the tenancy begins. Criminal Offence not to have this check. Contractors must be CORGI registered. Certificates to be renewed every 12 months. New appliances are exempt for the first 12 months

Electrical Safety Regulations 94.

These regulations require all appliances to be safe. No requirement for testing but good practice. Must have user instructions or appliances are deemed not safe. Tenants who bring in their own electrical appliances are personally responsible for them.

Part (P) Building Regulations

These regulations require that a competent person must do certain "notifiable" works. Building Control must check changes to property and if they are "notifiable" in certain rooms.

Furniture and furnishing Regulations 88.

Applies to all upholstered furniture after 1950. Some foam gives off toxic fumes when burnt. Landlords cannot give furniture to tenants or sell furniture to tenants.

Section 11 of Landlords and Tenants Act 1989.

Covers structures and installations but not for all appliances. Tenants have an obligation to report repairs but landlords cannot charge for repairs that are caused through wear and tear.

Section 4 Defective Premises Act

Landlords must take reasonable care to prevent personal injuries or property damage.

In common Law there is an Implied warranty for repair for functioning appliances e.g. washing machine.

Asbestos needs to be removed by contractors approved by the Health and Safety Executive and landlords maybe able to get some types asbestos that disposed of sensibly by the City of London 020-7332-3433.

Residential Environmental Health can require landlords to deal with asbestos using the powers under the new Housing Act 2004. (Health and Hazard Safety Rating System)

Tenants have fewer rights if the landlord is resident, If there is a distinction between the landlords and tenants facilities then the tenant has more rights. If there is a distinction between the landlords and tenants facilities then the tenant has more rights, If sharing facilities with landlord then the tenant has fewer rights.

4. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE , THE RESPONSE IN ISLINGTON

Harriet Wilkins, Domestic Violence Co-ordinator, gave a presentation on DV issues in the borough.

Mainly women are victims and violence and domestic abuse are usually a pattern of coercive behaviour this can be physical and sexual violence. Harriet's role is to support and liase with LBI partners. There is a three-year strategy in place that has five aims. The primary aim is to protect the victim and their family. Domestic violence occurs in all tenures and some social landlords consider domestic violence as a breach of tenancy.

A handbook with information is available on domestic violence in many languages. Other information is available in a domestic violence newsletter and on the LBI Website

Contact details: Phone: 0207 527 2184 E-mail: harriet.wilkins@islington.gov.uk

5. AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION RESULTS

Jan Hart, Assistant Director of Public Protection Division Fed back from Audit Commission Comprehensive Performance Audit.

It was a theme Inspection by the Audit Commission during February 2006. It covered work in Private sector work in Residential Environmental Health, the Housing Aid Centre and Private Sector Partnerships. The inspectors looked at what the departments do and how well they function as a whole. They assessed this using many criteria e.g. Access to services, Diversity, Private housing stock condition, Strategy, Impact of Services etc

STRENGTHS

- The council was rated as a two star service (maximum being three star) with excellent prospects for improvement.
- The audit showed a good promotion of Services and Customer focus.
- It identified good partnership working, good progress on improving properties, close working on prevention of homelessness.
- The inspectors were also impressed with LBI's choice base letting scheme.

WEAKNESSES

- Improving literature in reception areas and translations.
- Give more information to external bodies on illegal eviction and harassment.
- Evaluate Care and Repair Service.
- Give better information to tenants going into temporary accommodation

The next steps are to develop an action plan the full report is on the website www.islington.gov.uk Contact details: jan.hart@islington.gov.uk

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Jill Ellenby, Service Manager at Residential Environmental Health stated that there are new grants for Empty Properties, including owner occupation grants, and encouraged landlords to contact her if there were other changes landlords wanted to see.

Contact details: Telephone 0207 527 3327. E-mail: jill.ellenby@islington.gov.uk

6.2 A big thank you to Dionne Maxwell, Landlord Advisor for all her work especially for organising the landlords forum. She is leaving to work at Camden Council. Mayor Jyoti Vaja also thanked Dionne for all her hard work.

Date of next meeting 4th December 2006, 6.00 pm

London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road N7