



ISLINGTON

Islington Landlords' Forum

Thursday 13 September 2007

MINUTES OF MEETING

1. Introduction

Irna van der Palen, chair in place of Cllr Stacy, introduced and welcomed the speakers to the forum. She also welcomed the many attendees.

The forum opened with a general invitation to the Sub Regional Landlord Forum on 13 December 2007 at the new Emirates Stadium. All present are invited and everyone is asked to confirm their attendance. The Chair also reported that the Communities and Local Government has selected Islington Council as regional champions for Preventing Homelessness. She thanked everyone for their help in achieving this recognition.

2. Neville Archer, Head of Strategy and Policy, Islington Council

Neville Archer talked about Islington's Private Sector Strategy 2007-2010, the new private housing strategy.

All councils must have a comprehensive housing strategy to determine the needs of the community. A clear picture of action is required and the arrangements for private housing are very important. Many people presenting to the council with housing needs require a supply of private sector accommodation, which is in good condition and well managed. There are two main forces

- the volume of people approaching
- the supply of good condition private sector housing

The strategy looks at the ability to deal with the volume of people presenting, as the availability of social housing is limited, with the private sector critical in meeting demand. Secondly, the focus is to make greater use of the private sector with a 'housing options' approach i.e. not all directed to council or housing association properties.

How will the aims of the Strategy be achieved. There are three basic objectives

- to improve supply and demand
- raise standards (especially for vulnerable households)
- make landlords more professional

Private tenants are to be involved and engaged too. Finally, there is the Private Sector Action Plan document, which contains set targets, which are regularly reviewed and adjusted.

All present were given a copy of the new strategy and action plan.

Questions and Answers

No questions raised, the floor indicated it would like time to read the documents.

3. LAURA HALES, CLIMATE CHANGE PARTNERSHIP OFFICER, (ISLINGTON CLIMATE CHANGE PARTNERSHIP) ISLINGTON COUNCIL

Laura Hales gave a presentation on the impact of climate change on both Islington and landlords, and what Islington is doing to mitigate these affects.

What are the impacts of climate change

- it could mean more frequent hurricanes
- more extreme weather conditions
- increased pollution and flooding events

What is Islington's response

- to mitigate, adapt and decentralise energy use
- explore new opportunities and consider the impacts of climate change on inequality

The Council has looked at what the major emitters are and set targets to reduce emissions, and has pledged to reduce its carbon emissions by 55,000 tonnes by 2010. Projects include

- working in partnership with other organisations to reduce carbon dioxide emissions
- funding renewable/ alternative energy, see Council web site
- increasing energy efficiency in council stock
- investing in new technology like wind turbines
- there has also been a referendum on parking within the borough and advice centres set up with information on recycling

An Islington Climate Change Partnership study has shown there is huge scope for action and private landlords can contribute. Households produce over a third of the carbon dioxide emissions in the London Borough of Islington. Landlords and owners are an important link and many have ideas too on reducing emissions. The advantages of energy efficiency are well known, some examples are given in presentation five. The Islington Climate Change Partnership has a lot to offer and Islington are auditing, implementing and attaining the benefits of energy efficiency and sustainability.

Please refer to the Landlord pack for a copy of the presentation and contact details.

Questions and Answers

Q. Are there restrictions to installing solar panels in conservation areas?

A. (Laura) probably yes, but will find out. Historically there have been problems although this is changing.

A. (Andrew) always speak to planning first, but if the installation is ten centimetres or less then this is normally okay. But it is tricky in conservation areas, listed buildings etc, so it's more on a case-by-case basis. And you don't just need to talk to planning either, you need to consult with Building Control too. In October, there's going to be a planning policy statement published which will change the way Islington Council looks at issues about renewables, although primarily from the view of health and safety.

Q. (Chair) the three million-climate change fund, is that just for the London Borough of Islington

A. Yes, just applies to LBI

Q. If applying for a grant, is it only for properties inside Islington

A. The grant only applies to properties inside the borough.

Q. With reference to the three million fund and energy audits, would a landlord have to pay for the improvements

A. Islington residents and landlords can apply for the Climate Change Fund. The energy audits are different and are for anyone with offices in Islington. Following a free survey the landlord would pay for any works, the survey would highlight sources of funding

4. KATIE STEEL, BUSINESS PARTNER CO-ORDINATOR, ISLINGTON BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

Katie Steel talked about the work and achievements of the Islington Business Partnership.

The Partnership was established in 2004 with funding from government's Department of Trade and Industry. The idea was to help businesses achieve regulatory compliance. It was set up to help educate rather than prosecute for non-compliance. It has since evolved into an important service for businesses. There is a quarterly magazine called 'Update', which covers new legislation, events, training and networking, green news and initiatives. The business partnership also organises training events and seminars, e.g. the green business event, and carries out an annual business survey to help identify needs of businesses. For example, there is an upcoming briefing seminar on 12 October 12-2 p.m. at 222 Upper St, for estate agents about Home information Packs. Please see the website for further details and information on the Action Plan.

Katie encouraged all present to have a look in their information packs and see what the partnership has to offer. She also welcomed any feedback or suggestions.

Katie explained the benefits of signing up. It's free and subscribers receive four magazines a year. It's a great way to keep informed, have a say and queries are put to the right people. There is an on-going dialogue.

Questions and Answers

Q. Where is the web site

A. The Council website, under separate Business section

Katie asked for a show of hands of members which revealed a small minority, but hopefully more people are encouraged to sign up. Katie gave a final reminder to everyone about the October seminar on Home Information Packs to be held at 222 Upper Street. Lunch included.

5. ANDREW FORD, ENERGY POLICY OFFICER, ISLINGTON ENERGY CENTRE

Andrew Ford explained why landlords should be interested in energy efficiency.

There are many reasons. To save money, to improve the fabric of the buildings, reduce damp and mould, improve the health of the occupants. Many measures have little or no cost to install. Plus void periods may be reduced and an improved property may retain good tenants.

There are several allowances/grants.

- landlords energy saving allowance, this applies if income tax is applicable. Its worth up to £15 000 per dwelling when energy efficiency measures are installed
- energy efficiency commitment, all energy companies have to give grants and discounts on loft and cavity wall insulation. The grants are not means tested and there is around £250 each for loft and cavity wall insulation. This figure may be even lower in combination with other local initiatives
- warm front, applies to tenants on benefits. Insulation can be free or the heating system may be replaced. Most costs are covered by the grant
- private landlord energy award scheme, a landlord grant comprising a mix of grant and interest free loans. At Islington qualify for 67% (two-thirds) grant, the rest as interest free loan
- energy performance certificate, required by 2008, a legal requirement – must produce a certificate up front. Tenants will be able to compare energy use and running costs. If between properties, may affect rent?

In summary, doing energy efficient works, using grants, discounts and loans, may make a property 'decent' if not already. The government is also likely to use the Wear & Tear allowance and offset it with the Energy Performance Certificate. The Energy Centre offers free advice to landlords and tenants. It'll be located at 222 Upper Street as from 19 October. .

A copy of the presentation can be found in the information pack.

Questions and Answers

Q. Energy Performance Certificates. If the rent includes utilities, is one still required
A. Yes

Q. The Private Landlord Energy Award Scheme. If not in a Private Landlord Energy Award Scheme area, does this mean it's not applicable

A. If not in a Private Landlord Energy Award Scheme area, then cannot apply, but talk to a local authority as they may have similar scheme, especially if the tenant is on benefit. Check with the local authority

Q. With these private sector opportunities, how and where do grants apply

A. Depends where the property is located, some grants are local, some apply nationally

6. JILL ELLENBY, SERVICE MANAGER, RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH, LB ISLINGTON

Jill Ellenby gave a brief summary of the grants available from Residential Environmental Health.

Private Landlord Energy Award Scheme grants – please pick up leaflet provided. Regarding an earlier question about solar panels, there are grants available up to £1000. Not many approvals so far so happy to take enquiries. Safe and Warm grants are available to private tenants and owner-occupiers. The decent homes programme will be launched shortly and will provide similar grants to the Safe and Warm scheme.

For further information about grants, please call 020 7527 3104.

7. CLOSE

The Chair thanked all the speakers for their presentations and the delegates for attending, closed the forum, recognising that everyone is going to be busy joining up and attending events, launches etc.

NEXT FORUM:

SUB REGIONAL LANDLORDS' FORUM

13 DECEMBER 2007, 5.00 PM, The Emirates Stadium, Arsenal, Islington