

Getting tough on hazards in the home



Environmental Health officer Lorna Frost checks out a property in Bradford to see if it is fit to live in under the current system.

Get up to date on benefits !

The next landlords forum is to be held at the Carlisle Business Centre on Thursday, October 11, at 2pm. There will be an update on housing benefits, and a speaker will be organised. The last forum was held on July 12.

A new system which will determine if a property is fit to live in will be launched in the near future.

Under the new system the emphasis will be on health and safety rather than looking at defects in bricks and mortar.

To find out if a property is suitable for occupation, private sector housing staff will look at what hazards a property poses to tenants, visitors or passers by. The hazards will be rated according to the level and likelihood of harm they pose.

Any financial assistance or enforcement action will be determined using this system which will concentrate more on issues such as:

- Whether a home can be affordably heated – ie. is it well insulated, is it draft and damp free, does it have a well maintained and affordable heating system?

- Home and fire safety – ensuring that landlords provide homes that are as free as possible from physical and fire hazards, and that tenants are aware of any remaining risks.

This type of hazard is only partially covered by the current fitness standard and yet causes more harm in homes around the country than some of the issues which are currently given more emphasis.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) have recently carried out consultation on the proposed changes, and although the official consultation period is over, they will still gladly receive your comments. The legislation has still to be drafted in its final form, and it is envisaged that the new standard will be not be in force until next year at the earliest.

- If you wish to know more you can get hold of the FREE document 'Health and safety in Housing – Replacement of the Housing Fitness Standard by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System – A Consultation Paper' from: DTLR Free Literature, PO Box 236, Wetherby, West Yorks. LS23 7NB. Tel: 0870 1226 236.

News for landlords from Bradford Council's Department of Housing



BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

LET'S

TALK!

Thumbs up to property rating

More than two thirds of local landlords who took part in a survey about the idea of a local property star rating system gave it the thumbs up.

The survey, which followed the landlords' forum held in March, showed 69% favoured a voluntary accreditation scheme. Of the remainder 27% felt such a scheme was not a good way of improving standards in private rented housing, and 4% did not know.

The survey also asked what incentives could encourage landlords to join a scheme, and the runaway winner was better communications with the Council's Housing Benefits section.

Housing staff are still exploring how the scheme could work, and further consultation is planned with a range of groups including tenants, tenant groups, advice centres, police and the Health and Safety Executive.

Private Sector Housing Manager Mary Smith said: "Our aim at the Council is to bring about a renewed confidence in private sector housing. But there is a lot more work to do. As a local authority we need to have a better understanding of the issues in the private sector, and we are working with the Landlords Forum to achieve that."

Use your free bulk refuse collection

If you or your tenants are getting rid of large items of rubbish such as furniture which won't go in the weekly collections, don't forget our free Bulk Refuse collection service on 751000.

Get to grips with

This is a sight which can bring a whole area down. Rubbish outside houses in multiple occupation is easy to criticise – but is it really so hard to find a solution?

The landlord of this property was prosecuted by Bradford Council under the Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation Regulations for general neglect. He was found guilty, fined £1,500 and ordered to pay £1,000 costs.

The HMO regulations say that all landlords of HMOs must keep the common parts of the accommodation clean, and should provide enough rubbish bins, along with other requirements.

The main cause of rubbish problems at HMOs seems to be that no one person in each property takes responsibility for storing refuse or putting it out for collection. Also the landlord usually lives elsewhere, according to John Turner of Bradford Council's Cleansing Division.

"If no-one takes on the job of putting the wheelie bin out, we can't collect the rubbish. This means refuse is building up somewhere, and again, if no-one takes responsibility for storing it adequately, it ends up all over, turning properties into real eyesores," said John.

"We understand it is difficult to find one person to take on looking after rubbish at a shared house, but landlords should consider doing it themselves, or providing some small incentive for a reliable tenant to do the job."

"It's got to be worth it to avoid tenants making properties look



so bad." Wheelie bins can be put out on any convenient day as long as they don't cause an obstruction, he added. Student houses had their own particular problems, where tenants were temporary and may have less commitment to the property or area. There was also a tendency by landlords towards mass clearouts at the end of term. They needed to think through how to get rid of the rubbish before they start, John said. FOR MORE DETAILS on requirements of the Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation Regulations contact Mary Smith on (01274) 754726.

Snap up this bargain bin!

Landlords of properties with enough space outside for a HMO sized bin should snap up this bargain from the Cleansing Division. The 1100 litre Eurobin costs £420 full price, but Let's Talk readers are being offered them at the much reduced price of £200. The galvanised steel bins will take about 15 full black bin liners of rubbish. CONTACT Barry Fisher at Cleansing on 01274 753525.

LET'S TALK!

Get rid of your rubbish!



I want to evict my tenant because he owes me rent!

If you want to reclaim your property from your tenant during the fixed term of an assured shorthold tenancy then it is possible to apply to the court for possession relying on a number of grounds.

There are two types of grounds that can be relied on - mandatory and discretionary. The grounds relating to rent are Grounds 8 and 11. Before you start proceedings you must serve notice on the tenant informing them of the grounds you are relying on to gain possession.

If either or both of these grounds are relied on (a landlord may rely on more than one ground for possession) then the tenant must be given at least two weeks notice before you start court proceedings.

Ground 8 is a mandatory ground on which the court must order possession. To rely on this Ground the tenant must have owed at least two months' notice if the tenancy is on a monthly basis or 8 weeks' rent if it is on a weekly basis, both when you gave notice seeking possession and at the date of the court hearing.

Ground 11 is a discretionary ground on which the court may order possession. This applies where even the tenant was not behind with his or her rent when you started possession proceedings, but has been persistently late in paying the rent.

Because the notice to the tenant must contain particular information presented in a particular way for the notice to be valid, it is recommended that the pre-printed form of the notice is used. This can be obtained from legal stationers such as the Oyez Straker Stationery Group, Enterprise House, St Paul's Street, Leeds. LS1 2LE. Tel: 0113 243 5491.

The notice that you require is served under section 8 of the Housing Act 1988 and is known as a "Notice seeking possession of a property let on an Assured Tenancy or an Assured Agricultural Occupancy."

Avoid increased charges!

Keep your property in good repair and avoid increased charges for enforcement action!

Private Sector Housing staff will warn a landlord if they intend to take enforcement action, so they can deal with the problem. But if the landlord fails to do so and they have to serve notice, then they will charge £210, instead of the previous sum of £195. The Council is permitted by law to charge up to £300.

You can benefit too!

If your tenants receive income of disability related benefits, you can benefit too.

People on these benefits can now improve the warmth and comfort of their home for free with Eastern HEES, a non profit making subsidiary of Eastern Energy.

Eastern HEES is managing a government initiative, the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, to make homes affordably warm for eligible households in eastern England.

If you own the property and it is suitably built, your tenants could qualify for loft insulation, heating improvements and cavity wall insulation fitted at no cost to you.

In some cases where your tenant is over 60 and receiving certain benefits, they could even get central heating fitted free. FOR MORE DETAILS contact the Landlords' Helpline on 01473 490603, Mon to Fri, 8 am to 6 pm.

