

Best^{BD}Homes

Frequently Asked Questions



Q Why should I join Best^{BD}Homes?

A Best^{BD}Homes has been set up with landlords and offers real incentives to landlords, such as free advertising, a housing benefits hotline and potentially better levels of rent.

This improved performance was also reflected in a recent independent audit by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) as part of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) which recognised the Council had "strengths in its housing benefit services."

The service gained four out of four on the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment scale.

Only 30 per cent of other housing benefit services achieved this maximum score.

The Council is bidding for £1.6 million of external funding from the DWP to help it comply more fully with the performance standards set out jointly by the DWP and BFI.

Priorities include:

- Replacing the computer system
- Upgrading document management software
- Developing the role of the pre-assessment team
- Recruiting and training new staff.

Other initiatives include working with other council services, landlords and Government departments and agencies to improve customer service.

Bradford Council has one of the best performing benefits services in the country according to new government figures.

Bradford has been shown to be among the top performing local authorities according to the latest quarterly statistics issued by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) which measure how well all local authorities administer housing and council tax benefits.

The performance was measured by the following indicators:

- Percentage of renewal claims processed on time
- Accuracy of processing
- Percentage of new claims determined within 14 days of receiving all necessary information
- Percentage of new rent allowance claims in which the first payment is made on time or within 14 days.

Compared with two years ago, Bradford Council is now processing twice as many renewal claims on time, new claims in less than half the time and changes of circumstances in a third of the time.

Q If I join Best^{BD}Homes can I get more rent?

A You are free to charge whatever rent you wish (within the constraints of the tenancy agreement). As tenants become aware of the advantages of Best^{BD}Homes they may be willing to pay more rent for them. This has been the experience with other similar schemes.

Q Can I get more rent for a Best^{BD}Home if my tenant claims Housing Benefit?

A This is very likely. We are working with the rent officer to improve rent assessments for Best^{BD}Homes properties which will have a positive effect on housing benefits payments.

Q What is Homehunter?

A Homehunter is a well publicised website and hotline used to market social and privately rented housing to potential tenants.

Q Will Best^{BD}Homes properties attract better tenants?

A It is likely that tenants will welcome and respect accredited properties which are well managed and maintained.

Q Will Best^{BD}Homes be easier and faster to let?

A Many tenants will be looking for accredited properties and these should be taken up more quickly. If conditions and management are good, tenants should also stay in the property for longer.

Q If I join the scheme do I have to take tenants in receipt of Housing Benefits?

A No. You are free to let the property to whoever you wish

Let's Talk

www.bradford.gov.uk

New Scheme for Private Landlords and Tenants Launched



From left to right:
Denise Thomas (Chair Landlord's Forum)
Simon Brayshaw (Bradlon developments)
Julie Rhodes (Bradford Council)
Andrew Houldsworth (Bradford Council)
Geraldine Howley (BCHT)
Charles Patchett (Patchett Homes)
and Carol O'Keefe (Property Owner).

Landlords are presented with their Information Packs and Leaflets at the launch of Best^{BD}Homes.

For further details see inside.

Landlords Forum

Speakers at the next Landlords Forum will include John Towers from the Rent Service who will talk about the potential for landlords to get higher rent levels for accredited properties with tenants claiming housing benefits. The next forum will be held at Bingley Arts Centre on Monday, March 24 at 7pm.

UNIPOL



A charity that helps students find accommodation and landlords let out their property is setting up a code of practice in Bradford to protect both parties.

Unipol's Code of Standards has been recognised by Bradford Council, students and the university and college in Bradford as a professional minimum standard which landlords should meet.

Unipol anticipates that at least 50 per cent of property owners in the district will join the voluntary code.

Unipol officially opened its Bradford offices in May 2002 in the University's Sports Hall Building and is a popular service with students and landlords alike.

All available rented accommodation is listed on the charity's website, which can be accessed by students at all educational institutions in Bradford and in the Unipol office itself. It also allows the information to be viewed by overseas students before they arrive in the country.

As well as computer search facilities the Unipol office staff can provide advice and help for students and property owners.

So far the website has been searched 28,000 times, carried details of around 1,950 bed spaces for 5,000 students living in private sector housing in the district.

Property owners using Unipol can get:

- Full use of the service for a single annual fee
- Use of the Accommodation Bureau
- Full colour web display and photograph of their property/ies
- Access to all of Unipol's publications
- The right to buy cheap legal stationary e.g. Tenancy Agreements, Notices and guidance notes
- Invitations to special events and an annual briefing of what is happening in the student property market
- Advice and assistance from Unipol staff

The charity is now registering properties to let in 2003-4. Anyone wishing to receive further information about its services should contact the Bradford office at: Unipol Student Homes, Sports Centre, University of Bradford, Great Horton Road, Bradford BD7 1DT. Tel: 01274 235899.

E-mail: info@unipol.bradford.ac.uk

Website: www.unipol.bradford.ac.uk



The Unipol Offices, Bradford University Campus



Best^{BD}Homes Launched

Best^{BD}Homes has been set up by Bradford Council's Private Sector Housing Section and will work alongside an existing Unipol scheme that protects student tenancies in the district. Bradford Landlords Forum has also had a big input.

The last issue of Let's Talk included details of the scheme, but here is a summary:

Landlords will have to meet a set of standards before they can join the scheme. All will have to reach the requirements of a basic Bronze Standard. Those exceeding this can aspire to Silver standard which will be launched shortly.

In return, landlords will gain a higher status for their properties; free advertising on Homehunter; exclusive access to a Housing Benefit hotline; certificates and stickers; discounts from sponsors and the use of a mediation service to help with tenants' queries.

Tenants will enjoy better standards of management by knowing that Best^{BD}Homes landlords could be dropped from the scheme if they fail to meet the requirements of the code of practice. The mediation service will also make it easier for them to get repairs done and resolve other problems.

Councillor Kris Hopkins, Executive Member for Health and Housing said: "This is an exciting new venture. The scheme has incentives for landlords who provide good quality housing and gives tenants confidence and informed choice."

Denise Thomas, Chair of the Bradford District Landlords Forum said: "The standards are easy to achieve for good landlords and the rewards will be better recognition and more contented tenants".

To find out how to join Best^{BD}Homes ring Bradford Council Projects Team on 01274 437148 or call the information hotline and leave a message for an information pack on 01274 438888.



Students searching the Unipol Website for a property