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## A Invitation to You....

Welcome to our second edition of **Landlords@Stockton** - news from Stockton Council specially for landlords. Thanks to everyone who gave such positive feedback about our first edition. As always, we welcome your views and your news... if you have information you'd like to share with other landlords why not get in touch- our contact details are [landlords@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:landlords@stockton.gov.uk) and more specific contacts are detailed on the back page.

In this edition we are offering you some free training/information sharing, so I hope you will be able to take us up on the offer. It's a full day session on the 24th of January 2008.

In the morning session a trainer from the Residential Landlords Association (RLA) and will be speaking about the Housing Health and Safety Hazard Rating System.

This is the new system by which properties are assessed for their suitability for occupation. The RLA will provide advice and guidance on the interpretation of the system and what landlords need to do to follow this.

The afternoon will be devoted to the new Local Housing Allowance- there will be an information session and a chance for you to discuss Stockton's plans for implementation with the housing benefit team. In particular we would like to explain the arrangements we will have in place for deciding when payments can be made direct to the landlord, and to get to understand your concerns about the new scheme.

Places are limited for this session to 30 – so its first come, first served !

We would look to repeat the information day if demand is high.

You'll find a booking form inside the newsletter. We look forward to seeing you on the 24 January!

If you would like this information in any other language or format for example large print or audio please contact the 'First Contact Officer' on 01642 527797

إذا كنت ترغب الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أو بأشكال أخرى على سبيل المثال بالطبعة الكبيرة أو بالشريط المسجل فالرجاء الإتصال 'بدايفرستي تيم' 01642 527797 على هاتف رقم [First Contact Officer]

欲要這份資訊的其它語言版或其它版式例  
如大宇體印刷/錄音帶，請致電 01642  
527797 接洽 '多元化隊' (First Contact Officer)

Si vous souhaitez obtenir ces informations dans d'autres langues ou sous un autre format, par exemple, en gros caractères / version audio, veuillez contacter l'équipe "First Contact Officer" au n° 01642 527797

نہ گہر حضرت لئی یہ ہم زانیارہ بہدہستت بکہوئیت بہ زمانہکانی تر یان بہ شہوہہکی تر یو نمونہ چاہی گہورہ/یان بہتیبی تو مارکراو تکاہ بہیوہندی بکہ بہ تیمی دایفیرستی' 01642 527797 لہ سہر ژمارہی تہلہفون [First Contact Officer]

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਬਣਤਰ ਜਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ, ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਾਂ ਟੇਪ/ਸੀ ਡੀ 'ਤੇ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 'First Contact Officer' ਨੂੰ 01642 527797 ਨੰਬਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

اگر آپ ان معلومات کو کسی بھی اور زبان یا انداز، مثلاً بڑے پرنٹ/آڈیو ٹیپ وغیرہ میں حاصل کرنا چاہیں، تو 'ڈاؤن ریڈی ٹیم' (First Contact Officer) کو اس نمبر پر فون کیجئے 01642 527797

اگر شما این اطلاعات را به زبان یا شکل دیگری مثلا چاپ بزرگ یا بصورت صدا میخواهید لطفا با تیم دایورسیتی (گوناگونی) [First Contact Officer] با شما ره 01642 527797 به تماس شوید



# A Date for your Diary

## An Information and Training Day

<b>Date</b>	Thursday 24th January 2008
<b>Time</b>	10am for 10:30am start, 4:30pm close
<b>Venue</b>	Education Centre, Junction Road, Norton

In response to requests from Landlords we have arranged an information and training day as detailed on the front page. The event is free of charge and places are limited to 30 for this day.

So places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis and limited to one representative per company.

Depending upon feedback, we will consider arranging further sessions.

To assist us with planning the event and arranging refreshments and lunch, please complete and return the slip below to let us know if you would like to attend.

Or let us know by completing the on-line form at [landlords@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:landlords@stockton.gov.uk) and return by 9 January 2008 emailing: [www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords)

We will contact you in early January to confirm your attendance.

I would like to attend the Information and Training Day on 24 January 2008.

Please return to: Private Sector Housing, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council,  
16 Church Road, Stockton-on-Tees TS18 1TX, by 9th January 2008

Name:	
Contact Address:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Telephone number:	
E-mail Address:	

## The Landlord Liaison Scheme

The Landlord Liaison Scheme is going from strength to strength. It is run by Stockton Council and situated in the Community Safety Service, which is based in Stockton Police Station. Endeavour Housing Association, Tristar Homes Ltd, Tees Valley Housing Group and Accent Homes support the scheme. It is open to all landlords no matter whether they have one or hundreds of properties. This year from April to the end of September our 256 members made 846 requests for references for prospective tenants.

We pledge that we will provide the reference information within three working days of receiving the request if we can fax back the forms and between five and seven working days if we have to use the post to send the reference. More often than not our service is quicker than that! If a landlord tells us that a property is empty and that they need to fill it we

can prioritise their request. If there is a delay in getting the written reference from the previous landlord we will ring them and then pass on a verbal reference to the landlord making the request.

As well as obtaining a reference from the previous landlord we will check our data base to see if the prospective

tenant or any family who will be living with them is known to us for anti social behaviour and we also share this information with the prospective landlord.

If a landlord tells us that they are receiving complaints about anti social behaviour around a property they own we will ensure that this information is passed to the Anti Social Behaviour Officer who covers that area.



They will involve the Police and the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team to take action to reduce these problems.

The Landlord Liaison Officers Ann Marshall and Stuart Kell, working within the ASB team also offer help, advice and support.

Recently they were able to assist a Landlord in the eviction of a tenant who was not complying with the conditions of his tenancy, by providing advice in the Court process and helping to complete the relevant forms for the Court hearing. An ASB officer also assisted by serving the formal papers on the tenant.

Possession of the property was subsequently granted by the Court. Other members of the Landlord Liaison Scheme will be made aware of the tenant should he apply for a tenancy.

To join the scheme, please contact Ann or Stuart on 01642 527620.





# Local Housing Allowance - Your Questions Answered

In our last edition we discussed the introduction of local housing allowance, and explained the Government's policy intention behind the change. We couldn't go into too much detail at the time about the changes as the rules had not been set. We now have a lot more information, and answer some of your main questions about the scheme below:-

## What is Local Housing Allowance?

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is a new way of deciding rent payments for people receiving Housing Benefit (HB). It does not replace HB. It uses a flat rate allowance based on the size of the tenant's household and the area in which they rent property to decide the amount of benefit they will receive. This amount is not directly related to the rent that you charge so the benefit that your tenants receive may be higher or lower than the contractual rent. The rate of LHA that customers receive will be reviewed every year.

Other circumstances, such as the money that the tenant has coming in or other people living in the household, will still affect the amount of benefit paid so the tenant may not always receive the full rate of LHA.

## When are the changes being introduced?

We will introduce the new LHA from April 7th 2008.

The new scheme will apply to Housing Benefit customers in the deregulated private sector. Certain types of supported accommodation, Registered Social Landlords, and "old style" tenancies are exempt, and so calculated under existing rules.

## Will benefit claims be transferred to LHA rates right away?

Not straight away. Tenants will continue to receive benefit under existing rules until they have a break in their claim of one week or more, or they move to a different address.

## What are the rates based on?

Different LHA rates will apply in different areas. The amounts will be based on the size of a tenants household. The rates may change and will be published every month.

The amount of LHA will depend on the number of bedrooms a tenant/claimant needs and the area in which a person lives.

One bedroom will be needed for

- each adult couple
- any other adult (aged 16 or over)
- any two children under 10
- any two children of the same sex aged 10 to 15
- or for any other child.

Example:

Household	Bedrooms Needed
Family A - single parent with one child	2
Family B - couple with 1 girl aged 6 and 1 boy aged 8	2
Family C - couple with 1 girl aged 6 and 1 boy aged 12	3

In the above example Family A & B would receive the 2 bedroomed LHA rate and Family C would receive the 3 bedroomed LHA rate. Single under 25's will receive the "shared accommodation" LHA rate – replacing the current "single room rent" level. One major difference from the current scheme is that anybody who rents shared accommodation will receive the "shared accommodation" LHA rate regardless of household composition.

### What if the customer's benefit is higher than their rent?

They may keep any of the excess that they are paid up to a maximum of £15 per week. Prospective tenants will be able to shop around with their allowance. If they find a property they like with a rent that exceeds their LHA they will need to make up the difference themselves – as they do now. But if they find somewhere with a rent below their allowance, they will be able to keep the difference up to a maximum of £15.00.

Example:

N.B the LHA figure is just an example- the rates have not been set yet.

Number of bedrooms needed	Gross Rent charged	LHA Rate	Maximum LHA Paid
3	£70	£100	£85
3	£80	£100	£95
3	£90	£100	£100
3	£110	£100	£100

There are no changes to the entitlement rules – this will still be based on a person's income and savings and proof of a valid tenancy etc.



### Who will benefit be paid to?

Personal responsibility and financial inclusion are two key aims of the LHA. In the vast majority of cases, benefit will be paid to your tenant who will be responsible for making their own payments of rent.

We will be able to pay benefit directly to the landlord only where:-

- there is evidence that the tenant is unlikely to pay the rent
- the tenant has difficulty managing their financial affairs
- the tenant is 8 weeks or more in arrears.

Your tenant will no longer be able to

choose to have benefit paid directly to you.

We do acknowledge that you may have some concerns about this, and some tenants will not be able to manage money very well or will simply be unwilling to pay the rent.

We have drafted a policy to cover situations where the allowance could be paid directly to the landlord. If you would like to see a copy, or make any comments please contact the LHA project officer Brian Wilson on 01642 526670 or e mail him at [brian.wilson@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:brian.wilson@stockton.gov.uk)

We will be running a training session in January to cover the new rules in more detail – you will find more details about this in the newsletter. Even if you can't attend we can send you the notes from the day.

## Calling all private landlords - tenancy deposits, another option

Stockton Bond Guarantee Scheme is looking for landlords interested in offering accommodation and using the schemes Bond Guarantee as security on the tenancy.

The Bond Guarantee provides a legal agreement in which the scheme agrees to cover rent arrears or damage up to the value of two months rent. It replaces the up front cash deposit normally required by landlords and can be claimed against at the end of the tenancy if there are losses.

The scheme offers landlords an alternative to using the Government authorised Tenancy Deposit Schemes introduced in April 2007. It remains outside the legal requirements of Tenancy Deposit legislation as no cash is exchanged unless a claim is made at the end of a tenancy.

The scheme also offers help to tenants and landlords at the start and early stages of tenancy to deal with Housing Benefit claims and queries and other tenancy matters.

Councils and voluntary organisations have been using Bond Guarantee Schemes for a number of years to help people access the private rented sector who would not normally be able to. The Stockton scheme is being piloted by Community Campus, a local voluntary sector organisation, and is funded through a partnership arrangement with Stockton Borough Council.

If you are a private landlord interested in participating with the scheme or would like more information please contact Nik Milnes at Community Campus on tel: 01642 355619 or email: [nik@cc87.co.uk](mailto:nik@cc87.co.uk)

## Private Sector Housing

Following consultation with officers, clients and partners it was decided that the team name "Urban Renewal" was misleading and did not give customers a clear picture of what we were all about and how we would be able to help. After discussions it was decided that the service should be renamed Private Sector Housing. The name not only provides a better illustration of the services we have available, but also makes it easier for our customers to find us by telephone or on the Stockton Borough Council website.

The Private Sector Housing Division can help if you are an owner occupier, private sector landlord or a tenant who rents from a private landlord or Housing Association by:

- Providing advice and assistance (which could include financial assistance) to improve the condition of your home by, for example, providing financial assistance to fit a damp proof course or new windows, or simply providing information on caring for your home.
- Providing adaptations which could include fitting a level entry shower, stairlift or grab rails making it easier for you to continue to live in your own home.
- Inspecting your home if you feel it is in disrepair or unsafe; you might for instance be concerned about rising damp. After visiting your home and carrying out a survey we will then work with your landlord to ensure any improvements or repairs needed are undertaken.
- Improving standards in Houses in Multiple Occupation (i.e. bedsits, shared houses, B&Bs).
- Making empty properties secure and bringing them back into use.
- Giving free advice to landlords, tenants and owners about housing matters and giving contact details for other organisations where we can't help directly.

To help find out if the Private Sector Housing Division can help you contact our First Contact Officer on 01642 527797, email [privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk) or visit the private sector housing pages at [www.stockton.gov.uk](http://www.stockton.gov.uk)

## Help Us to Help You!

Changes in your tenant's circumstances can affect their entitlement to Housing or Council Tax Benefit. If a change occurs we need to know about it straight away- your tenant may be losing out on benefit, or there could be an overpayment which we would need to recover.

It is in everyone's interests that we find out about changes quickly, and make sure your tenant receives the right amount of benefit. You can help by telling us of any changes you know about, and reminding your tenants to tell us of any changes quickly.

Some of the changes we need to know about are:-

- Income changes
- Capital, savings or investments changes
- Rent changes
- Vacations
- Anyone moving into or out of the household
- Children leaving school or leaving the home

Or if your own details change such as your address or bank account number

Remember this is not a full list.

To report the change you can contact our Benefit Service Helpline on (01642) 393829 or write / visit us at 16 Church Road. Stockton, TS18 1TX.



## Not sure who to contact?

You can now e-mail your queries to [landlords@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:landlords@stockton.gov.uk) and we will forward your e-mail to the correct department or you can use the key contact list below.

You can also access the private landlords homepage on Stockton Councils web site, which gives up to date information and contact details for useful departments, at [www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords)

Anti Social Behaviour	Anti Social Behaviour Team providing advice, support and enforcement action where necessary	(01642) 527615 ASBTeam@stockton.gov.uk
Benefits - Housing & Council Tax	National Benefits administered by Stockton Council to help people on low income pay their rent and Council Tax	(01642) 393829 benefits.section@stockton.gov.uk
Care for Your Area	Street based services including household and business rubbish, litter/street cleaning, needles and syringes, recycling	(01642) 391959 careforyourarea@stockton.gov.uk
Debt and Money Advice - Stockton District Advice & Information Service	Independent citizens advice on a wide range of issues	(01642) 607445
Energy Advice	Free energy and environmental advice about cutting fuel cost & advice on eligibility for grants or discounts e.g. draught proofing cavity wall/loft insulation	(01642) 391959 careforyourarea@stockton.gov.uk
Housing Advice and Homelessness	Advice and services for temporary housing and homelessness	(01642) 528389 housing.options@stockton.gov.uk
Housing - Private Sector	Housing disrepair; unsafe gas or electrical installations; licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation; financial assistance for home improvements	(01642) 527797 privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk
Landlord Liaison	Advice and support services for landlords	(01642) 527620
Pest Control	Advice and treatment of rats, mice, cockroaches, bed bugs, fleas, wasps and beetles	(01642) 526575 pest.control@stockton.gov.uk
Street Lighting	Report faulty lights	(01642) 526769 street.lighting@stockton.gov.uk
Supporting People	A programme funding providers of supported housing services to ensure vulnerable people receive appropriate support	(01642) 528450 supporting.people@stockton.gov.uk
UNITE	Free service to resolve neighbour disputes and or conflict in a community	(01642) 311633 www.unite-mediation.org