



# landlords@stockton

The Newsletter for Landlords with Property in Stockton-on-Tees

May 2009

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## Welcome to Issue 5!

landlords@stockton is a newsletter from Stockton Council specifically for landlords. If you have any issues you would like to see covered in the next edition or comments on this edition please email landlords@stockton.gov.uk or telephone 01642 526544.

Following feedback received through our landlord consultation questionnaire our next landlord forum is going to be held on an evening and will be shorter than previous events. More information about the results of the landlord consultation questionnaire can be found on page 7.

The landlord forum will be held 5.45pm – 8pm on 17th June 2009 at the Education Centre, Junction Road, Norton.

The first session of the landlord forum will be by Stockton Council's Housing Options Service. The Housing Options Service provides housing advice and deals with homelessness applications.

They also offer a free advertising service for private rented properties available to let.

The second session will be an update on Stockton's Accredited Landlord Scheme. Some of you will have completed questionnaires or attended focus groups about accreditation and you will be able to find out how this has helped to shape the scheme which will be introduced later this year.

The third session will be about the Local Housing Allowance and how it operates in Stockton. Landlords will have the opportunity to ask questions about Local Housing Allowance policies and procedures.

The forum will end with an opportunity for landlords to network.

All of the sessions will be in the format of a presentation followed by a question and answer session. A booking form is included on page 2.

We look forward to seeing you on 17th June!

If you would like this information in any other language or format for example large print or audio please contact the Senior Urban Renewal Officer on 01642 526544

اگر آپ ان معلومات کو کسی بھی اور زبان یا انداز میں چاہتے ہیں یا انگریزی میں حاصل کرنا  
Urdu 01642 526544 Senior Urban Renewal Officer

欲要這份資訊的其它語言版或其它版式例  
如大字體印刷/錄音帶，請致電

01642 526544 接洽 Senior Urban Renewal Officer  
Mandarin

Si vous souhaitez obtenir ces informations dans d'autres langues ou sous un autre format, par exemple, en gros caractères / version audio, veuillez contacter Senior Urban Renewal Officer au n° 01642 526544  
French

نه گهر حوزت لئ يه نه م زايياريه به ده دستت بکه وئت به  
زمانه کابی تر يان به شيوه به کي تر بؤ نمونه جابی گه وره / يان  
به تنه يي نؤ مارکراو نکايه به يوه ندي بکه به

01642 526544 له سهر زمانه ي نه له فون Senior Urban Renewal Officer  
Kurdish

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਬਣਤਰ ਜਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ, ਵੱਡੀ  
ਛਪਾਈ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਾਂ ਟੇਪ/ਸੀ ਡੀ 'ਤੇ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ

Senior Urban Renewal Officer ਨੂੰ 01642 526544 ਨੰਬਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।  
Punjabi

إذا كنت ترغب الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أو  
بأنشكال أخرى على سبيل المثال بالطبعة الكبيرة أو  
بالشريط المسجل فالرجاء الإتصال

01642 526544 Senior Urban Renewal Officer على هاتف رقم  
Arabic

اگر شما این اطلاعات را به زبان یا شکل دیگری مثلا چاپ  
بزرگ یا بصورت صدا میخواهید لطفا با تیم دایورسیتی

Senior Urban Renewal Officer با شما ره 01642 526544 به تماس شوید  
Farsi



## A Date for your Diary Landlord Forum

<b>Date</b>	Wednesday 17th June 2009
<b>Time</b>	5:45pm for 6pm start, 8pm close
<b>Venue</b>	Education Centre, Junction Road, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees, TS20 1PR

We have arranged another free landlord forum – details are on the front of this newsletter.

The subjects to be covered at the landlord forum are topical private rented sector issues and we hope you will find the event informative and enjoyable.

Places are limited - if you would like to attend please return the form below by **Tuesday 26th May 2009** or email the details requested on the form to [landlords@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:landlords@stockton.gov.uk) by the same date.

I would like to attend the Information and Training Session on 17 June 2009.

Please return to: Private Sector Housing, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council,  
16 Church Road, Stockton-on-Tees TS18 1TX, by 26th May 2009

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

# Stockton's Accredited Landlord Scheme

Many landlords will be aware that Stockton is to introduce a voluntary accreditation scheme for private landlords later this year. Accreditation is based around a set of standards (or code) relating to the management and physical condition of private rented properties. Landlords who join the accreditation scheme and abide by the standards are "accredited".

No two accreditation schemes are exactly the same. The Stockton Landlord Accreditation Scheme will be based on the Accreditation Network UK (ANUK) model scheme which is seen as a national example of good practice. The ANUK scheme has been adapted to ensure that it meets Stockton's needs.

Extensive consultation took place to ensure that people with an interest in the private rented sector had the opportunity to comment on the introduction of a scheme. The results of the various forms of consultation have been used to shape the scheme which will be introduced. The consultation included:

- the formation of a group of stakeholders to help "steer" the scheme
- a survey of over 500 residents throughout the Borough
- two articles in Stockton News
- a tenant questionnaire
- an article in Teesside Landlords Association's newsletter
- a landlord questionnaire
- information on the private landlord pages of the Council's website
- a resident focus group

- two landlord focus groups

Although accreditation is voluntary to join there are many benefits from being accredited such as:

- public identification as a good landlord
- access to bond guarantees for qualifying tenants
- free advertising of property to let
- discounts on goods and services
- priorities for some Council services
- business advantage when advertising properties to let
- assistance with anti-social behaviour issues
- a dedicated Accreditation Officer to provide advice and assistance
- updates on legislation and private sector housing issues

Thank you to all of the landlords who completed questionnaires about accreditation and attended the focus groups that were held – with a special thank you also to Michelle Street, of Stockton Flats, who was part of the group of stakeholders that helped to steer the development of the accreditation scheme. Michelle also co-facilitated the landlord focus groups with Dave and Elizabeth from the Private Sector Housing Division.

To find out more information about the introduction of Stockton's Accredited Landlord Scheme please attend the next landlord forum (details on the front cover), telephone the Private Sector Housing Division on 01642 526544, visit [www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords) or email [landlords@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:landlords@stockton.gov.uk)



# Dealing with Rent Arrears

The National Landlords Association recently reported that 44% of their landlords have had tenants fall into arrears with their rent in the last six months. With the current financial climate landlords are also predicting that rent arrears will rise over the next year this makes it extremely important that landlords are taking action to manage this issue.

Thorough referencing of tenants is important when allocating a property to a tenant and can prevent problems in the future. The Council's Landlord Liaison Service provides free tenant references which show tenancy history information such as whether or not there are any outstanding rent arrears from former tenancies as well as anti-social behaviour information. Landlords may also want to undertake other checks, with the consent of the prospective tenant, such as employer references or credit checks to determine that the tenant can meet the financial commitment they will be entering in to.

Accurate record keeping is important to ensure that missed rental payments are identified promptly. The quicker the matter is dealt with the more likely the missed payments are to be recovered – the larger a debt becomes the more difficult it will be for the tenant to repay.

Although rent arrears can be extremely stressful for landlords it is important to always act in a professional manner. The first stage should be to contact the tenant to find out why the payment hasn't been made. Whilst there are some tenants who will deliberately try to avoid the commitments of their tenancy most tenants want to deal with matters properly - some tenants may be embarrassed or anxious to talk to you if they have, for example, lost their job and therefore you

may want to write to them about the matter.

The first letter should encourage the tenant to get in touch – the payment may have been missed due to a bank error or genuine oversight by the tenant. However, you may want to include information about where they can seek advice if they are experiencing financial problems such as the Stockton District Information and Advice Service and the Council's Housing Benefit and Council Tax Services.

If you make any agreements with the tenant regarding payments write to them confirming what has been agreed and ensure that you monitor the agreement.

When a tenant who is in receipt of Housing Benefit or Local Housing Allowance falls into arrears the landlord should make the Housing Benefit Service aware as soon as possible. In some circumstances it may be possible for payments to be made direct to the landlord.

If a tenant refuses to co-operate with you or does not make any contact then you should write to them explaining their contractual obligations and the next course of action you intend to take. Landlords must avoid taking any action which could be classed as harassment and if it is necessary to evict the tenant due to non-payment of rent the correct legal processes must be followed.

Making mistakes when dealing with rent arrears can be time consuming and extremely costly so it is important to seek appropriate professional advice when needed. If you manage the property yourself consider employing a solicitor or joining a landlord association such as Teesside Landlords Association, the

National Landlords Association or the Residential Landlords Association. Some landlords associations have help lines where you can seek advice or have opportunities to meet other landlords who have probably been through the same situation.

## Goodbye CORGI - Hello Gas Safe Register

The Gas Safe Register has replaced CORGI gas registration from 1st April 2009. It is the official industry stamp for gas safety.

From 1st April, by law, only Gas Safe registered engineers should carry out work on gas appliances or installations.

Legal information about landlord's gas safety obligations can be found on the Gas Safe Register website [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk). Gas safety checks are compulsory in private rented accommodation and help to prevent deaths due to explosions or CO exposure. In 2007-2008 14 people died from CO poisoning and 234 suffered health problems from CO exposure.

Always ask for the engineer's card. All Gas Safe registered engineers have an ID card with their licence number and photograph on it. The license number is easily verified on the website [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk) or by telephoning 0800 408 5500.

## Recycling Revolution



**Do your tenants need any recycling receptacles?**

If so, they can be ordered free of charge:

Ring: Care for Your Area – 391959

Click: [www.recycleforstockton.co.uk](http://www.recycleforstockton.co.uk)

Call in: Environment Centre

21 West Row, Stockton, TS18 1BT

The Private Sector Housing Division would like to hear from landlords who would be interested in helping to decide the content of this newsletter and landlord events.

If you would like to get involved please telephone 01642 526544 or email [landlords@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:landlords@stockton.gov.uk)



# HMO Licensing Update

## What is Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation?

The Housing Act 2004 made it mandatory for Local Authorities to licence privately rented Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) defined as:

- properties with 3 or more storeys, occupied by 5 or more people who form 2 or more households (a household refers to persons who are members of the same family).

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has operated a mandatory HMO licensing scheme since April 2006.

## Our Progress So far.....

Since the introduction of mandatory HMO licensing in April 2006 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council have issued 59 licences, 1 temporary exemption notice and are currently handling a further 4 applications. We work with landlords throughout the process, providing help and assistance to try and make the process as easy as possible.

If you would like to check the status of your application or you think that your property requires a licence, contact the Private Sector Housing Team.

## What Happens Once I have Applied for an HMO Licence?

Once the application form has been completed an officer would visit the property with an officer from Cleveland Fire Brigade to verify the application details and to assess fire safety standards.

If the application is satisfactory we would then issue proposal documents to the proposed licence holder and any other person

associated with the property for consultation. These proposal documents would include any works and timescales that are required in order for the property to meet the Local Authority's Amenity Standards. Works could include providing additional wash hand basins, sinks or cookers in order to bring the property up to standard.

Once the consultation period has ended a HMO licence would then be issued for the property, which usually lasts for 5 years. Within that 5 year period the Local Authority is also required to carry out a Housing Health and Safety Rating System inspection to ensure that the property meets all of the relevant standards.

The Local Authority will also carry out an annual management inspection and carry out compliance visits to ensure that the licence conditions attached to the HMO Licence have been adhered to.

Once the licence has expired a further application will need to be made if the property is still operating as an HMO.

## Contact Us

The Private Sector Housing Team are located at:-

16 Church Road  
Stockton-on-Tees  
TS18 1TX

Members of the HMO Team are:-

**Amanda Huitson**  
Urban Renewal Officer

**Anne Rayner**  
HMO Licensing Support Officer

Tel: 01642 526545

E-mail: [privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk)

# Landlord Consultation Results

Between November and January the Private Sector Housing Division distributed a questionnaire to over 850 landlords to ask them what they thought of various aspects of Council services provided for landlords – the consultation included issues such as this newsletter and landlord forums through to tenant referencing and the bond guarantee scheme.

The majority of landlords who responded stated that they felt the content of the landlords@stockton newsletter is relevant to them as landlords and that at 8 pages it is about the right size. Landlords also prefer to have landlords@stockton posted to them rather than distributed by other means – all issues of landlords@stockton are also available at

[www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords). Most landlords would like to see the frequency of landlords@stockton increased to quarterly and we are currently looking at resources to see if we can produce the newsletter more often.

The majority of landlords who have attended events by Stockton Council felt that the events were relevant to them. Landlords did however state that they would prefer that we held shorter events on an evening. We have listened to this and our event in June will be an evening event and two hours in length. It was also asked that we give landlords an opportunity to network at landlord events so we have added some time at the end of our next event where landlords can network over refreshments if they would like.

We asked landlords about accreditation and the majority of landlords would be interested in joining a scheme. Most landlords feel that an accreditation scheme should cover both management standards and property conditions and should require landlords to meet the minimum legal standards. These results have been used to shape the accreditation scheme which will be introduced.

Most landlords are aware that we offer a

free tenant referencing service and anti-social behaviour advice. Landlords who responded and said that they weren't aware of this have been sent information about the Landlord Liaison Scheme. Referencing of tenants is especially important in this difficult economic climate and we will continue to promote this free service to landlords.

The majority of landlords said that they are not aware that Housing Options will advertise properties available to let to their clients at no cost, or that they offer a bond guarantee for qualifying clients. To raise awareness of this the first session at our June landlord forum will be by the Housing Options Service. When accreditation is introduced free advertising and bond guarantees will only be available to accredited landlords.

Landlords raised some areas which they would like advice and/or training about. We are taking steps to address this through the articles in landlords@stockton (such as rent arrears and the gas registration changes in this edition), producing more articles on relevant topics for our private landlord's web pages

[www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords) and by holding landlord forums which cover the areas requested by landlords.

If you have any comments/questions about Council services for landlords or if there are any areas you would like to see covered in future newsletters (or at landlord forums) please contact us to let us know – telephone 01642 526544 or email [landlords@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:landlords@stockton.gov.uk)



## 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 <a href="mailto:ASBTeam@stockton.gov.uk">ASBTeam@stockton.gov.uk</a>
Benefits - Housing & Council Tax	National benefits administered by Stockton Council to help people on low income pay their rent and Council Tax	(01642) 393829 <a href="mailto:benefits.section@stockton.gov.uk">benefits.section@stockton.gov.uk</a>
Care for Your Area	Street based services including household and business rubbish, litter/street cleaning, needles and syringes, recycling	(01642) 391959 <a href="mailto:careforyourarea@stockton.gov.uk">careforyourarea@stockton.gov.uk</a>
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 <a href="mailto:careforyourarea@stockton.gov.uk">careforyourarea@stockton.gov.uk</a>
Housing Advice and Homelessness	Advice and services for temporary housing and homelessness	(01642) 528389 <a href="mailto:housing.options@stockton.gov.uk">housing.options@stockton.gov.uk</a>
Housing - Private Sector	Housing disrepair; unsafe gas or electrical installations; licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation; financial assistance for home improvements	(01642) 527797 <a href="mailto:privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk">privatesectorhousing@stockton.gov.uk</a>
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 <a href="mailto:pest.control@stockton.gov.uk">pest.control@stockton.gov.uk</a>
Street Lighting	Report faulty lights	(01642) 526769 <a href="mailto:street.lighting@stockton.gov.uk">street.lighting@stockton.gov.uk</a>
Supporting People	A programme funding providers of supported housing services to ensure vulnerable people receive appropriate support	(01642) 528450 <a href="mailto:supporting.people@stockton.gov.uk">supporting.people@stockton.gov.uk</a>
UNITE	Free service to resolve neighbour disputes and or conflict in a community	(01642) 311633 <a href="http://www.unite-mediation.org">www.unite-mediation.org</a>