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Stockton's Landlords Accreditation Scheme is here!



Regular readers of landlords@stockton will be aware of the work done to date in partnership with private landlords to develop Stockton's Landlords Accreditation Scheme.

It is with great pleasure that in this issue we officially launch the scheme, exclusively for private sector landlords and introduce you to our newly appointed Accreditation Officer - Paul Rodgers. Paul will be more than happy to assist you through the application process or with any other landlord related queries.

Some benefits of Membership;

- Recognition as a good landlord
- Provides good landlords with a market advantage

- Support from the council and partner agencies
- Discounts on services and other benefits

Be the first to join our newly launched, "Free to Join" Landlords Accreditation Scheme. Call the Accreditation Officer on 01642 52 8533 or download an application from our website at: www.stockton.gov.uk/privatelandlords

And start enjoying the benefits and recognition you deserve today!

Listening to You : Feedback from our last forum

SBC held a Landlords Forum on June 17th from 5:30 to 8pm with presentations on the Accreditation Scheme; The Bond Guarantee Scheme and updates on Local Housing Allowance. The event was attended by 25 private landlords. The following comments will be taken into consideration as we plan future events:

- 1 landlord stated their appreciation for an evening meeting but 3 stated that they would prefer mornings
- 4 landlords commented that they appreciate the information sharing aspects of the forum and one requested more information on how /where to get help with issues like arrears.

In response: We will be increasing both the number of day and evening forums and newsletters and our newly launched Accreditation Scheme offers individual one stop shop support, amongst other benefits, for members. Call the Accreditation Officer, Paul Rodgers today to join. 01642 528533 / email paul.rodgers@stockton.gov.uk



A Date for your Diary Tees Valley Landlords' Conference

Date

Friday 27th November 2009

I would like to inform you of the first ever Tees Valley Landlords' Conference. This not to be missed event is being organised by all of the local authorities within the Tees Valley and the NLA, (National Landlords Association) which is one of the largest landlords associations in the UK.

The conference aims to inform, educate and update private landlords on issues relating to renting properties, such as new regulations to be followed, policy issues that the government are introducing and good practice in renting properties.

This free event, will include keynote speakers from the Department of Communities and Local Government, the

Chair of the National Landlords Association, Stockton Council's Head of Housing; Julie Nixon and the Mayor of Middlesbrough to name but a few. There will also be various Exhibition stalls on display.

Due to limited numbers, access to this event is strictly by approved invitation only. To express your interest in attending this event please call 01642 528533 or e-mail paul.rodgers@stockton.gov.uk

We hope to continue to bring you further events on a sub-regional basis.

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، مثلاً بڑے پرنٹ/آڈیو ٹیپ وغیرہ 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

ئەگەر چەرت لێ بە ئەم زانیاریە بە دەستت بکەوت بە
زمانەکانی تر یان بە شیوێکی تر بۆ نمونە چاپی گەورە/یان
بە تێبێی تومارکراو نکایە بە پۆهەندی بکە بە
01642 526544 تەلەفۆن 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 ਬਿਰਥਾ ਕਰਕੇ
Senior Urban Renewal Officer ਨੂੰ 01642 526544 ਨੰਬਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Punjabi

إذا كنت ترغب الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أو
بأشكال أخرى على سبيل المثال بالطبعة الكبيرة أو
بالشريط المسجل فالرجاء الإتصال
01642 526544 على هاتف رقم Senior Urban Renewal Officer

Arabic

اگر شما این اطلاعات را به زبان یا شکل دیگری مثلاً چاپ
بزرگ یا بصورت صدا میخواهید لطفاً با تیم دایورسیتی
Senior Urban Renewal Officer با شما ره 01642 526544 به تماس شوید

Farsi

News

Landlords' Guide to Electrical Safety

The Electrical Safety Council (ESC) has published a new Landlords' Guide to Electrical Safety as part of its campaign to improve electrical safety in privately rented accommodation. The guide, which is supported by LACORS, highlights the legislation most relevant to landlords in the private rented sector and includes advice on what landlords must do to ensure their rental properties are complying with the law. The guidance covers fixed electrical installations, periodic inspections and portable appliance testing. It also covers fire alarms and emergency lighting and includes guidance on how to find an electrician. A link to the full guide is available at SBC's Private Landlords Web page; <http://sbcinternet/resources/housing/14732/privatelandlords/lges/lges.pdf>

Potential Legislative Changes

From Inside Housing 11/09/2009 By Isabel Hardman

Landlords could be made liable for their tenants' bills under new charging plans for water and sewerage services.

The move is recommended in a review on charging for household water and sewerage services by Anna Walker, the chief executive of the healthcare commission. In 2004/05, 44 per cent of

the water industry's £1.2 billion bad debt came from social and private tenants.

The Walker report also suggests that landlords of houses in multiple occupation are held responsible for paying the bill.

Unlike gas and electricity, water is the only utility which cannot be cut off if a bill is unpaid. The review is also considering using trickle valves to reduce supply to customers who persistently refuse to pay. This process would involve 'rigorous independent safeguards'.

Consultation on the review closed last week. A final report is due to be released before the end of the year. Recommendations affecting private landlords

- A new method of charging for water is needed.
- A named person must be responsible for water bills. In HMOs, this would be the landlord.
- Customers in debt could find their water supplies reduced by trickle valves. The supply cannot be cut off.
- Water efficiency must be improved in existing homes.
- Work to ensure new houses are water efficient must continue.



Tackling empty homes -

National Empty Homes Week of Action - 23 - 27 November

The issue of empty homes comes under the spotlight in November and Stockton Council is playing its part in tackling the matter.

Empty Homes Week of Action runs from 23 – 27 November and the Council's Empty Property Team is encouraging owners of unoccupied houses to get in touch for advice on bringing them back into use.

Across Stockton Borough there are in excess of 2,400 empty properties and these are often associated with social decline and anti social behaviour.

The Empty Property Team aims to return these properties to use and work with the owners, offering advice on selling and renting and information on local contractors and developers looking to invest.

Where it is clear an owner is unable or unwilling to take action, the Council has a range of enforcement measures available to ensure the properties are brought back into occupation.

Julie Nixon, Stockton Borough Council's Head of Housing, said: "Empty properties

can not only be an eyesore to an area, but they can cause nuisance by fly tipping and problems associated with disrepair they can also attract crime and anti-social behaviour. The Council's Empty Property Team can work with people affected as they have access to resources both within the Council and externally who may be able to assist in returning empty properties back in to use".

To mark National Empty Homes Week the team are also encouraging members of the public to report long term empty properties to help bring them back into use.

To report empty homes to the Council's Empty Property Team Housing Team or for advice and assistance in returning an empty property back in to use, call (01642) 526687 or e-mail emptyproperty@stockton.gov.uk

As part of our continuing efforts to be environmentally sensitive and to ensure the best use of resources while ensuring that we are providing a service that is accessible to all we will be moving towards an online newsletter. To help us achieve these goals we would very much appreciate your input.

Please choose one of the following options;

- If would like to receive the newsletter in the post, phone us to ensure you are added to our new distribution list.
- If you are happy to help us save money and you are able to read it online please email us with your email address.
- Telephone 01642 52 8533 / paul.rodgers@stockton.gov.uk

Remember to check our Private Landlords web pages regularly as we continuously update the site with links to relevant information. If you become aware of information you think we should highlight for other landlords please bring it to the attention of the Accreditation Officer for his consideration.

Landlords refuse support regarding nightmare tenants and suffer the consequences

A nightmare neighbour was recently removed from a house in Thornaby after repeated reports of drug dealing, fighting and prostitution.

Despite the greatest efforts from Stockton Council's Anti Social Behaviour Team, the landlords of the property refused to work together or even acknowledge the persistent behaviour issues. Following numerous residential complaints the Council had no other option other than to apply for a Premise Closure Order.

District Judge Harrison at Teesside Magistrates Court issued the Premise Closure Order which prohibits anyone from remaining in or entering the property for three months, to do so would render them liable to arrest. If the behaviour continues within the surrounding area, the Council have the option to apply to the courts for an extension of the order, which would have further repercussions on the landlord.

The landlords in this case have not only lost the rental income from the property, the Council will also be seeking reimbursement of costs for the securing of the property and legal costs.

These actions could have all been avoided if the landlord had taken advantage of support available from the Council through free schemes such as the newly launched Landlords Accreditation Scheme or the Landlord Liaison (tenant referencing) Scheme or ultimately co-operated with the Anti Social Behaviour team and the Police.

To join these free schemes and get support in dealing with landlord / tenant issues, or if you have any queries, contact Paul Rodgers ~Accreditation Officer on 01642 528533 or contact the Landlord Liaison Scheme directly on 01642 527620.



Join the Free
Landlords
Accreditation Scheme
and get the support
you deserve to avoid
finding yourself in a
similar situation!

Contact
Paul Rodgers ~
Accreditation Officer on
01642 52 8533

or email paul.rodgers
@stockton.gov.uk



Bond Guarantee Scheme

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Housing Options service provides a comprehensive housing advice service and assistance to people who are either homeless or threatened with homelessness. Clients who approach our service are offered an initial housing options interview. In this interview, the client's circumstances will be explored and a range of options to resolve their housing difficulties will be identified.

One of the options that may be considered is for the client to seek rehousing in privately-rented accommodation. If necessary, the Housing Options service will provide assistance, including financial support, to help the client take this step. One of the methods that can be used to provide this support is the bond guarantee scheme.

The Housing Options service will make enquiries into the client's housing history, including obtaining references from previous landlords, and request information from other organisations that the client receives support from.

If accepted onto the scheme, the client will need to find an affordable, suitable property with a landlord who is willing to accept a guarantee in place of a cash bond. The only properties that the client will be able to access using the bond guarantee scheme will be those owned by **accredited landlords**.

The benefits to a landlord of offering a tenancy to a bond guarantee scheme client include:

- **Assistance with Housing Benefits claims** – we will complete a Housing Benefit claim form with the client, ensure that the client submits all the necessary documentation with the claim, and arrange for the claim to be processed more quickly by the Housing Benefits service.
- **Direct payments of Local Housing Allowance** – we will complete an application to have Local Housing Allowance paid directly to the landlord. [We cannot guarantee that Housing Benefits will accept this application.]
- **When Local Housing Allowance** is paid to the tenant, we will ensure that the tenant has a bank account that can receive BACS payments from Housing Benefits, and help the tenant to set up a regular standing order for rent payments.
- **Tenancy sustainment** – for the duration of the bond guarantee period, the Housing Options service will maintain regular contact with both the landlord and the tenant and help to resolve any problems that may arise.

For further information about the bond guarantee scheme, please contact Adam Thorn on 01642 528322 or at adam.thorn@stockton.gov.uk.

Local Housing Allowance - 18 months on

Local Housing Allowance was introduced in April 2008 for new housing benefit claimants, or where people moved accommodation. The amount of benefit a tenant is entitled to is based on a flat rate allowance calculated depending on a number of bedrooms a family is said to require. The LHA rates are published in advance in reception and on our website (www.stockton.gov.uk/hsgben) There's also a link to a room calculator too. A major change is that tenants will usually receive benefit payments directly and can no longer choose to have payments made to the landlord.

Its now just 18 months since the introduction and over the last few months we have been looking at the effects.

We now have 2950 private tenants on Local Housing Allowance, and 19% are paid direct to the landlord. About half of those direct payments are due to rent arrears, and the others are cases where the claimant has difficulty managing their financial affairs or is seen to be unlikely to pay their rent.

There are many positives associated with the introduction of LHA – claims are easier to process and advisors find it's much easier to help people find accommodation when they know the benefit levels in advance. The rates are more generous than before and there have been reports of properties being refurbished because the greater bargaining power of tenants receiving payments direct.

Unfortunately, there is a common theme among a lot of the comments received and that is that our safeguarding policy is not working as well as it should. Many tenants are defaulting on their rent and in the current economic climate many landlords are struggling to keep in business. We have reviewed the way we are operating our safeguarding policy and as a result have put in place some changes to help. However please bear in mind that the law does prevent us making direct payments on request.

If you have any queries regarding Housing Benefits call the team on 01642 393829

Rent Arrears and Direct Payments

When a tenant does fall into arrears with their rent you should contact the Housing Benefits team immediately in order that we can look into the situation. You do not have to wait until the tenant is 8 weeks in arrears with their rent. Benefit will be suspended whilst we investigate the non payment of rent.

It would be useful when you contact us to let us know the amount of arrears and the

period the arrears cover, you maybe able to provide a rent book or letter to confirm the situation. Depending on the circumstances we may be able to pay benefit direct to you. If we do so, the decision will be reviewed regularly. We will notify you of the result of our investigation and what our decision is, even if we decide to pay the tenant directly. If you have any queries regarding Housing Benefits call the team on 01642 393829.



Not sure who to contact?

You can now e-mail your queries to 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

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
Environment Centre	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) 526595 or visit www.recycleforstockton.co.uk/environment-centre
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 ASBTeam@stockton.gov.uk
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