Private Rented Sector

The Government is keen to encourage responsible lettings through the use of voluntary accreditation schemes for landlords and letting agents. These can offer landlords the benefit of a market advantage and tenants a guaranteed standard of accommodation and service. They are working with the leading industry bodies to examine how to increase the use of voluntary schemes by landlords and agents.

Councils have a wide range of powers at their disposal to tackle the minority of rogue landlords who fail in their responsibilities.

These include:
- Requiring landlords to take action to rectify hazards in their property.
- The ability to carry out improvements and charge the landlord where landlords resist.
- Discretionary licensing powers to tackle areas blighted by poorly managed privately rented stock.

Landlords usually receive a letter from Environmental Health outlining the tenancy concerns and asking them to respond in 14 days, or they may inspect and could serve the appropriate notices.

Any notice served will result in a charge. Unpaid charges are followed up. Any works in default will be charged and recovered from the landlord. Tenants can request for a Home Fire Safety visit from Environmental Health. We target our visits in areas and situations where the home is at risk of fire or know someone who you think needs our help. To find out more visit: https://www.londonfire.gov.uk/HomeFireSafetyVisit.asp

Contact Details

Landlords Update, Noella Ling, Housing Options Service, Albert Jacob House, 62 Roman Road, Bethnal Green, London E2 0PG.

Telephone: 020 7364 3558
E-mail: housing.advice@towerhamlets.gov.uk
Website: www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

Fire Kills campaign appoints Fire Safety Champion for Landlords

As an advocate for the Fire Kills campaign, Councillor Healey will remind private landlords that it is good practice to install and maintain smoke alarms in the properties they are renting out. He will also encourage them to help protect their tenants and their property from the devastating effects of fire by fitting long-life smoke alarms like 10-year battery devices or hard-wired systems in every home they rent out.

Councillor Healey said:

“As a landlord myself, I know how important it is to install working smoke alarms in the properties I am responsible for. I am therefore pleased to have been asked to help support the Government’s Fire Kills campaign and urge all landlords to consider installing either 10 year battery alarms or hard-wired detectors in their properties.”

REQUEST A HOME FIRE SAFETY VISIT

If you are concerned that your home may be at risk of fire or know someone who you think needs our help then please arrange a visit. Certain insurers may offer a discount for a hard-wired fire alarm, which is mandatory for some types of properties.

To find out more visit: https://www.londonfire.gov.uk/HomeFireSafetyVisit.asp

Why request a visit?

Who is eligible?

We target our visits in areas and situations where we know there is a higher risk of fire, including the homes of older or disabled people, but anyone living in London can request a home fire safety visit.

Calling All Landlords

We have families waiting for properties. We currently pay an incentive. Do you have an empty property? Don’t delay please call Susan Hughes on 020 7364 7343

Accreditation Scheme

Many Tower Hamlets Landlords are now accredited, but if you are not accredited - Register for the one day course now. Tower Hamlets will refund your fees for this accreditation course when you register your property with the Housing Options Team. If you are interested speak to Noella or Geoff on 020 7364 3558 or visit www.londonlandlords.org.uk/accreditation/home

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES 2011

Landlords Forum
Wednesday 12th October 2011
Accreditation Courses
Wednesday 19th October 2011

Landlords Update

Newsletter of Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum. Building a better future for both landlords and tenants!
A special thank you to all landlords, agents and speakers who attended the Forum on the 15 June 2011.

I would also like to thank Jonathan Baston Environmental Health Officer and Clive Buckman, Housing Benefit Team Manager and Sue Hayes, Housing Options Team Manager who contributed to this newsletter.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jamie Jackson for his invaluable contributions to the Landlords Forum and newsletters for the last five years. Good Luck in your new post”.

Noella Ling - Chair of the Landlords Forum

Local Housing Allowance (LHA)/Welfare Reform

Update from Lee Fearon and Clive Buckman. This is the third presentation done by Lee and Clive and without fail the temperature in the room raised few degrees prompting a quick adjustment to the air conditioning.

Understandably these are burning issues for landlords. Housing Benefit is the hottest subject of the Forum, but our dynamic duo are proving very popular with all. With years of experience and knowledge they reassured all that the Council is looking at every option available to minimise the impact of LHA on both tenants and landlords.

Changes from April 2011

New housing benefit claims from 1 April 2011 will be affected straight away. Existing customers will normally be affected from 9 months after the anniversary of their claim after 1 April 2011.

They may be affected sooner if:

- There is a change in the size of their household that affects the size of dwelling they are entitled to, or
- If they move.

Changes from April 2011 to April 2013

Non dependent deductions made from Housing Benefit will be gradually increased if there is an adult living in the household who your tenant does not claim benefit for. An example would be a grown up child.

Changes from January 2012

New Housing Benefit claims from single tenants aged 25–34 made on or after 1 January 2011 will attract the shared accommodation rate of LHA from the start of entitlement.

There is transitional protection for existing claimants aged 25–35. If they were getting Housing Benefit before 1 April 2011 they will be protected for 9 months from the next anniversary date of their claim after this date.

If they first claimed between 1 April 2011 and 31 December 2011 they are protected up to the next anniversary date of their claim. Thus, protection will end at some point in 2012.

Changes from April 2013

Introduction of a universal benefit cap:

- £350.00 per week for single unemployed claimants
- £500.00 per week for workless couples and lone parents.

- Couples with 2 or more children living in privately rented accommodation will be affected as will lone parents with three or more children in privately rented accommodation.
- Couples can avoid this change by securing work - even if only one of the couple (or the lone parent) is in part-time work this cap will not apply.
- Council Tax Benefit is due to be abolished. Each local authority will need to have their own scheme paying out, in total, 90% of the amount that would have been paid under Council Tax.

Annual increases in payments

Local Housing Allowance rates will be up rated in line with the Consumer Price Index.

The Consumer Price Index measures the average changes in the prices of consumer and services in the UK from month to month.

It is the main measure of inflation in the UK used by the government for its inflation target.

Circumstances in which HB can be paid to the Landlord

Where the tenant:

- Has deductions being made from IS/JSA.
- Is in 8 weeks rent arrears.
- Has difficulty managing finances. (Incapacity)
- Is unlikely to pay the rent, (may have other debts).
- Or where rent has been reduced to an affordable level in order to enable the tenant to retain or secure a tenancy.

For existing tenancies

- Evidence of rent reduction must be seen.
- Variation of tenancy agreement.
- Tenancy renewed at a lower rate of rent.

Pictures taken at the Landlords Forum on 15th June.
The Landlords were addressed by Lee Fearon and Clive Buckman (top right)
The Housing Benefit Project Team

With so many tenants being affected by these changes a Housing Benefit Project Team was set up to consider the potential impact of our residents. It is led by Fiona Wellington, Team Principal, Housing Options.

The key objective of the team will be to ensure that rents are reduced to the level of available benefit wherever possible thereby minimising and preventing homelessness. This will involve establishing the situation for each landlord and tenant and negotiating a way forward in each case.

Lynne Duval informed the Forum of the Landlord’s survey conducted by the team to gauge the impact of LHA on availability of private rented sector properties.

An interesting finding from the survey is that 43% of landlords said that they would accept rent to LHA level to receive direct Housing Benefit payments.

Also interesting was that 55% of Landlords said that they would lower rent to LHA levels when the time came to renew tenancy agreements.

As discussed at the Forum more Survey forms were sent on the 16 June 2011 to all landlords/agents. Please make sure that you complete your form; your participation and feedback are invaluable.

If you would like to request a form or would like to speak to Project Officers, Brian or Sunday please contact them on the Landlords Hotline: 020 7364 1416

London Warm Zone (LWZ)

Emma Adams told the Forum that LWZ through their partnership with EDF, local authorities and other non-profit partners, are able to provide help for homeowners and tenants of private landlords who are in receipt of income or disability benefits. An integrated income maximisation service to tackle fuel poverty in a way that cannot be achieved by heating and insulation improvements alone.

Emma Adams also informed the Forum of RE:NEW, the London-wide initiative working with London Boroughs to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in London’s domestic sector through retrofitting energy and water efficiency measures.

FOR FREE INSULATION ASSESSMENTS
Contact Saving Energy on
0800 954 9689

FOR HEATING IMPROVEMENTS
Contact Broadway Chambers,
530-542 High Street North, Manor Park
London E12 6QN
Telephone 020 8477 1960
or 0800 389 7286
or apply on-line at
www.londonwarmzones.co.uk

GAS SAFE
(Previously known as CORGI) – John Byrne
Gas Safe Register is the official list of gas engineers who are legally allowed to work on your gas appliances. The Register is there to protect you and your tenants from unsafe gas work.

• Focus on gas safety and awareness
• Improve consumer safety through education
• Be open and accountable
• Listen and consult
• Work with others

What are the Benefits?
• High energy performance rating of property to meet re-letting guidelines
• Higher property value
• Tenants live in warmer home
• Helps tenant to pay reduced energy bills
• Lower maintenance costs through reduced condensation, damp and mould problems

• Landlord’s Energy Saving Tax Allowance (LESA) allows individual and corporate landlords to claim up to £1,500
• Enhanced Capital Allowance (ECA) allows corporate landlords to claim a 100% first year capital allowance for certain energy efficiency improvements
• Insulation Improvements: Full insulation improvements for homeowners and tenants of private landlords. All work is FREE for residents over the age of 70 who are in receipt of income or disability benefits.
• Heating improvements such as replacement of: old inefficient boiler; boiler repairs; new central heating systems; heating controls upgrades, such as thermostats, TRV’s. Full landlord approval is required before any works go ahead.

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or 0800 389 7286
or apply on-line at
www.londonwarmzones.co.uk

Duties of landlords
Under the Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulations 1998, Regulation 36 imposes two main duties on landlords:
1. Annual safety checks on gas appliances and their flues, and
2. Ongoing maintenance on gas pipework, gas appliances and their flues.

Effective maintenance normally involves an ongoing programme of regular inspection.

Gas pipework:
• visual inspection
• checking its condition
• protection against corrosion
• support, etc.

Gas appliances, and where applicable their flues:
• procedures are often defined by the appliance installation and service/maintenance instructions.

• Landlords have a duty to ensure that all gas work is carried out by a business that is registered with Gas Safe Register.
• Landlords have a duty to have relevant gas appliances, and any flue that they are connected to, checked for safety at intervals of not more than 12 months.
• A record of the safety check must be retained for a period of two years from the date of the safety check.
• Provide a record of the check to the tenant within 28 days of the inspection taking place.
• Ensure that any new tenant is provided with a copy of the safety certificate.

To ensure that your work is being undertaken by a registered Gas Safe engineer please visit

http://www.gasSafeRegister.co.uk
# Local Housing Allowance Changes

**When** — What’s Changing — Details of the Change — People Affected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April 2011</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Housing Allowance (LHA)</strong> capped for:</td>
<td><strong>Ending of 5-bedroom rate - 4-bedroom rate will apply to all larger properties</strong></td>
<td><strong>All households currently claiming the 5-bedroom rate of LHA</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All new tenancies from April 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Existing tenancies 9 months after review date</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-dependent deductions increase</strong></td>
<td><strong>All non-dependants will have to contribute a larger share of the rent</strong></td>
<td><strong>All households claiming LHA that include other adults such as grown-up children, elderly parents or siblings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>£15 weekly excess ends</strong></td>
<td><strong>Housing benefit claimants no longer entitled to keep up to £15 weekly ‘excess’ above actual rent</strong></td>
<td><strong>LHA claimants whose rent is below the current LHA rate</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LHA set on 30th percentile</strong></td>
<td><strong>Basis for setting LHA rates to reduce from the average to the lowest third of local market rents</strong></td>
<td><strong>All PRS tenants claiming LHA</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More flexible direct payments to landlords</strong></td>
<td><strong>Increased flexibility to have rents paid direct to landlords</strong></td>
<td><strong>PRS tenants whose landlords reduce their rent to the new LHA rates</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared room rate applies to under 35’s</strong></td>
<td><strong>The threshold for the shared room rate will rise from 25 to 35 years of age</strong></td>
<td><strong>All single adult PRS tenants up to the age of 35, without children, living in 1-bedroom properties</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum cap to all benefits</strong></td>
<td><strong>A maximum cap will be imposed on the amount of benefits a household can claim. This is expected to be around:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Larger families, and families living in more expensive areas in the private rented sector</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LHA linked to Consumer Price Index (CPI)</strong></td>
<td><strong>LHA rates to rise by the CPI rate of inflation rather than in line with local rent rises</strong></td>
<td><strong>All LHA claimants</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**April 2012**

**April 2013 (planned)**

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## Using a cowboy plumber?

The gas boiler needs replacing you appoint a plumber who you believe is Gas Safe because he provides you with an ID card with the Gas Safe logo on it — you are given a quote you choose a Top of the Range Boiler — you sit back and look forward to winter? What could go wrong?

You are left without hot water and heating for weeks, no boiler, leaking pipes, flooding, harassment and out of pocket. This is just the beginning — then you found yourself being driven by force to a cash point to withdraw money, being dumped in the middle of nowhere when you refuse to part with cash for a job not done.

This is exactly what happened to a landlord when she decided to replace the old boiler using a plumber her brother found on the Internet site “Rated People”.

The landlord ended having to pay a qualified plumber who was in fact Gas Safe registered to carry out all remedial work, replacing the pipes that the unqualified plumber removed and most importantly ensuring the correct boiler is installed and safe to use.

The matter is being currently investigated by Trading Standards and Gas Safe. The Health and Safety Executive have informed the plumber that he is not allowed to work with anything related to Gas and he is due to be questioned by them and could face criminal prosecution.

Thanks to Miss Mhordha for sharing this terrible experience with our readers. Ms Mhordha said that if she knew about the Forum she would have avoided being in her situation. She also added by attending the Forum she was able share her experience and learnt from other landlords. She praised the speakers for their expertise and found in particular the Gas Safe presentation informative and helpful. She said the Forum was very well organised and urged landlords to attend regularly.

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**HB Changes Advice Hotline**

Call: 020 7364 1416

or email

hbchanges@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Open Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm

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**Council Hotlines**

Contacting Tower Hamlets made easy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact the service you need direct on the following numbers:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 5001 – Housing Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 5002 – Council Tax</td>
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<tr>
<td>020 7364 5003 – Parking Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 5004 – Streetline (including recycling and refuse)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 5007 – Pest and Noise Nuisance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 5008 – Environmental Health, Trading Standards &amp; Licensing</td>
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<tr>
<td>020 7364 5009 – Planning and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 5010 – Business Rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 5011 – Recruitment Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 0872 – Electoral Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>020 7364 5016 – Healthline (to find a GP and other health services)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Useful Housing Numbers**

| 0800 376 1637 – Housing Repairs (for Tower Hamlets Homes tenants) |
| 020 7364 5015 – Tower Hamlets Homes |

**Report it**

If you need to report an incident, use one of our 24-hour freephone numbers:

| 0800 917 5918 – Anti-Social Behaviour |
| 0800 138 0521 – Hate Crimes |

**Switchboard**

If you know the name of the person you need to speak to or the department you need to contact, call the Switchboard on:

| 020 7364 5000 |

**General Enquiries**

For other council enquiries you can call the General Enquiry line on:

| 020 7364 5020 |

**Website**

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

Find information and contacts, request services and make payments