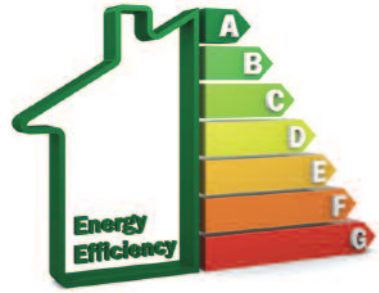


ENERGY PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE (EPC)



EPC provide information on how energy-efficient a building is and make recommendations on how to reduce that building's energy use and carbon dioxide emissions.

Since 6th April 2012 the duty to commission an EPC before marketing a property will be extended to the sale and rent of residential and non-residential buildings.

The current 28-day period within which an EPC should be obtained using "all reasonable efforts" will be reduced to 7 days. (However, there will be an additional 21 day period during which the EPC can be obtained if it has not been secured within the initial 7 day period).

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES 2013

Landlords Forum

5 March 2013
6 June 2013
9 October 2013

Accreditation Courses

13 March 2013
12 June 2013
16 October 2013



GAS SAFETY

Does your property have a boiler where all, or part of the flue cannot be seen? If yes, you will need to arrange for inspection hatches to be fitted. Carbon monoxide alarms are not an alternative. **This does not mean that your flue system is suddenly unsafe.** As long as the boiler passes a series of safety checks, including having audible carbon monoxide alarms fitted – it can be used normally for the time being.

You have until **31st December 2012** for this work to be completed. It is recommended that inspection hatches are fitted as soon as you are able to do so.

From **1st January 2013**, any Gas Safe registered engineer will turn the boiler off, with your permission and formally advise you not to use it until inspection hatches have been fitted in appropriate places.

Landlords' responsibility for gas safety



As a landlord, you are legally responsible for the safety of your tenants in relation to gas safety. By law you must:

- Repair and maintain gas pipework, flues and appliances in safe condition
- Ensure an annual gas safety check on each appliance and flue
- Keep a record of each safety check

You should also keep your tenants informed about their responsibilities while they are staying in your property.

Noella and the staff at the Housing Options Services wish you all a very Happy New Year.



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

The Tower Hamlets Landlords Forum took place on Tuesday 9th October 2012 at Albert Jacob House, 62 Roman Road, London E2 0PG. It was a huge success with over 30 landlords attending.

We had a wide range of speakers at the Forum.

- Once again Clive Buckman succeeded in raising the temperature when he addressed the Forum about the Impact of the Welfare Reform.
- Gary Norris and Bob Tout from the Fire Authority had an important message for all 'Fire kills'. From 2011/12 - 554 Fires in the home (69% kitchen) 1 fatality, 32 injuries and 1 rescue, this year.

- David Gingell informed the Forum of the Welfare Benefit Project.
- Followed by Christina Christansen who told the Forum of the good work Real Lettings a Broadway and Homelessness Charity organisation is doing in securing decent homes for the homeless.
- Lastly Richard Blanco from National Landlord Association gave an overview of recent changes in the law that are important for all landlords to know so as to avoid penalties and prosecution. He also touched on campaigns NLA are currently involved.

CONTACT DETAILS

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PREPARING FOR WELFARE REFORM

David Gingell Housing Options Service Manager

You may have seen recent media coverage of the work being carried out in the Housing Options Service to prepare for the impact of the Welfare Benefit cap due to be implemented next April.

The cap means that working-age single parents and couples who are not in work will not be allowed to receive any more than £500 per week in total benefits – including Housing Benefit.

These changes have been introduced by the Government and will mean big cuts in income for many of our customers living in temporary accommodation.

Some customers will be exempt from the cap – for instance if they are in receipt of some disability benefits. Also if they are working at least 16 hours a week as a lone parent or 24 hours a week as a couple and receive Working Families Tax Credit they will be exempt from the cap.

The Council, its politicians and officers, are trying really hard to limit the impact of the changes but there is only so much that can be done. This will be a very difficult time and the priority of the Council will be to help ensure families have enough money to live on once the welfare cap is implemented. This will mean some difficult decisions will need to be made about our customers' housing options.

Housing Officers will be visiting all customers in temporary accommodation who are likely to be affected by the cap by the end of this year. They will refer suitable people to the Council's Skills Match service to find employment and identify any help customers might need with money advice.

One way to avoid or limit the impact of the cap will be to move families to alternative cheaper accommodation if they are not likely to find work before April. This will mean moving them away from Tower Hamlets.

Many of our customers may be getting close to qualifying for a permanent offer of accommodation. If so, then because rents are cheaper in Local Authority and Housing Association properties and a move to a permanent home might take somebody out of being affected by the cap, officers will also discuss placing customers onto the Autobid system.

We are also now making contact with local private sector tenants who DWP has identified as being affected by the cap. We are inviting the people who will see the biggest reductions in income to come and talk to our Welfare Benefit Changes Team about securing employment or finding alternative cheaper accommodation. Those who are affected by less than £20 per week are being invited to talk to our Money Advisors about managing their finances so they can still pay their rent.

If you have a tenant who you think is affected by the benefit cap and will struggle to pay their rent please contact our Welfare Benefit Changes Team on 020 7364 1413 for further advice.

WELFARE REFORM HOUSING BENEFIT CAP

A summary of the key changes

There have been and will continue to be significant changes to the welfare system. The changes began in 2011 and are expected to continue through to 2017. The majority of benefits will be affected in some way. The reforms include measures to simplify the system, introduce more stringent rules, criteria and sanctions, emphasise making work pay, frequent reassessments, benefit rate freezes, caps to a range of benefits and new payment methods amongst other things.

Changes to housing related benefits have been introduced first whilst the big changes to income benefits are expected to come into effect from 2013 onwards. The table below summarises the key proposals affecting private sector tenants.

Welfare Reform Changes

April 2011

- Local Housing Allowance (LHA) caps introduced
- 30th percentile introduced to set local LHA rates
- Increase in non-dependant deduction charges (1st stage)

January 2012

- Single person between 25 & 35 no longer entitled to LHA for a one bedroom flat

April 2012

- LHA rates are now set for 12 months
- Non-dependent deductions have increased (2nd stage)

April 2013

- Cap on total amount of benefits a workless household can receive (likely to be £500 pw for couples and single parents. £350 pw for single claimants)
- LHA rates will be increased with the Consumer Price Index and not the local rental market
- Increase in non-dependant charges (3rd stage)

October 2013

- Working age benefits and tax credits will be replaced by one payment of Universal Credit starting now and completed in October 2017

For London Borough of Tower Hamlets the LHA weekly rates from April 2012 to March 2013 are:-

Property size	LBTH – weekly LHA rates
Room in shared property	£92.35
One bedroom property	£240
Two bedroom property	£290
Three bedroom property	£340
Four bedroom property	£400

For the LBTH we have looked at the following households and calculated the benefits they would normally be entitled to and the amount that will be left for them to pay their rent when the cap has been introduced. The household does have the option of contributing more towards their rent from their income.

Lone Parent	Two Parents	No. of children
£281.36	£240.91	2
£216.23	£175.78	3
£151.10	£110.65	4
£85.97	£45.52	5
£20.84	50p	6
50p	50p	7 or more

Please note that lone parents or two parents with one child will not notice any changes in their financial circumstances as a result of the cap.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES TENANCY DEPOSIT

Landlords who take a deposit from a tenant under an assured shorthold tenancy in England or Wales which started on and after 6th April 2007 have a legal duty to protect the deposit in an approved tenancy deposit scheme and provide within 14 days the tenant with key information about the tenancy and how the tenants deposit is held.

The legislation has been changed to make it clear that penalties for non-compliance apply to a tenancy that has come to an end after 6th April 2012. The changes mean that landlords and agents will have more time to protect deposits in one of the government approved schemes and more time to provide the tenant with the prescribed information, telling them which scheme the deposit has been protected with. Both these deadlines are now 30 days. The information that has to be provided to the tenant has not changed.

If your tenant's tenancy deposit is not properly documented, you may not be able to obtain possession at the end of the tenancy agreement and you may be subject to a substantial penalty payment.