

Thanet Landlords' Focus Group

Working for landlords in partnership with Thanet District Council



Wednesday 02 March 2016

Council Chamber, Thanet District Council, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent, CT9 1XZ

Meeting notes

In attendance:

Landlord representatives

Teresa Bartlett (Chair)
Sara Wade
Diane Solly
Hugh Horton
Lynne Sutton
Colin Mately
Sally Brinson
Kiren Patel

Council representatives

Richard Hopkins (Housing Regeneration)
Louise Ritchings (Housing Regeneration)
Rachel May (Housing options)
Stuart Clifton (Housing Options)
Rebecca Pavlou (Housing Options)
Sue Price (EK Services)

Other representatives

Harry Scobie (ABC Waste Forum)
Hazel Marek (ABC Waste Forum)
Sandra Cuckow (ABC Waste Forum)

Apologies: Damien Cooke; Marion Money; Tom Tennant; Keith Sharpe; Susan Hodges

1. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by the group and will be published on the Thanet District Council (TDC) website in due course.

2. ABC Waste Forum: Waste Management Forum Initiatives

SC informed the group that in 2012, KCC Public Health acquired funding to set up two resident-led partnership groups in Thanet. Based on health statistics, Cliftonville and Newington were chosen as the areas to benefit from the support of the C2 team. In June 2013, a listening group took place which included key residents and local service providers; the ABC (A Better Cliftonville) resident-led partnership group was formed shortly afterwards. The listening group highlighted resident's top ten priorities of issues that needed tackling, three of which were waste/environmental issues.

In May 2014, the first ABC Waste Management Forum meeting was held, with meetings now taking place on a fortnightly basis. The forum is an opportunity for residents to discuss waste issues and make suggestions on how to tackle the issues with representatives from the TDC Waste Management Team. Over the past 20 months the forum has developed a number of initiatives including the neighbourhood recycling opt-in scheme, the anti-dog fouling campaign and the Cliftonville bin angels. The forum has also successfully tackled several areas that have had fly tipping issues.

HS asked that local landlords and letting agents begin incorporating information on A Better Cliftonville into information packs provided to the tenants. Further details about ABC's upcoming events and activities can be accessed by contacting the partnership at abettercliftonville@gmail.com.

3. Housing Options: Landlord Liaison Officers update

RM informed the group that there have been recent changes within the team and there are now three landlord liaison officers in post; Rachel May, Stuart Clifton and Rebecca Pavlou. She advised that there have recently been a high number of homeless people gathering in a shelter along the seafront. The team are continuing to try and engage these people with available services and in some cases have been successful in getting them into private housing, although work is ongoing to tackle the issue.

Since January 2016 officers have had 187 people approach as homeless and 30 successful preventions. The 'Help to Move' scheme is currently high on the agenda and so officers will be visiting agents shortly in order to promote the scheme. RM added that referrals from managing agents have slowed down recently and so they are keen to encourage landlords and agents to continue to access the service before notices are served. SB said that she is very happy with the service being provided.

RP told the group that there have been improvements in the success of the tenant referencing scheme, with many more applications now being received. The scheme is being promoted by LLO's and local agents; DS added the scheme is a great benefit for private landlords as it works well as back up referencing.

4. Housing benefit/council tax benefit update

SP explained that from April 2016 there will be a four year freeze on all passported benefits as well as the Local Housing Allowance rate. Backdating of benefits will be reduced to a maximum of one month and social sector rents will be decreasing by 1%.

The benefit cap will not be introduced until the autumn. The cap for a person with children will decrease from £26000 to £20000; all affected families will be notified of the change by DWP. The budget for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) will be increased for 2016 in order to provide support to those affected by the benefit cap. SC added that early intervention is key when supporting tenants that will be affected.

5. Matters for discussion raised by:

(a) Teresa Bartlett

'An opportunity for group discussion on the experience of other members with the new system for Universal Credit and their thoughts/observations on it'

LS told the group of her recent experience with Universal Credit. A tenant who was supported through the LLO service after having issues with rent arrears, became unemployed and was consequently put on to Universal Credit. As a result, the tenant fell back into rent arrears and was at risk of losing their tenancy. The tenant made a claim for DHP within a 3-4 month period. LS thinks this should have gone back to rapid-reclaim to avoid any further arrears. She has found it very difficult to discuss any claims with staff at DWP and has concerns that more of these cases will happen once universal credit is fully rolled out. RP agreed to speak with Jayne Faulkner in order to chase a response from DWP and added that the LLO service will offer as much help and support as they can to agents, landlords and tenants that are affected by the roll out of Universal Credit.

TB told the group that the National Landlords' Association are running half day courses about the Right to Rent scheme and questioned whether it would be useful to run a course locally. The group agreed for TB to discuss the possibility of a local course with MM.

7. Selective licensing update

RH informed the group that the current selective licensing scheme will expire on 20 April 2016 with a further designation coming in to force on 21 April 2016. The primary difference between the existing scheme and the further designation is the inclusion of additional properties in Trinity Square and Northdown Road.

Requirements of selective licensing are continuous and so licenses that have been issued in the existing scheme will remain valid until the expiry date stated on the cover of the licence. Licenses issued under the existing scheme were issued for varying periods with some expiring on 20 April 2016. A licence would have been issued until 20 April 2016 if there was evidence to suggest that an owner had been privately renting the property and was aware of the scheme but failed to apply. The majority of licences were issued for five years.

RH informed the group that there are currently around 2000 licensed dwellings under the existing scheme. There are a handful of owners facing enforcement action for failing to comply with the scheme.

There have been a total of 1183 inspections carried out in recent years; this has been boosted by the Rogue Landlord Initiative. The initiative is a short term project that has seen four additional licensing officers and an additional admin assistant join the team until the end of March.

RH explained to the group that if a current licence holder applies to the new scheme before their current licence expires then they will be applying for a renewal of their licence. If they apply after the expiry date on their licence then they must make a new application. In order to encourage compliance with the scheme, there will be an early bird discount for renewal applications that are submitted at least six weeks before the current licence expires. The fees have been reduced and the group were advised to visit the TDC website, where more detailed information can be found.

8. Landlord Event

LR informed the group that the annual Landlord Event will take place on 29th June 2016 and include presentations on the Margate Task Force, Universal Credit, Selective Licensing, ABC Waste Management Forum and updates from the NLA, SLA and RLA. The group also felt it would be useful to have a presentation explaining the Right to Rent scheme. SW requested feedback forms are made available on the day.

HH suggested inviting a journalist to attend and will pass details of an independent person from the paper to LR.

The group agreed it would be useful to have a stand at the event and to give a very brief talk to advertise the focus group. SW said she would be willing to man the stand, if necessary.

9. Any other business

The group discussed the recent level of attendance at focus group meetings. The terms of reference state that any member who fails to attend two out of three consecutive meetings without reasonable excuse may have their membership terminated by the Focus Group. It was agreed that the terms of reference will be circulated to the group along with a reminder of the importance of attending the meetings.

End: 4.40pm

Summary of Actions:

Action	Timescale	Lead
Discuss with MM the possibility of running a local 'Right to Rent' course	May 2016	Teresa Bartlett
Pass details of an independent person from the local paper to LR	April 2016	Hugh Horton
Terms of Reference to be circulated to the group with a reminder of the importance of attendance	April 2016	Teresa Bartlett

Chair: Teresa Bartlett

Please direct any enquiries to:

Louise Ritchings

Housing Regeneration, Community Services, Thanet District Council, PO Box 9, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent, CT9 1XZ.

Telephone: 01843 577708

Email: landlordsfocusgroup@thanet.gov.uk