

# Thanet Landlords' Focus Group

*Working for landlords in partnership with Thanet District Council*



Thursday 22 September 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  
Susan Hodges  
Keith Sharpe

### **Council representatives**

Richard Hopkins (Housing Regeneration)  
Louise Ritchings (Housing Regeneration)  
Rachel May (Housing options)  
Cara Radford (Community Safety)  
Sue Price (EK Services)

**Apologies:** Damien Cooke; Marion Money; Tom Tennant; Sally Brinson.

### 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. Housing Options: Landlord Liaison Officers update

RM informed the group that there has been a major increase of homelessness in Thanet; the figure has approximately doubled since 2015. The team are experiencing increased difficulties with finding suitable accommodation due to a lack of available social housing, rent increases and a reduced number of landlords willing to accept tenants in receipt of housing benefit.

RM added that if the Homeless Reduction Bill is passed, local authorities will have to accept Section 21 and Section 8 notices as a statement of homelessness, rather than using the date a court order is issued.

### 3. Matters for discussion raised by:

#### (a) Steve Morgan

*'I would like to be added to the agenda anti-social behaviour from tenants as this is very much on the increase, especially around Cliftonville, and there seems to be very little that the Thanet Task Force or Police can do about it which is alarming and causing so many problems.'*

CR explained that one of the main issues with tackling ASB in the area is with reporting. Residents tend to make an initial complaint but fail to continue to report the issue when it persists. Following an initial complaint, diary sheets are issued and officers will survey an area in order to build evidence of any ASB. Unfortunately, diary sheets are rarely returned and the surveys indicate that many residents have experienced issues but failed to report it. CR added that a person reporting ASB can remain anonymous throughout the process.

LS commented that Acceptable Behaviour Agreements seem to be a useful tool when tackling ASB as it has a £5000 fine attached to it, if breached. The agreements can be appealed and so evidencing the ASB is crucial.

CR advised that where ASB can be evidenced, a written warning will be issued. If breached, a Community Protection Notice can be served, which allows the council to forbid certain behaviours or request positive requirements such as engaging with services. A breach of this notice could result in prosecution or the seizure of goods. Civil Injunctions and Criminal Behaviour Orders, which have replaced the ASBO, are also available tools.

(b) Lynne Sutton

*'I would like to know more facts and figures about the local housing crisis, I am getting so many people come into the office who have been served notice or are already homeless. I would like to know if this is across the board or not, also if the number of Landlords selling their property is still increasing as expected.'*

RM said the issue is on the rise and is a countrywide concern. Figures relating to this will need to be requested through the councils Freedom of Information process.

#### 4. Housing benefit/council tax benefit update

SP advised that DWP are leading on the benefit cap that comes in to force on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2016. DWP began contacting benefit claimants that will be affected in March 2016, TB said landlords should be informed if their tenants are being affected so they can be prepared, but this is not happening at this stage. SP added that 277 households across Thanet will be affected by the benefit cap; the DHP fund will be available to help as many people as possible.

#### 5. Selective licensing update

RH informed the group that since the further designation was introduced in April 2016, the team have received high numbers of applications, although not as many as expected, with a number of licence holders allowing their licence to expire. Renewal reminder letters are now being sent at least 10 weeks before a licence expires, allowing time for licence holders to benefit from the early bird renewal discount fee.

RH advised of slight changes to the format of a licence, with managers no longer being named on the licence. A manager declaration form will now be required for each dwelling, which will make the process for updating manager information much quicker.

#### 6. Landlord Event: Feedback

KS suggested it would be useful to relay the positive feedback from the event to local landlords and agents, SW added that there should be a database to circulate relevant information to.

RH questioned whether the group would like to make any changes to future events. It was suggested that the timing of the event is not ideal as many people have their holidays in the summer months; an event in the spring may be better. A change in venue was also suggested, with the Turner Centre being a popular alternative.

It was suggested that a commercial agent could be invited to provide general information regarding what is required within a rented property i.e. certificates and fire alarms. Breakout workshops may also be beneficial in keeping the event relevant with more of a flow.

The group discussed the aims of the focus group and how to increase engagement. It was agreed that more should be done to encourage local landlords and agents to put forward matters for discussion to the group, in order to ensure the meetings remain beneficial and focused. It was also agreed that the group would hold an open session where prospective members could attend and observe a focus group meeting. The session will also provide an opportunity to engage with current members and apply to join. There are currently 15 member spaces in the group, it was agreed by unanimous vote, that this will be raised to 20, with immediate effect.

#### 7. The National Approved Letting Scheme: Proposal for licence fee discounts

RH advised that the National Approved Letting Scheme (NALS) had been in contact to discuss the possibility of a co-regulation with the selective licensing scheme. RH asked the group for their views on expanding the accreditation schemes, which are accepted for selective licensing discounts, to include NALS. It was agreed that it would be unfair to include NALS and not ARLA and so the group suggested neither be used. A vote was taken with 6 members against accepting NALS and 2 members abstaining from the vote.

#### 8. Smoke alarm and CO regulations

RH informed the group that TDC are the enforcing authority of the new government regulations that were introduced on 01 October 2015. The regulations state that every private landlord must provide at least one smoke detector on each story of their property that has a habitable room. RH explained that under HHSRS, a mains powered system would be requested, although there is no specification as to what alarms should be used in the regulations. Carbon Monoxide alarms are required in any room that has a solid fuel burning appliance; this does not apply to gas boilers.

The council will be publishing a statement of principles and schedule of fees shortly. Where a private landlord is found to not be complying with the regulations, a notice will be served with 21 days in which to ensure compliance. If the notice is not complied with then a fixed penalty notice will be issued. For a first offence, the fixed penalty will be £2500, with a 50% discount if paid within 14 days. If a landlord receives a second fixed penalty notice then the charge will be £5000, also with a 50% discount if paid within 14 days.

Further information, including the statement of principles and schedule of fees will be available on the TDC website.

**End: 4.30pm**

#### Summary of Actions:

Action	Timescale	Lead
Update and circulate the groups Terms of Reference	December 2016	Louise Ritchings
Send the link to register for an accreditation course to TB and HH	September 2016	Louise Ritchings

**Chair: Teresa Bartlett**

Please direct any enquiries to:

Louise Ritchings

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