

# Thanet Landlords' Focus Group

*Working for landlords in partnership with Thanet District Council*



Wednesday 22 March 2017

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

## Meeting notes

In attendance:

### **Landlord representatives**

Sara Wade  
Diane Solly  
Tom Tennant  
Susan Hodges  
Hugh Horton

### **Council representatives**

Louise Ritchings (Private Sector Housing)  
Steve O'Shea (Private Sector Housing)  
Adrian Fibbens (Housing Options)  
Sue Price (EK Services)

**Apologies:** Damien Cooke; Lynne Sutton; Teresa Bartlett; Marion Money; Keith Sharpe; Colin Mately; Rachel May.

### 1. Election of temporary chair

LR explained to the group that TB was unable to attend this meeting and as there was no deputy chair, it was requested that a member volunteered to chair in Teresa's absence; SW agreed to chair the meeting.

### 2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated to the group. It was agreed that any amendment requests are to be sent to LR via email. The agreed minutes will be published on the Thanet District Council (TDC) website in due course.

### 3. Future meetings

The group discussed whether there is currently enough valuable content for the focus group to continue meeting three times a year, as recent meetings have become increasingly poorly attended with very few matters for discussion being raised. LR suggested that the group could amend the terms of reference to allow two meetings per year and one Landlord Event, with the possibility of one off meetings being held if deemed necessary by group members. SW said whilst she was not against the meetings being reduced to twice a year, it would be important that the group had regular communication regarding updates and new legislation so that members can decide on whether additional meetings were required. The group agreed by unanimous vote to cancel the December meeting and to hold future meetings in January and June with the Landlord Event being held in September.

#### 4. Housing Options update

AF informed the group that the team have recently gone through a restructure and the selection process for new posts is currently taking place.

The Housing Options Team has successfully sourced funding to provide a Rapid Response Service which will be managed through Porchlight. The service will work with landlords and tenants and provide early support, over a nine week period, with the aim of preventing issues escalating to the point where a notice is served. Anne Lamb will be running the service which has been funded for two years. AF suggested inviting Anne to the next Focus Group meeting to discuss the service in greater detail.

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

SB informed the group that from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017, the council tax support scheme is changing and tenants that currently pay 5.5% will need to pay 10% towards their council tax bill. Tenants that are struggling to keep up with payments can apply for an exceptional hardship payment, which is awarded on a temporary basis, however this funding is limited.

The Discretionary Housing Payment fund has been increased for 2017-18. Tenants that are in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit can apply to the fund for financial assistance over a short period. SB added that information, on all benefit changes for the next financial year, is available on the TDC website.

#### 6. Matters for discussion raised by:

##### (a) Hugh Horton

*What effect has the roll out of universal credit had to date on tenancies and on the landlord/agent that manage those tenancies in the Thanet area?*

The group agreed that whilst they were all concerned about the potential effects of Universal Credit, they had not yet been directly affected. HH said that DWP will not communicate with a landlord which has the potential to cause more problems.

##### (b) Marion Money

*Selective licensing? Has this been a positive experience for landlords and managing agents? Has it deterred you from investing in the area and or Thanet generally?*

DS said that she did not feel selective licensing was overly considered when investing in an area. HH added that a selective licensing area would not sway the decision of a true investment landlord. SW said she would see a property being within a designated area as a negative point because it is an added complication.

#### 7. Private Sector Housing update

LR explained that the team have been through a restructure and are currently recruiting to vacant positions; Richard Hopkins is now Private Sector Housing Manager. There will be 2 Senior Officers within the team, one covering improvement which is Kevin Rowe and a Senior Licensing Officer to cover selective, HMO and caravan licensing. The team are also currently recruiting an Empty Property Officer who will focus on bringing empty properties back in to use.

SO informed the group that the council will be bringing into force Fixed Penalty Notices under the Housing and Planning Act 2016. The notices can be used when a Prohibition Notice or Improvement Notice has been breached, therefore committing an offence without reasonable

excuse. The range of fines that the council will seek to charge will be discussed and decided by Council members.

The Housing Act 2004 states that the council are under a duty to consider Rent Repayment Orders (RRO's) for up to 12 months of housing benefit payments. RRO's can currently be applied for in relation to unlicensed dwellings, however, this is expanding to include failing to comply with Improvement Notices, Prohibition Orders and Criminal Law Banning Orders.

#### 8. Selective licensing update

LR informed the group that staff shortages have resulted in the focus for licensing being primarily on renewing licences and processing applications. A Licensing Support Officer has now been appointed and the Senior Licensing Officer and Licensing Officer roles are being appointed this week. The team are also in the process of appointing an apprentice who will work alongside the licensing team. Once staff are in place the team will be focusing on a new inspection programme which should be rolled out in the summer months.

It was also explained that all licensing fees will increase from April 2017. All new fee structures will be available in due course.

#### 9. Landlord Event 2017

LR asked the groups point of view on the event being extended from an afternoon session to a day session, in order to allow additional time for networking and questions. The group did not feel a day session would be best suited but questioned whether there could be more frequent events targeting a specific area each time. Suggestions for presentations, at the next event, included new investment strategies, information on new tax laws and positive things that the council does for landlords.

#### 10. Any other business

HH informed the group that under the Electrical Safety Regulations, it is now a legal requirement to purchase the correct manual for any new appliance. You must also ensure the appliance has a data plate, if purchased after 8 December 2016

**End: 4.30pm**

Summary of Actions:

Action	Timescale	Lead
Circulate new meeting structure to the group	April 2017	Louise Ritchings
Invite Anne Lamb to the next meeting to discuss the Rapid Response Service	June 2017	Louise Ritchings Adrian Fibbens

**Chair: Sara Wade**

Please direct any enquiries to:  
Louise Ritchings

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