

Thanet Landlords' Focus Group

Working for landlords in partnership with Thanet District Council



Wednesday 13 February 2019

Austen Room, Thanet District Council, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent, CT9 1XZ

Meeting notes

In attendance:

Landlord representatives

Teresa Dickinson (Chair)
Sara Wade
Hugh Horton
Joanna Cornford
Colin Mateley
Diane Solly
Nigel Pope

Council representatives

Louise Ritchings (Housing Licensing Officer)
Katy Laird (Housing Licensing Support Officer)
Bethan Thistle (Senior Housing Licensing Officer)
Matthew Goodbun (Policy and Performance Officer)
Rachel May (Senior Housing Options Officer)
Jodie Brenchley (Landlord Liaison Officer)
Nina Elwell (Landlord Liaison Officer)

Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) representatives

Tony March (Partnership Manager)
Philip Raeburn (Work Coach)

Apologies

Tom Tennant; Damien Cooke, Marion Money

Start: 2.00pm

1. Welcome and introduction
2. Minutes of last meeting

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

3. Universal Credit

TM informed the group that the total claimant count is now calculated using Jobseekers Allowance and Universal Credit claimants searching for full time employment. The total count for Thanet at the end of January was 4540.

Universal Credit Updates

As of 01 February 2019 claimants with three or more children will be able to make new claims to Universal Credit unless they are in receipt of a severe disability premium.

From April 2019 the current work allowance will increase for families and those who have disabilities. A higher work allowance rate is paid for those who do not have housing costs paid

in their award. This will increase from £409 to £501 per month. A lower work allowance rate is for those who do have housing costs paid in their award. This will increase from £198 to £285 per month. The taper will then take into account 63% of the remaining earnings.

The reinstatement of 18-21 year old housing support for claimants previously not eligible came into effect for assessment periods starting on or after 31 December 2018.

DWP have announced that they will fund Citizens Advice England and Wales, alongside Citizens Advice Scotland, to deliver a comprehensive support service ('Make a Claim') helping people make a Universal Credit claim. This will consist of various forms of support to those claimants who find it difficult to make claims, budget their money etc and will be provided until the claimant receives their first full payment. This service will be delivered on site in Jobcentres and in Margate's case will be upstairs in the CAB office.

As planned, managed migration of existing benefits will begin in July 2019. The initial pilot will involve no more than 10,000 claimants. Testing the system and processes will allow DWP to make sure they can provide the best possible service to those who migrate to Universal Credit. Managed migration will be completed by the end of 2023.

GOV.UK Links provided by TM for Landlords –

- Universal Credit landlord engagement newsletters on GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-landlord-engagement-newsletters> produced every quarter,
- Universal Credit and Landlords document on GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-rented-housing--2>

DS raised an issue regarding delayed payment of rent from Universal Credit on a case where incorrect bank details had been entered. TM agreed to follow it up. DS will e-mail TM with the specific details of the case.

4. Landlord Liaison Service Update

RM informed the group that the team had prevented 487 people from being homeless since April last year and only 5 rough sleepers had been identified in Thanet.

Landlord Incentive Scheme

This was introduced in September 2018 whereby a one off payment of between £500 and £1700 could be offered to landlords when tenants did not have a guarantor. This has worked well with Miles and Barr. DS raised a concern that the scheme could be open to abuse with the payments not going directly to the Landlords. Any further ideas to get around the 'no guarantor' issue would be welcomed for future discussion.

5. Housing Hands

NE advised us that she and RM met recently with the owners of Housing Hands. They are a rent guarantor company that accept workers who earn at least 1.5 times their monthly rent. The applicant must provide a co-signer which would normally be a family member. The company has been in business for six years and until now has primarily provided the service for students. TD mentioned that she has had dealings with Housing Hands, however her example

tenant couldn't afford to keep paying their fee. NE suggested that a years' tenancy without any problems could mean that a guarantor was no longer required. TD added that it was worth considering whether a tenant would need a guarantor for a second time.

6. Housing Benefit / Council Tax update

MG informed the group that there are no changes to Housing Benefit and Council Tax from April. Council Tax support is still dealt with separately to Universal Credit

Website links to online forms useful to Landlords are as follows:

<https://www.thanet.gov.uk/info-pages/council-tax-support/>

<https://www.thanet.gov.uk/online-services/moving-home/>

https://forms.thanet.gov.uk/site/xfp/scripts/xforms_form.php?formID=127&language=en

MG to recommend that the latter is included on the following landlord information page.

<https://www.thanet.gov.uk/services/landlords-information/>

7. Private Sector Housing Update

Policy for Imposing Financial Penalties

BT gave an overview of the Policy for imposing financial penalties which has been introduced as an alternative to prosecution for certain housing offences. Section 126 and Schedule 9 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 amended the Housing Act 2004 to allow financial penalties to be imposed by local authorities as an alternative to prosecution for certain housing offences.

The relevant housing offences are:

- Failing to comply with an Improvement Notice
- Failing to licence a house in multiple occupation
- Knowingly permitting the over-occupation of an HMO
- Failing to comply with the condition of an HMO licence
- Failing to licence a house subject to selective licensing
- Failing to comply with the condition of a selective licence
- Failing to comply with an overcrowding notice in respect of a non-licensable HMO
- Failing to comply with HMO management regulations

When determining the starting point for a financial penalty, the severity of the offence is considered, based on an assessment of the following factors:

- Culpability
- Track record
- Portfolio size
- Risk of harm

The table of financial penalties developed by the Council specifies a range of starting points from £1000 to £30000.

Before imposing a financial penalty, the council must issue a Notice of Intent which must be served within six months of the offence date. The notice allows any representations to be made within 28 days. If the council decides to impose a financial penalty following its review of any written representations received, a Final Notice will be issued.

A person on whom a Final Notice has been served has the right to appeal to the First tier Tribunal.

NP mentioned that he didn't always get reminder letters for Gas Safety Certificates and asked if the council could still impose a financial penalty if a reminder had not been sent. BT explained that reminders would always be sent before a financial penalty option is considered.

TD mentioned that it is due diligence for landlords/managing agents to keep up to date with gas and electrical certificates.

8. Member Attendance

TD informed the group that there are a few members in the group with significant non-attendance at the TLFG meetings. There are also applications from other people waiting to join the group. TD proposed that those who had not adhered (i.e. not attended two times in a row) should be written to and asked if they want to remain a member, and if so to adhere to the terms of reference. This was agreed.

TD stated that she felt that only one member from any company should attend, although she didn't have a problem with another member standing in for one who could not attend. SW pointed out that this wasn't ideal for continuity. LR mentioned that the terms of reference in their current form do not allow for 'stand in' representatives. NP said that if everyone was in agreement he would like to attend in his capacity as a landlord rather than a Miles and Barr representative to make way for Simon from Miles and Barr to attend. This was agreed by the group.

9. Landlord Event 2019

LR asked the group for venue suggestions as although last years venue was ideal it was felt that we wouldn't get it at the same price. Enquiries would still be made however. TN suggested the Yarrow at East Kent College and would send through the details to LR. A suggestion was made to ask for a financial contribution from anybody with a stand to help cover costs. Those present who previously had stands were happy to do this. SW suggested we have a Focus Group stand this year and would be willing to man it. The group was keen to invite back the speakers from last year (Paul Tapsell for legal updates, Marion Money, Selective Licence update and Landlord Liaison Service). NE suggested we invite the CAB. This had been tried before but RM agreed we would try again.

10. Any other Business

HH advised that all landlords are required to register with the Landlords Redress Scheme. He also advised that as Data Controllers, all landlords, under GDPR should register with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO).

NP mentioned that as EICRs were about to become a legal requirement, it would be useful to have this covered at the Landlord Event.

Next date to be confirmed

End: 4.30pm

Summary of Actions:

Action	Timescale
MG to provide link for Landlord forms	June 2019
TD and LR to write to absent members regarding future membership and adherence of terms of reference	June 2019

Please direct any enquiries to:

Katy Laird

Housing Licensing Support Officer

Private Sector Housing, Housing and Planning, Thanet District Council, PO Box 9, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent, CT9 1XZ.

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