## Minutes

**Merton Private Sector Landlords Forum**

**Notes of meeting on Tuesday 7 October 2008**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Actions</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>Welcome and introductions</strong></td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>KL informed the group that we are looking for someone to chair the forum for future meetings and looking for nominations and ideas.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td><strong>Energy Efficiency and Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs)</strong></td>
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<td>2.1</td>
<td>An Energy Performance Certificate must be made available to prospective tenants before a new tenancy begins.</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td>Certificates last for 10 years and can be used before a new tenant moves in during this period. But the certificate is a snapshot and will not include new measures completed since initial certificate completed. The certificate is very similar to the energy rating labels on white goods and informs the person how much carbon dioxide is being omitted and guidelines on how much it costs to heat, light and power a property.</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>The certificates provide important information due to the fact that 40% of all energy is used by domestic properties. It has been difficult to engage with landlords regarding energy saving measures because they do not tend to pay the energy bills and are sometimes unaware about the energy efficiency condition of their property.</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>Only Accredited Energy Assessors can complete the EPCs. Surveys within the £60-£80 bracket are reasonably priced. The Residential Landlord Association provides a flat rate survey for £69 including VAT.</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
<td>SP informed the group that he had just taken out Breakdown Emergency Cover for electricity and plumbing for his proprieties and they are included an EPC within the price. The company is called One Plus and this deal covers a 12month period.</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
<td>Energy Saving Measures include the following:</td>
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Loft and cavity wall insulation
Dry lining and external cladding (although planning permission may need to be obtained and there may be difficulties around listed buildings)
Condensing boilers and heating system controls
Solar panels
Wind generated power

2.7 There is a Tax Allowance against energy saving measures of up to £1500 per unit per year. See your accountant for details.

2.8 There are various grants and schemes available for tenants in receipt of benefits but they need to apply for the funding themselves, although should consult with their landlord initially. For example the Coldbusters scheme is a grant which replaces boilers and installs central heating systems. For each property there is a maximum grant of £6K. The Coldbusters funding for this year has already been committed but a new bid has been submitted and we should hear the whether we have been successful before Christmas.

2.9 **Action:** update group on the Coldbusters funding bid

2.10 Demand for grants is extremely high but it is worth tenants contacting the Energy Savings Trust Advice Centre for more information about how to apply: The landlord is not obliged to refund Coldbusters grant monies when the tenant moves out of the property

**Energy Savings Trust Advice Centre - 0800 512 012**

2.11 Utility companies are obliged to make money available for loft and cavity wall insulation, and people over 70 can receive these works free, anywhere in the UK!

2.12 For anyone in Merton who is 65+, there is free loft and wall insulation subject to a property survey. Contact Warm Zones on **0800 587 2251** whilst funds are available

2.13 Enforcement – Trading Standards are the EPC enforcers and they can serve a Fixed Charge Notice of £200 if a newly let property is without an EPC, and this is repeatable penalty.

2.14 See accompanying slides

3. **Local Housing Allowance and Housing Benefit**

3.1 Local Housing Allowance is a new way of working out new claims for
Housing Benefit tenants renting accommodation from a private landlord.

3.2 The LHA standard rates are decided and published on a monthly basis. Housing Benefit is means tested by income, rent etc. Benefit is paid directly to the tenant and not the landlord, unless there is proof of tenant being 8 weeks in arrears HB then might consider paying direct to landlord. Under exceptional circumstances.

3.3 Landlords will know how much benefit their tenants will be on and if for example HB is £260 and rent is set at £250 the tenant will be able to keep the difference. It takes 20-30 days to turn around.

3.4 There are still people under the old HB scheme through Rent Officer referrals, but all new tenants come under the new scheme.

3.5 Merton has been divided into three broad rental market areas:
- Outer South London
- Outer South West London
- Inner South West London

There is a guide to the rental areas see contacts below:

3.6 Telephone: 0208 274 4903
Email: Housing.Benefits@merton.gov.uk
Website: www.merton.gov.uk/benefits/hb-ctb

4. Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

4.1 Parts 2 and 3 of The Housing Act 2004 makes HMO licensing mandatory.

4.2 Below is the definition of a House in Multiple Occupation:
- A dwelling occupied by more than one household where the amenities (kitchens/bathrooms/WC's) are shared
- Converted buildings which are not just self-contained flats and which contain more than one household
- Houses converted to self-contained flats, which do not comply with the 1991 Building Regulations

4.3 HMO Licensing is mandatory for the following properties:
- Buildings of three or more storeys, and
- Occupied by five or more tenants
- In two or more households

4.4 Merton only do the mandatory HMO licence and do not have a discretionary (additional) scheme as some Councils do.
4.5 Contact Environmental Health for an application form and licence fee information on:

**Environmental Health - 0208 545 3025**

4.6 Environmental Health will carry out ‘fit and proper checks’ on the Landlord and survey the property. If physical works need to be completed on the property, a notice of intention is sent to the landlord. The HMO licence lasts for 5 years.

4.7 After 5 years the council will issue fees for renewal process for a HMO licence but they only cover the costs and do not provide any profit to the council. Merton fees are in line with neighbouring boroughs.

4.8 Environmental Health has issued 43 License to date and a further three are outstanding. 150 properties have been identified in Merton so far that may need an HMO licence and landlords will be contacted in due course. Where Landlords fail to license an HMO, the Council considers legal action inc Prosecution, Works in Default, Rent Repayment Order.

4.9 HMO licences ensure good property conditions
- Annual gas safety checks
- Ensure the safety electrical equipment and furniture
- Install and maintain smoke alarms
- Provide a tenancy agreement

4.10 Appeals
Landlords may appeal through the Residential Property Tribunal.
Landlords can apply for a Temporary Exemption Notice for a period of three months if the use of the property will be changing.

**Contacts:**
- Contact 020 8545 3025 or at ehealth@merton.gov.uk
- www.merton.gov.uk/living/housing/privatehousing/hmo.htm
- See also CLG at www.communities.gov.uk

4.11 If in doubt as to whether your property needs a license, please contact Environmental Health for advice.

4.12 See attached slides

5. Rent Deposit Scheme
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<th>5.1</th>
<th>Unfortunately Marion Collier was unable to attend the forum but information sheets were handed out to Landlords. Contact details: 0208 274 5765/5769 Email: <a href="mailto:housingsolutions@merton.gov.uk">housingsolutions@merton.gov.uk</a></th>
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<td>6.</td>
<td><strong>Any Other Business</strong></td>
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<td>6.1</td>
<td><strong>Suggested topics for future forums were:</strong> Good practice examples from other successful forums. Invite an external speaker to share ideas and experiences. Ask for nominations and elect new chair for forum.</td>
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<td>6.2</td>
<td>Agreed venue was suitable.</td>
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