



Aylesbury Vale District Council
Landlords' Forum
20th May 2009

1.	<p>Housing Benefits Surgery</p> <p>Mrs. Forsdike held an open surgery for any landlords who had questions about Housing Benefit.</p>
2.	<p>Choice Based Lettings – Fiona Wiggins</p> <p>Following previous presentations on Choice Based Lettings, Fiona explained that the scheme had now been launched and was called Bucks Home Choice. The scheme was developed by Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe district councils, with help from the major local registered social landlords.</p> <p>The new scheme replaces the points based system of allocating affordable homes, with a banding system where applicants must express their interest in a property that they qualify for. These properties are advertised on the BHC website and in newsletters that the system produces.</p> <p>There are many different reasons as to why this new way of allocating homes has been introduced and these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To encourage personal ownership• It is easier to understand• It will reduce offer refusals and therefore rent loss• To help build sustainable communities• Customers prefer it• It is a government target that needs to be met by 2010 <p>It is hoped that once the Bucks Home Choice scheme has been running successfully for a few months that it will be opened up to private landlords in order for them to advertise their properties. It is likely that there will be a charge for landlords advertising their properties and it is envisaged that it will only be opened up to accredited landlords.</p> <p>For further information on Bucks Home Choice please visit its website: www.buckshomechoice.gov.uk</p>

2. **Achieving Affordable Warmth in Rented Properties – Kelly Gardiner**

Kelly explained that 'affordable warmth' is the financial ability of householders to heat their homes adequately between 18°C and 21°C and that if householders are paying more than 10% of their income on keeping warm to this temperature, they are living in Fuel Poverty. It was estimated that in 2008 approximately 5.1 million households were in fuel poverty within the UK.

Common causes of fuel poverty are:

- Increased energy prices
- Low household income
- Fear of too high bills
- Limited awareness of social tariffs
- Poorly insulated homes
- Inefficient and/or expensive heating systems
- Inefficient homes

Kelly informed the forum that a lack of adequate insulation will result in tenants paying more to keep warm and is likely to result in condensation which can result in damage to the property.

Insulating the loft with the recommended 250mm can save up to 25% of heat loss and filling wall cavities can save up to 33% of the heat lost.

It is estimated that the average cost of cavity wall insulation is £180 and that the average cost of loft insulation is £150-£300.

Some easier methods of improving the energy performance of your homes include:

- Replacing old hot water jackets
- Insulating hot water pipes
- Eliminating draughts with DIY draught proofing
- When replacing electrical items such as fridges and washing machines, look for energy saving recommended appliances

It was also explained that improving the energy efficiency of homes can lead onto other benefits including:

- Reducing condensation, helping protect the fabric of the property
- It can increase the rental value of the property
- The Landlords Energy Saving Allowance (LESA) - Offsetting up to £1,500 spending on energy efficiency measures per dwelling per year.
- It will improve the rating of your property's Energy Performance Certificate

For more information on affordable warmth and the range of grants available to help improve the energy performance of your homes the following organisations may be able to help:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable Warmth Helpline – 0800 1070044 • Cocoon on 0800 848777
<p>3.</p>	<p>Local Housing Allowance Update – Janet Forsdike</p> <p>Janet explained that the number of claims for LHA was growing and that AVDC were currently in the process of recruiting new members of staff to help process the increased workload. This increased workload has had some impact on the timescales in which the Benefits department has been able to process new claims and make changes to existing claims. These new posts have been funded by a grant from the Department of Work and Pensions in recognition of the extra claims being made in the current economic climate.</p> <p>It was also announced that from April 2010 the £15 top-up will be removed. This top-up is currently received by some tenants who have accessed properties with a rent below the current LHA rate.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Housing Health and Safety Rating System – Martyn Chuter</p> <p>The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) was introduced within the 2004 Housing Act and it rates the health and safety of dwellings. This new system has replaced the ‘Fitness Standard’ which centred on features or conditions of a house and had little consideration of impacts on its occupants.</p> <p>The HHSRS considers 29 areas of risk and is people based rather than property based. It is also supported by data from real accidents. These 29 areas of risk have been placed in the following four categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physiological • Psychological • Protection against infection • Protection against accidents <p>A list of the 29 Hazards has been included with these minutes.</p> <p>There are 4 classes of harm (or outcomes) within the system, which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class I – Death or fatal paralysis • Class II – Chronic confusion, regular severe fever, serious fractures • Class III – Loss of a finger, severe concussion, serious strain • Class IV – Skin irritation, benign tumours, moderate cuts, regular colds <p>Use of the rating system will give a numerical value which places it within one of a number of bands. Depending on which band it fits into dictates the type of action, so for the top 3 bands, these are all determined as Category 1 Hazards. Once the authority becomes aware of a Category 1 Hazard, then they are statutorily required</p>

	<p>to take a course of action from a choice of several options. In the case of lower bands, where the hazards are categorised as Category 2, then action is at the discretion of the local authority.</p> <p>The different courses of action that could be considered are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement Notice • Prohibition Order • Hazard Awareness Notice • Emergency Remedial Action • Emergency Prohibition Order • Demolition Order • Clearance Area Declaration <p>For more information on the system please refer to the following website: http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/rentingandletting/housinghealth/</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Landlord Accreditation – Khyati Vaughan</p> <p>Khyati mentioned that landlords who have properties in Aylesbury Vale have now been consulted with regards to a future accreditation scheme in the district. A form was sent to all landlords and agents that the council have contact details for, seeking their views on what they would like from such a scheme. The response rate was around 30% and all respondents stated that they would be likely to join an accreditation scheme set up by the council. Landlords made a number of good suggestions, such as increased communication and networking between landlords and access to information and advice.</p> <p>Khyati said that the first meeting of the working group took place today. The aim of the group is to work together to construct a scheme which is relevant to Aylesbury Vale and one that is attractive to landlords. The group consists of a mixture of landlords and agents and they are representatives of the landlord’s forum. The first action for the group is to agree the property and management standards for the scheme. Khyati will draft these and consult with the group members before they are finalised. The standards will form part of the main scheme document.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Date and Time of the Next Forum</p> <p>The date for the next forum is Wednesday 09th September 2009. The forum will start at the usual time of 18.30 and will be held in our Gateway Building. This building can be found on Gatehouse Road, near to the roundabout at Bicester Road and there is parking on site.</p>

Contacts

Aylesbury Vale District Council Switchboard – 01296 585858

Landlords' Forum – Will Rysdale – 01296 585561

Landlord Accreditation – Khyati Vaughan – 01296 585881

Benefits Advice Line – 01296 585618

Private Rent Scheme – Bernadette Hryb – 01296 585270

Private Sector Housing, including Houses in Multiple Occupation –

Martyn Chuter – 01296 585151

Nigel Parsons – 01296 585592