

Welcome

From the Chair, to issue 8 of Private Renting Matters.

Mutley and Greenbank Anti-Social Behaviour



Paul Marten of PCC attended the meeting to advise on the project he was undertaking to map anti-social behaviour in Mutley and Greenbank so that service interventions could be better planned.

Mutley and Greenbank is the largest neighbourhood in Plymouth with around 18,000 residents – this obviously fluctuates with University attendance. It is also the youngest neighbourhood. The next in size is Honicknowle with 10,000 residents.

There are 7 broad strands to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB):

- Gang activity
- Litter
- Noise
- Graffiti
- Drug dealing
- Drunken/rowdy behaviour
- Abandoned vehicles

A survey of residents' satisfaction was undertaken (Plymouth Place Survey). This revealed that ASB was a big issue and also that residents felt the council was not talking to them about their concerns.

This project is something of a pilot nationally and will use software called Mosaic (created from credit transactions recorded by Experian) to map the demographics of the area, and then ASB against that. There will be a survey of all residents in October – University students will be assisting with this. Paul is currently looking for information of landlord/managing agent experience of ASB in the properties they manage or affecting their tenants.

If you would like to put contribute information for this project please use the [attached form](#).

Following analysis of the survey results, interventions to improve resident experience of the area will be put in place and it is hoped that this will show improved satisfaction in the next Plymouth Place Survey.

Coalition propose changes to Local Housing Allowance



Mike Joslin of the Valuation Office outlined the proposed changes announced by the new government. **From April 2011** – there will be a cap for each level.

- £250 max for 1 bed allowance
- £290 max for 2 bed allowance

Landlord EXPO and first buy to let event in Plymouth

Westcountry Landlords Association advised that the above event would be taking place on 16th September from 12pm to 7pm at the Guildhall.

This event is free and should be of interest to all landlords, new or experienced, or those just starting out.

Council Tax and Abandonment

Following the inclusion of this agenda item in the June newsletter, a number of landlords have raised concern about the position taken by Council Tax. A formal challenge has been lodged by one landlady and the Forum will be attempting to get Counsel's advice on this matter. We will keep you informed of developments.

Rugg swept under the carpet

Members expressed disappointment that all the proposed recommendations from Rugg which followed many years of study and consultation had been thrown out by new coalition government.

There were varying levels of support for the different aspects of the proposals but it was thought particularly disappointing that the proposals for some form of registration/quality control on letting agents was not being taken up.

Suggestion that the Local Authority have an accreditation scheme for letting agents – could do this but it would not prevent bad practice.

Planning Permission (C4) - unnecessary applications

Westcountry Landlords Association concerned that member had been given bad advice on need to obtain planning consent for existing house in multiple occupation. It was agreed that she needed to make a complaint if she was unhappy as Forum could not take up particular cases. General issue of advice given when there is historic but unauthorised use will be passed to Planning for response.

- £340 max for 3 bed allowance
- £400 max for 4 bed or larger allowance
- Anyone on job seekers' allowance for more than 12 months will have housing benefit cut by 10%.
- £15.00 'profit for tenants' on rent to be scrapped.
- Allowance will be introduced for non- resident carer to have a bedroom included in claim.
- Discretionary housing benefit – an extra £10 million to be allowed for this nationally.

From October 2011

- Setting of allowance changing from median rent to 30%. Rents may fluctuate more because of this – illustrations of the impact can be seen on the [VOA website](#).

2012

- Discretionary housing benefits – an extra £40 million to be allowed for this nationally.

2013

- Size criteria to be applied to social rents.

2013/2014

- LHA levels will be set and only vary in line with the consumer price index.

Produced for the Private Rented Forum by
[Westcountry Landlords Association](#)

On a related matter, the Government are proposing to scrap the requirement to obtain consent for a change from C3 to C4 in October. LJ had queried Planning Department's position on this and Chris Watson had advised: *'we have to abide by the law as it stands at this time, and still advise that planning permission is required for new C4 uses until such time as the April 2010 introduced C4 law change is formally reversed'*.

Water charges in leasehold flats

An enquiry had been received by Private Rented Team about what advice and support could be offered to tenants who appeared to be receiving excessive charges for water. Appears that some blocks of flats have a meter from which sub-meters are run.

Westcountry Landlords Association thought it was an issue of a commercial rather than residential supply being installed. Could also be an 'unfair contract term' which could be taken to Leasehold Valuation Tribunal. This seems to be causing significant financial problems for tenants and will be further investigated.

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