

## Welcome

From the Chair, to issue 11 of Private Renting Matters from the Private Rented Forum

### Updates on Local Housing Allowance Changes

No further information has been received but workshops have been held to advise landlords of the changes and get some feedback on how they should be dealt with. There is concern about families currently receiving a 5 bed allowance – there will be a big impact on them probably from a number of the changes. Twenty families have been identified so far and the Housing Benefit Team will be contacting them individually. The Housing Benefit Team will also be mailing landlords to let them know about the changes but can only contact those paid direct. There is now full information on the changes on the Council website. [To see more click here.](#)



### Student Watch

PCSO Sarah Nicholson attended the meeting to talk about the new 'Student Watch' Scheme and discuss issues in the Mutley and Greenbank area. She advised that she covered that area and had close links with the University – she has high visibility and deals with low level crime. Student Watch is an arm of Neighbourhood Watch and is aimed at encouraging students to be representatives for their streets/areas and take some responsibility for it. This could involve reporting crime, speaking to students about how they were disturbing neighbours, introducing themselves to neighbours etc. It is hoped that this would generally improve relations between students and others who lived in the area.

PC Jackie Hunt advised that Mutley/Greenbank had a very high burglary rate. Entry is normally through open windows or doors and once in multiple crimes will be committed as they will be able to easily access a number of rooms. This makes the figures look very high.

There is a need to educate students about locking up – police sometimes walk the area and find they are able to enter a number of houses without anyone challenging them. They have posters to hand out and suggest that a sign is put on the door reminding students to check if they are the last one in and to lock up.

Noise is another big issue in the area – police will address this following complaints, but do not have powers – these are with the city council. They will address on the basis of anti-social behaviour and have a number of standard letters – also like to wake students up early after they have kept residents awake at night! It was pointed out that some

### Empty Homes Team

Dan Thorning gave a presentation on the work of the Empty Homes Team. Empty Properties are a wasted resource for the owner and the city and attract anti-social behaviour. There are around 680 properties in Plymouth that have been empty for more than six months. They are empty for a variety of reasons and the team use a range of measures to bring empty properties back into use and make them available for occupation.

This includes:

- Assistance with sale – including special rates at auctions
- Advice on letting
- Easy Let Scheme – a management scheme
- House Let Scheme – a leasing scheme
- Compulsory Purchase Orders – with onward sale to an RSL or private developer.
- Enforced Sale – where there are debts to the council on the property

They are also looking at undertaking some Empty Dwelling Management Orders which allow the council to take over the property and put tenants in.

Dan drew attention to the fact that there were tax advantages to work on empty properties and listed buildings in terms of VAT rates. Dan can be contacted on 01752 307570.

### Smoking Legislation

Members were reminded that they may

properties will be licenced and this will provide another element of control over landlords/managing agents as licence holders are required to include a clause on anti-social behaviour in their tenancy agreements and to take reasonable steps to control it.

PC Hunt finished with some information on drug use and how to spot it. Landlords should report anything suspicious that they see. Things to look out for are:

- High electricity usage (cannabis growing)
- Living beyond means, paying for everything in cash.
- Lots of short visits to a property.

She advised that they need more than one piece of information to be able to get a warrant so are keen to receive even small bits of information that could help to build a picture. Reporting to them is very confidential and names of informants are never released. The area will be policed more densely in coming months.

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need to take steps to prohibit smoking in the common areas of multi occupied properties. This is because the areas may be deemed to fall within the 'No Smoking' legislation where it is a workplace. Notices should be displayed advising that it is a 'no smoking area'.

### Elections and changes to Charter

It was agreed that meetings would be reduced from every other month to quarterly. Meetings to be held in March, June, October and December. Next meeting to be in June 2011.

It was also agreed that elections would only be held every other year and therefore that posts would be held for two years.

Elections for the posts of Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary were held with the existing post-holders remaining in post for a further two years.

Chair – Brenda Gilbert (SAMS Accommodation)  
Vice Chair – Heather Crabb (Drake Accommodation)  
Secretary – Linda Johns (Private Rented Team, PCC).