

Welcome

From the Chair, to issue 7 of Private Renting Matters.

Traumatic Clean-Up - Richard Honey



This is a specialist cleaning service whose main work is crime scene clean ups – could be deaths, drug use etc. They have an immediate team of 6 but can call on assistance from other members of the Academy for larger jobs and have contracts with police, NHS etc. They do not do normal end of tenancy clean ups and do not deal with vermin, but can help with insect infestations.

They can provide a fast turn-around and will provide a report saying exactly what was done, which chemicals used etc. Service may appear expensive but need to consider the risks of not getting things done properly. Richard can be contacted on 0845 2103999. Web site www.traumatic-cleanup.co.uk Email info@traumatic-cleanup.co.uk

Waste Storage & Collection - Problems in Private Rented properties



Alistair Cunningham, Colin Mee and Dave Williams of Environmental Services attended to discuss some of the problems arising from privately rented properties. These include waste being put out on the wrong day, in the wrong container, low levels of recycling, tenants not having sufficient space to store refuse. They have been issuing fixed penalty notices to tenants and are looking for better ways of dealing with the problems so that tenants do not keep getting fined.

The Landlord Permit Scheme (for end of tenancy clear outs) is still in place but does not appear to be getting used. It was felt that a lot of the issues were down to management but some areas eg Mutley/Greenbank have such high concentrations of occupation that very large amount of refuse have to be dealt with and existing bins/collections may be insufficient.

The issue of litter from the late night burger vans was also discussed – this is a problem but from police point of view the burger vans are a good way of preventing other anti-social behaviour as it helps soak up alcohol!

The point was raised that sometimes the collection team cause litter in the street. Officers asked that if collections were not made properly a complaint should be lodged promptly so that it could be investigated.

A request was made for landlords/agents to put forward their problems/ideas for solutions with a view to developing a pilot project to reduce the amount of refuse on the streets. If you have something to say please contact Alistair or Colin – Alistair.cunningham@plymouth.gov.uk, colin.mee@plymouth.gov.uk

Council Tax Issues

Pam Dean & Paul Dean

A number of issues had been raised by landlords at previous meetings and representatives of this section attended to deal with these.

- Requests being made for agents to attend inspections of empty, unfurnished properties. Agents feel they should be trusted if they say it is empty. CT attendees advised that they have to review cases after six months and need to do some checks for audit purposes. They prefer not to attend properties unaccompanied.
- Suggestion that officers could check websites where they will see flats etc advertised in order to confirm they are empty.
- Re-assessment of an HMO (with some sharing of facilities) as a dwelling and charges back-dated. This query was raised by West Country Landlords Association at the last meeting. It has been appealed but decision was upheld. This is a licensed HMO so the decision is confusing. Pam Dean will take the address and investigate this case and report back on at next meeting.
- Query about landlords being held responsible for council tax when tenant leaves without giving notice. Appears that the law differs here with that of housing benefit/rent. Although the tenant can be held liable for the rent if they leave without giving notice, council tax legislation effectively states that the landlord is responsible as soon as it is vacated. There is no case law on this.

Any Other Business

- Brenda raised issue of the pre-inspection questionnaire sent out by HMO licensing team. She felt some of the questions were unnecessary and was concerned about being asked to give names of tenants. Linda Johns advised that, following discussion on the telephone, she had looked at the form with the team. It has now been changed to be more relevant to the inspection – some

Planning Tariffs - Chris Watson

There has recently been concern about high tariffs being charged on changes of use to an HMO.

Chris advised that it had been decided there would be no tariff for change of use from a single family dwelling to C4 (ie the new use class for 3 – 6 occupiers). However it appears there would be no charge for larger developments.

The reason for the charge is to pay for pressures on infrastructure. The aim had been to make it fairer and spread it across all developments. There is likely to be a charge where development goes over 10 bed spaces.

Chris also pointed out that planning permission for a change of say, hotel to HMO, was not always needed because of the range of permissions that may exist. Landlords felt that the high levels of charges would kill development in the city. A question was raised as to whether there was an opportunity to comment on the current proposals.

This wasn't clear but Chris will advise in due course. Westcountry Landlords Association confirmed they had been lobbying Planning on this issue and will continue to do so with regard to the larger properties.

items have been moved to the annual self certification declaration. There would still be a request for tenant names so that they could be notified personally to advise of the inspection. This is also a check on occupancy being in accord with the licence. She did not feel there was a data protection issue here but if any landlords/agents are uncomfortable with an informal request then the team can serve formal notices requiring the information to be provided.

- Discussed in principle the collapse of a letting agency (as one is believed to be in receivership in the city). Probably little prospect of recovery of monies taken for deposits. Landlords and tenants need to get advice on their particular cases. The general feeling is that we need to ensure that police investigate the matter – felt that a complaint needs to be made by landlord or tenant.

Produced for the Private Rented Forum by
Westcountry Landlords Association

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