

Gateshead Landlord Licensing Update

May 2010

Welcome...

to the third issue of Gateshead's Landlord Licensing Update newsletter. This newsletter tells you about developments in the licensing areas and what is planned for the next twelve months.

Landlord Licensing Introduced in Chopwell

Gateshead Council is very pleased to announce its second Selective Licensing scheme for the River Streets Chopwell, following Government approval in October 2009.

As found in the Sunderland Road area, the River Streets have suffered from large numbers of empty properties, an increase in short term tenancies, low property values (compared to the rest of Gateshead) and high levels of anti social behaviour and poor property maintenance. Selective Licensing has been introduced alongside further measures to tackle these problems. These include property and environmental improvements and improved neighbourhood management.

The scheme came into force on 11 January 2010 and covers over 200 properties. For more information go to www.gateshead.gov.uk

Sunderland Road progress

Now that the majority of licences have been issued, the team continue to take a proactive approach to secure further improvements in the area. In September 2009, the team, working alongside the Police, took part in Operation WAYS (We Ask, You Say), where residents were questioned on their feelings and experiences about the neighbourhood in which they lived.

- 74% of respondents agreed that the introduction of landlord licensing had had a positive impact on the area, with 25% strongly agreeing.
- 49% of respondents stated that rubbish on the streets and in yards was a priority.
- 47% of respondents agreed that the poor condition of properties within the neighbourhood was also an issue.

Neighbourhood Clean up Day

In response to the outcome of Operation WAYS, the team together with Local Environmental Services, organised a clean up day at the end of last year, where residents could dispose of refuse free of charge via skips and free bulky collections. Letters and leaflets were delivered to all 375 properties, with information on the location and use of the skips. Letters were also sent to all the licence holders with properties in the area, requesting their cooperation. The letters also warned that if residents did not use the day as an opportunity to remove rubbish from their properties, the team would consider taking formal action to address the issue of neglected yards and gardens.

Overall the day was very successful. Three skips were filled completely with miscellaneous items, and there was also three full van loads of white goods, electrical items and bulky items collected by Local Environmental Services. Prior to the event, officers carried out an inspection of the area and identified twenty seven yards containing refuse or bulky items. After the event, a second inspection was carried out resulting in seven properties now being subject to further formal action.

Future Inspections

Residents also told us that they were concerned about the condition of properties within the area. The condition of a property lies with the owner, whether it is owner occupied or rented (depending upon the terms of the tenancy agreement). Many properties within the area have been inspected by Council Officers and improved via either block improvement scheme works or by rented properties achieving the accreditation standard.

However there are a number of licensed properties that have not been inspected. These will be visited throughout 2010. Letters will be sent to licence holders to request that access is made available. Properties will be inspected under The Housing Act 2004 - The Housing Health & Safety Rating System. Following the inspection contact will be made with licence holders to address any issues identified.

Rent Repayment Orders

Although every effort is made to monitor the change in ownership and tenure within the licensing area, the team are aware that there may still be landlords operating without a licence. For this purpose this year we will be making contact with all tenants to inform them of their rights to apply for a rent repayment order if their landlord is prosecuted for failing to apply for a licence. If granted it will mean that tenants can claim back the rent they have paid during the period when the landlord was unlicensed (up to 12 months).

Licence conditions - Are you seeking references for potential tenants?

Please be reminded that obtaining a reference for a potential tenant is a condition of your licence, and should be carried out on all those who will be named on the tenancy. Failure to do so is a breach of your licence condition and on conviction may result in a fine of up to £5,000.

The vetting service is FREE to all members of the Gateshead Private Landlords Association. Statistics tell us that 20% of these checks are unsatisfactory. The cost of taking a tenant to court is £150, the use of a bailiff is £90 and the cost of taking legal action through a solicitor could be £1,250.

By carrying out a check you will minimise the risk of problems occurring. To find out more contact the Team on **0191 433 2660**.

Questions and answers

- Q. As a landlord, what are the benefits of selective licensing for me?**
- A.** Selective licensing has been introduced to help improve neighbourhoods in Gateshead. The Council is investing time and resources into focussing closely on these priority areas. With the support and partnership of residents and landlords it is hoped that the schemes will contribute towards the areas becoming more attractive, a reduction in the number of empty properties and incidents of anti social behaviour and increasing the number of people who want to live there. Hopefully this will encourage your tenants to stay in the area, reducing the administrative costs of creating new tenancies as well as improving the value of the specific properties.
- Q. What can I do if a tenant is causing anti social behaviour (ASB) problems in the area?**
- A.** All licence holders have an obligation to ensure that they effectively manage problems associated with ASB. The Council, Gateshead Private Landlords' Association and the Police operate a graded response towards addressing ASB. The team are here to support you and help guide you through this process. Don't hesitate to contact us as the sooner the problem is identified the sooner we can resolve it.

For more details please contact the Private Rented Team.

Diary Dates

Landlord Training Courses:

- Landlord Day - 15th May 2010 (free of charge)
- Guide to Running a Lettings Business - Friday 11th June 2010
- Inventories, Deposits and Disputes - Wednesday 22nd September 2010
- Legal Lettings - Friday 26th November 2010

Cost per course:
£20 GPLA members and
£40 to non GPLA members
To book a course contact a
member of the team
on **0191 433 2893**.

Contacts...

The Private Rented Sector Team, Development and Enterprise, 2nd Floor, Civic Centre, Gateshead NE8 1HH.
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