

accreditation news

August 2008



the **newsletter** for private landlords in the Bury area, produced by the **Bury Landlord Accreditation Scheme**



Accreditation grants coming to Radcliffe

As you may be aware, Bury Council have been offering accreditation grants of up to £5000 to accreditation scheme members with properties in East Bury.

We have recently been given approval to extend these grants to the Radcliffe area, as well as continuing to offer them, subject to availability, within the Bury East Local Area Partnership zone.

The grants are available to accreditation scheme members in order to carry out improvements to their properties, over and above their statutory requirements to keep the properties in a good state of repair and free from hazards.

The type of work usually undertaken as part of this grant can include items such as replacement boilers, new windows and doors, hard-wired smoke detection systems and renewal of electrical wiring.

In some cases, where everything else in the property is up to scratch, we can offer replacement kitchens and bathrooms in order to bring the property up to the government's Decent Homes Standard.

Grants are non-means tested, however, a condition of receiving a grant is that the landlord must agree not to sell the property for a minimum of three years after the work has been completed.

If you would like to find out more about applying for a grant and the criteria for eligibility, please contact Babette Howard on 0161 723 6448 or email babette.howard@greatplaces.org.uk



Raising the profile of the private rented sector

Bury Landlord Accreditation Steering Group has been meeting bi-monthly for over four years, to oversee the scheme, agree and monitor operational policies and procedures, to look at the future development of BLAS and to ensure that we provide a good quality service to our landlord customers.

The group has up to now been represented by members of Bury Council's Regeneration & Housing Standards Team, the Bond Board, the Homeless Prevention Team and the Accreditation Co-ordinator.

Over the last 12 months it has become

apparent that BLAS is only one of the many topics discussed by the group, particularly in light of recent major changes not only in legislation affecting landlords, but also in the rental market itself.

As well as landlord accreditation, regular agenda items include: empty properties, enforcement, HMO licensing, affordable warmth, migrant workers and homeless prevention.

To reflect these changes, the group has agreed to re-launch as Bury Private Rented

Sector Steering Group and will in future be represented on Bury's Housing Strategic Partnership Executive.

One key group of people not yet represented is you the private landlord and our future aim is to have either one or two nominated private landlords as group members.

If you are a member of BLAS and would like to find out more, contact Babette Howard on 0161 723 6448 for an informal chat.



“My landlord wont do any repairs!”

It is rarely the case that a landlord has refused to do any repairs to the property once he or she has been made aware of the problem by a tenant.

The Regeneration and Housing Standards Team receive on average around 450 complaints a year from tenants alleging that their landlord will not do any repairs.

When a tenant telephones the Council to report disrepair, one of the first questions they are asked is “have you informed your landlord?” If the answer is no, then we would expect the tenant to do this first and allow their landlord to deal with the problem.

If the repair has been reported to the landlord, we usually allow a response time of 14 days for the problem to be fixed. In certain urgent cases such as a boiler breakdown a quicker response would be expected.

One of the aims of the Regeneration and Housing Standards Team work is to raise the standard of private sector housing. One method by which the team achieves this aim is by appropriate use of enforcement. Enforcement action can be taken against landlords and owner occupiers alike.

When dealing with private sector housing within the borough we will aim to:

- Ensure that all enforcement officers when carrying out their duties adopt a balanced and consistent approach.
- Address hazards to the health and safety of occupants and visitors to residential premises.
- Ensure satisfactory standards of repair, safety and the provision of adequate amenities.
- Ensure satisfactory management and means of escape in HMO's.
- Liaise with other Local Authorities and appropriate bodies in the Greater Manchester Area to achieve a consistent approach.
- Provide a customer focused service.

Once it has been verified that a tenant has made a valid complaint we will telephone and/or write to the owner or landlord outlining the nature of the problem and ask what remedial action will be taken to

remedy the hazard or defect.

If a satisfactory response is not received or there are no signs of the improvements within appropriate timescales the case will be reviewed for formal enforcement action. The property will be assessed for formal action according to:

- The number of category 1 and 2 hazards. (A category 1 hazard where there is an imminent risk of serious harm to the occupiers may result in Emergency Remedial Action or Emergency Prohibition Action).
- The vulnerability of the current occupants
- The hazards scores
- In the case of HMO's, whether they are licensable and the number of storeys.

The Council has the power to make a reasonable charge as a means of recovering expenses incurred in the service of a notice and this is currently set at £300 for the service of a Housing Act 2004 Notice.

If a notice is complied with, no further action will be taken. However if a notice is not complied with an officer will consider the following options: prosecution works in default, works in default and prosecution or formal caution.

It's worth adding that we are unable to accept landlords as Accreditation Scheme members if they fail to comply with notices served on them.

Examples of some complaints received

Complaint 1

“I have no hot water or heating!”

The tenant had not paid their utility bill when this was investigated further. Obviously this was their responsibility to pay their bills and we did not get involved once the non payment came to light.

Complaint 2

“I can't contact my landlord to do any repairs!”

The landlord had moved to Australia without leaving any forwarding details or having put any management arrangements in place. The repairs required were quite minor so the tenant arranged for these to be undertaken from the rent they had withheld and kept

the receipts. This rent was withheld in order to encourage the landlord to make contact. The tenants moved to alternative accommodation once they had found somewhere suitable.

Complaint 3

“My rented house is falling down! The staircase is loose and plaster is falling off the wall!”

A visit to the property found that the fixings for the handrail were loose and there was a small area of perished plaster on the landing. Contact was made with the landlord in this case due to the hazard of falling on the stairs. The work was carried out by the landlord and no further action was taken.

These are the minority of complaints and often a visit does reveal defects at the property which could be classified as category 1 or 2 hazards which require remedial action.

However, there are also quite a number of complaints that are not justifiable and in these circumstances it would be inappropriate for us to contact the landlord. In some cases, the landlord may be unaware of the problem as the tenant failed to report it to them in the first instance.

Access to property

Landlords (or people authorised by them) have the legal right to enter their tenanted property at reasonable times of the day to inspect the property following at least 24 hours' notice having been given in writing.

The right to enter and carry out repairs should normally be included in tenancy agreements.

Although tenants have the right to be left in peace, it is your right and duty as a landlord to inspect the property every few months to make sure everything is still in good condition. If the time you give for access is inconvenient for the tenant, it is up to them to suggest a reasonable alternative time to let you inspect the property.

The Regeneration and Housing Standards Team are pleased where possible to help both landlords and tenants with advice or to redirect them to an appropriate person or service with their particular query.

If you would like information and advice on your repairing obligations as a landlord, you can contact us on 0161 253 6487





Landlords we need you urgently

- We have tenants waiting
- We are a dedicated letting agent
- Tenants fully referenced and homelet rent guaranteed
- Full maintenance team
- 24 hour emergency call out
- Professional trained staff
- Only 8% monthly fee



Potential hazards

These are the potential hazards under the Housing Health & Safety Rating System that Environmental Health Officers look for when inspecting a property

Damp/mould	Radiation	Noise	Excess heat/cold
Fire	Uncombusted fuel gas	Hygiene	Hot surfaces
Asbestos	Volatile organic compounds	Food safety	Entrapment
Biocide chemicals	Crowding and space	Water supply	Explosions
Poisonous gases	Intruders	Falls	Ergonomics
Lead	Lighting	Electrical	Structural

Empty property bulletin

The Facts

According to research carried out by the National Association of Empty Property Practitioners, there are currently in the region of 850,000 long-term empty homes across the country.

Bury currently has 1463 long-term empty homes borough-wide, which is a problem because they are a wasted resource. Long-term empty properties can spoil neighbourhoods, be more prone to vandalism and become an eyesore, or a focus for anti-social behaviour.

What can be done?

Bury Council's Empty Property Strategy will be put before the Council's Executive Committee on the 24th September 2008 to seek approval for the approach that the Urban Renewal Team want to take to address long-term empty properties.

Urban Renewal is keen to explore various options available to bring empty properties back into use, including:

- Acting as a facilitator for Landlords and those wanting to sell or rent out their empty property
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders
- Voluntary Acquisition
- Enforced Sale
- Compulsory Purchase
- Possible grant assistance

How could private landlords benefit?

Bury Council is starting to look at ways of bringing these properties back into use and it is considering the potential of acting as a facilitator between homeowners who wish to sell their empty property and landlords wanting to purchase property.



This could result in an empty property being brought back into use and you as a landlord making a financial gain. We are therefore looking to compile a list of interested landlords who we can contact once we have developed our ideas further.

In the first instance, contact Babette Howard with your details, or for further information, contact Ashleigh Barlow, Empty Property Officer on 0161 253 5512 or email a.barlow@bury.gov.uk

Would you like to contribute?

Is there something you think all BLAS members should know about? Have you got anything to share with other readers? If you have any suggestions for future editions of Accreditation News or would like to contribute contact Babette Howard - details are on the back page.



Landlords: don't lose the benefits of being accredited by letting your membership lapse

Renewing your scheme membership is easy. Either post or fax a copy of your current gas safety certificate for each accredited property to the BLAS address/number below and your membership will automatically be renewed.

Remember too to tell us about any major changes you may have made to a property, for example if you've sold or substantially remodelled any of your portfolio.

Don't forget, we're here to provide help and advice if there's anything you're not sure about.



Bury Landlord Forum Wednesday 10 September 2008 6pm - 8.30pm

Lancaster Room, Elizabethan Suite, Knowsley St, Bury

Light refreshments from 6pm, meeting starts at 6.30pm

Agenda includes:

Housing benefit and LHA update
Dealing with anti-social behaviour
Accredited tenant scheme

The forum is open to all landlords owning or managing properties in the Borough and is an excellent opportunity to network, gather information and discuss issues affecting the private rented sector.

For more information contact Babette Howard on 0161 723 6448 or email babette.howard@greatplaces.org.uk

Get in touch:

If you need any advice or information, we're only a stamp, click or call away!

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