

Apologies:

Olivia Donaghy (Association of Residential Letting Agents)

Charles Garrett (Bath & North East Somerset Council)

Lisa Perry (North Somerset Council)

Shane Dyke (North Somerset Council)

Luisa Roverato (Bath & North East Somerset Council)

Adrian Turner (Association of Residential Letting Agents)

Barney Coleman (Bristol Association of Letting and Managing Agents)

Gary Twinn (North Somerset Landlord Forum)

Guests present:

NONE

Present:

Chris Johnson [Chair] (South Gloucestershire Council)

Philip Gilbert (Bristol City Council)

Tony Hardacre (National Landlords Association (Wessex))

Richard Johnson (Bristol City Council)

Chris Kenrick (National Landlords Association (Wessex))

Janet Redfern (National Landlords Association (Wessex))

Catherine Shuttleworth (Bath & North East Somerset)

Alan Tink (Westcountry Landlords Association)

David Brown (National Landlords Association (Wessex))

[Any items in square brackets have been added after the meeting as an update]

2. Previous minutes – no issues.

3. Housing Act 2004 update, inc. fire safety – **South Gloucestershire** has had 37 applications, 23 are now fully licensed, 1 has been issued with an interim licence and 3 are not licensable.

The search for unlicensed, but licensable HMOs has now begun. The process of starting to liaise with Council Tax and Housing Benefits in order to widen this search has also begun, but this may be a slow process.

Tony Hardacre registered his appreciation for the light touch with which HMO licensing had been administered so far.

Bristol City Council has issued all licences in the Inner City area, almost all in the North and is about 2 months away from completing in the South team.

The search for unlicensed, but licensable HMOs has now begun. BCC has a protocol for this.

Chris Kenrick said that if landlord associations can be of any help in the search for unlicensed properties then local authorities should ask.

David Brown asked if there were variations in HMO licensing. Across the UK there are variations, but within the WoE area the authorities have worked together to produce common standards – although there have been issues with timescales for the amenity standards.

North Somerset have issued 3 full licences – they have been audited over the last few weeks and this has taken up a lot of time and energy. Normality should return now and HMO licensing can be concentrated on.

Bath & North East Somerset have had 275 applications, about 200 of these have been sent licences and the rest have been issued with proposed licences.

The search for unlicensed, but licensable HMOs has now begun.

All WoE authorities are looking at publicity for unlicensed HMOs – it was agreed that the best publicity would be a prosecution. Publicity will need to be discussed further in order to co-ordinate.

Fire safety – there are 2 conflicting sets of legislation (HHSRS & RRO). A committee was set up to look in to how to go forward with the integration of fire safety responsibility. A protocol has been produced and it may be the case that UK wide standards for fire safety are introduced on the back of this. The group will be kept informed.

On a more local level, the WoE group have been meeting with Avon Fire & Rescue Service and have agreed that they will go along with any Government protocol. HMOs will be responsibility of the local authority and not the fire authority. The local authority will be the first point of contact, but will only be able to enforce their own legislation. Landlords will be made aware of the RRO and its requirements, but the local authority will not be able to enforce this. This means that if the RRO is not complied with it will be passed to the fire authority to enforce.

Will hopefully have a redline book (like the pre-Housing Act 2004 protocol). The book will contain all requirements. This will be used until any Government standard is introduced.

Tony Hardacre expressed concerns about having standards rather than a risk based approach to fire safety. If a landlord comes up with an acceptable alternative to any scheme drawn up then they should present this to the local authority. Appeal to the RPT is always an option.

4. HMO licensing standards – Bristol City Council has revised its approach to bring it more in to line with other WoE authorities and to take account of the Government review.

Amendments to the HMO licensing regulations have been issued – Phil to distribute via email after meeting.

The amendments have not been fully discussed by the WoE authorities as yet, but seem to indicate that there will be some sort of discretion over the separate WC issue and the wash hand basin issue has been qualified with the phrase “if reasonably practicable”. Hopefully there should be some solid guidance on this by the next Panel meeting.

5. Landlord Development Course – The WoE authorities are planning on introducing a Landlord Development Course later in the year to compliment the Landlord Manual. It is hoped that the course content can be agreed by the Landlord Panel.

A series of ‘taster sessions’ was discussed – these would be short evening sessions designed to reach landlords that we do not currently engage with. Phil to discuss this in more detail with the individual authorities and landlord associations. It was thought that these meetings could be fronted by landlord representatives rather than LA representatives – Phil to contact landlord associations to progress further.

The point was raised that landlords should have some incentives to attend a training course. This will have to be discussed further, but the obvious group that this will be aimed at initially is the licensed landlords who are required to attend a training course by their licence conditions.

6. Tenancy deposit scheme update – In general, publicity has been poor. However, WoE authorities have made a large effort to let landlords in the region know. This is alongside information passed to landlords and agents by associations of which they are members.

All agreed that it will be in 6 months when the first tenancies are coming to an end when we will find out how successful the schemes have been (specifically the custodial scheme, as money has to change hands)

7. Any other business – briefly discussed the revolving chair – Phil to ask members before the next meeting if they would like to chair a meeting.

The next meeting will be at 10:30 on Thursday 18th October 2007
Venue will be The Bristol Golf Club, off the M5 at junction 17

Chair of the next meeting: TBC