

# The Landlords Bulletin

Issue 4

June 2009



## Letter from the editor...

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Landlords Bulletin. In this issue we have articles on the North Somerset Property Accreditation Scheme, Homechoice, Fire Safety Guidance, Bed Bug Epidemic, Drugs in Rented Accommodation and much, much more.



Caroline Crossley

Please contact me with stories or items of interest that you would like to share with other landlords and agents in the area. So, get pen to paper, write in and have your say!

Please send any contributions to:

**Caroline Crossley, Landlords Bulletin Editor, Private Rented Housing Team, North Somerset Council, PO Box 144, Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, BS23 1HB or email [caroline.crossley@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.crossley@n-somerset.gov.uk).**

## Homechoice North Somerset



Some big changes were made in April in the way social housing is dealt with in North Somerset.

The new Homechoice scheme will give applicants on the housing register more choice over where they live.

Anyone applying for housing will get a clear picture of properties available, as we will be publicising them online and in a weekly newsletter. They will then be able to express an interest in a particular property by bidding. The applicant in the highest housing need who placed a bid will be offered the property.

Although this will not mean that there are more properties available, it will mean that applicants will be able to get feedback on how popular properties and areas are.

The Homechoice scheme is designed to be clearer and easier to use than the current system.

Applicants will now also have the ability to apply and bid online. For further information please visit [www.homechoicensomerset.org.uk](http://www.homechoicensomerset.org.uk)

## North Somerset Property Accreditation Scheme



North Somerset Property Accreditation Scheme has arrived in North Somerset, the property based scheme launched in November 2008. It has been a positive start with five accreditation certificates awarded on the day of launch.

The scheme is free and voluntary for landlords to join with many benefits in doing so. Some of these benefits include, discounts with electricians, plumbers, DIY stores and insurance. In addition to these, landlords will have use of a delegated officer at North Somerset Council who will help with any queries. Above all, recognition of being a good, well intentioned landlord with good quality, safe accommodation.

The North Somerset Property Accreditation Scheme looks at the management and physical condition of privately rented property with the intention of accreditation being awarded.

The scheme is divided into two sets of standards; 'Accreditation' which is entry level and 'Accreditation Plus' a higher level that incorporates the entry level with added criteria.

For property to be awarded accreditation status it must meet the criteria that is set out in either 'Accreditation' or 'Accreditation Plus'.

The scheme has been developed in conjunction with the Accreditation Steering Group. The Steering Group is made up of landlords, agents, local business

representatives and other agencies. The North Somerset Property Accreditation Scheme is for landlords by landlords.

Applying for accreditation is easy, a simple self-assessment form needs to be filled out and handed into the Accreditation Officer in the Private Rented Housing Team at North Somerset Council. If assistance is needed in the completion of the application, the Accreditation Officer is more than happy to help.

**If you want to find out more information on the North Somerset Property Accreditation Scheme or request an application please contact, Caroline Crossley, Accreditation Officer on (01934) 426493 or email [caroline.crossley@nsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.crossley@nsomerset.gov.uk). Applications can also be downloaded from the North Somerset website, [www.n-somerset.gov.uk/housing](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/housing)**

## Website Launch

A new website developed by the four West of England authorities has recently launched. The site will become a central information resource for landlords and agents across the region. The site will include an online landlord manual and the latest information about licensing. It is hoped that in the next few weeks the site will also have information on Accreditation, HHSRS and Landlord Training.

Make sure you keep an eye on the site for further developments.

[www.privatehousinginformation.co.uk](http://www.privatehousinginformation.co.uk)



## Fire Safety Guidance

New national guidance regarding fire safety. The guidance provides advice on how to keep residential buildings safe from fire, explains how to carry out a fire risk assessment and includes a range of useful case studies. More information about the guidance can be found on the West of England website.

[www.privatehousinginformation.co.uk](http://www.privatehousinginformation.co.uk)

## LOOMING BED BUG EPIDEMIC

An epidemic of bedbugs is sweeping across the nation. The increases in air travel and warmer summers have led to the number of infestations by 500 per cent in the last two years.

Many cities have taken the brunt of the epidemic because of the large number of people on the move every day. Bedbugs are brown and red in colour and are about the same size as an apple pip. They feed on human blood by piercing the skin, sucking up four times their own body weight in 15 minutes. The insects whose bites cause itching, were virtually eradicated in the 1950's, but we are now seeing a surge in the number of calls from homes with bedbug infestations.

Many people think the spread of bedbugs is caused by bad hygiene, this is a common misconception. Dirty houses make infestations harder to remove, but they are actually spread more commonly by people that travel. They are also spread on public transport because people sit very close to each other.

Bedbugs are notoriously hard to spot because they hide in mattresses or in cracks in flooring and walls. They come out to feed between 1am and 5am. It is advised that mattresses are vacuumed and cleaned regularly to keep the bedbugs at bay.

**It is important that you advise your tenants about bedbugs and how to prevent them.**

For further information about bedbugs and any other pest related issues, please call **Environmental Protection on: 01275 884 882** or Email: [environmental.protection@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:environmental.protection@n-somerset.gov.uk)



## Landlord Expo 2009

The landlord Expo 2009 was held last month on the 14<sup>th</sup> May. The ninth annual event took place at the Holiday Inn, Hambrook, Bristol. Landlords from across the South West attended what was a successful day for everyone involved. More than 400 visitors came through the doors making the most of the free seminars and exhibitors. The twin themes for the expo this year were safe energy, save energy. A few of the seminars on offer to landlords were Fire Safety Order 2009 requirements, Cannabis Factories in Private Rented Properties – Avon and Somerset Constabulary, the new gas registration – Gas Safe, How Landlords Pay Less Tax, to name just a few. Year after year, the Landlord Expo becomes increasingly popular as landlords see how much new and useful information there is.



West of England  
Landlord Expo 2009

## Drugs in Rental Properties

Within the Avon and Somerset Constabulary force area there has been a significant increase in the use of domestic housing by the criminal fraternity for large scale growing of Cannabis and illicit drug production. A convenient way of sourcing houses for use in these illegal activities is via the private rented sector. From a landlord or property management perspective it is important to be aware of how you may fall foul of the law and also incur significant financial costs as a result of a property being used in the production of illicit drugs.

A typical Cannabis production room (see below)



### Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (section 8)

A person commits an offence if:  
Being the occupier, or concerned in the management of any premises they allow or suffer any of the following to take place:

- The production or attempted production
- The supply or attempted supply of a controlled drug
- The smoking of Cannabis, or
- The preparation or smoking of Opium

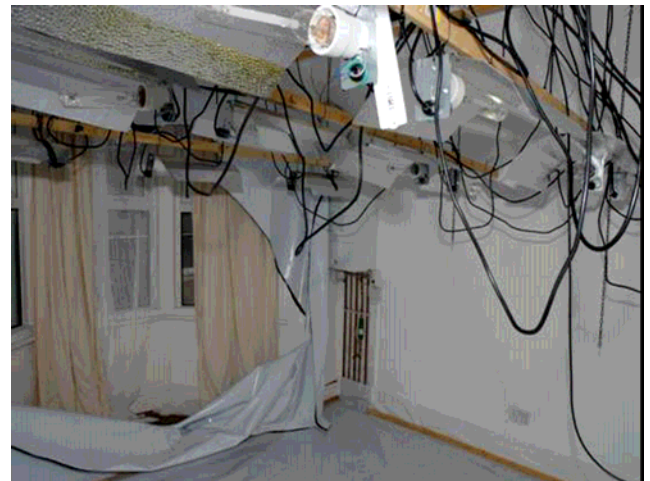
The prosecution must prove:

- Knowledge, actual or by 'closing eyes' to the obvious
- Unwillingness to prevent it, which can be inferred from failure to take steps to readily prevent it

From a financial perspective the potential repair costs incurred once the property is

vacated together with loss of rental revenue from an uninhabitable house can be considerable.

Damage that can be caused to property interiors (see below)



### Deterring drug activity

One tactic known is the use of a 'Front Couple' when viewing properties. These people will appear to be a genuine respectable couple seeking to rent a property for their own use. After they have been shown around the property by a landlord subsequently take possession of the property, they will disappear without a trace. They will then be replaced by members of the drug gang who will convert the property for drug production or cultivation.

Be aware of:

- Prospective tenants bearing gifts of several months rent in cash

- Request by tenants for you not to visit the property
- A tenants tendency to pay in cash combined with a lack of visible means of support or income

Consider:

- Photo ID of applicants, be aware of fake ID
- Request more than one form of ID
- Obtaining mobile phone numbers and car registration numbers from perspective tenants
- Are utility bills presented in different names?
- Liaising with local neighbourhood policing team if suspicious

A guide has been produced by the Drug Strategy Team at Avon and Somerset Constabulary entitled 'Keeping Illegal Drugs Out of Rented Properties'. For a copy please contact them on 01275 814576 or the Private Rented Housing Team at North Somerset Council. The Team will also be doing a talk at the next Private Sector Housing Forum on 15 July, 7.00pm at the Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare – So don't miss out!

## Have you heard about the PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING FORUM

If you are a private landlord, tenant, or involved in issues that affect the private rented sector in North Somerset, you may be interested in our Forum.

**It is established:**

- To promote a clear understanding of the wide range of issues associated with the private rented sector.
- To provide an opportunity for those interested in the private rented sector within North Somerset to meet to discuss common interests.
- To disseminate relevant information relating to the sector.

- To discuss and influence local and national strategies.

**Recent meetings have included many current topics:**

- Housing Benefit Fraud
- Local Housing Allowance
- On going Government Changes
- Tenancy Relations Service
- National Fire Safety Guidance
- The Credit Crunch – a local perspective
- Energy Performance Certificates
- North Somerset Property Accreditation Scheme
- West of England Landlord Panel
- Enforcement

**Any interested person may become a member . . .**

**For further information, please contact**

**01934 426786**

## Landlord Licensing

In response to a commissioned independent review of the Private Rented Sector by the Government published last year by Housing academics Julie Rugg and David Rhodes, indicates the possible implementation of compulsory landlord licensing.

The rumoured plans suggest landlords will be required to hold a license, costing around £50 a year, before they can rent out a property. Landlords who are caught flouting the rules will receive points, much like a UK drivers licence. Further to this landlords could also expect to see fines and even being banned from renting property.

It was suggested that the licensing administration should be centralised rather than down to local authorities. In order for the scheme to be carried forward it must have legislation passed by Parliament. It is believed that this will not occur before the next general election.

## Housing Resource Officer . . . Who are you?

I am Helen Boyd Housing Resource Officer with North Somerset Council within the Homechoice and Advice Team and have been in post about 4 years. My main role is to find private rented accommodation for single people and families that are facing homelessness.

We can offer a number of incentives to landlords including deposit Bonds, Tenancy Agreements, fast tracking Housing Benefit, subscription to the Guild of Residential landlords, rent in advance (if your property is within the North of the district) and ongoing support and advice during the tenancy. We are also able to ask Liberata to pay the Housing Benefit direct to the landlord in many cases.

Also I am pleased to announce that as of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2009 we will have our own dedicated Housing Benefit Officer to deal with our claims and queries but this service will only be available to landlords that specifically consider our clients.

We are situated in Somerset House and will shortly have a landlord information area and drop-in to enable landlords to discuss tenancy issues.

For further information I can be contacted on 01934 426271 or email [helen.boyd@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:helen.boyd@n-somerset.gov.uk).



## Runaway Tenants

New figures have revealed a boost in tenants abandoning their properties to avoid paying rent.

Figures were released by the Letting Protection Service (LPS), show that the numbers of landlords claiming for lost rent has soared in the last year.

In January 2008, 218 landlords claimed for lost rent, yet in January 2009 the numbers had increased dramatically to 1,117. This comes as a warning to new landlords to the buy to let market. The landlords in these figures have been careful by taking out insurance on their rent. However there may be many landlords that have not. So be cautious and get your rent insured.

## Tenancy Deposit Warning

A recent warning to landlords has come about from the RLA regarding agents using the Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS). They urged landlords to check their agents after hearing that the TDS is only open to 'regulated' agents. This means agents that are members of RICS, NAEA, ARLA or NALS.

Landlords need to ensure that their agents use these initials and confirm that they are entitled to do so if they use the TDS.

A spokesperson from RLA said: 'It is landlords who, in law, are ultimately responsible for tenancy deposit protection. That is why it is important that you check out any agent who says they belong to the TDS.'



# Your Letters



Please send us your letters! Write or email to: **Caroline Crossley, Private Rented Housing, North Somerset Council, PO Box 144, Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1HB** or [caroline.crossley@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.crossley@n-somerset.gov.uk)

Dear Caroline,

I own several Houses in Multiple Occupation and have recently been told that I should be doing fire safety risk assessments for these properties. I am unsure on what this means. What do I need to do?

**Mr B Turner, Weston-super-Mare**

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 came into force in October 2006. These changes in fire safety regulations will have a big impact on landlords with non-domestic (commercial) properties and HMOs. There are also fire safety obligations under the Housing Act 2004 which affect landlords of single lettings.

Under the new rules, the 'responsible person' usually the owner is obliged to carry out an annual fire risk assessment. However not all HMOs are required to do a Fire Risk Assessment.

In a HMO this would involve identifying all fire related hazards within the property and common areas. It would need to identify the levels of risk; the controlled measures put in place and also take into account things like fire alarms, fire extinguisher checks and servicing. Additionally electrical and gas safety checks, fire doors, escape routes etc.

For further information and guidance, please contact Avon Fire Brigade on 01179 262061 or visit their website [www.avonfire.gov.uk](http://www.avonfire.gov.uk)

Hello,

I am thinking of buying a property which I intend on renting to five students keen to live in the area for educational purposes. I have been told by a friend that I need a HMO licence? I am new to this industry; please could you tell me more?

**Mrs Andrews, Clevedon**

Your friend is correct, you will need to have a HMO licence if the property meets the following criteria; if the property is three or more storeys, has any shared facilities i.e. bathroom, kitchen or WC and five or more people (unrelated) are living in the property as their main home. Please contact the Private Rented Housing Team for further advice and information.

## TAKE A BREAK

Take a minute to fill out our word search

C	B	Q	R	P	R	I	V	A	T	E	R	E	N	T	E	D
O	H	A	B	G	J	K	S	C	A	F	J	Q	U	R	F	J
S	L	M	W	S	G	C	F	C	A	H	E	D	H	D	W	H
U	H	O	U	S	I	N	G	R	E	S	O	U	R	C	E	I
D	D	Y	W	K	S	M	Y	E	B	J	F	Y	J	X	R	F
H	L	K	Y	R	C	E	I	D	E	K	I	T	Y	Z	I	E
F	O	R	U	M	X	Q	M	I	C	P	D	E	F	X	D	C
S	D	U	G	C	T	H	P	T	E	W	X	F	K	W	U	R
Q	H	W	B	Q	I	T	L	A	J	T	P	A	V	G	V	O
K	Z	E	R	H	E	W	U	T	Q	G	M	S	L	N	T	H
G	Y	W	X	F	L	J	S	I	B	L	L	E	P	I	I	C
N	X	B	G	R	T	G	Z	O	H	V	M	R	F	S	J	E
I	Q	F	Z	G	U	J	F	N	E	C	B	I	G	N	N	M
S	W	X	L	B	W	V	U	Z	A	C	Z	F	H	E	D	O
U	K	G	D	Q	S	T	C	D	Z	V	X	T	J	C	M	H
O	K	E	L	R	I	J	U	Q	T	H	R	M	F	I	P	R
H	B	J	G	L	A	N	D	L	O	R	D	E	D	L	F	P

Can you find these words?

PRIVATE RENTED  
FORUM  
ACCREDITATION  
HOUSING  
LICENSING  
BED BUGS  
FIRE SAFETY  
HOMECHOICE  
HOUSING RESOURCE  
LANDLORD

# Goodbye Corgi, Hello Gas Safe Register

## WHAT is Gas Safety Register?

Gas Safe Register is the new hallmark for gas safety in Great Britain. From 1 April 2009, Gas Safe Register replaces the CORGI gas registration as the official gas body.

By law, only Gas Safe registered engineers should carry out work on gas appliances or installations in your property.

## WHY do I need to use a Gas Safe registered engineer?

This is all about safety. To make sure that gas appliances such as boilers, fires, ovens and hobs are installed, maintained and serviced safely, you should employ a Gas Safe registered engineer to carry out the work.

You should not allow anyone other than a Gas Safe engineer to work in your property, as this could mean putting lives at risk.

## HOW do I find a Gas Safe registered engineer?

Finding a Gas Safe registered engineer is easy. All registered engineers are listed on the Gas Safe website. Visit [www.GasSafeRegister.co.uk](http://www.GasSafeRegister.co.uk) or call 0800 408 5500.



## Useful contacts:

### Private Rented Housing Team:

(01934) 426 786

### Housing Renewals Team:

(01934) 426 885

### Housing Options Team:

(01934) 426 484

### Housing Advice Team:

(01934) 426 249

### Enabling Team:

(01934) 426 755

### Planning:

(01275) 884 292

### Building Control:

(01275) 888 685

### Liberata:

(01934) 888 136

### WDGB:

(01934) 617 617

### Landlords Association:

0845 345 57 52

### Private Sector Housing Forum:

(01934) 426 847

## National organisations:

### Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA):

0845 345 57 52 [www.arla.co.uk](http://www.arla.co.uk)

### Gas Safe Register: 0800 408 5500

[www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

### TRANSCO: 0192 665 30 00

[www.nationalgrid.com](http://www.nationalgrid.com)

### Guild of Residential Landlords:

0870 350 33 45 [www.allforlandlords.com](http://www.allforlandlords.com)



## IN THE NEXT ISSUE ...

Interview with Landlords on the North Somerset Property Accreditation Scheme;

Empty Homes;

Who are you?... Interview with a member from North Somerset Councils Housing Service

And much, much more!