

Minutes: Property Licensing Panel

Council Attendees: Michael Cooper, Laura Malin, Anne Haxell, Daniel Harvey and Chloe Burden

External Attendees: Julie Hogbin, Dean Webster, Connie Cullen (SHELTER), Marion Money (NLA) and Roland Haigh (Citizens Advice Bureau)

Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Overview of the schemes and the consultation
3. Consultation results
4. Fees, Costs and Accreditation
5. Benefits
6. Standards and conditions
7. Exemptions
8. General discussion
9. Next steps

Overview of licensing schemes

- Overview of additional licensing scheme and the selective licensing scheme.

Consultation/consultation results

- Overview given of the work done to promote the consultation and discussion of the consultation results.
- Discussion around the number of responses to the consultation. Whilst the number of responses is lower than other councils, as a proportion of the properties to be licensed it is similar.

Fees, costs and accreditation

- List of organisations landlords need to be accredited with, will be reviewed as some may be on the list that do not offer accreditation courses in relation to property management.
- Suggestion that when publicising the schemes to break it down to the weekly or monthly costs to show that it will not be a huge burden on landlords. The council should also heavily promote the early bird scheme to ensure that there is a good uptake and landlords do not miss out.

Benefits of the scheme

- Various suggestions on benefits that could be given to landlords who are part of the scheme. The council will look into the possibility of discounted Energy Performance Certificates, Fire Risk Assessments, Gas Safety Certificates and Inventory services.

- The ASB Team said that if landlords are having issues with ASB, then they would like to be made aware so that they can offer assistance.

Conditions and Standards

- Suggestion made to separate out conditions for selective licensed properties and HMOs but the council has found that this does not work so have found this is the best way.
- Overcrowding in properties was discussed, the council investigates any reports that it receives and as a range of powers that it can use to deal with it. All selective licensed properties will be inspected during the 5 year duration of the scheme, which will help to identify any overcrowded properties.

Exemptions

- Due to the responses received during the consultation Temporary Accommodation used by the council will not be exempt from selective licensing.

General Discussion

- Council agreed to publish a timeframe of when properties will be inspected.
- Shelter said that we can take any documents we produce to a server user group which they hold monthly and they can review them and give feedback and suggest changes that will make them easier to understand.
- Enforcement of the scheme was discussed and the council said that it intends to use all of the powers available to it. The enforcement policy is being reviewed and the intention is to use Civil Penalty Notices where landlords could be charged up to £30,000 for not licensing their properties and failing to comply with notices served by the council.

Concern was expressed that not all properties will be inspected and that some rogue landlords will avoid licensing. All properties in the selective licensing areas will be inspected which should mean that all licensable properties are found.

- Tenants should be made aware of their responsibilities but also what their rights. The council will supply an information sheet that landlords can complete which will have their contact details and details of the refuse collection, amongst other things.
- Make it clear to the tenants and the landlords that the law stands first and these standards and conditional are additional to them.
- The issues of beds in sheds was raised, it is not a problem in Bexley but if they were reported to the council then they would be investigated and appropriate action taken.
- Update provided on the online form and changes to it suggested that will be taken forward.

NEXT STEPS

- Full report will be put together and put to full council to vote on in mid-April.

Agreed points to take forward:

- Temporary accommodation used by the council will be subject to selective licensing.
- Review the benefits of the scheme to landlords and consider the possibility of offering discounted Energy Performance Certificates, Fire Risk Assessments, Gas Safety Certificates and Inventory services.
- Put together a timeframe for inspections of properties.
- Consider changes to the online application form that we are putting together.
- Review the list of organisations that landlords must be accredited with.
- Explore the possibility of a fact sheet for tenants that will explain their rights and liabilities.