10/11/2020



Minutes - Meeting of the Agents Liaison Group

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## Introductions

The meeting organised in the form of an online conference took place on 10th November at 18:00.

The participants introduced themselves.

### Participants:

**Agents and Partners:**

**Adam Kingswood** Kingswood Residential

**Dan Walker** CPWalker and Son

**David Thomas** Liberty Gate

**Emma White** B&W Lettings

**Terry Galloway** **Norman Galloway lettings**

**Owen Cosslett**, Oak Student Letts

**Mike Dawson**, Woo Properties Ltd

**Luke Pritchet**, FHP Living Ltd

**Jakub Pietruszewski**, Unipol

**Faye Swanwick**, DASH

**Giles Inman**, EMPO

**Apologies:** **Gaynor Cunningham**

**Council representatives:**

**Pete Mitchell,** Head of Safer Housing and ASB (meeting chair)

**Cllr Linda Woodings**, Portfolio Holder

**David Hobbs**, Selective Licensing Manager

**Julie Liversidge** - Operations Manager

**Matthew Turner** –Principal Data Analyst

**Paul Greevy**, Homelessness Prevention **Graham Demax**, Housing Partnership Manag.

**Helen Foster** NPRAS

**Louise Johnson** Housing Aid

**Robert Skwierawski** (minutes and actions)

**Lisa Allison** - Communications and Marketing

## Updated licence conditions & Block license update

**Julie Liversidge** explained briefly the processing of licence applications. After draft licence is issued there is a 14 day representation period which is a good chance to discuss any concerns landlords may have with the council, landlords are encouraged to make representations, in case of any disputes not being resolved to the landlords satisfaction they may still want to appeal to the First Tier Tribunal.

Some licence conditions have been recently updated due to changes in legislation and following feedback from landlords.

PAT testing, has been removed but landlords will still be required in a condition to test and inspect electrical equipment they provide and may be required upon request to provide a declaration in regards to its safety.

The council has extended the time to response to our queries from 7 to 28 days in some conditions. The wording ‘at all times’ removed from all the conditions

Discretionary conditions (extra conditions) are sometimes added to the licence . So it is recommended that landlords always check and read their licence conditions

When a final licence is issued, there is still a time period of 28 days to make an appeal to the first tier tribunal.

Once the final licence issued the only way to change personal data present in the document is to apply for a Variation. There is no charge for a variation.

**Action**: Agents have requested that any changes to licensing process should be communicated on the website and additionally in the newsletter.

**David Hobbs** reminded that in relation to selective licensing we introduced block licenses for building containing multiple flats

**Julie** presented a new design of our website. There are more services being introduced.

At the bottom of the home screen there is a Housing tab where in the option: Private Rented Accommodation – Private Sector Landlords and Tenants. You can find there minutes and updates of liaison groups meetings.

## Report It services and the complaints process

On the Nottingham City Council website you can report a problem here<https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/reportit> it is possible to report any housing problems and other issues related to neighbourhood



**David Thomas** asked if the cases submitted through Report It are monitored daily. He received the explanation that the system picks up a report and directs it to a relevant team. The Team logs the report and starts enquiry. Depending on a report the case can be dealt with by HMO, Community Protection Officers, Licensing Team, etc. It is not possible to define time frame for the reaction, all depends on a kind of the case. When the report concerns a property having a licence, first the CPO pay a visit to the tenants and try to resolve the issue if it is regards to ASB, waste etc. CPO can advise, warn, and issue a fine when necessary to the tenants. The licensing teams will then contact the licence holder and may later inspects the property..

**Adam Kingswood** said that in his case the automatic response gave information about the action to be taken within 10 days, however it was not happening. He suggested that since we provide a particular time frame for an issue to be dealt with, we should stick to this. **David Thomas** noticed that the system must be reliable if we want people to use it and trust it.

When **Julie** suggested contacting the police in urgent situations, **David Thomas** reiterated that we should not put anti –social behaviour as one of the options to report, then.

**Action**: **Pete Mitchell** agreed to verify response time and information provided, possibly update time frame provided

## Landlords library of documents

In Library section there are useful documents presented, like:

* Landlords ASB guide
* Unipol guides to new homes, mostly for students
* Fire Safety at home
* Damp, mould and condensation issues
* Landlord Training – reference library
* Common reasons for applications being rejected and how to avoid this
* How to comply with licence conditions

Julie thanked for the feedback received for HMO planned outside inspections and the letter to go out to the landlords.

HMO Proposed Licence Fee Increase

. The group was informed that the council was due to increase all fees in April 2020, however only the selective licensing fee was taken forward. Due to the emerging pandemic Cllr Woodings and David Walker met and decided that the HMO fee would not be increased at that time as it was not fully signed off for introduction so the work was put on hold. This work was deferred until Autumn 2020 for a further review and it has been agree to go forward with the proposal to introduce a new fee from the 1st April 2021 for the HMO schemes of Mandatory and Additional licensing.

**Julie** explained how fees for the licences are calculated and

Draft proposals for the fee increase April 2021 are;

The accredited fee would increase to £1290. The standard fee would increase to £1450 and the less compliant fee would increase to £1850 if fully approved.

**Julie** explained that when fees were calculated in September 2018 we estimated from historical data that about 33% would be accredited applications. It turned out that there were more accredited applications received, about 50% . The scheme is not allowed to make a profit and we need to review fees to ensure the schemes full costs are covered by the fee and we have committed to do this every year.

We estimate that about 12% of the application are incorrectly claiming the accredited fee. Approximately 20 applications per month drop out of accreditation because either they withdraw, or do not comply with the accreditation code of practice. This creates extra administrative work where each accredited application has to be checked more thoroughly at different stages of the process. More checks are now made to ensure the application remains accredited and that the correct fee is collected and this extra work was not originally costed for in 2018 review, hence the fee is proposed to increase.

The Council follows the Open for Business government guidance and also benchmark on other cities with the most representative being Oxford and Bristol.

Action: Lisa to put a document about fees calculation on a website to keep transparency.

**Owen Cosslett** did not agree that the fees should go up. He said the licensing is mostly technological process – a work on computers. The council gained experienced and the process should be more efficient now.

**Julie** said that *Civica*, the system the Council uses system is at least 15 year old and is end of life and the Council is currently in the procurement process looking for a replacement system..

**Owen** This information proved to be controversial for the agents – there are significant fees paid by them and they would expect in return our efficiency.

**Pete** said that the system is linked with other council activities therefore changing it is not an easy process, however it is in the plans.

**David Thomas** noticed that accredited landlords spend more to keep the properties in better standard therefore we should appreciate that there are more and more of accredited property owners because they help to reach faster our goal which is to increase the standard of rented accommodation. Such landlords should be gratified by the council. Unaccredited landlords only should have a rise and cover extra costs.

**Linda Cobb** added that DASH will have an online portal to streamline the accreditation.

**David Thomas** said that if a property is managed by accredited agency, there should be less checking.

**Julie** said that unfortunately accredited properties are not always up to standard and the Council still has to inspect accredited properties to check compliance. .

**Action**: consider diversification of fee rise for accredited and non-accredited landlords so that the costs are carried more by non-accredited group – Pete Mitchell

## NPRAS – who, what, and why

**Helen Foster** gave a presentation about NPRAS

Nottingham Private Rented Assistance Scheme has been in service for 20 years now. Recently it was expanded to include homelessness response.

It is increasingly difficult to find social housing for people, more and more eviction notices from private rented accommodation and people becoming homeless

NPRAS supports landlords, agents, and tenants

NPRAS helps homeless people to find the accommodation, it matches landlords and potential tenants, provides negotiations, helps in obtaining required documents, assists in agreement preparation

Pays deposit and / or bonds help with benefit claims for tenants

Service are free of charge.

For landlords NPRAS acts in a similar way as an estate agency managing a property but the services are free of charge. The services comprise:

* Deposit assurance
* Inventory
* Viewings
* Tenancy preparation and sign up with documents

For tenants:

* Help with direct payments and welfare benefits
* Prevention from eviction protocol
* Rent arrears
* Mediations
* Last financial year NPRAS homed 331 people

For the landlords NPRAS additionally offers Tenancy Management service for £35 per month. The service includes most of the things that a letting agent would do, including: inspections, gas safety inspections, rent collection, check outs, repairs arrangement

This services, however, comprises only a few properties and is supposed to develop in the future.

The contact to NPRAS is 01158761644 [NPRAS@nottinghamcity.gov.uk](mailto:NPRAS@nottinghamcity.gov.uk)

Action point organise a separate meeting with Helen from NPRAS

Update on JAIT (Joint Authority Inspection Team) and MORB (Multiple Occupancy Residential Buildings)

Postponed till next meeting

## My Property look up and enforcement pages and Private Rented Housing webpages

**Matthew Turner**, council data analyst presented the functionality the council new website My Property will have. It will be possible to see the status of a property after providing the address, not only if it already has a licence, but if a licence has been applied for.



**Lisa Allison** said that there will be a section about enforcement action. Data will be without addresses and names because of GDPR regulations but it will show prosecutions, financial penalties, repayment, and all the work done by enforcement team. It will describe by dates particular offences and penalties imposed. The website will show how we tackle bad landlords.

The participants were asked to provide feedback. Suggests ides for discussion at the next meeting, describe any areas for the council work improvement. All the suggestions and issues to be directed to [robert.skwierawski@nottinghamcity.gov.uk](mailto:robert.skwierawski@nottinghamcity.gov.uk)

## AOB

**David Thomas** suggested that there should be more transparency about the scheme, positive results that we can articulate to the landlords that the money they spend brings positive results. He also said that we as a collective should invent new actions to tackle homelessness

**Helen Foster** promised cooperation with agents (already mentioned in an action point)

**Adam Kingswood** said about how difficult for landlords is the process of wheelie bin replacement and good condition of the bin is crucial to keep the city tidy

**Cllr Woodings** said that we currently work on winter measures for: rough sleepers, and housing aid people. Homelessness meetings are every Wednesday.

**Action**: Meeting in relation to homelessness with NPRAS, and Cllr Woodings

Suggestion that MAF meeting should last 2 hours, and start possibly at 17:00