

Good Landlord and Agent Scheme Newsletter

Winter 2013



Universal Credit & Direct Payment

It has been announced that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will work with social landlords to identify tenants who should be exempt from receiving direct payments and when action will be taken if tenants fall into arrears.

Three levels of protection will exist:

1. Decisions about whether tenants should receive direct payments will be made in collaboration with social landlords
2. If arrears build up to the equivalent of one month's rent the decision to make direct payments will be reviewed
3. If arrears reach the equivalent of two months' rent, the claimant will have housing payments switched to the landlord, or managed payments

The key to making direct payments work

will be the DWP'S on-going collaboration with landlords, but they are determined that managed rent payments should not be a permanent solution. Once arrears have been paid, they will look to return tenants to direct payments, with the right support in place.

Once arrears have been cleared, the DWP will work with landlords to return tenants to direct payments. In most cases, following the tenant being offered budgeting support, they will return to direct payments within 6 months of the arrears being paid off.

It is expected that this will cause more cases to revert to payment to landlord as tenants struggle to make up the additional amount that they are required to pay. These safeguards were developed following findings from the Direct Payment Demonstration Projects that are currently running in 6 areas across Britain.

As a direct result of the Demonstration Projects, the DWP recognises the need for organisational adjustments to meet the challenges of welfare reform, developing new rent collection/arrears and advisory processes and structures.

However they do retain concerns about how tenants will manage direct payment under Universal Credit when the wider and cumulative impacts of welfare reform changes begin to impact.

For more information visit
www.gov.uk

Benefit Cap

From April 2013 some tenants of working age saw their housing benefit cut if they received a high level of state welfare benefits. The cap is applied to the combined income from the included benefits and will be deducted from any Housing Benefit due.

Some households will see their housing benefit only partially reduced. The cap is going to be set at these levels:

- £500 per week for couples (with or without children) and lone parents
- £350 per week for single adults

In Burnley there are currently 20 families affected by the benefit cap, although some are now no longer claiming housing benefit.

Bedroom Tax

From April 2013 Local Housing Allowance size criteria rules were introduced into the social rented sector for working age claimants. Those of working age who are living in the social rented sector and were under occupied have had their housing benefit reduced:

- Those with 1 spare bedroom have their maximum rent reduced by 14%. In Burnley 665 customers are affected.
- Those with 2 or more spare bedrooms have it reduced by 25%. In Burnley 180 customers are affected.

The way that the bedroom tax is calculated is based on the number of qualifying bedrooms not on the number of bedrooms in the property.

Social Fund Changes

From April 2013, the Department for Work and Pensions crisis loans and community care grants were abolished.

From that date, within Lancashire, a new local scheme was established called the Care and Urgent needs Support Scheme. The new scheme is there to support vulnerable people in financial need. This might be to allow someone to live independently or to deal with a particular crisis. To be eligible for the scheme, you must live in the area covered by Lancashire County Council and be aged 16 or over, on a low income, leaving care, needing support to stay in the community, experiencing exceptional pressure or in urgent need of help following a disaster such as loss of money.

Reducing Re-Offending across Pennine Districts

In September Sam McConnell, Burnley Council's Community Safety Manager gave a presentation to the Landlord Evening about reducing re-offending.

The presentation explained how reducing re-offending is a strategic priority for all three Pennine Districts, Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale. To try and prevent individuals from re-offending there are a number of "pathways" that are focused upon, one being accommodation. It was highlighted that the three Pennine Districts have developed an Accommodation Panel whose aim is to locate prior to release from custody suitable properties for offenders, in addition the panel will consider logistical requirements such as basic furniture, setting up payments etc. as part of the exit from custody.

Working closely with the prison service in particular Forest Bank those in custody will also receive advice, support etc. regarding money and tenancy management to give them the best chance of maintaining a tenancy in a reasonable manner.

The key to the project is the availability of suitable accommodation and the landlord forum was presented with details of the "offer" for those landlords, who chose to work with members of the accommodation panel, to try and identify suitable accommodation for offenders on release.

The changes to the benefits system have complicated an already difficult situation and it was explained that as part of the "offer" there could not be any additional payment for rent above that set by housing benefit, but the landlord would be supported and communicated with as part of the initiative.

The request made on the night was for those landlords interested in discussing the "offer" further, including dual tenancies to make up for rental shortfall and management with guaranteed rent to contact Sam McConnell on 01282 477136 to discuss those options in greater detail, or to discuss any ideas associated with reducing reoffending.

As a consequence of the presentation a number of landlords have already expressed an interest in the initiative.

'Everyone has the right to a life free from abuse and violence, or the threat of violence. Our vision is of a Burnley that is a safe and harmonious place for residents, where there is no tolerance of violence or abuse'

Burnley Community Safety Partnership Vision

How can we help you to keep your tenants safe?

Being assaulted, sexually abused, threatened or harassed by someone you know or live with is just as much a crime as violence from a stranger, and is often more dangerous. Domestic violence accounts for up to 25% of all reported violent crime in Burnley, and is treated very seriously by the Police and the Courts.

As a landlord you may see signs of a tenant living with domestic violence such as

damage to the property e.g. 'punch' marks/ holes on internal doors or walls; or a tenant may tell you that they are being harassed by an ex-partner, who may be causing damage to the property e.g. kicking external doors/ breaking windows.

Burnley SafeNet Domestic Abuse Helpline & Community Outreach Service; can help keep your tenant safe, including; by helping your tenant gain legal advice to exclude

the offender from the property; and/or by changing the locks and fitting security improvements to the property such as a home panic alarm or security camera.

If you suspect that someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse or violence, you can ring the Burnley SafeNet Domestic Abuse Helpline confidentially, to find out what help is available. Burnley SafeNet: 07866 510 728, (Mon - Fri, 10am - 5pm)

In case of an emergency always ring 999

Gas Safety and the Gas Safe Register

The Gas Safe Register is the official list of gas engineers who are qualified to work safely and legally on gas appliances. By law, all gas engineers must be on the Gas Safe Register (which replaced CORGI). Only use a Gas Safe registered engineer to fit, fix or service your appliances and always check the engineer's Gas Safe Register ID card.

Landlords are legally responsible for the safety of their tenants. Landlords should make sure maintenance and annual safety checks on gas appliances are carried out by a Gas Safe registered engineer. By law landlords must make sure:

- Pipe-work, appliances and flues provided for tenants are maintained in a safe condition
- That maintenance and annual safety checks are carried out by an engineer who's Gas Safe Register
- A gas safety record is provided to the tenant within 28 days of completing the check or to any new tenant before they move in
- That all appliances and flues that they provide for tenants use have an annual safety check
- All gas equipment (including any appliance left by a previous tenant) is safe or otherwise removed before re-letting
- They keep a copy of the gas safety record for 2 years

Before any gas work is carried out always check the engineers ID card and make sure the engineer is qualified for the work you need doing. Encourage your tenants to do the same.

For more information and to find and check an engineer go to www.gassaferegister.co.uk or call 0800 408 5500.

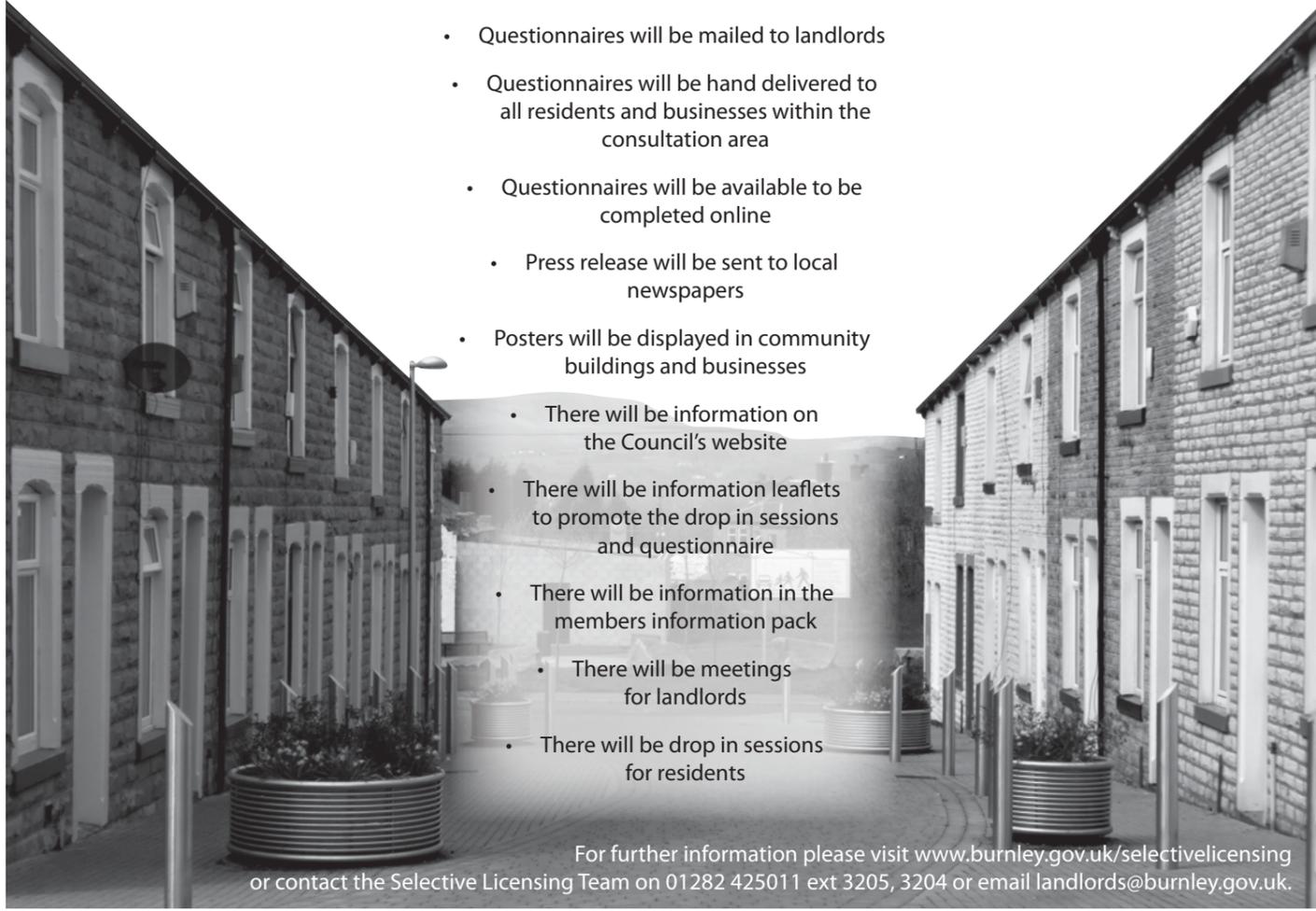


Selective Licencing

The Trinity Selective Licencing Area is continuing for a further 5 years.

On the 14th October 2013 the Council started a 12 week consultation period to ask residents and landlords their view on introducing a selective licencing area in the Queensgate/Duke Bar and Gannow areas of the Town. During the consultation:

- Questionnaires will be mailed to landlords
- Questionnaires will be hand delivered to all residents and businesses within the consultation area
- Questionnaires will be available to be completed online
- Press release will be sent to local newspapers
- Posters will be displayed in community buildings and businesses
- There will be information on the Council's website
- There will be information leaflets to promote the drop in sessions and questionnaire
- There will be information in the members information pack
- There will be meetings for landlords
- There will be drop in sessions for residents



For further information please visit www.burnley.gov.uk/selectivelicensing or contact the Selective Licencing Team on 01282 425011 ext 3205, 3204 or email landlords@burnley.gov.uk.



Advertising your property

Did you know that one of the benefits of being accredited is that you can advertise your Property to-let on the Council's website?

All you need to do is download a property marketing form from burnley.gov.uk/ accreditation provide a photo and we will arrange for it to be advertised. When new properties are put on the site we also notify our colleagues in Housing Advice that a property of an accredited landlord is available.

Heating Rebate Scheme

Once again the Heating Rebate Scheme is available to Burnley residents and landlords with tenanted properties. There is a grant available of either £300 or £500 towards the cost of installing an energy efficient replacement boiler (depending on the tenant's circumstances). For properties that have never had a central heating system a grant of £1000 is available towards the cost of installing a central heating system. For an application form please contact 425011 ext. 3192 or email kcotham@burnley.gov.uk

Empty Homes Update

Landlords who own a property that has been vacant for six months or more may be eligible for an Empty Home Loan from Burnley Council to bring the property back in to use. To be eligible the property must be in one of the three designated areas of Brennand St, Gannow Lane or Trinity (for more detailed information on the areas visit www.burnley.gov.uk). The property must also require remedial work in order to bring it back in to use. The maximum amount of the loan is £20,000 and the landlord does not have to match fund the amount borrowed. The loan is interest free and the repayment term is a maximum of ten years. For more information contact the Asfan Khan on 01282 425011 ext 3195 or email akhan@burnley.gov.uk

The Immigration Bill and Private Landlords

On the 10th October 2013 the Government announced the Immigration Bill and subject to the Parliamentary progress it should be introduced in the spring of 2014. The Bill included making it more difficult for illegal immigrants to live in the UK. One way is by requiring private landlords to check the immigration status of their tenants, to prevent those with no right to live in the UK from accessing private rented housing.

'Working towards decent homes for all'

The Good Landlord and Agent Scheme is a partnership between Burnley Council, private sector landlords and managing agents.

Other partners include:

- Homesure
- Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service

The Good Landlord and Agent Scheme

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