

Housing Services Newsletter



Issue 5

March 2007

This Newsletter is designed for people on the Isle of Wight Housing Register. We hope that you find it useful and would welcome any feedback that you may have. Please feel free to write to us at the address on the back page with any suggestions.

Inside this issue:

New Head of Housing Joins Island Team

Housing Register Review

2 It is great to be able to welcome you to the latest edition of the Housing Services newsletter. As I write this piece it is the start of my tenth week in my new job as Head of Housing at the Isle of Wight Council, and I am delighted and honoured to have been offered the opportunity to work in such a beautiful part of the world.

Housing Allocations and Housing Benefit

3

New Tenancy Deposit Scheme

4 Although I have not been here long I have worked with my new colleagues long enough and seen enough of the Island to know that there are some real housing issues that need to be tackled. I am acutely aware that for many people who approach the Council for housing assistance finding a safe, affordable home in the place where they want to live is one of the biggest problems they have to face.

Homeless Statistics

5

Housing Renewal Section - Info for Tenants

6 Our new Housing Strategy will be published soon and that will contain full details of these housing issues and a wide range of measures designed to have a positive impact on the housing situation on the Island.

Money Saving Initiatives that help the environment

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Homeless Prevention and Contact Details

8 I hope you find this newsletter and all of the information in it useful. Over the coming weeks and months I and the team look forward to meeting and working with some of you. If you feel that you need any additional information on anything highlighted in this newsletter please contact us.



Mark Howell, Head of Housing Services

New Structure at Housing Services

Last year we introduced our new Homeless Prevention and Housing Options teams in our offices at 7 High Street, Newport. Housing Options Advisors are the first point of contact, and provide help and advice for people threatened with homelessness, or needing assistance with housing issues. They provide informed choices about accommodation options, and work with the Homeless Prevention Officers to reduce the risk of people becoming homeless, and find solutions to housing problems.

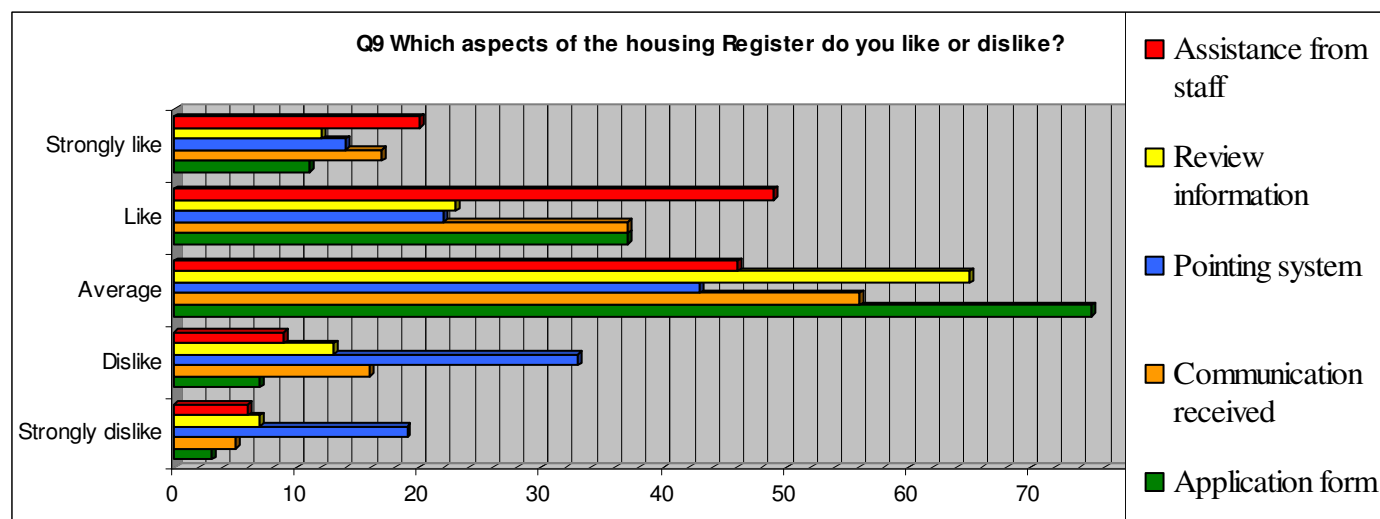
We have already started to see a difference in terms of the number of homelessness cases that we are dealing with and feel that this new way of working is making a real difference to people with housing issues on the Island.

Housing Register Review

In August 2006 we undertook a review of the Housing Register by sending a questionnaire to a random 10% of applicants listed on the Island Housing Register, and met with register applicants, housing association residents, supported housing providers and other agencies.

The review concentrated on the operation of the housing register, an assessment of the points system and alternative approaches to allocations.

The following chart shows the results from one of the questions. In total 131 people responded and Mr J of Ryde won the £25 voucher for returning a completed form.



From this review we found:-

- 1) Confusion about the operation and management of the register from applicants and professionals.
- 2) Frustrations with the administrative requirements and processes, and as a result, some applicants failure to stay on the housing register.
- 3) A view from a significant number of applicants that the pointing system is not fair. Some people felt that insufficient priority was given to Island residents and others felt that pointing did not reflect housing need.
- 4) The register does not effectively deal with helping people move on from interim/ temporary accommodation.
- 5) Assistance from staff was considered to be good.

To tackle points 1, 3 and 4, a new and simpler allocations system is being developed and the establishment of the housing options team is intended to overcome a number of the issues raised in point 2.

Some early conclusions show:-

- 1) Significantly increasing points for island residency has not in overall terms affected the allocation of properties to those with island residency. Lettings to those people who did not live on the Island immediately before being allocated a property has remained steady over the last 3 years at around 2.8% of all lettings. Those without Island residency were usually previous residents returning to the Island or people wishing to return to give or receive support to family members.
- 2) Although the experiences of individual households varies significantly, in general terms those accepted as statutorily homeless have not been detrimentally affected by the points change.
- 3) Some groups appear to have been disadvantaged by the points review and taking all the responses into account the survey has given reason for the Council and Housing Association partners to review the allocation policy.

Please remember:-

If we send you a Housing Register review form, please return it within the time period given, or your application WILL be cancelled.

Housing Allocations 01 January 2006 - 31 December 2006

Between 1 January 2006 and 31 December 2006 there were 427 lettings made through the three main Housing Associations. 173 of these went to households who the Council had accepted as homeless and 58 were to transfer applicants, although not all of the housing associations allocate transfers to their own tenants through the register.

	Cowes	East Cowes	Newport	Ryde	Wootton	St Helens	Bembridge	Brading	Lake	Sandown	Shanklin	Godshill	Ventnor	Wroxall	Freshwater	Totland	Yarmouth	Chale	Shorwell	Calbourne	Chillerton	TOTAL
Bedsit	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
1 bed	4	3	15	38	0	0	2	2	5	9	6	1	11	2	8	6	0	5	1	1	0	119
2 bed	6	4	17	47	0	0	3	3	2	25	9	2	12	1	14	3	2	0	0	0	1	150
3 bed	4	4	10	20	1	2	2	2	0	23	2	0	1	3	6	1	2	1	1	1	0	84
4 bed	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	9
5 bed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total general housing	14	12	44	109	1	2	7	7	7	62	18	3	25	6	28	10	4	7	2	2	1	368
Sheltered housing	12	4	14	13	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	3	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	59

There are more than 4,800 applicants on our housing register and only about 400 properties become available to rent in any given year, so it's not hard to see how the demand for homes outstrips the supply.

We are trying to maximise the supply of new affordable and low cost homes across the Island and by the end of the year should have seen 158 new homes built. As we told you last year, we are working, with our partners, to introduce a choice based letting system that will not only offer applicants a choice of the homes that they bid to live in but should simplify the allocations system we use.

Housing Benefit

Are you claiming Housing/Council Tax Benefit?

LETS MAKE OVERPAYMENTS A THING OF THE PAST! TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHANGES FAST! CALL US ON 01983 823950

Our promise to you:-

- We will keep your claim in payment
- Action your change within one week
- Advise you of your new entitlement quickly
- If we need more information we will tell you what we need and give you time to provide it

If you have just commenced employment or moved home you will be required to complete a form. On receipt of your telephone call we will ensure that these forms are sent to you immediately.

New Tenancy Deposit Scheme

From 06 April 2007 Part 6 of the Housing Act 2004 comes into force where a landlord or letting agent can only take a deposit from a tenant if that deposit is protected by a Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS)

Why has this been introduced

(TDS) aims to ensure good practice in deposit handling, so that when a tenant pays a deposit, and is entitled to get it back, they can be assured that this will happen. It also intends to encourage tenants and landlords to have in place, from the outset, clear agreement on the condition of the property by using inventories.

How can tenants find out if their deposit is protected after 6 April 2007?

After 6 April 2007, when you are signing a new tenancy agreement with your landlord, ask how your deposit will be protected. Your landlord must provide you with the contact details of the scheme protecting your deposit within 14 days of receiving a deposit.

How will this affect deposits paid for Assured Shorthold Tenancies which start before 6 April 2007?

The legislation will only apply to new deposits paid for Assured Shorthold Tenancies entered into on or after 6 April 2007. Any deposit paid before this date will not need to be safeguarded by a tenancy deposit scheme, or if a tenancy continues on a periodic basis with no new agreement. However, if a replacement tenancy is given the Tenancy Deposit Scheme will apply to the initial deposit that was paid prior to 6 April 2007.

The Government awarded contracts to three companies to run its tenancy deposit schemes::

1. The Deposit Protection Service (The DPS)

The only custodial deposit protection scheme – is free to use and open to all Landlords and Letting Agents. For more information, visit www.depositprotection.com or call 0870 707 1 707

2. Tenancy Deposit Solutions Ltd (TDSL)

This is a partnership between the National Landlords Association and Hamilton Fraser Insurance. This insurance-based tenancy deposit protection scheme enables landlords, either directly or through agents, to hold deposits. For more information, visit www.mydeposits.co.uk

3. The Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS) is an insurance-backed deposit protection and dispute resolution scheme run by The Dispute Service. The new scheme enables letting agents and landlords to hold deposits. For more information, visit www.tds.gb.com or call 0845 226 7837

What happens when there is a dispute over the return of the deposit?

Each scheme will contain an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service which is free of charge for landlords and tenants and aims to resolve disputes without resorting to the courts.

When must deposits be paid back?

When the landlord and tenant agree how the deposit should be returned, in full or in part, it must be paid back within ten days of the scheme being notified of the agreement between the landlord and tenant or notified of an ADR/court decision. The custodial scheme will not be able to return cash to tenants. It will return deposits electronically or via cheque. Landlords in insurance-based schemes can continue to give deposits back in cash.

What happens if a deposit has not been protected ?

Tenants can apply for a court order requiring the deposit to be safeguarded or the prescribed information to be given to him about the scheme in which the deposit is safeguarded. Where the court believes that the landlord has failed to comply with these requirements, or the deposit is not being held in an authorised scheme, the court **must** either order the landlord within 14 days of the making of the order to repay the deposit; or order the landlord to pay the deposit to the custodial scheme administrator. The court **must** also order the landlord to pay to the tenant three times the deposit amount within 14 days of the making of the order.

Under Tenancy Deposit Protection, the landlord is unable to regain possession of the property using the usual 'notice only grounds', if the deposit has not been safeguarded and the prescribed information passed onto the tenant within 14 days of the landlord receiving it.

Email tenancy.deposits@communities.gsi.gov.uk or telephone 0207 944 4400 for more information.

Homeless Statistics

CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE WHO WERE ACCEPTED AS HOMELESS

(1 JANUARY—31 DECEMBER)	2006	2005
Families with children and households with pregnant women	123	156
Elderly	2	22
Mental Illness	1	24
Physical Disability	9	18
16/17 year old	4	10
Young people leaving care	1	4
Fleeing violence	2	6
Having served in HM Forces	0	0
Having been in custody/on remand	0	1
Drug or alcohol dependency	0	0
Homeless in emergency	1	1
Other	1	0
Refugees/Asylum Seekers	0	0
TOTAL	144	242

REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS IN PERSONS WHO WERE ACCEPTED AS HOMELESS

(1 JANUARY—31 DECEMBER)	2006	2005
End of assured shorthold tenancy	41	69
Reason for loss of rented accommodation—other	15	30
Rent arrears	6	7
Mortgage arrears or repossession	2	6
Parents unable to accommodate	41	44
Other relatives or friends unable to accommodate	12	19
Relationship breakdown with partner (Non Violent)	8	20
Relationship breakdown with partner (Violent)	10	25
Violent breakdown with associated persons	2	3
Other forms of violence or harassment	2	2
Left institution or care	2	7
Other—homeless in emergency/abroad etc	3	10
TOTAL	144	242

These figures show we have reduced the number of people accepted as homeless by over 40% in the past year which is due to the combined efforts of housing staff who have been working with people to find solutions to their housing problems.

Families with children or pregnant women are the main category of people accepted as homeless in both years; with the main cause of homelessness being the ending of assured shorthold tenancies, and we are starting to look at new ways in which we might be able to work with private landlords to help widen the housing choices available to residents.

Advice Agencies

Law Centre—Exchange House, St Cross Lane, Newport Tel: 01983 524715

CAB—Exchange House, St Cross Lane, Newport Tel: 0845 120 2959

Frontline—Parklands, Park Road, Cowes Tel: 01983 291552

Housing Renewal Section - Information for Tenants

The Housing Act 2004 introduced the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) what is it?

HHSRS is a new risk assessment tool used to assess potential risks to the health and safety of occupants in all residential properties.

What has the HHSRS replaced?

HHSRS has replaced the Housing Fitness Standard, set out in the Housing Act 1985.

Why has the HHSRS been introduced?

The new assessment method focuses on the hazards that are most likely to be present in housing. Tackling these hazards will make more homes healthier and safer to live in. The Fitness Standard did not deal with, or dealt inadequately with, cold and falls for example.

How are dwellings assessed?

A risk assessment looks at the likelihood of an incident arising from the condition of the property and the likely harmful outcome. Where there are hazards, the assessment will show the presence of serious hazards (category 1) and other less serious hazards (category 2). To make an assessment, Local Authority Housing Renewal Officers will make reference to the HHSRS "Operating Guidance". During an inspection they may take notes for assessing the seriousness of any hazard.

Why assess whether something may be a hazard to elderly people or children if none are living there?

Local Authority Housing Renewal Officers won't necessarily know who is living in a property until they inspect. They are interested in the condition of the housing stock in their area and may want to ensure that housing is suitable for a wide range of potential occupants and/or visitors.

What are the most common category one hazards?

The most common hazards are cold, fire, falls and hot surfaces that could lead to burns or scalds.

What happens if a property is found to contain serious hazards?

The Local Authority has a duty to take the most appropriate action in relation to the hazard. Local Authorities are advised to try to deal with problems informally at first. Appropriate action could be to serve a notice for the landlord to carry out improvements to the property, for example to install insulation, or mend a leaking roof.

If it is considered the most appropriate action, Local Authorities can implement any of the following:

- A) Serve an improvement notice requiring remedial works (the most likely action)
- B) Make a prohibition order, which closes the whole or part of a dwelling or restricts the number of permitted occupants
- C) Serve a hazard awareness notice
- D) Take emergency remedial action
- E) Make a emergency prohibition Order
- f) Make a demolition Order
- g) Include the property in a clearance area

How quickly do improvements need to be made?

This is for the Authority to decide, often in consultation with the owner. But unless it is an emergency an owner cannot be made to begin work earlier than 28 days. An emergency would constitute the presence of a serious hazard and, in the Authority's view, an imminent risk of serious harm to the occupiers.

What are the penalties if the owner, landlord or managing agent fails to make improvements?

Landlords, owners or managing agents face fines of up to £5,000 for not complying with a statutory notice.

If it is not practical to make changes to a property, what is the solution?

This is at the Authority's discretion. If improvement of the property is not possible the Authority can allow the tenants to remain living there if they appear less vulnerable to a hazard. In other cases the Authority may have to prohibit or restrict occupation.

Where can I get more information about the HHSRS? www.communities.gov.uk/hhsrs

Money Saving Initiatives that help the environment

We have put together a list of money saving initiatives that could benefit you and help the environment.

Warm Front Scheme

If you need help paying for heating and insulation improvements in your privately owned or rented home you may be able to get money from the Government's warm front grants scheme if you are receiving income or disability related benefits. The package includes loft insulation, draught proofing, cavity wall insulation and hot water tank insulation as well as gas room heaters with thermostat controls, gas, electric or oil central heating, converting a solid-fuel open fire to a modern glass fronted fire and timer controls for electric space and water heaters. To find out if you are eligible please phone 0800 316 6011.

Fire Safety

Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service can undertake a free home fire risk check and work with you to develop a plan to get out alive and can provide free smoke alarms as necessary. Please call 01983 533834 for more info.

Ryde Warmer Homes

If you own your own home and have high heating bills Ryde Warmer Homes may be able to help you obtain grants to get a modern heating system and give you ideas of how to save money. For more information please call 01983 822282 or email ray@footprint-trust.co.uk

Overgrown Gardens

If you are no longer able to maintain your garden and cannot get anyone to assist you, there are two charitable organisations that might be able to help you. Needs and Seeds will only consider work in the Newport area and can be contacted on 07748 200164 and Not Just Lawns will consider work Islandwide and can be contacted on 01983 563833. (Not Just Lawns is operated by Not Just Enterprises, whose aim is to assist people with mental health difficulties to gain personal, social and work-based skills with a view to returning to the work environment. Not Just Lawns do charge for their service).

Saving Water

By installing an easy to fit Save-a-flush bag and you can save 1 litre of water each time (a third of all the water used in the home). Save-a-flush bags are free to Southern Water customers. To receive this bag please write to Southern Water, FREEPOST (BR 1500), Worthing, BN13 1BR or email flushsavers@southernwater.co.uk

Low energy light bulb offer

If you receive a qualifying benefit you could claim four FREE low energy light bulbs. This pack of bulbs contains 4 20W low energy light bulbs and could save you over £300 on your energy bill over their lifetime. If you want to claim your four FREE low energy light bulbs, send your name and address details together with details of which benefit you claim to Free Light Bulb Offer, Powergen, FREEPOST PO Box 7, M19 2HD

If you don't receive a qualifying benefit, you could save over 60% on the price of low energy light bulbs. A pack of two 11W bulbs for £8.50 (equivalent to 60W ordinary bulbs) or a pack of two 20W bulbs for £7.50 (equivalent to 100W ordinary bulbs). Contact 0845 456 1158 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

Southern Electric

Southern Electric have a special package called, energyplus Care, which offers qualifying customers up to 20% discount on their current fuel prices as well as offers such as a free fridge or a discounted fridge/freezer. You may qualify for energyplus Care if you spend over 10% of your total household income on your energy bills. They assess your eligibility using a simple questionnaire which is completed either over the phone or in person. You can apply by ringing 0800 622 838, 8am - 6pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 2pm on Saturdays.

Recycling

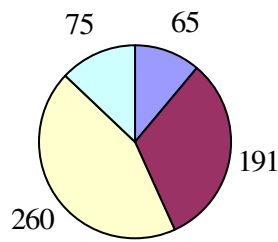
Island Waste Services will provide (free of charge) a 10 litre lidded bucket for the collection of organic kitchen waste (fruit and vegetable peelings, tea bags and coffee grounds, egg shells and left over cooked and uncooked food). The bucket will be collected weekly at the same time as your general refuse. They also provide a kerbside box for the collection of newspapers, stapled magazines, glass bottles, jars and textiles. This service operates on a fortnightly basis on the same day as your normal refuse. Please call 0800 328 3851 to obtain one.

Homeless Prevention

The rent deposit scheme has been running for four years in March, and has been a successful partnership between the Council and the Private Rented Sector. Over 437 families (up to 12 Feb 07) have been assisted to secure accommodation in the private sector over the past four years and it has been a valuable tool in helping to prevent homelessness. Rent deposit schemes are growing nationally as Local Authorities are increasingly looking to the private rented sector to help prevent homelessness.

An additional two Homeless Prevention Officers joined the team last year, bringing the total to three full time officers working in this busy section which dealt with 591 clients last year alone.

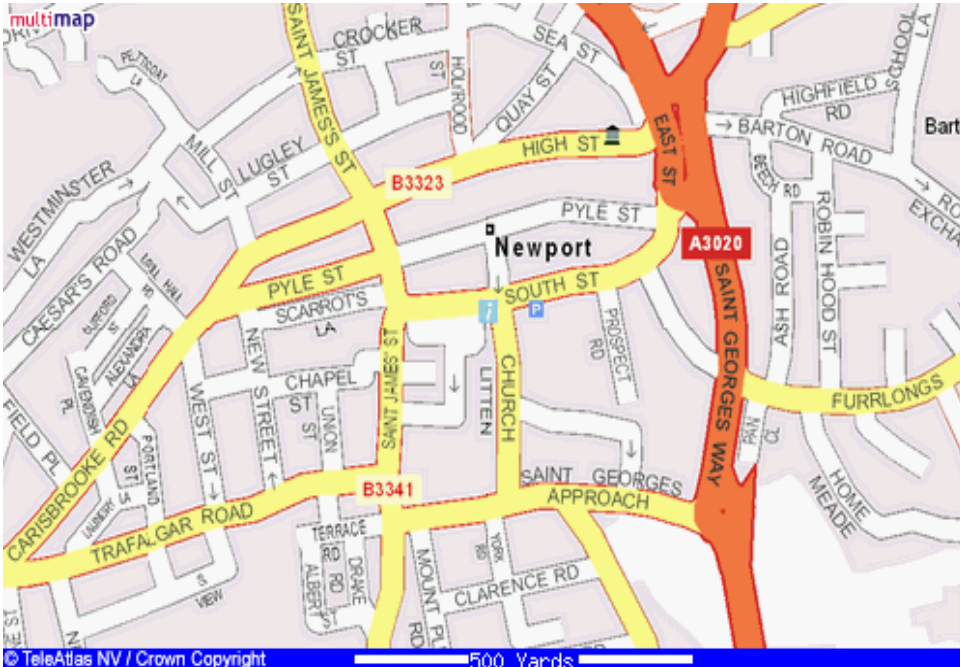
Outcomes of the 591 clients that homeless prevention dealt with in 2006



- Not prevented from becoming homeless
- Outcomes unknown
- Prevented from becoming homeless
- Unable to assist

Contacting Us

Housing Services is located in Newport opposite the main council building.



Opening Times

Monday	08:30 – 17:00
Tuesday	08:30 – 17:00
Wednesday	08:30 – 17:00
Thursday	08:30 – 17:00
Friday	08:30 – 16:30

For out of hours emergencies please call 01983 821105

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This newsletter is also available in Braille, on audio tape, in large print and in other languages.
For further details, please contact 821000.