

PRIVATE LANDLORDS NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO: 13

STRATEGIC HOUSING SERVICES

MAY 2009

GAS SAFETY IN GREAT BRITAIN IS CHANGING – WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

From the 1st April 2009 CORGI is replaced by the Gas Safe Register.

It remains a legal requirement for all landlords to have an annual safety check on all gas appliances and flues provided in a rental property. However, from 1st April 2009 a Gas Safe registered engineer, **not** a CORGI installer, must carry out the safety check.



For more information please visit www.GasSafeRegister.co.uk

LANDLORD FINED £30,000 FOR HOUSING & FIRE OFFENCES

The Private Sector Housing team at Herefordshire Council and the Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service took a joint prosecution at Hereford Magistrates Court in March 2009, against a Hereford landlord. He was fined over £30,000 for not licensing his House in Multiple Occupation (HMO), failing to comply with a Housing Emergency Prohibition Order for fire, under the 2004 Housing Act, and failing to carry out a proper fire risk assessment and four other fire safety offences under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Richard Gabb, Head of Strategic Housing Services said that "HMOs provide a valuable accommodation option and are an important part of the housing stock in Herefordshire. The licensing of HMOs should ensure healthy and safe housing. We want to encourage responsible landlords to invest in the sector and deter those who flout the law".

Herefordshire Council has one of the cheapest licensing fees in the country.

For more information on Licensing your HMO please contact The Private Sector Housing Team on (01432) 260746.



Working together for the people of Herefordshire

Come & Find Out More !! Herefordshire Private Landlords Event 2009

THURSDAY 25TH JUNE 2009
3.00 pm to 8.00 pm

*The annual Landlords Event will take place at
The Bishops Palace, off Broad Street,
Hereford HR4 9BL (by the Cathedral)*

*The Event is free & includes seminars for
landlords, covering issues such as: Legislation,
tenancy deposit protection, HMO licensing,
EPC's, eviction, harassment, changes to gas
safety, housing benefit the landlords
perspective & much more...*

*So come along and find out more about
private housing and what plans we have
to help support it.*

For further information please contact
Laura Ryan on (01432) 261905 or
lryan@herefordshire.gov.uk

CALLING ALL LICENSED LANDLORDS

There are waiting lists of tenants looking for shared accommodation in Herefordshire.

For more information please contact:

Jane Young, Accommodation Officer, HCT,
Folly Lane, Hereford. on (01432) 365319

or email youngj@hct.ac.uk

UK SHOULD CUT VAT URGENTLY TO HELP TACKLE EMPTY HOMES

"The UK Government should seize the opportunity presented by the vote on VAT reform on the 10th March 2009 and slash the 15% tax on repairs and renovation that encourages property owners to leave homes empty and penalises efforts to bring them back into use."



Herefordshire

This was the message from the Empty Homes Agency (EHA) on 11th March 2009, following the decision at the ECOFIN meeting of European Union finance ministers in Brussels yesterday to allow EU member states to charge VAT at 5% on home maintenance and repairs.

Henry Oliver, the EHA's Policy Advisor, commented:

"This is a fantastic first victory for the campaign to reform VAT that we and our partners in the Cut the VAT coalition² have been waging for well over a year now. For years the UK Government has cited EU rules as its excuse for not acting to cut the rate of VAT on repairs and renovation, so we're hoping to see a much more positive stance from the Government from now on."

HOUSE DOCTORS:

Tired of asking the same housing question and not getting a straight answer? Never fear, our resident House Doctors, Yarnold and O'Mahony are here to answer all your housing queries.

In this edition, they tackle tricky heating trivia and avail themselves of assistance



Q. A tenant is not happy about heating in one of my properties. I thought I only had to provide an electric socket for her to plug in a portable heater, but I've now been told this is no longer acceptable. Why has this changed and what do I need to do?

A. From 6th April 2006, the Housing Fitness Standard was repealed and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) introduced as the new method for assessing housing conditions. While the Fitness Standard was building focussed, the HHSRS is concerned with threats to the health and safety of residents. The approach is based on the risk assessment of potential hazards (i.e. it is the effects that are assessed, not the defects). The System lists 29 potential Hazards including Excess Cold, all of which are solely or partially attributable to the design, construction and/or maintenance of the dwelling. The HHSRS therefore allows consideration of a wide range of factors that can affect whether it is readily possible to keep the dwelling at reasonable temperatures.

In order to assess the nature of Excess Cold hazard and the wide range of contributing factors at a dwelling, guidance suggests the following are taken into consideration:

- Thermal insulation
- Settling of insulation
- Dampness
- Type of heating provision
- Size of heating system
- Installation and maintenance of heating system
- Controls to heating system
- Amount of ventilation
- Ventilation controls
- Disrepair to ventilation
- Draughts

Landlords should also bear in mind that a comfortable indoor temperature is around 21°C. Discomfort and the risk of adverse health effects starts when the temperature falls below 18°C. Adverse health effects include respiratory conditions, bronchitis, heart attacks, and strokes. There is a relationship between indoor temperature below 18°C and the presence of dampness and mould growth, both of which are linked to respiratory and allergic conditions.

Landlords should therefore aim to achieve 21°C in all habitable rooms (particularly during winter) by making appropriate changes to the design, construction and/or maintenance of their property. If Private Sector Housing assess that habitable rooms cannot be kept at a comfortable temperature they will suggest a range of measures that may including insulation and fixed efficient controllable heating. Electrical sockets are no longer acceptable.

Q. I've been told that there are no more landlord grants available. Is this true?

A. No. Although recent changes to our assistance policy have removed major works grants for landlords, a new range of provisions have been introduced that include help towards security and energy efficiency in rented accommodation. Landlords are invited to join the Home Cert Landlord and Tenant Accreditation Scheme to access this assistance.

Information can be found on the Council website at

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/psh

or you can telephone the Private Sector Housing team on (01432 260746)

or email psh@herefordshire.gov.uk