



The Camden

Private Tenant

The voice of private tenants in Camden

Autumn 2015 Issue 13



We've moved...

**See Page 2 for details of an evening drop-in event
at our new office in 13 Malden Road**

Landlord licensing is coming

With over a third of the borough's households living in privately rented homes, Camden Council has decided it is time to licence landlords who provide shared accommodation. They have estimated the move could benefit around 20,000 renters living in 8,000 homes.

Licensing will come into effect on the **8th December 2015** and landlords who rent out what is called a HMO (House in Multiple Occupation) must apply for a five-year licence, and the licence will only be granted if a minimum set of standards for the property are met.

Councillor Sarah Hayward, Leader of Camden Council said: "We are introducing licensing after residents called for us to do more to improve living standards, and by using feedback from 1,400 people who responded to our consultation, including 70% who were in favour of licensing."

Sarah Mitchell, Chair of Camden Federation of Private Tenants management committee added "We are proud to have played a vital role in encouraging individual tenants and a range of different groups and organisations to give their views and make sure the Council fully understands what renters have to put up with on a daily basis".

What type of properties will be covered by licensing?*

Entire houses or flats which are let to three or more tenants who form two or more households and who share a kitchen, bathroom or toilet.

- This is typically where a group of young people or students live in a house or flat share arrangement

Houses which have been converted entirely into bedsits or other non-self-contained accommodation and which are let to three or more tenants who form two or more households and who share kitchen, bathroom or toilet facilities.

- This is the type of "bedsit" accommodation that most people would describe as a typical HMO

Converted houses which contains one or more flats which are not wholly self-contained (i.e. the flat does not contain within it a kitchen, bathroom and toilet) and which is occupied by three or more tenants who form two or more households.

- This is the type of accommodation where you will find a mixture of self-contained flats and bedsits/rooms

Buildings converted entirely into self-contained flats if the conversion did not meet the standards of the



1991 Building Regulations and more than one-third of the flats are rented out on short-term tenancies

- This is the type of accommodation that a lot of older tenants will live in and involves a building converted (often poorly) into self-contained flats

*To qualify the property will need to have three or more floors in total

To find out more about the Council's licensing proposals and whether the type of property you live in will be covered go to:
<http://tinyurl.com/qj5ebcq>

Come and meet the team, find out more about what we do and how we might be able to help you.

When:
Wednesday 7th October

Time:
6.00pm – 8.00pm

Where:
13 Malden Road,
NW5 3HS

Councillor Sarah Hayward, Leader of Camden Council and Councillor Pat Callaghan, Cabinet Member for Housing will also be attending

Light refreshments and snacks will be provided

News in brief

Prosecuting landlords

Research carried out by housing consultancy London Property Licensing shows the top three London councils for prosecuting landlords are Newham (359 prosecutions) Haringey (57 prosecutions) and Camden (20 prosecutions).



The reason for such a high figure in Newham is because enforcement action has been dramatically stepped up following the implementation of borough-wide selective and additional licensing in 2013.

Words of wisdom from landlords and agents

Here are some genuine comments made by landlords and agents. We will leave you to come up with your own suitable responses.

"The law is 99% in favour of tenants".

"I just wish the politicians, councils and all the do-gooders would stop preaching to us".

"Landlords need to lobby their MP and state they do not rent out damp, mouldy sub-standard properties".

"Most encouraging for landlords will be the seeming affordability of the latest rent rises.."

"Very few tenants understand that they are just residing in someone's business asset".

Richard Tacagni, Managing Director at London Property Licensing said: "This latest research should act as a wake up call to landlords who try to evade their legal responsibilities and place tenants' lives at risk."

Camden Council has agreed to implement additional licensing here beginning in December 2015, which is expected to cover between 5,000 – 8,000 properties (see **Page 2** for more details about this)

How private tenants voted

It's a while back now, but this is how private tenants across the country voted in the 2015 general election according to a YouGov megapoll:

- Conservative 34%
- Labour 32%
- UKIP 12%
- Liberal Democrat.....9%
- Green7%

Council homes' sell-off

More than 1,500 of the most valuable council homes in Camden are predicted to be sold off over the next five years, to pay for Right to Buy to be extended to housing association tenants.

Councillor Pat Callaghan, the Cabinet Member for Housing said: "Right to Buy has already had an impact on housing available for those most at need in the borough. Forcing councils to sell will kill off investment, stall house building and mean that London's communities will no longer be mixed and vibrant."

The government also recently instructed housing associations to reduce their rents by 1% per year for the next four years in an attempt to reduce the housing benefit bill.

Letting agents' growth

Research carried out by Camden Council's "Fair Lettings Project" run by Trading Standards shows there are around 327 letting agents operating in the borough.

It is now a criminal offence for a letting agent to not be registered with one of the three government-approved redress schemes (they provide a free, independent service for resolving disputes between letting agents and their customers), and they can be fined up to £5,000 by the Council if they haven't done this.

See **Page 5** for details of how to complain to Trading Standards about your agent.

Happy first birthday

While we exist to improve conditions for private renters in Camden, we know that the unfair renting system is not confined to the borough's borders. There are two and a half million private renters in the capital, living on short-term, insecure tenancies, facing low standards and unaffordable rents.



So that's why we asked Trust for London to help us take the message beyond Camden's borders. They agreed to fund a small, three year project that teaches London's private renters about

their rights and campaigns for a fairer renting system – it's called Renters' Rights London and it's just reached its first birthday!

For more information about the project go to: www.rentersrightslondon.org



Facebook

Check out Camden Federation of Private Tenants page and please Like us.



Developing the private rented sector

"Roguish parts of the private rented sector need to be tackled, standards need to be addressed and rogue landlords need to be penalised." These seem strong words to live by, but according to Joanna Hahn from the Department of Communities and Local Government this is exactly what is needed to professionalise the sector. She conveyed these ideas at the Westminster Social Policy Forum seminar I attended "The future of housing policy in England - priorities for the house buying market and private rented sector".

Many speakers seemed to resort to boosting supply as a way out of the current housing crisis; we simply have not built enough homes during the last few decades. It was argued by Kate Faulkner, Managing Director of Designs on Property that we are in the middle of a Catch-22 situation. Young people cannot afford to buy a house, but a huge price drop would bankrupt the elderly. As there is a lot of pressure on the social housing sector, there seems to be an aim to squeeze vulnerable households into the private rented sector.



Labour MP Stephen Pound said that it was an absolute disgrace that the Tenancies Reform Bill was blocked in Parliament. Most of the speakers agreed on this. Katharine Sacks-Jones, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Crisis, claimed the sector is dealing with four important issues. Access is increasingly limited with for example landlords refusing tenants on benefits, affordability is more and more pressured with housing benefit cuts, short-term tenancies increase the feeling of instability many tenants face and lastly about a third of homes are labelled non-decent. Different speakers saw rent controls and licensing landlords and agents as possible solutions to these issues.

Last speaker of the day was Sarah Hayward, Leader of Camden Council. According to her, Camden Council will introduce additional licensing. In terms

of supply she claimed that the Council is leading in London by building both social and intermediate rent homes. When one of the other speakers complained that many local authorities frustrate the private sector development process, she replied by saying that councils are afraid that developers will sell completed developments to, for example, overseas investors. With a chronic housing shortage, this seems to be a new potential Catch-22 situation.

The call for more housing supply seems fair and urgent. Improving the current stock and sector may be just as, if not more, important. It will be interesting to see what the impact of the different schemes discussed during the seminar will be.

Patrick van den Bos

Need occasional help around the house? New social or cultural activities? A companion?

North London Cares' young volunteers host a range of activities for over 65s to be part of – from local film nights to games afternoons to men's cooking sessions. All are free, and events take place at various times and locations from Kilburn to King's Cross.

To join us, call or text:
07884 581671



Having a problem with a letting agent ?

Call the **Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline** on: **08454 040506** and speak to an experienced adviser who will assess your problem and work out whether to pass it on to Camden's Trading Standards

Even if Trading Standards do not contact you directly about your case after it has been reported to them, they will use the information they receive to make sure that agents are behaving fairly and not breaking the law

You can also find lots of useful advice online at: www.adviceguide.org.uk



Bringing empty homes back into use

There are hundreds of privately owned properties standing empty across Camden while at the same time there is a massive demand for housing in the borough.

Empty properties are often in a rundown and poor condition and can attract crime and vandalism to an area.

There are also a number of ways that Camden Council can work with the owners of these properties to bring them back into use, including grants, and more information can be found about this in the Housing section of their website at:

www.camden.gov.uk

To report an empty property call: **020 7974 4158** or to do it online visit the above website and search for "report an empty property".



Renovated flats on Camden High Street

Are you a local business?

Need more customers?

Then why not advertise in this newsletter?

It's low cost, effective and 2,000 copies go out to individuals and organisations across Camden.

Contact Robert Taylor for more information about our competitive advertising rates



Thanks to The Hampstead Wells and Campden Trust for financially supporting this newsletter

osbornes^o

Solicitors LLP

You don't have to live with housing disrepair

Despite duties imposed upon them some landlords refuse to carry out necessary housing repairs or do not complete them to a necessary standard.

Osbornes Solicitors can help you to take action against your landlord to force them to carry out repairs as well as compensate you for any loss you may have suffered.

Types of disrepair which may also have an adverse affect on your health include:

- **Dampness or mould from roof and pipe leaks, blocked drains or gutters,**
- **Dry rot infestations,**
- **No heating or hot water,**
- **Dangerous electrical systems,**
- **Infestations of rats, mice or cockroaches.**

To speak with one of our housing disrepair specialists about your case contact us on **020 7485 8811**.

We also offer conditional fee agreements (also known as "no win, no fee") for housing disrepair.

The housing department at Osbornes is ranked as a leading team in London in the independent legal directories 'The Legal 500' and 'Chambers & Partners'.

Go online and watch one of our senior solicitors talk about housing disrepair and how to resolve it.



Osbornes Solicitors | Livery House | 9 Pratt Street
Camden | NW1 OAE | www.osbornes.net

William Ford, specialist housing and disrepair solicitor at Camden based firm Osbornes Solicitors recounts a recent disrepair claim which saw him represent his tenant clients all the way to the High Court.

Our clients were renting private sector accommodation and the property fell into disrepair. Although the landlord was notified of this, no works were undertaken. In response our clients started to withhold rent. This resulted in the landlord starting a campaign of harassment against our clients to force them to pay the rent.

Possession proceedings were also issued against our clients and the rent arrears were claimed against them. They counterclaimed in respect of the disrepair and argued that the rent arrears should be set off against the counterclaim.

Our clients were ultimately unlawfully evicted from their home and were refused the safe return of many of their possessions which had been left at the property. The goods were stored by the landlord and eventually some of the items were returned. However, the clients' possessions had been badly damaged. The counterclaim was amended to include a claim for the harassment, unlawful eviction and destruction of goods as well as disrepair.

After a six day trial at which the rent arrears were agreed to be £12,027.95 our clients were successful in obtaining an order for £19,372 on their counterclaim plus interest of £682.56 to be offset against the arrears. The landlord was therefore ordered to pay the clients £8,026.61. The Court also awarded costs against the landlord.

Unfortunately the landlord failed to comply with the court order and Osbornes then had to represent the clients in enforcement proceedings which included successfully obtaining a Charging Order, on the landlord's property. Being no nearer to recovering costs Osbornes issued proceedings in the High Court and ultimately, a settlement was reached whereby the landlord made financial arrangements to pay the costs and damages, plus interest, in full.

If you are currently experiencing a disrepair claim the steps you should adhere to are as follows:

- 1. Notify the landlord of disrepair preferably in writing**
- 2. Keep a log of telephone calls you make about this**
- 3. Keep photographs and videos of the disrepair and items of clothing and furniture that is damaged**
- 4. Keep copies of receipts of costs incurred in connection with the disrepair i.e. replacement furniture / belongings**
- 5. Allow the landlord access to the property to inspect the disrepair**

To discuss a disrepair claim you can contact William Ford at: williamford@osbornes.net or **020 7485 8811**



Camden Council Housing Options and Advice Service

Offers specialist advice on housing options, staying in your home, service charges, rent levels, repairs and tenancy rights

Home visits can be arranged if you are housebound or would have difficulty getting to the office or if there is a need or to assess the condition of a property

5 Pancras Square
London N1C 4AG

Tel: 020 7974 4444
(Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)

Website: www.camden.gov.uk/housingoptions

Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association

39 Tottenham Street, W1T 4RX

Tel: 020 7580 4576

Tuesday (10.00am-1.30pm) open door advice session

City Law School Advice Clinic

4 Gray's Inn Place, WC1R 5DX

Tel: 020 7404 5787 to make an appointment (open from Oct to May only)

The College of Law – Legal Advice Centre

14 Store Street, WC1E 7DE

Tel: 01483 216528 to make an appointment

BPP Law School – Legal Advice Clinic

68-70 Red Lion Street, WC1R 4NY

Tel: 020 7430 5668 to make an appointment

Shelter London Advice Line

Tel: 0344 515 1540

Mary Ward Legal Centre provides free legal advice and casework to people on a low income in the areas of:

■ Debt ■ Housing ■ Welfare benefits



We also run free evening advice clinics delivered by volunteer lawyers in the areas of housing, employment, personal injury, tax, and general civil litigation.

10 Great Turnstile, London, WC1V 7JU

Tel: 020 7831 7079

For debt advice ONLY call:
Debtline: 020 7269 0292

Website: www.marywardlegal.org.uk

Mary Ward Legal Centre

People's rights have no meaning without the means to enforce them

Advice for leaseholders

Leasehold Advisory Service

Provides free legal advice to leaseholders, landlords, professional advisers, managers and others on the law affecting residential leasehold in England and Wales.

Monday-Friday
(9.00am-5.00pm)

Tel: 020 7383 9800

Email: info@lease-advice.org

Website:

www.lease-advice.org.uk

Camden Council's Housing Options and Advice Service can also advise leaseholders.

(See box on the left for their details.)



Keep well and warm

Are you worried about rising fuel bills or finding it hard to keep warm in your home ?

Don't wait until Winter or when it gets colder to do something about it – call the Green Camden Helpline and get some advice now.

Call free on: 0800 801 738

or visit:

www.camden.gov.uk/wellandwarm



Join today for FREE

Renting from a private landlord ?

Fed up with:

- Rip off rents
- Excessive rent increases
- Letting agent fees
- Unprofessional landlords and agents
- Poor quality accommodation
- Not getting repairs done and other problems resolved quickly

Then, join today and:

- Receive invites to all of our meetings and events
- Receive this tenants newsletter in the post
- Get help, support and useful information should you need it
- Help us become a bigger, more effective lobbying and campaigning organisation to get things changed and improved for renters.

There are 3 simple ways to join:

- Email us at: admin@cfpt.org.uk and request an electronic version of the membership application form
- Join via our website at: www.cfpt.org.uk
- Call us on: **020 7383 0151** with your name and address and we will post you a paper copy of the application form.

We are the voice of private tenants in Camden:

- We work with and support private tenants in Camden to organise and campaign for better protection, rights and services.
- We work with the Council to improve standards in Camden's growing private rented sector.
- We work closely with national organisations such as Shelter, Age UK, Citizens Advice and Friends of the Earth to campaign for change.
- We also signpost people to advice agencies, and provide information, support and basic advice on a wide variety of tenancy-related issues.

If you are interested in getting involved with us you can:

- Become a member (see the left hand side of this page for details of how to join)
- Become a volunteer (visit www.do-it.org to see our latest opportunities)
- Join our Management Committee (call or email us for more details about this)

CFPT est la voix des locataires dans le secteur privé de la municipalité de Camden.

Nous travaillons avec les locataires du secteur privé de la municipalité de Camden et nous les soutenons pour qu'ils s'organisent et mènent une campagne afin d'obtenir une meilleure protection, le respect de leurs droits et une prestation de services.

CFPT es la voz de los inquilinos del distrito de Camden.

Trabajamos con los inquilinos del distrito de Camden y les ayudamos a organizarse y a conseguir más protección, derechos y servicios.

CFPT é a expressão dos inquilinos privados em Camden.

Nós trabalhamos com os inquilinos privados em Camden e lhes damos apoio para organizar e fazer campanha por melhores direitos, serviços e proteção.

CFPT waa codka gaarka ah ee ijaartayaasha xaafada Camden.

Waxaan la shaqaynaa oo ka caawinaa ijaartayaasha Camden in ay is habeeyaan uuna ololeeyaan kobcinta amaanka, xaquuqdooda iyo adeega.

ক্যামডেনে বসবাসরত বেসরকারী ভাড়াটিয়াদের কর্তৃত্ব হছে সিএফপিটি ।

আমরা ক্যামডেনে বসবাসরত বেসরকারী ভাড়াটিয়াদের সঙ্গে একত্রে কাজ করি, এবং তাদের আরো অধিকতর রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ, অধিকারসমূহ এবং অন্যান্য সেবার জন্য সংগঠিত হতে এবং প্রচারাভিযান চালাতে সহায়তা করি ।

هي صوت المستأجرين الخاصين في كامدن. المستأجرون الخاصين في كامدن فيدرالية
للقيام بتنظيم وإدارة حملة من أجل الحصول على حماية نحن نعمل مع المستأجرون
الخاصين في كامدن وندعمهم وحقوق وخدمات أفضل.

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Camden Federation of Private Tenants

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