Landlords Selective Licensing Working Group  
Wallasey Town Hall N Annex  
Wednesday 3rd December 2014 2.00pm

Present: Karen Spearing, Ian Hurst, Mark Moscrop, Peter Exley, Sue Smith, Helen Evans, Jason Abbott, John Foran, Emma Foley, Lisa Newman, Paul Jackson

Apologies: Kingsley Taylor

1.0 Welcome

1.1 LN welcomed everyone and thanked those present for volunteering to be on this working group which will inform future decisions on selective licensing in the borough.

2.0 Consultation

2.1 LN briefed the group on the Selective Licensing (SL) consultation which was approved by Cabinet on 9th November 2014 and will run for 10 weeks from 24th November 2014 until 2nd February 2015. So far 200 online questionnaires have been completed. The consultation involves an online/paper survey which will be promoted through the following means:

- Landlord and community drop-in sessions
- HB mail-out over a 4 week period
- Landlord associations letters
- Accredited landlords e-mail
- Press releases
- One Stop Shop screens
- Leaflets to all residents in proposed areas – hand delivered
- Posters in proposed areas

2.2 A survey form was circulated to the group.

2.3 LN asked for other suggestions about how the Council could engage stakeholders. IH suggested also using newspaper adverts / advertorials to promote the scheme halfway through the consultation.
2.4 SS suggested Wirral wait and see how Liverpool’s Selective Licensing Scheme was implemented to learn from their experience and look at their outcomes.

3.0 Fees

3.1 PE asked for clarification on the purpose of the meeting and discussion on the detail of the scheme as the scheme was still subject to consultation. EF said that the working group were meeting so that if a SL scheme does go ahead landlords have had time to influence the details of how the scheme operates.

3.2 EF explained that Councils are only legally able to charge for some aspects of operating a scheme and they could not make a profit. Wirral has set out costs for the chargeable processes and has determined that fees would be around £550-£750 for a 5 year period or £110-£150 per year. The Council has agreed to subsidise the scheme to keep the costs of the scheme down and for any enforcement action which is not covered by license fees.

EF said that Wirral had looked at the fees of SL schemes in other Councils which average around £620 across the UK.

3.3 EF explained that other Council’s offered discounts for being accredited (ranging from £50-£150) and for coming forward and licensing their property within a certain timescale, usually the first 3 months after a scheme is declared (ranging from £100-£200). There was general agreement that these discounts should be implemented which could reduce the license fee by around £200-£250 in total if both discounts were applied.

3.4 HE said that larger portfolio landlords would be hit particularly hard by the license fees. EF said some Council’s also gave a discount if a landlord had multiple properties which reflected that the ‘fit and proper person’ checks only needed to be done once for each landlord. It was agreed that Wirral would look at this. SS suggested the fit & proper person check should include a CRB check.

3.5 Landlords asked if the fees would have to be paid up front or whether direct debit would be considered as many of the landlords round the table reported that their income streams had been depleting in recent years. EF said that the fees had been calculated on the basis of up-front payments and while direct debit payments had been allowed with HMO licenses initially, there had been a significant additional cost to
the Council associated with chasing additional payments and setting up direct debits. The Council agreed to look into this for larger portfolios, but there may be an additional charge for this.

3.6 There was discussion about who should pay the licence fee - the landlord or their agent. JF said the legislation states that the license holder should be ‘the most appropriate person’ i.e. the person in control of the day to day management of the property including responsibility for repairs and collecting the rent. If a company is limited, the Company would be the license holder rather than an individual in the company. Guidance on these matters will be issued if the scheme is implemented.

3.7 IH asked if landlords who only wanted to let their property out for a 6 month let would still have to pay a 5 year license fee. He commented that SL could trap low income property owners who may need to rent their properties out for a short period of time. JF said that the cost of the license was fixed by the processes that had to be done to check compliance. This was the same whether the license was for 6 months or 5 years.

3.8 Additional charges were discussed for landlords who do not come forward to license their properties. Other schemes charge £50-£200 on top of the basic licence fee. It was agreed that this was a fair charge.

3.9 There was discussion about temporary exemptions but this will be discussed in detail at the next meeting.

4.0 Next Meeting

4.1 It was agreed that the next meeting would cover Licensing Conditions, Enforcement Policy and Exemptions.

3.2 The next meeting will be in the middle of January, a date to be advised by e-mail.

3.3 It was agreed that meeting minutes will be posted on the Selective Licensing website once they had been signed off. LN confirmed that feedback and comments from the Landlord Working Group meetings would be recorded and incorporated into the final consultation report on Selective Licensing.