Selective Licensing

Wirral Council is aiming to radically improve living standards in your neighbourhood through the introduction of a Selective Licensing Scheme.

This leaflet tells you about Selective Licensing and how you can get involved in the consultation, which will help to decide if and how these schemes should go ahead.

What is a Selective Licensing Scheme?
These are schemes where owners or managers of private rented properties in designated areas are legally required to get a licence for each property that they rent out in the designated area.

Why is it needed?
Wirral has areas of low housing demand and almost one in three properties in Wirral’s private rented sector currently fails to meet the decent homes standard, which can have a terrible impact on the health and welfare of their tenants and on their wider communities. This scheme aims to reduce that figure by ensuring that private landlords meet satisfactory standards of tenancy and property management.

Where will it apply?
The Selective Licensing Scheme would apply in parts of the following areas:
- Birkenhead South
- Egerton North
- Seacombe Library
- Egremont Promenade South

A full list of properties and a map are available at wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing or from any One Stop Shop.

If you would like to speak to someone about the Selective Licensing proposal, please call in to one of these special drop in sessions:

Thursday 4th December 2014
(3pm - 7pm)
The Lauries Centre
142 Claughton Road
Birkenhead, CH41 6EY

Monday 8th December 2014
(3pm – 7pm)
Wallasey Town Hall
Brighton Street
Seacombe, CH44 8ED

Monday 15th December 2014
(4pm – 7pm)
St Catherine’s Community Centre
Church Road
Birkenhead, CH42 0LQ

Monday 5th January 2015
(3pm – 7pm)
Wallasey Town Hall
Brighton Street
Seacombe, CH44 8ED

Tuesday 6th January 2015
(4pm – 7pm)
The Lauries Centre
142 Claughton Road
Birkenhead, CH41 6EY

More information about the consultation process, including how to get involved, is available via:
Website: wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing
Email: engage@wirral.gov.uk
Write to: Selective Licensing Consultation
Wallasey Town Hall, Brighton Street,
Seacombe, Wirral, CH44 8ED
How were the areas identified?
The four areas were identified using research by the Council's performance and public health intelligence team which identified key areas suffering from low demand i.e. low sales values and high levels of empty houses. A full breakdown of the evidence, methodology and findings is included in the Business Case which can be found on the Council website at wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing

What benefits will it have?
Poor property management has a very negative effect on areas where the housing market is already weak and contributes to high numbers of empty properties, high turnover of tenants and depressed rental and sale values. Selective Licensing will tackle poor management and is expected to deliver lots of benefits, including:

Benefits for landlords
• Improved confidence in the market and potential growth in property values
• A level playing field where all landlords are required to operate to the same decent standard
• Improved communications with the Council
• Better understanding of their statutory responsibilities through training sessions, etc
• Improved reputation of private landlords
• Access to the Council's Property Accreditation Scheme

Benefits for tenants
• Better understanding of the standards they should expect
• Better understanding of their responsibilities
• Written tenancy agreements, inventories and protected deposits
• Confidence that the Council will help if licence conditions are not met

Benefits for the wider community
• Landlords encouraged not to take tenants with a poor reference
• Shorter void periods and less tenant turnover
• Improved quality of life, image and desirability of the area
• Less empty properties and blight
• Less anti-social behaviour
• Increase in the length of tenancies resulting in more settled communities

Will landlords have to pay for a licence and what will it involve?
The Council proposes to recover some costs by charging a Licensing Fee. The cost of the licence will be determined following the consultation.

Most licenses would apply for 5 years and they will contain a series of conditions that the licence holder would need to comply with, which would include property management, fire safety and anti-social behaviour.

There will also be a requirement that landlords provide references for tenants that move on from their properties. The Council would also determine if the proposed licence holder was a ‘fit and proper’ person and suitable to manage properties before issuing a licence.

What would happen to private landlords who let their property without a licence or don’t meet the licence conditions?
Failing to apply for a licence or meet licence conditions could lead to a fine of up to £20,000.

Who is being consulted and how?
Landlords, tenants and stakeholders who live or operate in the proposed Selective Licensing areas, or those immediately in the surrounding areas, will be targeted directly as well as service providers, Council staff, and National and Regional Landlord organisations.

Various methods will be used to engage these people and representatives including, direct mail, questionnaires, leaflets and posters, website and social media, and through a series of workshops.

What are the next steps?
Before the scheme is launched the Council is consulting with residents and other stakeholders who may be affected, to invite them to have their say on the proposals. The consultation will last for 10 weeks, starting on 24 November 2014.

A questionnaire is available online at wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing and hard copies of the questionnaire - including an Easy Read version - are available at One Stop Shops, public libraries and leisure centres in all of the proposed Selective Licensing areas.

If feedback from the consultation supports the introduction of a scheme in the proposed four areas, it is hoped that it will start in Autumn 2015.