

INSIDE LETTERING

Edinburgh's Link with Landlords

ISSUE 6 • WINTER 2005

Responsible Renting



Wednesday 26th October saw the official launch of the letwise service and Edinburgh Landlord Accreditation.

As part of Private Housing Services' "Responsible Renting Week", this successful event at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre featured an opening address by Councillor Sheila Gilmore, a speech by John Blackwood, the Director of SAL (Scottish Association of Landlords) and a short film highlighting the importance of Edinburgh's rental market.

During the evening the 200 guests were able to meet, face to face, the teams who make up Private Housing Services,- Letwise, Edinburgh Landlord Accreditation, Private Rented Sector Team, Edinburgh Stair Partnership and Homeworks. Some of our partner organisations were also on hand to provide information and advice including Orchard and Shipman, who run the council's private sector leasing scheme, the Lothian and Edinburgh Environmental Partnership (LEEP) and the Scottish Association of Landlords.

The evening provided an excellent opportunity for landlords and letting agents to find out more about how the letwise and ELA services can help to support them in their business.

Letwise launched their new guide "letwise guide to starting a tenancy" at the event and distributed around 100 copies.

ELA were able to demonstrate their new website which is due to go live in December 2005. This created lots of interest and enthusiasm amongst landlords.

Overall, the feed back received about the event was extremely positive, with our guests, partners and staff reporting that they had made valuable new contacts.



Councillor
Sheila Gilmore

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FEEDBACK

If you have any thoughts or comments on the magazine please contact:

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Letwise

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THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Finding a tradesman

Landlords often ask letwise for a list of approved or recommended tradesmen. We have now produced a list of Trade Association, find it by visiting www.edinburgh.gov.uk/letwise. Looking for a tradesman on their trade association website will guarantee that they are members.



Newspaper adverts or telephone directory entries are often unreliable since around ten percent of Edinburgh tradesmen falsely claim membership of a trade association according to Trading Standards. Over half of those found to be making false claims also listed a false address.

A false claim of membership of a trade association is an offence under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, and is punishable by a fine of £5,000 or a jail term of two years.

Some businesses were found to be making false claims of membership of the Council for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI), the Federation of Master Builders, the National House Building Council, and the National Federation of Roofing Contractors.

Investigations into five businesses are ongoing, and reports will be made to the Procurator Fiscal.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) have produced two helpful booklets: "Having work done on your home – organisations which can help" and "Having work done on your home – a step by step guide" are full of useful information about getting work done on your property. The booklets also contain information about your rights and what to do if things go wrong. They can be downloaded from www.oft.gov.uk or phone OFT on 0800 389 3158 and ask for one to be posted. A link to these documents is also available on the letwise website

Business as usual

Letwise would like to apologise to anyone affected by the disruption to our services during 26 – 28 October. Our computer and telephone systems were affected by building work which cut our connection to the network.

All our systems were fully restored by close of business on Friday 28 October.

Rental Market Report

Rental markets continue to boom... that is the message reported from John Blackwood, managing director, of Gladstones, as he announces continued growth in rent levels over the last quarter.

Gladstones Ltd which owns and operates Gladstones Property Investment Managers, A B Letting Services and Lister Marshall Property Managers have just reported their last quarter results which show a 9% increase in rents over the last three months.

John explains that for the first time in over five years we have seen a steady increase in rent levels, an 11% increase on the same period last year.

This unprecedented trend seems to reflect increasing demand from tenants for privately rented accommodation in the city. It may also be a symptom of the current slow down in the house selling market. John, however, warns landlords against becoming too complacent.

These signs may indicate some landlords reluctance to invest further in the letting market, or worse still, considering selling up and investing their cash elsewhere. With increasing regulation on the private rented sector, private landlords may be holding off from expanding their property portfolios or choosing to reduce their occupancy levels to avoid HMO licensing regulations.



John Blackwood

Whilst these market indicators might give us mixed messages, an increase in demand by tenants most commonly results in a fall in periods where properties lie empty between tenancies. John reports that throughout his group, all properties are being let very quickly. Sometimes they don't even get the chance to advertise them as tenants are keen to view and move in within just a few days. This experience is also echoed by other letting agencies and private landlords throughout the city and not only in the 'fashionable' renting hot spots either!

The Edinburgh property market continues to be seen as a good investment by many out-of-town and overseas investors. Gladstones' investment trading arm, Gladstones Property Investment Managers, confirms that overseas investors are still keen to buy in the city. There have been increased enquiries from potential investors, in particular from the Middle East and Australasia.

The message to existing and would be landlords is consider your property investment as a long term one. Don't rely on increases in rental yield, but on capital growth over a much longer period. Long term speculation often pays off and more importantly overcomes normal market fluctuations.

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For more information on how to maximise your rental income why not book on the letwise course 'Finding a Tenant' run by John Blackwood. For booking details contact letwise on 0131 529 7454, e-mail letwise@edinburgh.gov.uk or visit www.edinburgh.gov.uk/letwise



Q+A

In this issue we turn the spotlight on Chris Wood. Being a landlord himself and having previously worked for Ryden Lettings, Chris decided to form his own company, Woodstar Property Management one year ago. He is 31, from Edinburgh, is a keen golfer and lifelong Hearts fan.

Q. How many properties do you manage/are you responsible for?

A. I'm currently managing nine properties.

Q. Where are the properties?

A. They're all over Edinburgh, from Leith, via Gorgie to Balerno.

Q. Why Edinburgh? What's so special about its rental market?

A. I'm lucky that Edinburgh's my home town and so I know it very well. It's the busy cosmopolitan capital of Scotland and a major financial centre. A very attractive city for people to move to and this keeps demand for all types of rented properties higher than elsewhere. Edinburgh is able to offer a good choice of quality property to let and I see this as a positive for the city.

Q. What are your main concerns as a Landlord/Agent?

A. Like most Agents I strive to get a good tenant for my clients. It is important to make a good start to any tenancy. It is important to keep landlords informed about their business and to keep tenants in a high standard of property. As a property manager it's my job to keep costs reasonable, watch out for the pitfalls, especially the legal ones, and keep everyone happy.

Q. How did you find out about Letwise?

A. I was told about them by SAL (Scottish Association of Landlords) and John Blackwood. This industry is constantly changing, I have to keep up to date with new developments.



Q. Have you attended any Letwise courses?

A. Yes, I have. I've attended them all and I'm booked on your new course Managing Common Repairs.

Q. Which course gave you the most food for thought?

A. Tenancy Agreements and Recovery of Possession were very interesting.

Q. What do you think of Edinburgh Landlord Accreditation?

A. As someone who is accredited I think it's a good thing. It does no harm to be accredited and gives landlords and tenants piece of mind. It provides you with good support from ELA and Letwise.

Q. Best landlord story?

A. Well it's not the funniest story, but a while ago I was showing a flat to a prospective tenant and when we walked into the bedroom we found somebody in the bed! It transpired that the landlord had allowed a friend to stay the night and hadn't informed me. It was no problem, just a bit embarrassing!

Q. What advice would you give to landlords just starting out?

A. When buying a property to let, think about who your potential tenants will be. Deciding who your potential tenants are, will dictate the size and location of the property you buy, and how you furnish and equip it. It will also dictate how you will market the property.

Choose your tenant very carefully and ensure you have good quality references. If you get the right tenant then you should have no problems. Make sure you are fully aware of legal procedures relating to the lease and serving notices. I could go on all day but lastly, I would definitely promote the use of letwise, ELA and the Scottish Association of Landlords, to get as much support as possible.

PRIVATE RENTING PROFILE THE ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR INVESTIGATION TEAM

LEGISLATION UPDATE



The Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Team (ASBIT) is a specialist team of investigators within the City of Edinburgh Council's Antisocial Behaviour Division. Its eighteen staff are based at 23 Waterloo Place.

The team investigates complaints of antisocial behaviour made against individuals whether they are owner-occupier, the tenant of a private landlord, a housing association or a council tenant.

Complaints can be made in different ways:

- from local housing offices.
- from private landlords, letting agents or members of the public
- from Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) like housing associations
- from the Police, the Council's noise teams and other Council departments such as Environmental and Consumer Services.

ASBIT tries to obtain the most appropriate remedy for each case.

We issue warning letters to the accused person. We may also speak to the accused's landlord, helping them to take any necessary enforcement action. We can supply evidence to landlords that may help them take appropriate legal action against their tenant.

ASBIT can apply to the Sheriff Court for Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) against those causing antisocial behaviour. At present only the Police, the Council or a an RSL (housing association) can apply for an ASBO.

Under 16's who are behaving antisocially are usually signed up to Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, (ABC's), These are a type of non-legal agreement for youths.

Using mediation services is a highly effective way of resolving antisocial behaviour cases. (Edinburgh Community Mediation Service can be contacted on 0131 557 2101).

ASBIT can provide emotional support to the victims of antisocial behaviour as well as offering appropriate help to those who cause antisocial behaviour.

All ASBIT services are free of charge.

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If you would like more information about how ASBIT can help you tackle antisocial behaviour contact team manager Kenneth Black, at 23 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh, tel. 0131 529 7858 or e-mail kenny.black@edinburgh.gov.uk



Housing (Scotland) Bill 2005

The Housing Bill moved into Stage 2 of the parliamentary process on 21 September 2005. During this stage the Communities Committee consider amendments to the Bill.

A significant amendment introduced by Malcolm Chisholm (Minister for Communities) is the introduction of a rent deposit scheme. The Bill establishes the principal of a rent deposit scheme and recommends setting up a working group to look at how such a scheme could be developed.

The Bill is likely to receive Royal Assent during January 2006. The date for implementation of the Bill has still to be decided.

If you would like any more information about the Housing Bill please contact Phil Rowsby on 0131 529 2256 or email phil.rowsby@edinburgh.gov.uk

Registration of Private Landlords

The Scottish Executive published feedback on the consultation on the registration of private landlords in October. The feedback received is available on the Scottish Executive website:

www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2005/10/31111044/10452

Guidance for local authorities on how the registration scheme will operate is expected to be available at the end of December 2005. Once this guidance has been issued we will provide information to landlords in early in 2006, on how the scheme will operate in Edinburgh.

In Edinburgh, the registration scheme will be operated by Environmental and Consumer Services (ECS) on behalf of the Council. ECS have now appointed a registration co-ordinator, Bruce Binnie, who can be contacted on 0131 469 5293 or email bruce.binnie@edinburgh.gov.uk

Queen Margaret University College IS ON THE MOVE



This redevelopment means that just over 3000 students who would normally look for a let in the Corstorphine or city centre areas may be looking for accommodation in East Edinburgh or perhaps Musselburgh.

The student accommodation currently on offer on the QMUC website is located in Corstorphine, city centre and Leith. Demand for property in Leith is likely to remain the same as the drama department will continue to use its Gateway Theatre base in Leith Walk.

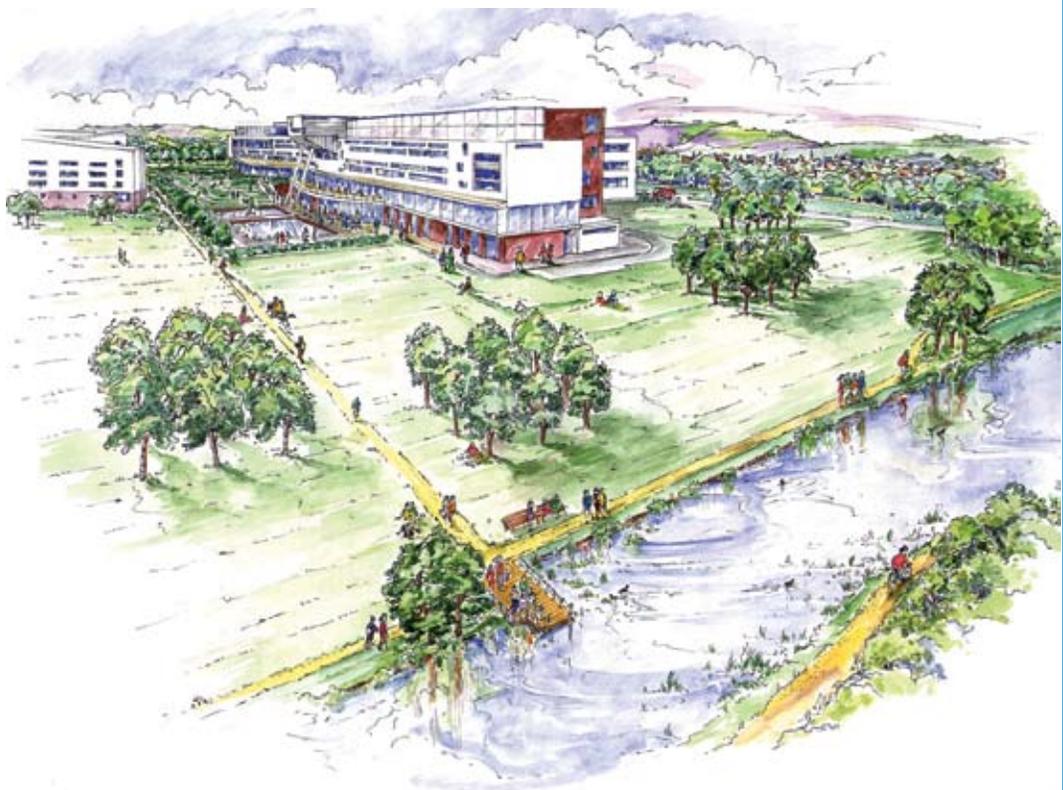
Persimmon Homes will build 300 new properties on the existing QMUC site at Clerwood.

Work has started on the new Queen Margaret University College (QMUC) campus at Craighall near Musselburgh. The Edinburgh college, recently voted Britain's top higher education college by the Sunday Times, will leave its Clerwood campus and reopen on the new site in the autumn of 2007.

Approximately 4000 students and 500 staff will relocate to the modern academic facilities which will feature student accommodation, a hotel, sports and student union complexes.

By September 2007 the student accommodation will comprise 800 bedrooms on campus. There is the potential for a further 700 bedrooms to be built on site.

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Want to know more about university term dates - visit the Letwise website:
www.edinburgh.gov.uk/letwise





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TOP TEN TIPS TO KEEP HOMES AFFORDABLY WARM

Ensuring that your property is energy efficient has a number of benefits. It means your tenants can afford to keep their homes warm at an affordable cost and so manage their bills. Energy efficiency improves the 'rentability' of your property, and can help to reduce dampness caused by condensation. Finally, warm happy healthy tenants are more likely to want to stay.

1. Recover some of the cost of installing energy efficiency measures in your properties.

Take advantage of the Landlord's Energy Saving Allowance (LESA) through the Inland Revenue. Energy Efficiency Commitment grants are available from the energy supply companies. Contact the Affordable Warmth Strategy Team for further information on both of these.

2. Install low energy lightbulbs wherever suitable.

They last longer than standard lightbulbs and use less energy. You and your tenants may be able to get some free low energy lightbulbs through the Affordable Warmth Strategy Team.

3. Give all of your tenants a copy of the 'Top Ten Energy Saving Tips' available from the Affordable Warmth Strategy Team.

4. Install 'A' rated appliances in your properties where possible. Make sure oven and cold appliance door seals are in good repair. This will reduce the heat / cold that escapes from the appliance and reduce wastage.

5. Provide tenants with efficient electric kettles, toasters and microwaves.

These are more energy efficient because heat is just used for heating the food or the water. Using lids on pots can reduce condensation.

6. Encourage tenants to dry washing outside where possible. This saves energy and can reduce condensation. Using the spin function on the washing machine helps to dry washing before using a tumble drier.



7. Site fridges and fridge freezers out of direct sunlight and away from the cooker and boiler.

This minimises the amount of work the appliance has to do to keep cool, and so reduces the cost of using it.

8. Have energy audits carried out on your properties.

This will tell you about energy efficiency measures that could be installed. Energy audits allow you to advise tenants of the anticipated fuel bills to help ensure they can afford to run the property. The Affordable Warmth Strategy Team can advise further on this.

9. Install thermostatic radiator valves on radiators to allow tenants to maintain suitable temperatures in each room and avoid wasting energy.

10. Become a partner to An Affordable Warmth Strategy for Edinburgh.

By keeping up to date with national and local energy efficiency initiatives you will be able to identify opportunities to improve your property. This will make it more attractive to tenants and help enable them to manage and reduce their fuel bills. Contact the Affordable Warmth Strategy Team for advice on how you and your tenants could benefit from affordable warmth.

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Affordable Warmth Strategy Team: Phone 0131 468 8657, email SCargill@leep.org.uk web: www.leep.org.uk

