

# Briefing

April 2010



## orchard & shipman letfirst

*An innovative new Local Lettings Agency helping local authorities reduce homelessness presentations*

“Even without the accompanying demands on health or social care services, estimates drawn demonstrate that the costs of a failed tenancy can range from £4,000 to £10,500 per case. The cumulative savings resulting from preventative action can therefore be very high.”

**Chartered Institute of  
Housing, 2006**

**Welcome** to the April 2010 issue of our Local Authority Briefing. This month we focus on Orchard & Shipman letfirst, our Local Lettings Agency service, currently provided to our local authority partners in Edinburgh and Westminster.

### Background

Our letfirst model was created as our answer to the challenges identified in reviews of the Private Rented Sector, such as the October 2008 Rugg Report and the March 2009 Scottish Government review. These reviews highlighted the relative ease with which young professionals, students and high earners can access the PRS for housing, but also outlined the barriers to entry faced by those in receipt of Housing Benefit or on low incomes, such as:

- No savings available for a deposit
- No previous landlord references
- No credit references
- Unwillingness of some landlords to rent to tenants on HB

Orchard & Shipman letfirst successfully counters these challenges and barriers by providing landlords with the guarantees and assistance they require to make their properties available to let to this market, as well as a full property and tenancy management service. We are therefore able to offer tenants:

- Access to good quality, fully managed PRS properties
- Access to properties without the need for deposits or references
- Flexibility and choice on property type and location

In addition, letfirst can also provide tenants of any PRS tenancy with housing advice and information on tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention. This can include:

- welfare and benefits advice
- advocacy and assistance with benefit applications
- advice on saving for a deposit
- employment advice
- tenancy sustainment advice
- signposting to specialist agencies

## How does letfirst fit in with your homelessness and housing strategies?

The letfirst Local Lettings Agency service fits in to local authority housing and homelessness strategies as a value for money homelessness prevention service. The service facilitates wider access to the Private Rented Sector for those households facing the traditional barriers of entry. In addition, the service also provides PRS properties to let to households threatened with homelessness, which subsequently helps reduce the number of households making homeless applications and assists local authorities in meeting their national targets.

## Case Study

A lone parent, Mr D was referred to Orchard & Shipman letfirst by the Black Community Development Project (BCDP), after a previous tenancy had ended following instances of racial harassment directed toward him and his daughter.

He was looking for a furnished property, as he had very few items himself. Our letfirst team worked with his new landlord and identified a way for this to happen, arranging for the landlord to remove the existing sofa at no extra cost to Mr D, and referred him to a partner organisation, who supplied a starter pack of basic items.

Our Welfare & Benefits Advisor also reviewed Mr D's expenditure and identified that whilst he was receiving all benefits that he was entitled to, he was paying a higher council tax for his previous property. Assisting him with correspondence where necessary, we were able to arrange for the arrears to be settled and paid, leaving Mr D financially better off.

With the support of Orchard & Shipman letfirst, Mr D now has a new home, in a new location, where he and his daughter can start their lives anew, with less expenditure than they had previously.



## City of Edinburgh

### letfirst progress to date:

- 165 private rented properties procured in 9 months
- Assisted 122 households to enter the private rented sector in its first six months - exceeding the annual performance of the previously commissioned rent deposit scheme which was 118 households
- 112 referrals received for housing advice and information
- 21 where legal action was averted following intervention

### Benefits of letfirst for Local Authorities

- Ability to access good quality accommodation whilst demonstrating value for money
- Increasing housing options for homeless
- Significant budget savings
- Partnership working with private landlords
- Potential to utilise specialist providers and managers of accommodation
- Risk flexibility (e.g. indemnities)

## Contact us to discuss how letfirst could work for your local authority

### England & Wales:

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Orchard & Shipman are the UK's largest private sector provider of PSL management services. We also operate Local Lettings Agencies in both London and Scotland as part of homelessness prevention.

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