



Solving the social housing puzzle: a fresh approach

As demand for social housing continues to rise, local authorities are increasingly turning to landlords in the private-rented sector for more extensive housing options. *UK Landlord* considers how one young consultancy sets out to dispel fears commonly held by landlords.

Until recently local authorities have bridged the gap between available supply of permanent accommodation and the demand from those seeking housing assistance through the use of Private Sector Leasing Schemes. Under these schemes local authorities lease the property from the landlord, guaranteeing rent and managing the property for an agreed period. However the Government has now stipulated that all local authorities must reduce the use of such housing options by 50 per cent by 2010 and look at more cost effective housing solutions under Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) agreements to meet their obligations towards the homeless.

The challenge facing local authorities is to design private-rented sector options that protect both the tenant and landlord against the possibility of tenancy breakdown and encourage long and sustainable tenancies. Unless the levels of support and communication between local authorities and the private sector are improved, some landlords may feel renting to Local Housing Allowance tenants is a gamble they would rather not take.

A balanced approach to housing

"Landlords do not want to be left holding the baby when it comes to renting to vulnerable tenants," says Alan Elborough of Settled Housing Solutions. Alan and fellow co-founder Jim McLaughlin established Settled Housing Solutions in September last year. Both men claim to have

operated "at the frontline" of housing advice and homelessness services, gaining extensive experience in local authorities in handling disputes between landlords and tenants to prevent evictions.

Their experience in developing successful housing options in the private-rented sector to the satisfaction of both vulnerable tenants and property owners gives them a useful insight into the issues facing landlords who would like to support local authority housing initiatives while minimising any risk to capital or property.

Alan and Jim describe their primary objective is to unlock the huge potential in the private-rented sector by achieving a "unified AST housing option model" which establishes minimum levels of standards in referral, tenancy support and property management practices. Creating flexible strategies that can provide housing options for vulnerable groups such as victims of domestic violence and those with particular health issues



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Settled Housing Solutions



Settled Housing Solutions

are an indication of Alan and Jim's ambition to raise private-rented sector housing and tenancy support standards throughout the current system. Settled Housing Solutions has been able to test their approach to balanced landlord-tenant relations in projects for several local authorities including North Devon Council and more recently the Thames Gateway Sub-Regional Group.

Benefits for landlords

Settled Housing Solutions is carving out a niche role for itself by working to reduce the financial risk for landlords in letting to the local authority housing sector. The consultancy guides local authorities through Local Housing Allowance monitoring plans that reduce the risk of overpayments and rent arrears, as well as methods to protect against tenancy failure and to preserve a landlord's rental income.

Landlords stand to gain significantly by supporting these types of strategies. Healthy tenant relationships guarantee longer, more stable tenancies and fewer voids, while local authorities often offer attractive financial incentives to landlords who are prepared to rent to the local authority housing sector.



Directors Alan Elborough (left) and Jim McLaughlin

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