

Landlord Incentive Scheme

Introduction

The Homelessness Reduction Act was implemented on the 3 April 2018 which placed a new prevention and relief duty on local authorities. The aim is to provide customers with a personal housing plan and work with them for 56 days to prevent their homelessness. This could be support to help retain their current home or to find a new home.

With the growing financial pressure that the council faces and the ever increasing price of privately rented accommodation in comparison to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, it has become tougher than ever for us to try and prevent households from becoming homeless or to assist them to move to alternative privately rented accommodation. Thanet has also seen a rise in temporary accommodation costs due to the number of homeless approaches over the last few years. The aim of our new incentive scheme is to help secure private rented accommodation for households facing homelessness. This will help to reduce the number of homeless applications and the need for homeless households to move into emergency housing.

We are aware that other local authorities offer incentives to landlords in the Thanet area. We aim to provide a financial incentive and package of on-going support that will encourage local landlords to work with us in providing homes for local people.

The Incentive Scheme

There are 2 options to the new scheme depending on whether a 6 month or 12 month tenancy is being offered. The scheme has been designed following work with local letting agents and landlords to understand their business needs and to overcome the difficulties landlords face when letting to a new tenant. For example, new tenants may not have access to rent-in-advance, deposits or to a guarantor. The maximum amounts permissible under the scheme are set in appendix 1 and are dependent upon the size of the property and the length of tenancy offered. We will always seek to negotiate the lowest payments possible.

In addition to a financial incentive, the package can also include the following benefits for landlords:

- Priority for DHP claims
- Support with HB and UC claims
- Pre-tenancy training for tenants
- Support for Landlords
- Tenant referencing
- A 6 month review with tenant and landlord

Qualifying for an Incentive Payment

To qualify for an incentive payment, the following criteria must be met:

- The applicant must be homeless or at risk of homelessness within 56 days - a legal and valid NTQ must have been served.
- The applicant must be engaging and actively working with the Housing Options Team and have completed a Personal Housing Plan.
- The property must be reasonably suitable and affordable for the applicant. The rent should be within 20% of the relevant LHA rate for the property unless it can be clearly shown that the applicant is able to afford the rent by other means. The applicant must have completed a full income and expenditure assessment with the Housing options Team.
- Housing Benefit will be paid directly to the landlord or agent. Applicants in receipt of the Housing Element of Universal Credit will be required to ask for these payments to be made directly to the landlord or agent.
- For the financial incentive to be paid, the property must have been inspected by the council and be free from significant hazards as assessed by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- To qualify for a 12 month Incentive Scheme payment, applicants must be in priority need as defined by Housing Act 1996 (amended 2002).
- Households with savings or capital of more than £1,000 will be required to contribute towards the cost of the incentive.

Help To Move Scheme

We also provide a 'Help to Move' scheme. This option provides a cashless deposit guarantee, lasting for the duration of the tenancy. The value of the deposit guarantee depends on the size of the property and the relevant Local Housing Allowance rate, as shown in the table below.

Number of bedrooms	Multiple of the relevant LHA rate	Maximum value of guarantee
One bedroom	2 months	£720.64
Two bedroom	3 months	£1,560.27
Three bedroom	3 months	£1,876.68
Four bedroom	3 months	£2,311.14

The 'Help to Move' scheme is available for people who have an identified housing need and do not have savings or assets that exceed £2,500. Applicants must have a local connection to Thanet and must not have been assisted with a deposit guarantee in the last 12 months.

Supporting Evidence

Each application for an Incentive or Help to Move payment will need to be supported by the following evidence/documentation:

- Proof of ID and verified household details;
- Proof of income;
- Income and expenditure form;
- 3 to 6 months bank statements;
- Confirmation of all fees from agent/landlord;
- Evidence of negotiation for rent and fees payable;
- Evidence that the applicant has explored options to retain their last settled accommodation;
- HHSRS inspection report.

Decision Making and Appeals

Applications for assistance will be considered by a Landlord Liaison Officer in the first instance. The Landlord Liaison Officer will need to ensure that all of the qualifying criteria are met and once eligibility is confirmed will contact the landlords/agent to discuss the incentive packages available.

Applications will need to be approved by the Senior Housing Options Officer.

The approval of a landlord incentive package is dependent upon the availability of sufficient budget and applications may be either rejected or deferred if budget is not available.

Applicants will have a right to appeal against an adverse decision in relation to their application. The appeal will be considered by a senior officer, not previously involved in the case. The appeal outcome will be final.

Scheme Review

The effectiveness of the landlord incentive in securing suitable private rented sector homes for households facing homelessness will be monitored and the number of homes secured and cost recorded.

The value of incentive payments will be reviewed annually to ensure that they remain relevant to the cost of local private sector rents and the level of local housing allowance available.