

# Choice Based Lettings

## A new way to find an affordable home

During March, we will be bringing in a new way to apply for and find affordable housing within the Borough. If you are already on the Council's Housing Register, then you should have already received some details and a new form to complete.

With choice based lettings, it will be for you to decide which empty properties you want to be considered for – we will then offer it to the person or family who has the most pressing needs.

### Here is how it works

#### Step 1 - Register to join the scheme

You can do this by contacting the Council and asking for an application form. You can also apply on-line [www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk](http://www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk). If you are on the Council's Housing Register, then you should have already had a new form – please return this if you have not already done so.

#### Step 2 - Finding out which properties are available

Every fortnight, we will advertise details of the properties that we have available for letting. These will be on our website and in a newsletter, which is available at our offices, customer services centres and libraries. Some properties may only be open to certain people (for example,

bungalows are normally reserved for older people without children).

#### Step 3 - Making a bid

This is all about letting us know which property you want to be considered for. It is not making a bid for money – just registering your interest. You can make bids on-line, by phone or by text. You will get to know straight away where your bid sits in the queue. Before the fortnightly closing date, you can always change any bid you have made.

#### Step 4 - Deciding who should have the property

With more people applying for homes that we have available, we have to decide who has the most urgent need to move. We do this by putting every application into one of four 'bands'. These range from a low band (where there is no urgent need to move) through to the priority band, (for example, families who are homeless). We then put all applications into date order within each band. A property will be offered to the bidder who is in the highest band and has been waiting

the longest. We will also give priority to people who have a local connection to the Borough".

#### Step 5 - Getting feedback

Every fortnight, we will publish details of the band and the length of time spent waiting for people who have been successful (but not the name or any personal details). From this, you will be able to get a better idea of the likelihood of being successful when you bid again.

This is only a quick summary of how the new system will work. For further details, please call into any of our customer service centres or telephone (0116) 2572 609. You can also look on-line – [www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk](http://www.oadby-wigston.gov.uk)



### Important information for all residents of flats

## Fire Safety

We have had an independent fire risk assessment carried out on all blocks of flats. As a result, we now have a programme to fit smoke and fire alarms and improve fire safety in the communal areas.

**Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Services have an ongoing inspection program, to check that communal areas to blocks of flats are safe.**

#### Things that you can do:-

- ✓ Have an escape plan for your flat – decide which is the safest room, would you need use of a mobile phone or landline.
- ✓ Keep doors closed, particularly fire doors on escape routes and to staircases (doors onto communal staircases have a one hour fire resistance).
- ✓ Let us know about any damage to doors in communal areas, so that we can repair it quickly.

- ✓ Install smoke or fire alarms in your flat, test them regularly and don't remove the battery.
- ✓ Don't leave rubbish in communal areas (on staircases or escape routes). Please dispose of rubbish in the right place.

#### Please help us to make sure you are safe

If you have any concerns about the safety of your flat, please contact your Housing Maintenance Team by telephoning Leicester (0116) 257 2614, or in person at any of our Customer Service Centres based at the main Council Offices and South Wigston, Oadby and Wigston Libraries.

# Join Oadby and Wigston Borough Council's Tenants' Panel... and help to Improve the Housing Service

Tenant involvement is a vital part of the boroughs housing service. It is only by working in partnership with tenants that we can provide the best possible service.

Our Tenants' Panel is made up of a group of tenants from the Oadby and Wigston area who volunteer as much of their spare time as they can to help us to improve what we do.

We are looking for some new tenants to come and join us and we would welcome people from all walks of life and any age groups. You can give as much as your time as you want.

## Here are some of the things that Tenants Panel get involved in;

- Attend monthly or 6 weekly meetings with the Resident Involvement Officer and Head of Housing to hear what's going on in the Housing Service. Meetings will be flexible to fit around you
- Help to select maintenance contractors for the work that is carried out on our Council rented properties
- Get involved in tenant scrutiny work
- Get involved in inspecting some void properties and helping to feed back to the Maintenance Team
- Work with other tenants to help to get more people involved in improving the area in which you live
- Help with setting up your own local residents association in the area in which you live
- Opportunities to attend some excellent free training courses, which are free

- Opportunities to attend interesting seminars and workshops throughout the region, where you will hear about what's going on within the Housing world and the 'Big Society'
- Chance to meet with other tenants from all areas

## What can I gain by joining the Tenants' Panel?

- Learn new skills by communicating with others
- Meet new people and have the chance to have your say in the way you feel we could make improvements
- Gain experience from attending meetings and seminars
- Attend some great training sessions - which will improve your interpersonal skills, very handy if you are job hunting
- Opportunities to gain some administration experience by helping the Resident Involvement Officer to organise meetings, agendas and preparing minutes for meetings
- Your travel costs and out of pocket expenses will be paid when you attend any training courses, seminars or workshops

## Remember this is your borough – your future and we would love to hear from you

For further details about any of the above opportunities please contact your Resident Involvement Officer Claire Erskine on 0116 257 2619 or email: [claire.erskin@oadby-wigston.gov.uk](mailto:claire.erskin@oadby-wigston.gov.uk)

## Citizen's Advice Bureau –

## Now Located in South Wigston

South and West Leicestershire Citizens Advice Bureau are now located in South Wigston. Funding from Oadby and Wigston Borough Council ensures that residents of this Borough are able to access advice and information on a range of subjects including employment and receive enhanced advice in debt and housing from specialist caseworkers.

Funding from the Council will additionally allow the residents of the borough to access all of South and West Leicestershire CAB's other offices in Blaby, Harborough, Lutterworth, Hinckley and Coalville. This is particularly important for those who may live in the Borough but travel outside to shop or to work.

The office is located at the Bassett Street Community Centre with further outreach provision to be developed in the very near future. Specialist services, such as Debt Counselling are available in-house from the Bureau's own staff and will therefore no longer require an individual to be referred to another organisation, often one outside of the Borough.

They are also pleased to offer specialist advice for local residents affected by cancer, either as a sufferer or family member or carer. Macmillan Cancer has funded a post for the Borough and the caseworker has already raised a significant amount of money for local residents who find themselves affected by this illness.

The opening hours are Monday, Wednesday, Friday between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. You can telephone on 0844 499 2375, or 0844 848 9009 Monday – Thursday 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. to receive over the phone advice or to arrange an appointment.



## Home Contents Insurance

As a council tenant the structure of your home is covered by the Council's insurance.

This insurance does not cover your furniture, personal belongings or decoration. It is therefore important that you take out your own home contents insurance policy to cover you in the event of theft, fire, vandalism, burst pipes and other household risks.

We have details of a scheme specifically for council tenants that offers this important cover from £5 per month.

Please contact your Housing Officer for further details by calling (0116) 2888 961 or pick up a leaflet from any of our Customer Service Centres.

## Since April 2010 the Housing Maintenance Department have:

Raised	<b>5044</b>	Repair Orders
Installed	<b>97</b>	Fitted Kitchens
Installed	<b>54</b>	Bathroom Suites
Installed	<b>39</b>	Central Heating Systems
Installed	<b>11</b>	Level Access Showers
Installed	<b>11</b>	Car Hardstandings

## Rent arrears at record low levels

In spite of the current Economic Climate our level of rent arrears has been getting lower every year. This is due to our rent teams working together with tenants as soon as they begin to have difficulties paying their rent. By getting help early, serious ongoing problems can be prevented.

If you are having problems please contact the team as soon as possible and they will:

- See if you can claim Housing Benefit, and help you fill out the forms.
- Help you sort out your weekly budget
- Come to a reasonable agreement for you to pay the money you owe
- Refer you for debt counselling or money advice if needed

You can contact the rent team by telephoning Leicester (0116) 257 2649, or Leicester (0116) 257 2617 or in person at any of our Customer Service Centres based at the main Council Offices and South Wigston, Oadby and Wigston Libraries.



## Paying your Rent by Direct Debit

### The Convenient Way to Pay

You can pay your rent by direct debit by completing a direct debit instruction form that can be obtained by telephoning Leicester (0116) 257 2618 or in person by visiting any of our Customer Service Centres based at the main Council Offices and South Wigston, Oadby and Wigston Libraries.

Payment by direct debit allows you a choice of payment dates on either 1st or 15th of each month.

All direct debits are covered by the Direct Debit guarantee which makes sure you have 10 days notice of the first payment to be deducted from your bank account, or of any change to the monthly amount so that you can stay in control of your payments.

If you decide to pay your rent by direct debit it will be collected in 10 monthly instalments. This brings the collection of rents in line with Council Tax and means that you will benefit from not having to make a monthly payment in February 2012 and March 2012

## Rent Free Weeks

### As a council tenant you benefit from 4 rent free weeks each year.

Rent free weeks are:

19 and 26 December 2011  
19 and 26 March 2012.

If you do have any rent arrears you should make every effort to reduce these by paying on these weeks.

Please contact our Rent Department on (0116) 2572 649 if you want to discuss payment further

## Having Problems Paying Your Rent? We Want to Help!

### Contact our rent section as soon as you start experiencing problems.

#### We will

- See if you can claim Housing Benefit, and help you fill out the forms.
- Help you sort out your weekly budget
- Come to a reasonable agreement for you to pay the money you owe

- Refer you for debt counselling or money advice if needed

Whatever your situation we want to help and avoid legal action, so contact us as soon as possible by calling (0116) 2572 649, or by visiting any of our Customer Service Centres located at:

Council Offices, Station Road,  
Wigston, Leicestershire, LE18 2DR

Oadby Library, 10 The Parade,  
Oadby, Leicestershire, LE2 5BF

Wigston Library, Bull Head Street,  
Wigston, Leicestershire, LE18 1PA

For free, independent, confidential money advice and assistance with your debts you can contact

Money Advice – Citizens Advice  
Bureau – 0844 499 2375

