

8th September 2006

BURKINSHAW'S FREE ADVICE IS KEY!

An Open Day recently held at the Ashton Burkinshaw's newly opened Chislehurst branch proved to be a lively and informative event. Landlords and potential landlords attended the event to view the new premises and take advantage of being able to have an informal chat with Ashton Burkinshaw staff.

Visitors to the branch were, generally, first-timers; new to the business of letting property and very keen to hear the free advice from the letting specialists on subjects ranging from funding, insurance, tax, furnishing to legal issues. Even the experienced landlord, who will need ongoing help with portfolio management, property selection, marketing and support in managing multiple tenancies, continues to value the professional advice given by their letting agent, especially in understanding all the highly publicised legal responsibilities associated with letting and managing property.

From the Open Day it was evident that many landlords were not sure what their new obligations were under the Housing Act 2004, in particular the new legislation relating to the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) which came into force in April this year. The recent government publicity about the new legislation appears to have confused many landlords as to whether they need to license their property or not.

Landlords also had many questions about the forthcoming legislation on Tenancy Deposit Protection (TDP) to be introduced in April 2007. TDP will add to the measures already brought in to drive up standards in the private rented sector set out in Housing Act 2004. Those measures include multiple occupancy homes and new safety rules. The ARLA (The Association of Residential Letting Agents) TDSRA is a voluntary scheme which protects deposits and offers the facility of an independent resolution service for deposit disputes. Membership of such a scheme will be a legal requirement next April but not all letting agents will qualify.

Legislation affects every landlord and ignorance is certainly not bliss! The importance of working with a reputable agent to ensure that a landlord's property is let securely and possession is regained at the end of the tenancy was strongly stressed.

The extent of landlords' insurance liability was another area of concern. Landlords were advised to ensure that their buildings and contents are insured for normal risks and that they are covered by relevant liability insurance.

Many insurers do not cover let properties, or if they do, offer policies that simply do not cover the risks landlords are exposed to; so it is vital that landlords take out specialist policies offering comprehensive cover. Landlords were also advised to use a letting agent who is authorized by the FSA (Financial Services Authority) to directly advise on, sell and administer insurance products related to let property, and who has the authority to deal with any insurance claim with any insurance company on their behalf. Unregulated agents are unable to do this.

Taking out protection against the major risk in letting property – the tenant failing to pay the rent, and against certain legal aspects which may occasionally arise – was also advised, thus removing the worries associated with financial commitments, most particularly mortgage payments.

Ashton Burkinshaw is regulated as a "Principal" by the FSA for the sale of letting and property management insurance. This means it can directly provide tailored insurances, manage those insurances, act on any insured problem and managed a landlord's claim. It is also a founder member of ARLA's Tenancy Deposit Scheme for Regulated Agents (TDSRA).

Ashton Burkinshaw has been in the letting business for over 30 years and has 13 branches across Kent and Sussex, offering specialist letting services to both landlords and tenants. All its branches are members of ARLA. Its Operations Director is the Vice President of ARLA and two of Ashton Burkinshaw's other directors are former chairmen. Ashton Burkinshaw is represented at National Council level and two directors are national industry trainers. All Ashton Burkinshaw staff are fully trained and take the ARLA exams. Every landlord, tenant and property is protected by the ARLA bond which secures landlords' monies (and tenants' monies) if the agent should fail.

Photo:- Lloyd Porter, franchisee of Ashton Burkinshaw's new Chislehurst branch with Ashton Burkinshaw's management team (from left to right, Stuart Cornwall, Sales & Marketing Manager, Angie Atkins, HR Manager, Lloyd Porter, Tina Nicholls, Operations Manager, Daniel Burkinshaw, Commercial Manager (Franchising) and Graham Harrison, Chief Executive).

