

20th June 2006

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM YOUR AGENT

Frances Burkinshaw, Director of Ashton Burkinshaw Ltd, says landlords and tenants can still surprise her, even after more than 35 years in the lettings industry. She comments: 'Talking recently with friends, who have an investment property in the north of England, I realised that there are many, many misunderstandings amongst landlords, tenants and the general public over the services offered by letting agents.

These friends were telling me how excellent their new agent is compared to their previous agent. I asked 'Why? What differences were there?' My friends replied: "The first agent only found the tenant, created the Tenancy Agreement and collected the first month's rent and deposit. After that, we had to deal with all problems and collect our own rent. Our new agent is amazing; they do everything the first agent did, PLUS they deal with any maintenance issues AND collect the rent for us. If the tenant is late paying, the agent does the chasing, which saves us awkward conversations. We would never use the first agent again; we feel that they just took our money and did as little as possible".

I was shocked by these comments and I tried to explain the differing services. I am not sure, however, whether the message was properly received - when one has made up one's mind about something, it can be difficult to change views!

All agents offer a range of services at a range of fees. As a general rule the services are Letting Only, Let and Rent Demand, Full Management. Ashton Burkinshaw offers all three of these services.

My friends clearly had **Letting Only** from the first agent. With this service, we would have sourced the tenant, taken up references, prepared the Tenancy Agreement, perhaps prepared the Inventory, collected the first month's rent and deposit and accounted to the landlord for these monies. Thereafter our involvement would cease. We would not be contracted to carry out further duties.

Our next service is **Protected Rent Demand**. This service involves all the duties of the Letting Only contract, but in addition, we will continue to collect the rent throughout the tenancy and chase unpaid rents. The service also includes ABPP, our own rent and legal protection scheme, which will generally cover unpaid rents and legal expenses. Needless to say, this service costs more than the Letting Only service!

The most comprehensive service is **Full Management**. Ashton Burkinshaw basically takes the place of the landlord and deals with every aspect of the let, from seeking a tenant, to maintenance of the property, to rent matters, to inventory preparation and checking; indeed, everything connected with the property during that period. This service is naturally the most expensive. We also expect our clients to have ABPP when using this service.

Tenants also often misunderstand the service they will receive from agents. Many tenants believe that, if they take a property through an agent, they will be dealing with that agent through the tenancy. Not necessarily so! The services above relate to tenants as much as landlords.

It is important for tenants to ask the agent what service they can expect during the tenancy; we also make it very clear to the tenant, even before the first viewing, if the tenancy is not to be on Full Management. The tenant will then have regular contact with the landlord.

It must be up to the agent to inform both landlords and tenants what level of service they can expect to receive – and the agent must deliver that service; Ashton Burkinshaw both informs landlords and tenants, **plus** we deliver the service.

If any client is not absolutely sure about details of the various services available within the company, please contact any of the Ashton Burkinshaw 13 branches throughout Kent and Sussex.'

Photo: Frances Burkinshaw, Director of Ashton Burkinshaw Ltd

