



Worcester CAB & WHABAC

Crisis Private Renting Champions 2015 for Client and Landlord Support

Good practice

Worcester CAB & WHABAC have been delivering a deposit guarantee scheme since 1998 in conjunction with Crisis and since 2011 we have been running our SmartLets social lettings agency.

Our experience during this period, having worked as a landlord and placing clients, is that for a tenancy to be sustained and successful you need a happy landlord and a happy tenant.

The support that we offer to landlords can vary from advice on property standards and grants, legal advice, providing tenancy agreements and inventories, mediation to sustain tenancies, accompanied viewings and updates on legislation and local issues through our landlord's brief newsletter, the 400 landlords on our database receive this every quarter.

We ensure that we are flexible with landlords and are able to offer them a range of services to suit individual needs including property management for a fee, guaranteed rents, property leasing, and guarantee bonds in place of traditional cash deposits. In some cases providing these services has helped keep properties in the private rented sector with landlords who had considered selling accommodation, it has also given us the opportunity to select individuals for accommodation that may not have been considered by other landlords.

Clients are provided with practical support from the initial application process all the way through to moving into a tenancy, sustaining a tenancy and if required ending tenancies correctly. This may include, how to search for accommodation, awareness of different types of tenancies, applications to charities for white goods and furnishings before or during the tenancy, assistance to set up utilities and payments, housing benefit applications, and life skills including budgeting, cooking and relationships with other tenants.

As we are part of the Citizens Advice Bureau network clients can also be referred to other in house services such as debt advice, benefit advice and financial literacy assistance, including any ongoing casework that may be required.

We realise that housing clients is just the beginning for many people and as such we ensure that clients are supported to access any training and employment opportunities available to them as well as help to register with medical professionals if needed.

At Worcester CAB & WHABAC we recognise that sometimes it is not easy to resolve issues that a landlord and tenant may have either with each other or as individuals and that these can sometimes put tenancies at risk. We have a designated landlord worker who is able to talk to landlords as a neutral as they have no immediate link with the tenant and as such the landlord feels that they are receiving impartial advice, issues such as repairs, rental arrears

or conduct are often resolved with mediation between the landlord worker, on behalf of the landlord, and the project worker who works closely with clients.

We would like to be able to share our best practice as private renting champions in providing support to landlords and clients and feel that our experience since 1998 would be of help to other organisations and individuals.

Case study

KS was referred to the SmartMove team from the West Mercia Probation Trust for assistance in finding and maintaining suitable accommodation. He was in a homeless situation and had been sofa surfing for several weeks following release from Prison. KS had a long history of offending and substance misuse.

Worcester CAB & WHABAC assessed and accepted him onto the Smart Move Deposit Guarantee Scheme to enable him to access properties within the private rented sector and he was supported to seek and view potential properties through internet searches and liaising with landlords with whom we have previously worked.

This process required assisting him to get references and liaise regularly with the landlord and the landlord development worker to ensure that any potential landlords were willing to work with the scheme as well as to undertake a property inspection.

An accompanied viewing was arranged to see a 1 bedroom flat and the landlord agreed to accept KS and work with our scheme. A bond was provided in place of a traditional cash deposit.

Utilities and payment plans have been set up and he has been assisted to ensure that these are maintained, he also receives ongoing support to enhance his understanding of the tenancy agreement. Housing benefit was set up direct to the landlord, whilst we work at developing his money management and budgeting skills.

The property was unfurnished, so he was supported to apply to the Local Discretionary Welfare Scheme overseen by the local authority and he was awarded various furnishings and he also received a Home Starter Grant (£200.00) which enabled him to obtain a variety of household goods.

KS now volunteers each week with the Birmingham Community Mental Health Team where he is assessing and assisting offenders as a mentor to help rehabilitate individuals back into the community.

About the champion

Worcester CAB & WHABAC are an organisation offering the usual services of a traditional citizens advice bureau as well as schemes to help people access accommodation in the private rented sector. We offer our services in Worcester City and Worcestershire.

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