



the South East Alliance of
working together for

Landlords, Agents & Residents
a better Southend-on-Sea

Purpose of Report to Scrutiny Committee

To update on joint working and
cooperation between the Council and
private sector landlords under the
formal agreement with SEAL

Background

- The Council now needs to discharge its responsibility for housing into the private sector
- Vital to have a good working relationship with landlords and agents
- SEAL is a way to achieve this
- Council and SEAL have actively worked out joint initiatives

Formal Agreement with SEAL as
basis to postpone Selective Licensing
for 12 months to monitor the
progress of SEAL

Joint Initiatives

- SEAL Board or Steering Committee
- Branding identity to show members of SEAL provide quality housing and manage their property to best prevent Anti-social Behaviour and improve the Street Scene
- SEAL leaflet, Members Handbook of documentation ensuring a safe and healthy living environment for tenants

SEAL Member Information Pack

- The following is a presentation to Members launching and explaining the results of the consultations between the private sector landlords, agents, residents representative, Police, representatives from Private Sector Housing, Community Housing and Streetscene departments as well as a Councillor representing Members.



1. Seal Membership Number

Each Member will be given a unique number to be written on all the identification stickers they are given.



2. SEAL Identification Sticker

The member is to write their number on a sticker for each property that they manage.

The sticker should be positioned so that it can be seen from the pavement. The intention is that the SEAL sticker is a sign of well managed quality property.

Should there be an issue with the property the public can contact SEAL, who will then help to resolve the problem by working through the SEAL complaints procedure, initially contacting the landlord or agent for their version of the facts. Ultimately if there is no progress with the issue the Council may have to deal with it. Any complaint about a SEAL property which goes directly to the Council will be diverted to the SEAL Administrator to process. Complaints about non SEAL property will be dealt with directly by the Council.



3. SEAL Leaflet

This explains how the Alliance of Landlords, Agents and Residents intends to operate, and provides contact details of the Steering Group.



4. SEAL Code of Conduct

The following SEAL Code of Conduct lists the agreement that the Landlords, Agents, Council and Residents Representatives worked out as being a practical way forward to help raise the standards of rented property, and to better manage Anti-Social Behaviour in the residential areas of the town.

The front sheet is for each member to sign confirming that:-

- a. The member will operate as described in the SEAL Code of Conduct thus enhancing the professionalism of the Alliance.
- b. The member has received the Member Pack including the Tenant Information Folder.



5. Tenants Declaration

Please add this as an addendum to every tenancy, as an aid to getting tenants to understand what is deemed to be Anti-Social Behaviour, and to make it clear to them the consequences of that behaviour. **Note 18.09.2013 The Data Protection Clause is now included, enabling Members to add the tenant to the Troublesome Tenant list should the tenant be troubled and new landlords need to be informed of the nature of their behaviour.**

To ensure the tenant's engagement with this detailed description of Anti- Social Behaviour, please read through this Declaration with the tenant, and ensure they sign it.



6. Street Scene and Refuse Management

This element of us all working together is very important to Residents of the Borough, particularly to the neighbours of rented property.

The recommendations involve more careful property management and should help avoid complaints.

Making this work should enhance the ease of renting, and the property values in the areas where there is a high percentage of rented accommodation.

By ensuring your property is smartly presented and intelligently managed, the Council Officers can then concentrate on the non-compliant managers and landlords and even residents, who let the area down.



7. SEAL: Section 21 Notice Procedures

The idea behind this is that even though the Section 21 Notice has been served, the tenant will get immediate advice from the Council Officers.

Should the tenant take the advice, it could result in less evictions clogging the courts and dragging out the limbo period for both landlord and tenant.

This period of up to a year is damaging to the tenant and can result in them losing many of their possessions, because ultimately they are not in a planned situation and cannot take their bulky possessions where they have to accept as their next home.



8. Property Condition Visit Report

This format of inspection is recommended by the Council Officers to catch the issues they will be looking for should they be brought in to carry out an inspection.

You decide at what intervals to inspect your rented property, 3 monthly or 6 monthly. If you have had a problem in a property previously, it is a good idea to start after a few weeks to see how the tenant is settling in, then at 3 monthly intervals. Once you are happy that the tenant is managing the property well, the intervals can be increased. It is a fact that it only takes a few weeks in the cold weather for an inexperienced tenant to develop a previously clear environment into a haven of black mould, so it is better to pick this up sooner rather than later.

Some agents have their own extensive systems of inspections, others use inspection reports produced by their own association and carry out the inspections themselves. It can be a good strategy for a landlord to employ a professional to carry out the inspections as an independent advisor to both landlord and tenant, even if they otherwise manage their own properties. The tenant may well take notice of advice from a third party, while being sceptical of advice from the Landlord or Agent. Also in the case of any dispute with the tenant, the independent opinion will be invaluable.



9. ELA Inventory/Condition Schedule

The following 6 page example recommended by the Eastern Landlord Association shows the typical method used by a fulltime inventory clerk. It is for you to photocopy or use as a pattern to put your own version on your computer.

Note: The 'Record of Photographs' table and written advice on the same page, the Deposit Schemes adjudicators would be very happy with this as well as the inventory, as evidence in case of any dispute.



10. Law Pack Household Inventory

This example, very detailed, comes from the Law Pack on renting from W.H Smiths. Again it can be copied or used as inspiration for your own design.



11. Inventory Clerk Form Example

A professional Inventory Clerk will produce the inventory, check in the tenant, carry out regular inspections and provide independent evidence for deposit disputes, through correct paperwork of their inspections. The tenant and landlord or agent should sign front and back of each page after these inspections.

The cost of each visit can be around £30, to do a professional job that we know needs to be done to care for our assets, the property that we put so much effort to keep up to standard.



12. SEAL Complaints Procedure

Non SEAL Complaints will continue to go directly to the Council, via phone calls and Councillors. The PRS team will then respond with appropriate action, possibly a full inspection if it is a property condition issue.

Complaints regarding a SEAL property will refer to the ID Sticker Number.

The SEAL administrator will then refer the matter to a SEAL complaints member, who will then operate the agreed procedure, which is generally line with that of the recognised associations, such as NALS and the NLA. SEAL will in the first instance contact the landlord or agent to verify their version of the facts.

If the issues are not resolved amicably, they will then feel the full force of the council officers.



13. Tenant Information Pack

All SEAL members will receive a completed Tenant Information Pack as an example of the helpful information they will provide for every property.

Even the most sceptical among the Steering Group found this folder impressive, so imagine how much it will be appreciated by your tenants.

You can choose how you make this available for every property that you rent out, either by making up a similar folder, or by giving the tenant the information to look up on our SEAL website.

Some Agents and Landlords may make the Tenants folder even more helpful by providing additional information to help the tenant with managing their new environment.



14. Sections still being developed Mar '13/Oct'13

- Website and Email – still some technical glitches - **now running**
- Audit Trail - **now operating and building up**
- Mediation Service
- How to sustain tenancy training for tenants through HARP
- Tenant referencing service - **became Troublesome Tenant Clause in ASB Tenant Declaration as an addendum to every AST contract**
- Promotional logos for members to use in their documentation - **ready**
- Advertising and Recommendation Section on Website - **Community funding imminent**

Finally, please remember that your opinions and ideas are needed to help build SEAL into a highly effective measure of quality accommodation, and a way of working together for a better Southend, avoiding the necessity for Selective Licensing in our pleasant town.

Results to Date of operating SEAL

- Feedback from landlords and agents shows appreciation of the education and support to manage their properties better.
- Membership covers 6188 properties plus.
- Techniques and procedures to manage ASB result in improved Police crime figures in HMO's.
- Educating tenants to sustain tenancies thus reducing homelessness.
- Council Officers, landlords and agents are benefitting from each others knowledge and experience.
- Regular Property Inspections are proving very successful in providing up to date maintenance schedules and monitoring of unacceptable behaviour more directly, promptly and effectively.

Future SEAL Initiatives

- Continue to develop then embed robust procedures in the Members handbook and throughout our paperwork and procedures
- Continue to build productive relationships and break down boundaries between : -

Council Officers, Police, SMAART Team,

HARP(Homeless Action Resource Project)

SBC Councillors, residents and tenants and

SEAL Members

for the successful resolution of issues relating to rental property

Future SEAL Initiatives continued

Auditing of : -

- Property Visit Inspections
- Gas Safe Certificates
- Energy Performance Certificates

To ensure all appliances are safe from the beginning to the end of a tenancy.

Future SEAL Initiatives Continued

- To develop techniques to assist in the management of difficult to manage tenants living in HMO's
- Consider developing a special arm of SEAL to look at HMO issues where landlords and agents are providing a valuable service to more vulnerable members of the community.
- These landlords and agents would wish to comply but the nature of their tenants makes management very challenging

Future SEAL Initiatives continued

- Develop SEAL's website to provide useful guidance and signposting to residents of the Borough and stakeholders
- Media campaigns through editorial, Council media and SEAL Members' advertising, for which they already have a budget
- Possible joint advertising of SEAL Members.
- Street Blitz campaign with all agencies and departments working together on small sections of the worst streets, parallel with the Echo's Clean-up Campaign. The ward Councillors, residents and tenants assistance will be essential, with various stages of leafleting used to educate and encourage improvement of the Streetscene and the property condition. Ultimately landlords and agents not participating will attract close attention from the PRS Team likely to be followed by fines and charges, and further editorial.