



## **Elmbridge Rentstart**

### **Crisis Private Renting Champions 2015 for Innovative Ways of Improving Supply**

#### **Good practice**

Our borough has few properties suitable for the single homeless, especially those who due being under 35 need to rent a “sharers” property. We are also seeing a rise in our local homeless population: out of 300 boroughs, we are in the top 50 for evictions; on a national level, Streetlink has told us that Elmbridge is in the top ten for homeless notifications via this system.

#### **What we have done:**

Over the last decade we have cultivated a loyal group of private landlords who are happy to rent to our clients, when statistics show that many private landlords are now unwilling to accept tenants in receipt of housing benefit.

“The National Landlord’s Association’s quarterly landlords’ panel survey has tracked a steady decline over the past three years, from 46% of respondents telling us in 2011 that they let to benefit claimants, to 22% in 2014.

Our success is due to: providing excellent customer care, providing deposit guarantees for the landlord and the fact that we remain actively involved with every client to minimise risks to the tenancy. However, in the last 12 months we have seen that we still needed to do more in order to house the increasing numbers of homeless people.

#### **Innovation:**

This year we have taken our work to source new property a stage further. By working with local partners we can offer a new service to landlords. We were aware of local properties that would be suitable for renting but were not in a fit state of repair.

We arranged with Thames Homeless Project (THP) that they would lend landlords interest free loans to enable these properties to be brought up to standard. One of our key strengths is the way in which we have built partnerships over many years with other local organisations.

We have worked with Thames Homeless Project over the last 14 years and they always fully supported the work that we are doing locally. Because of our close relationship they were willing to step in and offer interest free loans to the landlords who needed to renovate their properties ready to rent to our clients. THP were in a strong financial position and could see that this use of their capital would free up properties that would otherwise not have been available to our local homeless population. This relationship has continued with Walton Charity who have become custodians for the Thames Homeless Project assets.

We also wanted to use the renovation work as a means of providing further social benefit and linked up with York Road Hostel in Woking who are providing training for their clients in property skills, (they have set up a social enterprise called Freshstart to do this). We have been successfully able to



engage Freshstart to renovate properties, and where they were unable to do so, have been able to place the work with two of our ex homeless clients who have also started to work in this area.

Over the past 12 months we have been able to source 10 new properties giving 19 new units of housing. To date we have housed 22 people (some have now moved on). We have been able to work with three new landlords who own seven of these properties.

- 5 of these landlords have been given loans to renovate their properties.
- 21 of these clients have received tenancy training/support.
- 12 have secured paid work or enrolled in work related education

#### **Next steps:**

We are still short of quality properties and are now looking at renting properties ourselves, effectively becoming the tenant, and then housing our clients this way. Landlords are happy as they are not exposed to risk and we have been able to underwrite any risk to our organisation via support from Crisis and Walton Charity. We are aiming to secure another 12 new units over the next 12 months.

#### **Impact:**

The backdrop to this work has been one of immense change in the benefits system, particularly the increase in numbers of people who are now only able to afford sharing properties. We have found that this has meant intensified support from our staff to ensure that these new sharers properties succeed: budgeting, CV writing, help with finding employment, how to share bills and tenancy responsibilities. To date of the 116 people housed last year, 35 have gone on to find paid employment.

#### **Case study**

We became aware of a local landlady who owned a 3 bedroom property in a very poor state of repair. There was one tenant in the property who faced eviction due to arrears, he contacted us to see if we could help. We visited the property and arranged for two of our ex clients to carry out improvements, this included redecoration, new carpets, rubbish clearance and gas and electricity safety certificates. (The original tenant was not in fact able to stay in the property as they were unfortunately arrested in an unrelated matter.) Since renovation this property has been used consistently for our clients, the landlady is happy with our service, and we have been able to use the property as a training / sharers house with great success.

#### **About the champion**

We are passionate about preparing our clients to be successful tenants and matching them with quality properties owned by responsible landlords.

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