

PRESS RELEASE: LOCAL LETTINGS AGENTS' FEES

Update at 3rd August 2018

Our Research and Campaigns volunteers have been looking at the information on local letting agents' websites to help prospective tenants assess the cost of renting a property.

Since November 2013, the Advertising Standards Authority has required letting agents to provide clear information about charges and holding deposits. The 2015 Consumer Rights Act also places a duty on agents to publish a full tariff of their fees on their websites.

A total of 30 letting agents who operate in Hillingdon and have a website were identified and, of these, an initial review revealed that 19 agents (63%) included information on their websites on letting fees for tenants. A further 6 (20%) had fees information on their websites but a deeper search was required to find it.

One lettings agent (3%) had no letting fees information on its website, however it also had no rental properties available in Hillingdon at the time of our review, and no fee information was found for the remaining 4 agents (13%).

We wrote to those 4 agents for whom we were unable to locate any fee information on their website, asking where these details can be found.

On reviewing their websites again a few weeks later we found that three of the four agents had added the required fees information to their websites and one continued to flout their obligations. We are therefore considering options for further action to ensure compliance.

Further Information: observations on the presentation of letting fees

Where fee information was found on agents' websites, there was little consistency between agents in the way the fees were categorised and displayed. This makes it difficult for prospective tenants to be sure about the total sum required to set up a tenancy for a given agent, and to compare letting fees across agents.

Therefore in many cases prospective tenants may need to request clarification on the fees from the individual agents.

For instance:

- Some agents include a single detailed list of fees, whereas for others some of the information is given in different parts of the website.
- Some agents include referencing costs in the administration fee, some give one figure for referencing fees, while others list a number of different referencing fees.
- Holding and security deposits are not always stated.
- In many cases it was clearly stated that the fees given include VAT. However this was not true for all agents, leaving prospective tenants unclear as to the full fee.
- Some agents provide a link to the fees information from the individual property details pages. This would potentially work well for a prospective tenant who starts their search by looking for a property, but not so well for a prospective tenant who wishes to start their search by identifying agents whose fee structure suits them.

Background

Additional information can be found in Citizens Advice press release of 29th March 2018:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/how-citizens-advice-works/media/press-releases/citizens-advice-responds-to-housing-committees-report-into-renters-fees/>

Notes to editors:

- Still Let Down is a report from Citizens Advice based on a survey of 353 letting agents, an online survey of 1,141 renters (both comparable with similar surveys run in 2009) and a review of the evidence from our own cases.
- Citizens Advice is made up of a network of local Citizens Advice in England and Wales, all of which are independent charities, the Citizens Advice consumer service and the national charity Citizens Advice.
- Together we help people resolve their money, legal and other problems by providing information and advice and by influencing policymakers.
- Citizens Advice also offers Pension Wise appointments at 500 locations across England and Wales.
- The advice provided by the Citizens Advice service is free, independent, confidential and impartial, and available to everyone regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age or nationality.
- To get advice online or find your local Citizens Advice in England and Wales, visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- You can get consumer advice from the Citizens Advice consumer service on 03454 04 05 06 or 03454 04 05 05 for Welsh language speakers.
- Last year we helped over 2.7 million people face to face, by phone, email or web chat. For full service statistics see our monthly publication Advice Trends.
- Citizens Advice service staff are supported by more than 23,000 trained volunteers, working at over 2,500 service outlets across England and Wales.