

## **Increasing access to the private rented sector through Homefinder**

Homefinder.uk.com is an innovative new website which aims to improve the standard of privately rented properties in Leicestershire. It has been set up in partnership with Blaby District Council, Charnwood Borough Council, Harborough District Council, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council, Leicester City Council, Melton Borough Council, North West Leicestershire District Council and Oadby & Wigston Borough Council. Blaby District Council has led on the development of the scheme, which had the original aim of increasing access to privately rented properties across Leicester and Leicestershire.

Located at [www.homefinder.uk.com](http://www.homefinder.uk.com) the site currently has over 1,300 properties advertised, ranging from shared houses to large family homes. Almost 200 lettings agents and landlords have signed up since the launch on 31 October 2013.

To help prevent homelessness the site provides a range of advice, help and support services for residents seeking new homes and for those who are experiencing difficulties in maintaining their existing accommodation:

- access to the free service to search for properties
- checks on Housing Benefit entitlement
- support to help them stay in their current home or move to an alternative one, and links to organisations that can help tenants maintain their current accommodation

The website has a comprehensive advice page with budget calculators, videos and downloadable documents. Residents can register to have property details emailed directly to them.

The scheme has also been set up to benefit landlords and lettings agents in the county, offering support, advice and providing a range of services all under one roof. Landlords and agents can advertise their properties for free, and at the same time keep up-to-date with current legislation, have access to documents, videos and toolkits to help manage their properties, and information on available grants and loans.

Free training is offered to landlords and agents on all aspects of managing properties. This has been developed in partnership with Decent and Safe Homes (DASH) and gives landlords the opportunity to become DASH accredited.

A Landlord and Local Authority Working Group has also been set up to establish close working relationships between landlords and local authorities.

National Landlords Association (NLA), Leicester Landlords Association (LLA), Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), Safe Agent, National Approved Lettings Scheme (NALS) and Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) are all supporting the scheme.

The project was funded through a grant of £190 000 from the Department for Communities and Local Government. This was to fund the IT for three years and for the posts of the Private Sector Development Officers for two years.

## **Outcome and Impact**

The scheme has helped to reduce the number of homeless applications, resulting in cost savings in referrals to temporary accommodation.

There are over 1300 properties advertised on Homefinder.uk.com, of which over 160 properties have landlords and agents that are happy to accept Housing Benefit.

Through Homefinder, residents have access to a wide range of affordable properties across Leicestershire and links to access help and support from a range of organisations. Users of the site can get appropriate advice and information in different formats and languages that are suitable for their needs.

Agents and landlords are provided with easy access to the relevant help, advice and support to help improve property standards and property management.

## **Contact**

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