

Babergh & Mid Suffolk's Gardening Awards
Ceremony, September 2012



THE NEW DCLG LINE-UP

David Cameron's first ministerial reshuffle has seen local government left with a substantially changed ministerial team at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Here's the new team:

- Secretary of State for DCLG: Eric Pickles;
- Housing Minister: Mark Prisk (Mark Prisk has been moved from his role as Minister of State for Business and Enterprise to replace Grant Shapps as Housing Minister. Mark is MP for Hertford and Stortford);
- Planning Minister: Nick Boles;
- Communities Minister: Don Foster;
- Parliamentary Under Secretary of State: Bob Neill;
- Parliamentary Under Secretary of State: Baroness Hanham CBE.

REFERENCE: Local Government Information Unit (LGIU): Blog, 'The new DCLG line-up', 05/09/2012, Rob Dale. Available at: <http://www.lgiu.org.uk/2012/09/05/the-new-dclg-line-up/>.



BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK GARDENING COMPETITION: SEPTEMBER 2012

This year's gardening competition was held across both Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

The event was an outstanding success with a total of 38 entries.

Competition was fierce even though this year has seen one of the wettest in the last century, making it difficult for even the most experienced gardeners.

Judging took place slightly earlier this year with those involved confirming the standard of the gardens was exceptional.

The gardens were judged across six categories including best front garden, back garden, vegetable garden, tallest sunflower, open space, and sheltered garden.

Sutton Seeds donated thousands of free packets of seeds to promote the competition which were distributed to tenants across both districts.

We hope that this competition will evolve over the coming years with the number of entries growing.

We believe it is wholly fitting that those that make an extra special effort should be rewarded for their hard work. We sincerely hope that more and more tenants get involved and enter in future years.

The gardening awards ceremony took place on 26 September. Councillor Sue Wigglesworth, who is a member of our Housing Board and takes a keen interest in environmental issues, accompanied Gavin Fisk, Corporate Manager – Tenant Services in giving out the awards.

If anyone has any ideas or suggestions as to how we can improve the competition in the future, please do not hesitate to contact Gavin Fisk, Corporate Manager – Tenant Services on 01473 825771 or email Gavin.fisk@babergh.gov.uk.

CONTACT: Gavin Fisk, Corporate Manager – Tenant Services, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, Tel: 01473 825771, Email: Gavin.fisk@babergh.gov.uk.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS HOUSING POLICY

At their party conference in September, the Liberal Democrats endorsed the policy paper 'Decent Homes for All'. Key proposals of the policy include:

- Action to increase house building to 300,000 homes a year, including giving more freedom to councils and housing associations;
- Improved energy efficiency in all public housing by 2018;
- More powers for councils to tackle empty homes;
- Stronger powers for the Social Housing Regulator, including reintroduction of inspections;
- Allow councils and housing associations to charge higher rents to better-off tenants.

The Liberal Democrats envisage a significant increase in new building by councils and housing associations, although no specific numbers are proposed. They argue that housing construction has the potential to provide a major stimulus to the economy.

They also point out that there is a strong invest-to-save case for investment in social housing, since the higher initial cost of subsidising new social homes will be repaid over time by a lower call on housing benefit compared with providing housing for the same tenant in the private rented sector.

For local authority housing, the case for allowing additional investment is even stronger, since there need be no call on current government spending where the necessary subsidy can be provided from within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The policy paper pursues this argument to its conclusion, proposing the abolition of HRA debt caps and the reclassification of HRA borrowing to take it off the public sector balance sheet.

The big question now is how much of this agenda has any chance of adoption by the Coalition partners.

REFERENCE: Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH), ARCH Blog, 'Lib Dems call for abolition of debt caps', 27/09/2012, Matthew Warburton. Available at: http://www.arch-housing.org.uk/policy-and-practice/arch-blog/lib-dems-abolition-of-debt-caps.aspx?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+ARCH-

NEW HOUSING SOLUTION FOR HEALTH AND CARE

The new Care Services Minister, Norman Lamb has announced a new commitment to housing. An additional £100m will be invested in specialist housing over the next five years.

During his speech at the Liberal Democrat Party Conference, Lamb confirmed that the government will add £100m to their £200m allocated for specialist housing.

Those in the housing sector are delighted to see the Department of Health making a commitment to help support greater health and independence for older people as well as providing safer homes.

It is thought the investment will create new opportunities to deliver additional and improved services through collaboration with housing and health professionals as well as planning departments.

The Chartered Institute of Housing is encouraging the Department of Health to consider the options for older people who would like to remain in their homes but require home modifications to enable this to happen.

REFERENCE: The Chartered Institute of Housing, 'CIH welcomes new housing solution for health and care', 25/09/2012. Available at: http://www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/CIH_welcomes_new_housing_solution_for_health_and_care?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Chartered+Institute+of+Housing&utm_campaign=1648783_Latest+at+CIH+-+28+September+2012&dm_i=YRX,ZC7J,7E6H64,2YXJK,1

MARK PRISK'S NEW BLOG

Mark Prisk, the new Minister for Housing and Local Growth has started a new blog about the visits he makes, his thoughts on the new ideas and suggestions that he receives, and the announcements he makes in his role.

So far Mark Prisk has posted blogs on the following topics:

- Meeting housing needs
- Involving tenants in home improvements

Mark Prisk says in his opening entry that his number one priority as the new Minister for Housing and Local Growth is to get Britain building again.

The blog is available at <http://markprisk.communities.gov.uk/>

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INTERNET FOR TENANTS AHEAD OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Social landlords are in talks with internet service providers in a bid to arrange free online access for tenants ahead of the introduction of the universal credit.

From October 2013, a range of benefits will begin to be merged into one monthly payment, administered by a central IT system, which has led to concerns that tenants without internet access may struggle to manage their claims as the government expects most claims to be made online.

Under the proposed scheme, the company would pay for a fibre optic link into the council's housing stock. Tenants would be offered a box enabling free internet access through their televisions. They would be able to access government, email, shopping and banking websites and some free view television channels.

In return for funding the free service, the company will offer more complex packages tenants would pay for.

REFERENCE: *Inside Housing*, 'Landlords in talks to give tenants free internet', 28/09/2012, Carl Brown. Available at:
<http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/ihstory.aspx?storycode=6523945>

PRISK PRAISES LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM

Mark Prisk praises London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham for 'ripping up the social housing rule book' and introducing radical changes to its allocations scheme. The new measures have been out for consultation and are due to be agreed on 15 October.

They include:

- Preventing households earning more than £40,200 from accessing the housing register;
- Prioritising local, working residents, members of the armed forces and those who make a community contribution for social housing lettings;
- Introducing five year fixed-term tenancies, with two years for those aged 18-25. Secure tenancies will still be available for the most vulnerable residents;
- Ending inherited welfare benefit by preventing the children of tenants inheriting their council property;
- Promoting local lettings plans to produce more mixed, balanced and sustainable communities;
- Breaking the link between a homelessness application and a social housing tenancy and removing the perverse incentives the current system can create.

REFERENCE: *Coalition Watch*, 'Prisk praises 'trailblazing Conservative council'', 03/10/2012. Available at:
http://www.coalitionwatch.info/2012/10/prisk-praises-trailblazing-conservative.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+coalitionwatch+%28CoalitionWatch+from+HouseMark%29

£1 BILLION TO IMPROVE COUNCIL HOMES

Housing Minister Mark Prisk has confirmed that the Government will release nearly £1 billion in funding to improve sub-standard council homes. Mark Prisk said:

"By improving this country's council homes we will transform many families' lives for the better, bringing their living standards up to scratch ensuring that their home is the safe haven it is meant to be. But the benefits of the £1 billion I've confirmed today reach far beyond tenants themselves and into the local economy. With every pound spent on improvements boosting local business, creating new jobs and supporting local spending, I want to see councils realising the benefits of this cash as soon as possible."

The Minister quoted research by Nottingham Trent University showing that every pound spent through Nottingham's Decent Homes Programme created £1.46 spend in the local economy.

Mark Prisk's announcement reiterates earlier Government pledges to release Decent Homes backlog funding, and the 2010 Spending Review made £1.6 billion available to local authority landlords to help them renovate stock which had fallen below the required standard.

The Decent Homes Backlog programme is run by the Homes and Communities Agency on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Minister's announcement means the Government is continuing to fulfil its earlier promise – that 46 local authority and Arms Length Management Organisation landlords would receive backlog funding between 2011-15, to make around 127,000 homes decent.

REFERENCE: *Coalition Watch*, 'Prisk confirms £1 billion to improve council homes', 28/09/2012. Available at:
http://www.coalitionwatch.info/2012/09/prisk-confirms-1-billion-to-improve.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+coalitionwatch+%28CoalitionWatch+from+HouseMark%29

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RIGHT TO BUY FAILING

Prime Minister David Cameron launched the 'reinvigorated Right to Buy' policy six months ago trebling the discount in some parts of the country.

However, an Inside Housing survey has found that only 4 per cent of people who have expressed an interest in buying their home under the government's revamped Right to Buy have managed to complete a sale. Just 233 sales have completed at 25 councils in London, Birmingham, Leeds and Newcastle, compared with 5,697 expressions of interest from tenants.

It is thought that delays are caused by people being unable raise the funds for a mortgage deposit.

A sum of £650,000 has supposedly been spent on the marketing campaign for the 'reinvigorated Right to Buy' policy.

New campaign

Mark Prisk has announced a new government campaign to boost the take-up of the Right to Buy. He will be announcing a concerted government campaign to help many more people in council houses fulfil their dream and own their home. Prisk is urging Conservative councillors and MPs to promote the scheme.

This came after the Communities Secretary Eric Pickles promised in a speech to reverse moves by Labour councils to keep 'their tenants in the dark about these new extended rights' to buy.

Prisk believes a right can only be exercised if people know about it so he will be encouraging his department to start talking directly to tenants to inform them of their Right to Buy.

The revived Right to Buy offers a discount of up to £75,000 for council tenants who want to buy their home. The government has pledged each home sold will be replaced with a new home let at an 'affordable' rent at up to 80 per cent of the market rent.

REFERENCES: *Inside Housing Magazine*, 'Right to buy falls flat', Pages 1-2, 21/09/2012, Rhiannon Bury. www.insidehousing.co.uk.

Inside Housing, 'Tories pledge right to buy campaign', 09/10/2012, Carl Brown. Available at: <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/ihstory.aspx?storycode=6524109>

HOUSING BENEFIT AGE LIMIT

David Cameron has confirmed the government will look to end automatic housing benefit for under 25-year-olds.

The prime minister confirmed the move at the Conservative party conference where he reiterated the government's commitment to cut a further £16bn from public spending including £10bn in welfare cuts by the first full year of the next Parliament.

Cameron told delegates that welfare is not working.

He made a contrast between young people who work hard and save up for a flat while living at home, and those who 'sign on....get housing benefit, get a flat, and then don't ever get a job [because they think they'll] lose a load of housing benefit'.

It is thought this move could have devastating effect on youth homelessness.

REFERENCES: *Coalition Watch*, 'Housing benefit age limit planned', 10/10/2012. Available at: http://www.coalitionwatch.info/2012/10/the-conservative-party-plans-to-end.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+coalitionwatch+%28CoalitionWatch+from+HouseMark%29

Inside Housing, 'PM confirms age limit plan for housing benefit', 10/10/2012, Carl Brown. Available at: <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/ihstory.aspx?storycode=6524142>

Rural affordable housing, Bury Road - Thorpe Morieux, Orwell Housing Association, February 2012



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TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Shaw Road - Long Melford, Icenis Homes
(Suffolk Housing Society), July 2012



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THIS NEWSLETTER PROVIDES A MONTHLY ROUNDUP OF LOCAL HOUSING NEWS FOR THE BABERGH AND MID SUFFOLK DISTRICTS, AS WELL AS HEADLINE NATIONAL HOUSING NEWS.

IF YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT, OR IF YOU HAVE ANY IDEAS FOR FUTURE NEWS ARTICLES, PLEASE CONTACT US USING THE DETAILS TO THE LEFT.