

Housing Association - Legal Services

working
with you,
for you

Stephensons Solicitors LLP is a full service law firm. Our housing association team seeks to find solutions to the demands of the external environment. More recently, this has meant our range of fixed prices services we offer to housing associations has extended further to allow clients in this sector more control over costs in a difficult financial landscape.

Stephensons

Our commitment

We are committed to providing clients with a personal service. We are able to deliver on this as a result of our ethos to provide clients with direct contact details and holding regular meetings and training.

To give our clients assurance over the consistency of our communications we operate to service level agreements that have set response times. We see early identification as key to ensuring clients receive the most efficient and cost effective service possible.

We serve housing associations nationwide, however unlike most firms of our size we do not operate from city centres. Instead we prefer to pass cost savings on to our clients as a result of us being in towns that are easily accessible. We have 10 offices nationally, making it feasible to serve clients nationwide.

Our understanding of the sector has led to a growing number of housing association clients. We remain committed to improving the quality of service we offer in a cost effective way.



David Baybut
Head of Housing
Association Law

Sector understanding

We have been acting for local authorities and housing associations for over 20 years. We have an in depth understanding of the rapid change affecting these sectors. A combination of policy, led by the shift in approach to subsidy and vast welfare changes, has created challenges and uncertainty. We are fully aware of the ramifications of the Affordable Homes Programme 2011 and the welfare reform. Despite the cuts in legal aid for Welfare we have retained a pro bono unit and consequently we have vast knowledge of universal credits and what this means for housing associations and local authorities.

We understand the budget constraints and funding issues being faced, with grant and bank lending reduced we seek to make our services cost competitive and add value to clients as well as assist them with finance.

Stephensons acts for a diverse range of housing associations, lender panels and local authorities throughout the country. We act for individual housing associations and groups of registered providers. Our legal services can be limited to one particular service area or due to our full service offering we may be appointed to deal with multiple service areas simultaneously ranging from housing management to employment.

For most of the panels we are appointed to, we work to service level agreements and key performance indicators in terms of reporting. We understand that the sharing of management information and client survey feedback is crucial to organisations operating in the public domain. We have been able to adopt any system where we have been appointed to a panel and create bespoke reporting where required.

Although many organisations face trends in terms of the challenges that confront them, all organisations are unique in terms of their organisational structure and specific work agendas. We seek to understand an organisations' specific requirements by having an initial briefing meeting and through our appointed relationship manager conducting regular review meetings.

We regularly deliver training to local authorities and housing associations to assist with any knowledge gaps and to work with these organisations to help them fulfil their strategies.

Our team

We have a substantial team specialising in and supporting our housing association clients. Due to the level of work we undertake in the sector we have dedicated relationship managers and day-to-day managers. These managers work closely with our housing association clients providing their direct contact details to make them accessible. Below are details of key points of contact within the team.

David Baybut

David specialises in all aspects of commercial property. He acts for housing associations/registered social landlords, from site assembly, estate development, management to disposal on shared ownership and shared equity basis. In addition to this he has experience of tenancy and housing management, social contracts, supported housing and management agreements. He acts for a wide range of commercial clients, including owner occupiers, investors and developers. David also acts for schools and colleges, leisure providers, and many other quasi government organisations.

Louise Hebborn

Louise has extensive experience of advising housing associations and local authorities on housing matters including seeking anti-social behaviour injunctions, possession orders, and disrepair issues. Louise is the relationship manager for a number of our housing association clients. She has assisted clients in terms of implementing government policies and procedures, particularly when the Affordable Homes Scheme and welfare reform took affect. She has assisted housing management teams to ensure that they could affectively deal with rent arrears. Louise has created a bespoke flow file to assist housing management teams at each stage of the tenancy agreement to ensure that they implemented government policy in a way that would ensure efficiency. Louise's team has been appointed to provide courtroom training skills to a local authority.

Kate Bullen

Kate is the relationship manager for a number of our housing association clients for whom we have acted for in excess of 20 years. She advises social housing providers on many different types of transaction including flexible tenure, right to buy and right to acquire applications as well as forced and shared ownership sales. Kate frequently provides training to this sector and has done so recently several housing association clients on lease extensions and right to buy transactions. Kate proactively identifies areas where she believes a knowledge gap exists for these clients and delivers free training as a value added service.

Kate has developed a unique relationship with her social housing clients providing advice on all aspects of their transactions. They see her as first point of contact for all unusual and difficult property issues which require specialist advice. Kate sees it as important to understand the structure of her social housing clients so that she may in turn tailor her advice and the service she provides to suit their needs.

Neal Boland

Neal has 30 years experience appearing at courts, tribunals and regulatory bodies. He has represented a number of local authorities in applications for anti-social behaviour orders and enforcement of civil injunctions when the authority sought commitment to prison for breach of court orders. Neal has represented local authorities in applications for ASBOs and enforcement of civil injunctions. He has conducted over 3,000 prosecution cases for Manchester City Council.

Our services

Increasingly our housing association clients appoint us for multiple service areas as we have specialist teams in every commercial area of law and are able to assist them accordingly. We are able to assist housing associations with the following areas of commercial law:

Property and finance

Areas of work the team carries out on a regular basis includes, property acquisitions and disposals, landlord and tenant, finance and refinance including grants, portfolio management, corporate support and restructuring work, construction and development, planning, site assembly and both residential and commercial development work including shared ownership and shared equity dispositions, and staircasing.

Dispute resolution

We can assist this sector with, commercial disputes, alternative dispute resolution, construction and adjudication, property litigation (commercial and residential) fraud recovery, insolvency litigation, defamation, injunctions and emergency protective measures, asset tracing and recovery, professional negligence, intellectual property protection and disputes that arise between business owners.

Housing management

We are experienced in delivering housing management services including disrepairs, anti-social behaviours, nominations, management agreements, support services, tenancy advice, tenancy enforcement (including debt recovery), possession proceedings, homelessness and asset managements for this sector.

Human resources

This team provides advice to employers and senior staff in relation to HR law and practise. We provide advisory services and insurance for clients, as well as tribunal representation. Our team of six advisers and lawyers act for housing associations, SME clients, insurers, local authorities, trade bodies and member associations. We provide niche insurance solutions to our clients and operate entirely on a fixed fee structure for all services.

Debt collection

This team operates an IT driven debt collection system that provides our clients with a sophisticated and effective debt collection service. All of this work is provided to clients at fixed fees. For all organisations cash flow is key and out housing association clients are no different.

Regulatory discipline

This team provides advice to businesses across a number of sectors. We represent companies and individuals in criminal proceedings (Magistrates and Crown Courts) and also those facing investigation and prosecution by regulatory authorities, for example, the Traffic Commissioner, Environment Agency, Food Standards Agency, HMRC and Vehicle Operator Services Agency. This team carries out intervention work for the Solicitors' Regulation Authority and prosecutes cases for local authority clients.

Company/commercial

Our commercial advice and deals specialists can assist registered providers with: licensing, joint venture agreements, intellectual property, terms and conditions, agency, confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements, information technology and e-commerce and data protection.

Our credentials

Stephensons has obtained several quality marks and accreditations which signify our commitment towards quality assurance. We are LEXCEL and Investors in People accredited as well as holding the Specialist Quality Mark in several areas from the Legal Services Commission. We also hold the Conveyancing Quality Standard awarded by the Law Society. Stephensons is appointed to the Solicitors Regulation Authority's Interventions Panel and have been so since 2009. We were reappointed in 2012. We act as Intervention Agents which is testament to our sound working practices.

We have been given several awards in the last 12 months: at the 360 Legal Conference we were awarded 'Law Firm of the Year' for the 2nd year running and we are twice winners of the Law Firm Services Conveyancing awards; we were 'Highly Commended' at the Law Society Awards Excellence in Community Investment in 2012.

As a firm or as individual lawyers, we are active and leading members of, or approved by, key associations:

- Social Housing Landlords Association (SHLA)
- VHCC Fraud Supervisor
- Solicitors' Association of Higher Courts Advocates (SAHCA)
- Health & Safety Lawyers Association (HSLA)
- Financial Services Lawyers Association (FSLA)
- UK Environmental Law Association (UKELA)
- Association of Regulatory & Disciplinary Lawyers (ARDL)
- Fraud Advisory Panel. We are ranked in the Legal 500 and noted in Chambers

If you have a legal concern we would welcome the opportunity to discuss it with you, please contact: David Baybut, Head of Housing Association Law on 01942 774180 or email dba@stephensons.co.uk

Working with you, for you

At Stephensons our clients are real people, and they live and work in the real world - which at times can be an unpredictable place. But whatever it throws at them we're never far away to help. Because we're real people too and we understand our clients needs. Our similarities mean we can work side-by-side to get the best outcome possible. It also means we can tailor our legal costs and services to lots of different circumstances. Ensuring everyone gets the representation and result they deserve for their individual circumstances. Our business is to deliver legal services that work for our clients, so you can trust our specialists to take care of things on your behalf.

www.stephensons.co.uk/housingassociation