

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS)

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As part of its inquiry last year into Housing Lettings Pressures, the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) received information regarding the Council's approach to making best use of housing stock in the private sector, with particular reference to empty dwellings. As a result, the Board recognised the need to consider private rented sector housing in more detail and resolved to undertake a separate inquiry during 2008/09.
- 1.2 The Leeds Housing Strategy acknowledges substantial changes in housing market conditions in Leeds and in the patterns of housing choice and use made by households and individuals. With Leeds growing economically and becoming a thriving regional centre, a 'two-speed' housing market has emerged, showing a clear gap between parts of the city where there is considerable affluence and buoyant housing markets, and parts where housing is in poor condition, housing markets are frail, and where there exists significant social and economic deprivation. At the same time, throughout the city and within neighbourhoods, there have been changes in housing tenure patterns with a continuing home ownership and a substantial increase in the number of households renting privately.
- 1.3 The private rented sector in particular is now considered the fastest growing tenure in Leeds fuelled by increased demand from students and young professionals, the buy-to-let market and some speculative investment. The Board's inquiry will therefore be focusing on trends in demand and supply for private rented accommodation in Leeds and the Council's role in regulating private sector rented accommodation and providing advice to private landlords and tenants.

2.0 Scope of the inquiry

- 2.1 The purpose of the Inquiry is to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:
 - the levels of owner occupied and private rented accommodation in Leeds;
 - an analysis of trends in demand and supply for private rented accommodation in Leeds;

- the effectiveness of initiatives established by the Council and its partners to improve the condition of private rented sector housing, such as the equity loan scheme;
- issues surrounding energy efficiency and the Decent Homes requirements and how these can be promoted and sustained within the private rented sector;
- empty private rented sector properties and the negative impact they can have on neighbourhoods;
- the role of the Council in offering advice and support to private landlords about the various options available to them to enable their properties to be re-occupied;
- legislation governing the private rented sector in the current Housing Act, with particular focus on Selective Licensing, Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing, Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Housing Health and Safety Rating System;
- the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme and the incentives to accreditation;
- the views and experiences of private landlords and tenants;
- common perceptions of the different housing tenures and the impact this has on private rented sector housing;
- the Council's role in promoting private rented sector property and offering advice to prospective tenants;
- the impact of Local Housing Allowance (housing benefit) on private rented sector housing.

3.0 Comments of the relevant Director and Executive Member

- 3.1 In line with Scrutiny Board Procedure Rule 12.4 the views of the relevant Director and Executive Member have been sought and have been incorporated where appropriate into these Terms of Reference. Full details are available on request to the Scrutiny Support Unit.

4.0 Timetable for the inquiry

- 4.1 The Inquiry will take place over a number of sessions. These sessions will involve working group meetings which will provide flexibility for the Board to gather and consider evidence that will aid the discussions during the public Board meetings.
- 4.2 The length of the Inquiry is subject to change.

5.0 Submission of evidence

- 5.1 Working group meetings will be held prior to session one and during the interim period between session one and two. Dates for the working group meetings are to be arranged.

5.2 **Session one – Scrutiny Board Meeting (10th November 2008)**

To consider evidence in relation to the following areas:

- the levels of owner occupied and private rented accommodation in Leeds;
- an analysis of trends in demand and supply for private rented accommodation in Leeds;
- legislation governing the private rented sector in the current Housing Act, with particular focus on Selective Licensing, Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing, Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Housing Health and Safety Rating System;
- the effectiveness of initiatives established by the Council and its partners to improve the condition of private rented sector housing, such as the equity loan scheme;
- issues surrounding energy efficiency and the Decent Homes requirements and how these can be promoted and sustained within the private rented sector;
- empty private rented sector properties and the negative impact they can have on neighbourhoods.

5.3 **Session two - Scrutiny Board Meeting (9th February 2009)**

To consider evidence in relation to the following areas:

- the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme and the incentives to accreditation;
- the views and experiences of private landlords and tenants;
- common perceptions of the different housing tenures and the impact this has on private rented sector housing;
- the Council's role in promoting private rented sector property and offering advice to prospective tenants;
- the impact of Local Housing Allowance (housing benefit) on private rented sector housing;
- the role of the Council in offering advice and support to private landlords about the various options available to them to enable their properties to be re-occupied.

5.4 **Session three – Scrutiny Board Meeting (20th April 2009)**

- To agree final report

6.0 **Witnesses**

6.1 The following witnesses have been identified as possible contributors to the Inquiry:

- Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)
- Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Housing
- Deputy Chief Environmental Health Officer, Leeds City Council

- Housing Needs Manager, Leeds City Council
- Chief Revenues and Benefits Officer, Leeds City Council
- National Landlords Association
- Leeds Landlords Forum
- Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau
- Unipol Student Homes
- Student Union
- Empty Homes Agency
- Tenants Federation

7.0 Post inquiry report monitoring arrangements

- 7.1 Following the completion of the Scrutiny inquiry and the publication of the final inquiry report and recommendations, the implementation of the agreed recommendations will be monitored.
- 7.2 The final inquiry report will include information on the detailed arrangements for how the implementation of recommendations will be monitored.

8.0 Measures of success

- 8.1 It is important to consider how the Scrutiny Board will deem if their inquiry has been successful in making a difference to local people. Some measures of success may be obvious at the initial stages of an inquiry and can be included in these terms of reference. Other measures of success may become apparent as the inquiry progresses and discussions take place.