

SCRUTINY BOARD (SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES)

INQUIRY INTO PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Leeds now represents 13% of the total housing stock and as such provides accommodation for a significant number of Leeds households, some of whom are amongst the most vulnerable members of society.
- 1.2 Following an earlier Scrutiny Inquiry in 2009, the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board identified a need to revisit a number of longstanding issues surrounding quality standards and maximising the use of private sector rental accommodation in Leeds.
- 1.3 The PRS in Leeds is monitored and regulated by the Housing Regulation Team, which is now based within Housing Services. The principle legislation covering this activity is the Housing Act 2004, covering 4 main specific areas:
 - Housing Standards and Enforcement – for singly occupied and smaller houses in multiple occupation (HMO's), utilising the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
 - Mandatory HMO Licensing – for the high risk HMO's
 - Selective Licencing – for designated areas of the city
 - Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme (administered by the RLAAS Ltd, a subsidiary of the Residential Landlords Association, as from April 2011)
- 1.4 This Inquiry sets out to ensure that existing regulatory and enforcement powers available to the Council in relation to the private rented sector are being used effectively and that current demands for such services are being met. Equally, it is vital that projected demands for such services are also being considered and planned for effectively. As part of this, particular attention will be given to the potential impact of the Welfare Reform Bill on private sector tenants and landlords.
- 1.5 As part of this inquiry, attention will also be given to the development and growth of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme as a tool for driving up standards within the private rented sector.
- 1.6 Another key area of concern raised by the Scrutiny Board relates to private sector empty properties. The total number of private sector long term empty properties is currently 6,552 or 2.43% of the total stock. The Leeds Housing Strategy and the Empty Property Strategy provides the framework and key drivers to effectively manage empty properties within the private and public sectors.

- 1.7 The timing of this Inquiry will enable Scrutiny to contribute to the review of the Empty Property Strategy and also have an input into the Empty Property Project, currently under development, which aims to bring together all activity and evidence on empty homes in Leeds and co-ordinate a proactive response.

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:
- The challenges in dealing with long-term private sector empty properties and actions in place to bring them back into use.
 - Current and projected demand levels for private rented sector housing in Leeds
 - The potential impact of the Welfare Reform Bill on private sector tenants and landlords
 - The role of the Council, and its partners, in providing effective regulation and enforcement services to the private rented sector
 - The development and growth of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme

3.0 Comments of the relevant Director and Executive Member

- 3.1 In line with Scrutiny Board Procedure Rule 12.4 comments from the Director and Executive Member will be reflected in the final terms of reference.

4.0 Timetable for the inquiry

- 4.1 The Inquiry will take place over a number of sessions. These sessions will also involve smaller working group meetings or visits with stakeholders, 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. However it is anticipated that a final report will be produced in March 2012.

5.0 Submission of evidence

- 5.1 The Board will receive evidence through a combination of formal Board meetings and smaller working group meetings or visits with stakeholders. There will also be an opportunity for Scrutiny Board Members to attend a Private Rented Sector Conference, hosted by the Council, in November 2011.

5.2 Session one – October 2011

To consider the challenges in dealing with long-term private sector empty properties and actions in place to bring them back into use. In particular:

Contributing to the review of the current Empty Property Strategy;

Development of an Empty Properties Project, including an Empty Properties City Wide Action Plan, aimed at bringing together all activity and evidence on empty homes in Leeds and co-ordinating a proactive response.

5.3 Session two – November/December 2011

To consider the role of the Council, and its partners, in providing effective regulation and enforcement services to the private rented sector. In particular:

That current demands for such services are being met;

That projected demands for such services are being considered and planned for effectively;

That the potential impact of the Welfare Reform Bill on private sector tenants and landlords is taken into account;

To consider initial feedback from the Private Rented Sector Conference.

5.4 Session three – January 2012

To consider the development and potential growth of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme. In doing so, a city-wide and locality based perspective will be considered.

5.5 Session four - March 2012

To agree the Board's final report.

6.0 Witnesses

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

- Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods
- Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing and Regeneration
- Chair of the Housing and Regeneration Board
- Chief Officer Statutory Housing
- Chief Officer Revenues and Benefits

- Head of Housing Partnerships
- Service Manager, Housing Regulation
- Service Manager, Area Renewal
- Leeds Locality Managers
- Representative from the Homes and Community Agency
- Representative from the Leeds Residential Property Forum
- Representative from the Leeds Tenants Federation
- Private Sector Tenant Representatives
- Representatives from the Private Rented Sector Working Group

7.0 Equality, Diversity and Cohesion and Integration Issues

7.1 Where appropriate, all terms of reference for work undertaken by the Scrutiny Boards will include:

‘To review how and to what effect consideration has been given to the impact of a service or policy on all equality areas, as set out in the council’s Equality and Diversity scheme and on the Council’s Cohesion and Integration Priorities and Delivery Plan’.

7.2 The objectives of this inquiry particularly reflect the following theme from the council’s Equality and Diversity scheme:
Service Delivery – Leeds City Council provides fair access to services which meet the needs of our diverse communities and individuals.

8.0 Post inquiry report monitoring arrangements

8.1 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.

8.2 The final inquiry report will include information on the detailed arrangements for how the implementation of recommendations will be monitored.

9.0 Measures of success

9.1 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.