

Report of Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

Report to Executive Board

Date: 20th June 2012

Subject: Scrutiny Board Enquiry into the Private Rented Sector

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	Yes	
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?		No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	Yes	
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	Yes	No

Summary of main issues

1. This report provides the response of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board report into the Private Rented Sector.
2. The report is welcomed as a significant contribution to improving the quality and standards within the Private Rented Sector
3. The recommendations can all be accepted with the caveat that whilst the Department is supportive of recommendation 1 additional resources will need to be identified to maximise the impact of this recommendation.

Recommendations

4. The Executive Board welcomes the report from the Safer and Stronger Communities Board into the Private Rented Sector as a valuable contribution to the Council's strategy in this area.
5. The Executive Board agrees the recommendations within the report subject to the caveat that additional resources will need to be identified to maximise the impact of recommendation 1.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the response of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board Scrutiny Report into the Private Rented Sector.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The Private Rented Sector is becoming an increasingly important market to the successful delivery of the Council's ambitions within its Housing Strategy.
- 2.2 Following an earlier Scrutiny enquiry into the Private Rented Sector in 2009, this enquiry revisited a number of the longstanding issues surrounding quality, standards and maximising the use of private rented accommodation in Leeds.
- 2.3 The Council provides four key services in this area
- A mandatory Licensing service for Houses in Multiple Occupation of 5 or more units of accommodation
 - A Selective Licensing service for a designated area within Cross Green
 - A city wide regulatory service for customer complaints about standards within private rented accommodation
 - A city wide empty property advice and enforcement service aimed at bringing properties back into use as family homes
- 2.4 In November 2011 the Council held its first Private Landlord Conference at the Carriageworks. Over 100 landlords attended the conference. The purpose of the conference was to kick start a new relationship with Private Landlords to work together with the Council to tackle standards of accommodation, reduce empty properties and to work with the Council on its aspirations within the Council's Housing Strategy.
- 2.5 A key message from the landlords in attendance was that the Council should do more to tackle those Landlords that provide sub standard accommodation. The recommendations from the Scrutiny Board, in particular recommendation 1, will help support new initiatives to tackle this issue.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Board report is welcomed and complements the work already underway by the Department.
- 3.2 Recommendation 1

That the Executive Board:

- (i) supports the principle of adopting a more proactive and targeted integrated management approach in addressing those areas of the city that have greater housing and environmental needs.**

(ii) requests the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to work closely with the Housing Regulation Team and Locality Managers to begin developing this approach based upon the existing locality working model and neighbourhood planning principles of working collaboratively with other key council services, partners and landlords to maximise and target resources effectively.

(iii) requests the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to identify potential 'hot spot' areas of the city in which to undertake a pilot of this approach.

(iv) requests the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to report back progress to the Executive Board and Scrutiny within the next 6 months on implementing the above.

This recommendation is suggesting that as well as the four initiatives set out at 2.3 above the Department should consider targeted work on quality, standards and empty homes based on an area basis. This is a similar approach to that underway in the Selective Licensing area but would not require the formal preparation of a business plan and extensive consultation as in Selective Licensing. The Department is keen to adopt this approach linking up with Locality Management and Area Committees to provide integrated intervention.

An assessment of resources to support this approach is underway. In particular Officers are exploring how the New Homes Bonus could be used to support initiatives in this area. The Council receives the same amount per property if an existing home is brought back into use as it does for a new home being built. It is, therefore, logical, to look at whether or not investing some of the New Homes Bonus into activities associated with bringing empty private sector properties back into use would lead to an increase in income to the Council as well as providing much needed family accommodation. Subject to availability, the approach should be operational later this year.

3.3 Recommendation 2

That as part of the drive to recruit and retain landlords to the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods works closely with the Housing Regulation Team, Locality Managers and the Chair of the Residential Landlords Association to:

(i) engage more effectively with existing landlord forums and;

(ii) explore the development of local landlord forums, particularly within identified 'hot spot' areas of the city, to share ideas on how to address their needs

Recommendation 3

(i) That the Housing and Regeneration Partnership Board continues to drive forward the aims of the Empty Properties Project and explores how the council and its partners can work together in delivering the desired outcomes set out within the Empty Properties Action Plan.

(ii) That a progress report on the delivery of the Empty Properties Action Plan is brought back to Scrutiny before December 2012.

Both these recommendations support and complement existing strands of work within the Department.

3.4 Recommendation 4

That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods leads on undertaking an analysis of current housing market trends within the Leeds 6 postcode areas and for this to then be used to predict empty property trends within these areas over the next 2-3 years.

That the findings from this work is brought back to Scrutiny by January 2013 for consideration.

This recommendation recognises the uniqueness of the housing market in Leeds 6. In particular this recommendation is about keeping an informed eye on the impact in the area of any reductions in student numbers so that the appropriate interventions can be planned.

3.5 Recommendation 5

That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods seeks to combine the targeting of long term empty properties as part of the wider proactive and integrated management approach set out within recommendation 1

This recommendation complements recommendation 1 by drawing empty property activity into the locality approach.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 The Scrutiny Board consulted with a wide range of officers from within the Council as well as the Chair of the Residential Landlords Association. The Department is to begin internal consultation around the recommendation 1 and 5.

4.1.2 The Department regularly consults with representatives from private landlord associations and the Universities. These recommendations will be picked up in those meetings which are chaired by the Executive Member.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 There is a direct link between the quality of Housing and the Health of residents. Therefore, implementing the recommendations in this report will have a positive impact on Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and integration. Successful implementation of the recommendations will lead to improved quality of accommodation and management standards in some of the most deprived wards in the city. This work should have a positive impact on the quality of life for residents living in these areas and will also contribute to the environmental feel of areas. The resulting actions will be subject to the usual screening.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 Empty properties and the Private Rented Sector are key Council priorities and this report supports the Council's aims and aspirations.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 As stated above an identification of resources will be required to fully implement recommendation 1 and to link in recommendation 5. This work is already underway. The remaining recommendations raise no resource or value for money issues.
- 4.4.2 The more empty properties that can be brought back into use will assist in providing the Council with additional resources through the new homes bonus.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 There are no legal implications raised by the report.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 There are no risk management issues.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Board report is a welcome support to the existing work and ambitions of the Council in the private rented sector. It is also particularly supportive of the report to link in the management of empty homes into the recommendations to join up services within targeted areas.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 The Executive Board is requested to accept the Scrutiny report from the Safer and Stronger Communities Board into the private rented sector.
- 6.2 The Executive Board is asked to note the need to identify resources in order to fully implement recommendation 1.

7 Background documents

- 7.1 Scrutiny Inquiry Report – Private Rented Sector.