

Scrutiny Working Group (Environment, Housing and Communities) – Selective  
Licensing

26<sup>th</sup> October 2018

**Attendees**

Anderson, Cllr Barry  
Truswell, Cllr Paul  
Wildman, Jill  
Ireland, Mark  
McCartney, Robert  
Pentelow, Sandra - Scrutiny Advisor

The following information was considered by the Scrutiny Working Group:

- a) Selective Licensing Briefing Paper
- b) Maps of the proposed Selective Licensing Areas
- c) Why Beeston and Why Harehills
- d) Consultation information
- e) Say No leaflet

Introduction

An overview of the enabling legislation was provided to the working group.

It was highlighted that the areas are designated as requested by Executive Board. Choice of area is linked to locality agenda and areas most in need, with high levels of deprivation. Also based on peoples circumstances including health indicators, demand for services, housing conditions and levels of crime. Officers are confident that there is a good business case in terms of high levels of deprivation in both areas.

With regard to consultation, a minimum of 10 weeks consultation is required, currently consultation has taken 12 – 14 weeks, more than the minimum required. This started 1<sup>st</sup> of August. The Council has used learning from Cross Green and has learned best practice from other local authorities who have been subject to judicial review. The Governments Local Authority Code of Publicity has been utilised as guidance.

Nature of consultation has been

- 6 drop in sessions – 3 in each area, reasonably well attended – 40/50+ landlords at the least attended session.
- One – stop centres – to promote consultation questionnaires being filled in
- Two leaflets dropped in both areas - Companies GPS tracked. Leaflets in local public buildings.

- Used Council Web Site, Facebook, Twitter, billboards, Fever FM and buses.
- Conducted Stakeholder meetings (including businesses, landlords)
- Email alerts sent to partners

At the time of the meeting 1936 responses have been received from residents, 333 landlord responses – this is perceived to be a good response. Nottingham did not achieve this level of response by comparison.

License fee is suggested as £825 which correlates with other fees charged in England . This covers processing the licence and enforcement. Landlords who are a member of the Leeds Rental Standard will get a £150 discount.

#### Questions raised by members of the Working Group.

*Choice of areas, can you elaborate?* –Both Beeston and Harehills compared to other parts of the city are in need of attention based on issues of deprivation, which are highlighted in the briefing paper. Holbeck is another area in need of attention and is being dealt with through a Leeds neighbourhood approach.

*How informative were the FAQ's, are they balanced?* - FAQ's are on the website as part of the consultation. Before they were published they were checked by legal services and are compliant.

*Some Tenants do not speak English as a first language what has been done to engage* – We don't send out consultation information in multiple languages but have sought support through partners and the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector to engage with tenants. There are so many languages in different areas that producing documentation in every language would be impossible, additional support however has promoted engagement.

*Do officers feel that the consultation period has been suitably long enough to be robust in engaging with harder to reach communities or those who's first language is not English?* – the level of work done with other sectors to reach and engage with communities has been significant and the level of overall responses reflect that. There are some identified difficulties in tenants engaging due to perceived detrimental repercussions from landlords, including being made homeless. Some landlords are saying homelessness will rise due to selective licensing. However there has been significant consultation with the community via social media, meetings, face to face contact and via partners..

*Would it be easy to demonstrate the percentage of responses that come from tenants who have English as an additional language, or people from hard to reach communities?* – the questionnaire is anonymous all we will know is the postcode of the person completing it. There is no requirement to put down any information regarding language. Where there are issues we have tried to engage via trusted partners including paying for specific consultation with the harder to reach Roma communities

*Have specific briefings been provided to Councillor representing these areas –* Briefings and background information have been provided. When queries have been received from Councillors these have been responded to.

*Did officers respond to all legitimate questions at consultation events? –* The primary purpose of the consultation events was to receive feedback and comments. Officers did answer questions but were clear that they needed to answer questions with fact and not opinion. Officers cannot answer all questions as it is a consultation process and there are still many issues to resolved prior to any decision or subsequent introduction, if approved.

*Is there a package of investment being considered by the Council to compliment selective licensing and improve the areas in general? –* Selective Licensing could potentially be part of package of complimentary services for communities. We would need to assess what complimentary services could be put into place, if Selective Licensing was to go head, but that should not be pre-determined.

*Isn't Selective Licensing about improving housing and ensuring minimum standards are being met? –* Some of the feedback from landlords has been about the cost of improving properties, however the cost of the improvement will only be incurred if properties do not currently meet minimum housing standards. This is something that landlords should already have done as it is not part of selective licensing but already a duty on the sector to comply.

*How have we communicated information about the Leeds Rental Standard (LRS) to all Landlords?–* It is on the website, it has been communicated as part of the consultation. We hope that more landlords will join it and benefit from the information and advice provided.

*How many landlords have signed up to LRS? –* This standard is sector led standard not an LCC standard, meaning the sector can self-regulate. Unfortunately the up take is not as great as both we and the sector would like. It is currently around the 300 landlords

*The suggested license fee is £825, is it clear how the Council has arrived at that figure? -* Following a recent case the fee will have to be split, into administration and enforcement. We are taking legal advice on the matter as to how to split the fee. It may require further consultation depending on the outcome of that advice.

*Once the fee is paid can a visit take place at any time in the following 5 years –* Yes, however visits can be structured based on intelligence and risk. Work is being done to look at additional lines of intelligence particularly with those who work directly with children and families.

*Would selective licensing in Beeston and Harehills divert current enforcement activity away from other areas in the City? –* No, selective licensing could potentially enhance existing enforcement activity to improve standards.

Conclusions –

- a) Both working group members were reassured and satisfied by the answers given during the session and the measures taken to ensure robust consultation on the proposal for Selective Licensing.
- b) There were no suggested recommendations arising which would require consideration and agreement of the Scrutiny Board at the meeting on the 28 November 2018.
- c) It was agreed that the outcome of this working group session would be shared with the Scrutiny Board to inform any post consultation Scrutiny discussion on Selective Licensing, Standards in the Private Rented Sector, and support any subsequent policy development and decision making that may be required by the Executive Board.