

Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Inquiry into Private Rented Sector Housing

Summary report of the working group meeting held on 19th January 2009.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A working group of the Board met on 19th January 2009 to consider evidence in line with session two of the Board's Inquiry into Private Rented Sector Housing.

1.2 Session two of the Board's Inquiry focused on 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.

1.3 The following Members, officers and external witnesses attended the working group meeting to discuss the above issues:

- Councillor B Anderson (Chair of the Scrutiny Board)
- Councillor A Blackburn
- Councillor G Hyde
- Councillor G Kirkland
- Councillor L Mulherin
- Angela Brogden, Principal Scrutiny Adviser
- Andy Beattie, Head of Service, Pollution Control and Housing
- Jane McManus, Project Manager (HB reforms), Leeds Benefits Service
- Linda Sherwood, Accreditation and Selective Licensing Manager
- Tom Wiltshire, Head of Housing Needs and Options
- Paul Broadhurst, Private Sector Scheme Manager
- Martin Blakey, Chief Executive of Unipol
- Chris Town, Leeds Residential Property Forum
- Andy Hudson, Leeds Property Association
- Simon Moran, Leeds Letting Agents
- Richard Aston, Leeds Letting Agents
- Suki Thethi - Leeds Letting Agents

- 1.4 In preparation for the working group meeting, the following briefing papers were circulated to all the attendees:

Appendix A – Briefing paper on the role of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme and other initiatives to promote improvements in private rented housing conditions;

Appendix B – Briefing paper on the Council's role in promoting private rented sector (PRS) accommodation and advice to PRS tenants;

Appendix C – Briefing paper on the impact of Local Housing Allowance (Housing Benefit) on Private Sector Housing;

Appendix D – Update report on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Mandatory Licensing

- 1.5 Unfortunately the working group was only able to consider two of the briefing papers within the allocated meeting time and therefore agreed to schedule a further meeting in February to consider the remaining briefing papers. Copies of the briefing papers that were considered (Appendix A and B) are attached to this summary report as background information.

- 1.6 During the meeting, particular importance was placed on obtaining the views of the external witnesses around the challenges faced by private rented sector landlords and the opportunities available for the Council to further engage with landlords and tenants to help promote improvements in this particular housing sector.

- 1.7 The main issues raised during the meeting are summarised below.

2.0 Main issues raised

The role of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme

- 2.1 The working group learned that the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS) was originally launched in April 1997 as the Leeds City Council's Code of Standards for the Private Rented Sector and was based upon the Unipol Code of Standards launched in 1995, specifically aimed at the student market.
- 2.2 The working group was informed that the aims of the LLAS are to encourage, acknowledge and actively promote good standards and management practices by owners and to assist owners and tenants to undertake their respective responsibilities to each other. Information packs relating to the LLAS were circulated as additional information during the meeting.
- 2.3 As previously reported to the Scrutiny Board during its inquiry, it was noted again that the Leeds City Council Private Sector House Condition Survey 2007 estimates there are 41,660 dwellings in Leeds rented from private landlords, which equates to around 13% of the private sector stock.
- 2.4 Whilst there are private rented sector properties across the city, the working group learned that these are significantly concentrated in the North-West and East areas of Leeds and within former Urban Renewal Areas with particular

concentrations in the inner city areas such as Armley, Beeston and Holbeck, Burmantoffs and Harehills, Chapeltown and Richmond Hill. It was highlighted that the previous House Condition Survey in 2001 showed that 32% of private rented dwellings in single occupation and 74% of private-rented dwellings in multiple occupation were located in North-West Leeds. The working group therefore acknowledged that the majority of the properties owned by LLAS members portfolios are also located in the North-West

- 2.5 The working group sought clarification on the current numbers of members within the LLAS. In response, it was highlighted that there are currently 400 members of the scheme and that overall coverage of accreditation is estimated to be in the order of 16.6% of the private rented sector in total. The working group also learned that the Council's Private Rented Sector Strategy contains a target for LLAS of 20,000 bed-spaces coverage by 2010 (current bed-spaces 17,853 at 31/12/08 against an interim target of 18,000 by 31/3/09).
- 2.6 It was also reported that the membership of the LLAS is split between Unipol and other non Unipol landlords in the City 27%: 73% respectively and that this is made up of landlords with differing sized portfolios as follows:-
 - One property – 28% of members
 - Two-Three Properties – 23% of members
 - 4 or more properties – 49% of members
- 2.7 It was recognised that whilst the LLAS membership and coverage has grown over the last 10 years, there remains much work to do to extend its influence across the whole of the private rented sector and in particular in areas beyond North West Leeds.
- 2.8 During the meeting, the representatives of the Leeds Residential Property Forum, Leeds Property Association and Leeds Letting Agents, all of whom are private sector landlords themselves, were given the opportunity to voice their opinions about the LLAS and why they felt a large majority of private sector landlords across the city were not volunteering to become members of the scheme. The working group noted that two of the representatives were already members of the LLAS and that they had joined the scheme to help improve their own standards and develop a closer working relationship with the local authority. Whilst acknowledging the advantages of being a member of the scheme, one of the key issues raised was around the lack of communication with tenants in raising the awareness and profile of the scheme.
- 2.9 Other representatives explained to the working group that whilst they too recognise the wider advantages to becoming a member of the LLAS, there remains certain stipulations within the scheme which they felt were acting as barriers towards them becoming members. An example shared with the working group was around LLAS members not being able to re-market their property for at least 24 hours following a request from an interested party to seek independent advice on any contractual terms under which that property had been offered. This was considered unreasonable when landlords may have numerous interested parties competing for a property at the same time.

- 2.10 The working group considered it appropriate for the Scrutiny Board to request a written submission from representatives of private rented sector landlords setting out in more detail their views on the LLAS and highlighting what revisions they feel should be made to help increase membership. It was reported to the working group that since the LLAS started, its contents have been debated and modified and that it will continue to be reviewed regularly in terms of the standards set within in.
- 2.11 The working group acknowledged that private rented housing provides a home for many different types of household markets; students (both undergraduates and mature students), nurses, doctors and young professionals, retirement accommodation, low income households, benefit claimants and households relocating from other parts of the country, migrating from outside the UK or seeking asylum. In recognising the difficulty of identifying an appropriate set of standards to meet the needs of all these household markets across the city, the question was raised about whether the Council would benefit from differentiating between these different markets. Reference was also made to some of the difficulties encountered when dealing with managing agents and the need to gather more detailed information on such agents in terms of their property portfolios and management standards to enable clearer transparency and accountability, particularly before accreditation is given.
- 2.12 The working group also agreed that in order to attract and retain private rented sector landlords, it is imperative that the LLAS offers increasing numbers of incentives to landlords to enable the much-needed increased coverage across the city. It was noted that this concept was also supported by the LLAS Review and the Health Impact Assessment of the LLAS completed in August 2007.
- 2.13 In the meantime, the working group noted the list of potential Leeds City Council concessions that have been suggested as part of the Health Impact Assessment and LLAS Review as incentives that could motivate more landlords to become accredited (these are outlined in paragraph 4.7 of Appendix A).
- 2.14 Of this list, there was particular discussion around the incentive for an exemption on council tax whilst landlords are renovating properties to the decent homes standard. Whilst acknowledging that landlords would welcome this incentive, questions were raised around the exemption period and who would determine when a property is eventually deemed appropriate for letting again. It was felt that such issues needed to be discussed with officers responsible for the administration of Council Tax .
- 2.15 In view of the Scrutiny Board's ongoing inquiry into Street Cleaning, the working group was particularly interested in the proposed incentive for the enhancement of the LLAS refuse disposal concession to include beds, settees and furniture which are currently chargeable and can have a significant negative visual impact on the area when placed in yards. The working group learned that whilst landlords actively support this extension, there are existing barriers within the Council in terms of progressing with this any further. The working group emphasised the need to work together as a

Council in offering such concessions when recognising the wider advantages and particularly when these help to address environmental health issues. The other example highlighted was around the incentive to also offer discounts for pest control treatments.

- 2.16 It was agreed that the proposed incentives set out within the briefing paper would help to attract more private sector landlords to the LLAS. The working group recognised the value of raising the profile of the LLAS and it was highlighted that the findings from a recent piece of national research carried out by Julie Rugg and David Rhodes from the University of York also confirms the importance of accreditation in helping to improve standards in the sector, in combination with enforcement powers available to local councils, and that it calls for a national scheme of licensing for landlords and increased professionalism in the sector.

Tenants reliant on Local Housing Allowance

- 2.17 The working group noted that progress is ongoing to deliver increased bedspace coverage across the city and expand the number of landlords who will work with clients who are in housing need. It was recognised that such clients are usually dependant on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which is payable to the tenant.
- 2.18 Currently, development of a scheme to make referrals to the private rented sector is underway, working with Landlords who are members of LLAS. It was highlighted that under Local Housing Allowance rules the benefit level is not dependant on the state or condition of the property or the level of competency in property management of the owning landlord. Whilst this clearly gives no direct incentive to the landlord, under this new scheme referrals to the private rented sector are only through the LLAS, which does require that properties should be both in a good state of repair and well managed. This therefore provides some reassurance for the Council and such vulnerable tenants.
- 2.19 However, it was highlighted that where landlords have previously worked with LHA dependent tenants, some have experienced problems with rent arrears as a result of delayed claim applications and payments. It was felt that this issue would therefore need to be addressed effectively to help increase landlords' confidence in working with LHA dependent tenants in future.
- 2.20 The working group learned of an Accredited Tenants Scheme that was developed two years ago and which all LLAS members were encouraged to offer their tenants as part of the LLAS requirements. The landlord was to be responsible for administering the scheme, which in effect provided a reference at the end of the tenancy. However, it was reported that when reviewed, only 16% of the tenants interviewed were aware of the ATS and only 13% had a copy of the LLAS.
- 2.21 To encourage the private rented sector to work with tenants who are reliant on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to pay their rent, it was agreed that a more robust method of tenant referencing would increase landlords' confidence in

setting up Assured Shorthold Tenancies with LHA tenants and also be an added incentive to take up LLAS membership.

- 2.22 Details of the new proposals for such a scheme and related tenant support and training proposals were set out in the briefing paper around the Council's role in promoting private rented sector accommodation and advice to PRS tenants (Appendix B). The working group acknowledged that such a scheme does have landlord support and would involve tenants agreeing to be checked by Police, ASB, Housing Benefit, ALMOs etc before they were given a Tenant Reference. This would therefore increase landlord confidence in working with LHA dependent tenants. The reference would be subject to review by landlords following subsequent tenancies and could be operated electronically. It was highlighted that similar schemes that are currently operating in Manchester and Burnley are considered to be successful. However, in view of the resources needed to operate such a scheme, the working group noted that this would ideally operate across West Yorkshire.

Empty properties across the city

- 2.23 Towards the end of the meeting, the external witnesses highlighted to the working group that one of the key issues affecting housing need is around surplus empty properties located across the city and particularly within the city centre. The working group acknowledged this problem and confirmed that the Scrutiny Board has already considered evidence on this matter during session one of its inquiry.

Appendix A

The role of the LEEDS LANDLORD ACCREDITATION SCHEME (LLAS) and other initiatives to promote improvements in private rented housing conditions

1. Background

- 1.1 The LLAS was originally launched in April 1997 as the Leeds City Council's Code of Standards (LCC CoS) for the Private Rented Sector based on the Unipol Code of Standards (UC of S) launched in 1995. The LCC scheme was reviewed in 2001 and re-launched as the LLAS with a 3 year business plan for its development from September 2001. The LLAS was again reviewed in 2006/07 and an action plan produced for its continuing development over future years.
- 1.2 The requirements of the LLAS include 3 components of good practice:-
 - Good physical and amenity standards
 - Proper management
 - Good landlord/tenant/neighbour relations
- 1.3 The LCC Private Sector House Condition Survey 2007 (LHCS) estimates there are 41,660 dwellings in Leeds rented from private landlords, which equates to around 13% of the private sector stock (nationally 11%), compared to 7% in 1981. Private rented housing provides a home for many different types of households ; students (both undergraduates and mature students), nurses, doctors and young professionals, retirement accommodation, low income households, benefit claimants and households relocating from other parts of the country, migrating from outside the UK or seeking asylum.
- 1.4 Data on the private rented sector has been gathered as part of local house condition surveys repeated approximately every 5 years. These have shown that whilst there are PRS properties across the city they are significantly concentrated in the North-West and East areas of Leeds and within former Urban Renewal Areas with particular concentrations in Armley, Beeston and Chapeltown. The previous House Condition Survey in 2001 showed that 32% of private rented dwellings in single occupation and 74% of private-rented dwellings in multiple occupation were located in North-West Leeds. Not surprisingly , therefore, the majority of the properties owned by LLAS members portfolios are also located in the North-West.

2. Beneficiaries of Accreditation

2.1 Tenants

- Helps with the identification of good landlords committed to providing good quality accommodation that meet reasonable standards of health & safety, management and tenant welfare in accordance with the scheme standards.
- Assists tenants to gain access to decent PRS accommodation
- Empowers tenants to negotiate with their landlord to secure repairs and improvements in line with the prescribed standards.

2.2 Landlords

- Enables landlords to be consultees of the Council on matters of interest to PRS and have a defined role in the Council's Housing Strategy working in partnership with the Council.

- Promotes confidence in private sector renting & greater stability to the PRS lettings market
- Encourages responsible renting and gives landlords a competitive business advantage and also enhances the image & reputation of the PRS in general
- Gives clarity on the housing and management standards that should be met
- Supports landlords in encouraging tenants to be good tenants & neighbours

2.3 **Communities**

- Encourages landlords to properly maintain & invest in properties to keep them in good order so as not to be detrimental to the local amenity and local housing markets
- Improves community safety by reducing the potential for burglary through good repair and maintenance and tenant awareness initiatives
- Reduces ASB by tenants
- Assists in area regeneration & contributes to the local housing strategy

2.4 **Leeds City Council**

- Supports the Council's strategic objective to "improve the quality of life in Leeds "
- Supports the expansion and improvement of PRS in line with the government's policy on self regulation of the PRS
- Empowers landlords & tenants to set, achieve & monitor standards by negotiation between themselves , to compliment the enforcement role of the Council
- Enables LCC to access PRS to help in meeting its Housing Needs obligations

3.0 **Summary of the LLAS Current Position**

- The bed-space coverage of the LLAS continues to increase in line with the Council's Private Rented Sector Strategy which contains a target for LLAS of 20,000 bed-spaces coverage by 2010 (current bed-spaces 17,853 at 31/12/08 against an interim target of 18,000 by 31/3/09)
- The membership of the LLAS is split between Unipol and other non Unipol landlords in the City 27%: 73% respectively
Membership is made up of landlords with differing sized portfolios as follows:-
One property – 28% of members
Two-Three Properties – 23% of members
4 or more properties – 49% of members
- The LLAS members properties are predominantly in LS6 . The highest concentrations after that are in LS4 and LS11.
- Negotiations are ongoing to develop a city wide managing agents scheme to compliment the current scheme which only covers properties owned by members, some of whom also operate as managing agents for other non member property owners.
- The estimated current market coverage of accreditation for LLAS is 10.7% and Unipol C of S is 8.8% of the private rented sector in Leeds. There are 388 LLAS members and 318 Unipol members, of which 105 have joint membership in both schemes (31/12/08). Due to the overlap of membership the overall coverage of accreditation is estimated to be in the order of 16.6% of the private rented sector in total. Based on an average of 46 bed-spaces managed by each member, the total number of bed-spaces covered by accreditation is 27,646.

4.0 Specific Actions/ Challenges to Achieve Aims & Objectives of LLAS

- 4.1 **Broaden LLAS Cover City Wide** - a main aim of the LLAS Action plan is to widen the base of the LLAS membership to cover all segments of the private rented sector across the city.
- 4.2 The majority of the properties covered by the LLAS are still within the LS6 postcode area which indicates this objective has not yet been achieved. However the data also shows that the number of LLAS members who rent properties outside the NW of the city is growing.
- 4.3 The LCC Private Rented Sector Strategy sets targets for the LLAS to achieve 20,000 bedspaces by 2010. Currently the LLAS is on target to achieve this objective having achieved in excess of 16,000 bedspaces at end of March 2008. Improved property coverage in LS12, 11, 9, 7 & 8 has been achieved and during 07/08 increases of 216%, 285%, 573%, 39% & 105 % on the previous year's figures have been achieved in those postcodes respectively. It should be appreciated that the figures are however still relatively small numbers.
- 4.4 **Whole Council approach by LCC to offer unique incentives for LLAS** - there have been concessions and discounts made available to LLAS members for a range of products including Insurance premiums , Builders Merchants supplies, White Goods Rental, Pine Furniture, Soft Furnishings, IT equipment, uPVC windows & Doors, Beds and many more. The concessions have been further enhanced by the production of a Traders List which covers trades and businesses across West Yorkshire such as electricians, gas fitters, plumbers, glaziers, locksmiths, decorators and others all offering discounts to members.
- 4.5 Recently the LLAS Team in preparation for the launch of Energy Performance Certificates (EPC's) was able to negotiate an EPC concession for LLAS members at £49 + VAT per property which was a highly competitive rate. However these unique opportunities are rare and national organizations such as landlord professional bodies are able to subsidize concessions which the local accreditation scheme is unable to fund.
- 4.6 To attract and retain PRS landlords, it is imperative that the LLAS offers increasing numbers of incentives to landlords to enable increased coverage across the city. This concept was supported by the LLAS Review and the Health Impact Assessment of the LLAS completed in August 2007. Such concessions would be offered through LCC's existing services in corporate support of accreditation and could not be obtained by landlords other than through achieving LLAS membership. For example, a LLAS concession for landlord parking in RPZ's has been negotiated with Parking Services and although a fee is payable landlords are known to have joined the LLAS to access this concession. Parking Services are able to monitor the usage as it is tied to declared portfolio's under the LLAS.
- 4.7 The following potential LCC concessions have been suggested as part of the Health Impact Assessment & LLAS Review as incentives that could motivate more landlords to become accredited:
- negotiated enforcement for LLAS members i.e. write in the first instance and prosecute as a last resort under a range of Council enforcement activities .
 - an exemption on council tax whilst landlords are renovating properties to the decent homes standard.

- one hours free legal advice per year per member through legal services by appointment, together with unlimited landlord & tenant advice through Homelessness Advice & Prevention.
 - a priority service to deal with Local Housing Allowance enquiries including a telephone hotline and an enhanced benefit rate for tenants occupying properties owned by LLAS members.
 - enhancement of the LLAS refuse disposal concession to include beds, settees and furniture which are currently chargeable and can have a significant negative visual impact on the area when placed in yards. Landlords actively support this extension.
 - establish rent deposit guarantee scheme administered by the Council (see 4 below)
 - free advertising on the Leeds Homes website and associated flyer (obtained April 08 for 6 months trial period, and still continuing to date) .
 - fast tracking of accredited landlords into future selective licensing schemes where they have properties in the area covered by such a scheme (£50 discount proposed to be offered to LLAS members if SL in Leeds is approved)
 - discounts for pest control treatments (negotiated free RAT treatments only in early 2008).
 - discounted advertising from partner organizations such as Unipol for LLAS student landlords
- 4.8 Work continues on other discounts and current work with Leeds Homes has led to free advertising for LLAS members properties for rent in the Leeds Homes flyer and on their website with an improved uptake.
- 4.9 **Tenant Referencing Scheme** - An Accredited Tenants Scheme (ATS) administered by landlords was developed 2 years ago as a low cost option which all LLAS members were encouraged to offer to their tenants as part of the LLAS requirements. The landlord was to be responsible for administering the ATS, which in effect provided a reference at the end of the tenancy. During the last 2 years LLAS compliance check forms have indicated that only 16% of the tenants interviewed were aware of the ATS and only 13% had a copy of the LLAS. In contrast the “Living in Your Home” booklet produced by the Council has however proved very popular with landlords. Copies of this booklet have been offered free of charge to members to date to give to their tenants. To encourage the PRS to work with tenants who are reliant on LHA to pay their rent a more robust method of tenant referencing would increase landlords confidence in setting up AST’s with LHA tenants and be a huge draw to LLAS membership amongst landlords. Details of new proposals for such a scheme and related tenant support and training proposals are provided in the report – “The Council’s role in promoting the PRS”.
- 4.10 **Damage Liability Scheme** - A pilot scheme launched by HAP in October 2008 pays a damage liability up to a maximum of 4 weeks rent to a LLAS landlord who has a HAP homeless tenant referred to them through their AST scheme where verifiable damage occurs to the property during the tenancy.
- 4.11 **Landlord & Tenant Advice through HAP** – To overcome barriers to LLAS membership landlords need confidence in working with LCC to build a trusting relationship. Whilst much work has already been undertaken to provide advice and support to landlords, the more specific advice work to landlords on landlord /tenant contractual issues has been limited. In

consequence LCC are perceived anecdotally to be tenant orientated and biased. The reduction in the Landlord & Tenant support work previously afforded to LLAS members has been notable, and proposals now being developed to increase this aspect of the Council's role as HAP goes through its Change Process , are welcomed.

- 4.12 **Central Procurement of PRS Lettings & Advice to Landlords**– there are anecdotally “ad hoc” PRS procurement regimes operating in various departments of the Council with no specific requirement to work exclusively with LLAS accredited members. Work is underway to determine the extent of PRS accommodation usage across directorates, and the extent to which LLAS membership is relied upon as an indication that proper standards of management and property repair and maintenance are being met.

It would be good practice to formalize the PRS procurement practice and also set up a central contact point for landlords to engage with the council. Since the restructure of the Council's website there is no obvious route into LCC for landlords wishing to contact the Council.

4.13 **Private Sector Leasing of Properties**

Numerous landlords make contact with the LLAS offering to lease their rental properties to LCC on a long term basis. Currently ,consideration is being given to developing a private rented leasing scheme, whereby a landlord would sign over their property to the Council or its appointed agents (such as an Registered Social landlord) for an agreed period of years , in return for a guaranteed rental income over the period. The agreement would be subject to the property being in a reasonable condition at the commencement and conclusion of the leasing period , and the Council would be able to nominate tenants to occupy the property during the lease period, typically for 3 or 5 years.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The LLAS has now operated for over 10years , in parallel with Unipol's Code which is specifically aimed at the student market. The LLAS membership and coverage has grown over the period but there remains much work to do to extend its influence across the whole of the private rented sector , in particular in areas beyond north west Leeds.
- 5.2 Recent national research (the Rugg Review) has confirmed the importance of accreditation in helping to improve standards in the sector, in combination with enforcement powers available to local councils, and calls for a national scheme of licensing for landlords and increased professionalism in the sector.

6. Supporting LCC Documents

- 6.1 Health Impact Assessment of Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme (2008)
LLAS Action Plan (2007)
Stonham – Leeds Pre Tenancy Training Proposal (July 2008)
Rugg Review November 2008 – The Private Rented Sector- its contribution and potential.

Appendix B

The Councils Role in Promoting PRS Accommodation and Advice to PRS Tenants

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The overall pressure on housing supply to meet demand for accommodation has increased the importance of ensuring that the private rented sector plays a key partnership role in the delivery of affordable housing for both temporary & permanent options to those in housing need. The importance of this partnership has been reflected in the development of a number of key overlapping strategies; the Private Rented Sector Housing Strategy, the Empty Property Strategy & the overall Affordable Housing Plan.
- 1.2 The development of this partnership is also key to the ability of the Homelessness Service to prevent homelessness through the provision of wider housing solutions and where this is not practicable to provide temporary accommodation to meet our statutory obligations.
- 1.3 CLG's National Homelessness Strategy, Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives, sets out the government's agenda for how housing advice and homeless services should be reconfigured to effectively respond to housing need.
- 1.4 One of the main drivers of increasing housing need is to address the lack of good quality affordable housing across all tenures, including the private rented sector (PRS).
- 1.5 Currently, referrals to the PRS are through the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme and progress is on going to deliver increased bedspace coverage across the city, and to expand the number of landlords who will work with clients who are in housing need. Such clients are usually dependant on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) which is payable to the tenant. Under Local Housing Allowance rules the benefit level is not dependant on the state or condition of the property or the level of competency in property management of the owning landlord. Whilst this gives no direct incentive to the landlord, the Accreditation Scheme requires that properties should be both in a good state of repair and well managed, which provides some reassurance for the Council and tenants .

2.0 Housing Options

- 2.1 LCC has re-organised its Homelessness & Prevention Service and is currently investing in a 2 year Transformational Change Programme which will include investment in ICT and Customer Service training to deliver a step change in service provision.
- 2.2 The Service currently offers a range of advice and housing solutions including:
 - Advice on the availability of different housing tenures, sizes, types
 - Advice on locations, costs, amenities

- Advice on access to market rented housing
- Advice on housing solutions for older people
- Advice on housing solutions for people with physical, sensory or learning disabilities
- Advice on housing solutions for BME communities
- Advice on housing solutions for vulnerable people
- Advice on the Prevention of Homelessness including Landlord & Tenant Relations
- Emergency homelessness services including access to temporary accommodation
- Sign posting to Debt counselling services
- Furniture Provision Services
- Tenancy Support
- Sign posting to Anti Social Behaviour services
- Private Tenant and Landlord Support (PTLS) in conjunction with LCC's Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS)
- Referrals to providers who provide supported housing or housing support.

3.0 Private Tenant & landlord Support Team (PTLS)

3.1 Within existing resources, work has progressed over the last two years to facilitate Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST's) in partnership with Leeds Benefit Services and Health & Environmental Action Service through LLAS members. The initial Private Sector Scheme has facilitated the creation of 614 AST's in 2007/08. In 08/09 the numbers have reduced due to a review and restructure of the service, along with the drive for increased quality of accommodation. During this period of review the service has reduced its level of activity to an average of 40 AST's a month.

3.2 The review has highlighted that we need to:

- Expand the scheme to provide at least 60 AST's monthly
- Provide more support to both tenants and landlords
- Ensure that landlords within the scheme are clear about the requirements of the scheme and the customers
- Ensure that the scheme meets the aspiration to expand the number of LLAS members and ensure a continued drive to improve the overall standards in the PSS which LLAS can support.
- Review and strengthen the partnership arrangements between LBS and HEAS to ensure the 'One Council Approach' by working across internal and external stakeholders.

3.3 Following the review the service has bid for and secured short term funds through Supporting People to pump prime the required scheme expansion and deliver an enhanced PTLS scheme whilst still maintaining its links with LLAS. The PTLS has been developed in partnership with Planning, Health & Environmental Action Service and Leeds Benefit services to ensure improved quality control, enhance the value for money and over time seek to act as a conduit for enhancing the standards of private rented accommodation provision city wide.

3.4 The aim of the scheme is to:

- i) Deliver support to customers who have secured a housing outcome through the private rented sector. Ensuring tenancy sustainment through support and engagement with the customer
- ii) Assist in the reduction in the use of temporary accommodation
- iii) Assist in expanding the range of options available to prevent homelessness
- iv) Promote the 'One Council Approach' through partnership working across internal and external stakeholders

4.0 Damage Liability Scheme (DLS)

4.1 A pilot DLS scheme has been launched by Homelessness Advice & Prevention Service in October 2008. The DLS is a legally binding agreement that is provided to a qualifying landlord in place of a deposit. This will assist in securing increased landlord support for the scheme

5.0 Discretionary Housing Benefit

5.1 National regulations cover the payment of Housing Benefit however; currently discussions are taking place with Leeds Benefits Service to investigate ways of preventing homelessness through the innovative use of Discretionary Housing Benefit Payments.

6.0 Tenancy Training

6.1 Inevitably some clients will be unable, due to their past history, will not be seen as a acceptable risk for a landlord to take on, regardless of the housing support on offer. Supporting People have grant funded Stonham Housing Association to provide a Tenancy Training Programme. Undertaking such a course would help equip the client with the skills & knowledge necessary to live responsibly and independently.

7.0 Tenant Referencing Scheme

7.1 To build on this and to further encourage PRS landlords to work with tenants who are reliant on LHA to pay their rent a robust method of tenant referencing would increase landlords confidence in setting up AST's with LHA tenants and be an added incentive to take up LLAS membership. Such a scheme has landlord support and would involve tenants agreeing to be checked by Police, ASB, Housing Benefit , ALMO's etc before they were given a Tenant Reference. The reference would be subject to review by landlords following subsequent tenancies and could be operated electronically. Similar schemes operate in Manchester and Burnley and have been very successful in reducing ASB and increasingly landlord confidence in working with LHA dependant tenants.

7.2 Such a scheme would however not be possible to run from within existing resources and would ideally operate across West Yorkshire.