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## Report of the Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing

### Scrutiny Board (Neighbourhoods and Housing)

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006

### Subject: Leeds Private Rented Housing Strategy

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**Electoral Wards Affected:**

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

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## SCRUTINY SUMMARY

- 1 This report summarises the contents of the Leeds Private Rented Housing Strategy (hard copies can also be found in the Group Offices).
- 2 The strategy has been compiled by a multi-agency private rented sector strategy group sitting within the structure of the Leeds Housing Partnership and provides a partnership framework of how the Council and private landlords can work together to improve the supply and condition of private rented housing in Leeds.
- 3 At the heart of the strategy is a complementary balance of the two key roles of the Council in it's relationship with the private rented sector namely the Council's 'enabling role' to assist good landlords to provide the essential private letting service that many Leeds citizens need and the Council's statutory duties as the enforcement agency for health, safety and welfare in the private rented sector.
- 4 The strategy includes a commitment on the part of private landlords to work in partnership with the Council in order to provide quality housing provision and standards of management and to contribute to good neighbourhood management.

### 1.0 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to recommend that the Scrutiny Board endorse the Leeds Private Rented Housing Strategy.

### 2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Using the private rented strategy group as a consultative forum, the key elements of

how the Council and the private rented sector can be mutually supportive have been explored, a partnership framework agreed and an action plan produced to put the aims and objectives of the strategy into practice.

### **3.0 Main Issues**

- 3.1 The private rented sector is the fastest growing tenure in the Leeds housing market. Its growth has been driven by the growing buy-to-let market, the student housing market, demand from young professionals and households relocating to Leeds.
- 3.2 The strategy recognizes that the private rented sector provides a valuable part of the overall structure of housing provision in Leeds providing flexibility and ease of access for many households. However, it is also the case that where private rented housing becomes the majority tenure in a neighbourhood then problems with instability and high levels of household mobility can arise.
- 3.3 The Housing Act 2004 brought into effect an number of measures to regulate the private rented sector and deal with rogue landlords. HMO licensing and other forms of licensing along with application of the Home Health and Safety Rating System are having an impact on private landlords while the Leeds Landlords Accreditation Scheme is continuing to be promoted as the main mechanism for driving up standards while providing support for landlords.
- 3.4 The Local Housing Allowance pathfinder in Leeds lay the basis for the roll out of the Local Housing Allowance for private rented housing nationally. This will have implications for landlords letting to households claiming housing benefit.
- 3.5 The strategy seeks to strike a balance between enabling the provision of private rented housing and the enforcement of appropriate standards of housing condition and management.
- 3.6 It seeks to set out the roles and responsibilities of the range of organisations and agencies involved in the provision, management and regulation of private rented housing along with advice agencies, the Leeds Benefits Service and the Rent Officer service.
- 3.7 The Vision for the strategy is

“To enable good quality, well managed private rented housing to be an essential part of sustainable and balanced housing provision across Leeds and in individual neighbourhoods”.

The Vision of this Strategy will be achieved through three priority themes:

- 2.4.1 Promoting and supporting the private rented sector to meet needs and provide choice: involving the Council using its enabling role to promote the private rented housing and ensure that the Council and all relevant departments support a healthy private rented sector; and landlords contributing to agreed strategic objectives such as meeting housing needs and contributing to regeneration programmes and sustainable and balanced housing provision
- 2.4.2 Ensuring good standards of housing and management: involving the Council using its regulatory role to encourage responsible landlords and its enforcement role to tackle bad conditions and standards of management and

landlords using self regulation through support to accreditation schemes to provide good quality housing.

- 2.4.3 Effective advice and information and encouraging the positive engagement of private tenants and communities hosting private rented housing: Involving the Council providing or supporting provision of accurate and timely advice and information to private tenants and working with the Leeds Tenants Federation and other community engagement groups to encourage the inclusion of private tenants in tenant and resident groups, community associations and other forms of community engagement
- 2.5 The strategy identifies a series of key actions that are needed to put those principles into place and realize the Vision of the strategy and operationalises those through an integral action plan.
- 2.6.1 The strategy sets out actions that the Council can take to enable better private housing provision and support to landlords.
- 2.6.2 It also sets out the ways in which the Council will undertake its private rented sector health and safety enforcement role in a fair and equitable way. Firm enforcement action taken against the minority of private landlords who provide substandard services in order to force them to improve or leave the market, Indirectly provides support for the majority of good landlords by maintaining their good reputation.
- 2.6.3 Conversely the strategy places an obligation on private landlords to undertake a complementary set of actions that use and build on the Council's support in order to enable quality services to be provided in a way that is commercially supportive for landlords.
- 2.7 This strategy when implemented will ensure that all of those involved in private rented housing will work together to achieve or contribute to:
- The recognition of private rented housing as a valued component of balanced and sustainable housing provision and communities in Leeds
  - A recognition of the role of private rented housing in not only meeting demand and choice but also meeting needs of specific groups including students, homeless and vulnerable people and asylum seekers and refugees so long as it is economic to do so
  - More privately rented homes of a good standard through encouragement of landlords to improve their service
  - Fewer private rented homes of a poor standard of condition and amenity through effective enforcement action being taken against poor landlords
  - Increased membership of the Leeds Landlords Accreditation Scheme, the UNIPOL Code of Standards and other accreditation schemes
  - Increasing numbers of bedspaces in the private rented sector provided by accredited landlords
  - Provision of accurate and timely advice and information to private tenants
  - Inclusion of private tenants in tenant and resident involvement and community engagement structures
  - Efficient operation of housing benefit/local housing allowance processes for the benefit of private tenants and landlords

- Efficient and timely application of planning policies relating to private rented housing

### **3 Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

- 3.1 An Scrutiny Board decision to endorse the strategy will obligate those Council departments named in the action plan to undertake their respective actions as listed in the action plan.
- 3.2 The endorsement would provide a strong message to private landlords of the Council's sincerity and commitment to partnership working and private landlords will in turn will be encouraged to trust and use the Council's support to provide and maintain quality accommodation services.

### **4 Legal And Resource Implications**

- 4.1 Endorsement of the strategy does not place the Council or representatives of the private rented sector under any legal contractual obligations. The strategy is aspirational in its aims and not legally binding.
- 4.2 The strategy does not place the Council Departments named in the action plan under any additional resource pressure as the action points are either a confirmation of existing services or a commitment to good practice.

### **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 Endorsement of the Leeds Private Rented Housing Strategy will provide valuable strategic guidance to those Council service providers who are involved with private landlords and will in turn provide confidence to private landlords that the Council is committed to supporting them to provide the quality private tented housing accommodation services that Leeds citizens need.

### **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 Members of the Scrutiny Board are recommended to give their endorsement to the Leeds Private Rented Housing Strategy.