

SOCIAL SERVICES, HEALTH & HOUSING POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE REVIEW: THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR IN HILLINGDON

Cabinet Member	Councillor Philip Corthorne
Cabinet Portfolio	Social Services, Health & Housing
Officer Contact	Charles Francis, Democratic Services
Papers with report	Appendix 1 & the Committee's Final Report

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To receive the Social Services, Health & Housing Policy Overview Committee's report providing recommendations which propose improvements to the Private Rented Sector through a combination of information sharing, partnership working and self regulation.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	This report contributes to the Council's primary aim to prevent homelessness and ensure robust procedures are in place to assist tenants in the Private Rented Sector.
Financial Cost	There will be no additional costs as the proposed improvements will be contained within existing budgets.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Social Services, Health and Housing Policy Overview Committee
Ward(s) affected	All.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 1. Welcome the report from the Social Services, Health and Housing Policy Overview Committee (as in Appendix 2) and note the general consensus it found in favour of improving the Private Rented Sector in the Borough; and**
- 2. Endorses the recommendations of the Policy Overview Committee report as in Appendix 1, noting the officer comments on their implementation.**

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The recommendations are aimed at building upon Hillingdon's understanding of the changes to the Private Rented Sector. An improved approach to the Private Rented Sector will help reduce cases of homelessness by focusing on information advice and guidance and in cases where this is not possible, ensure that any intervention is as effective as possible.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could decide to reject or amend the Committee's recommendations.

Supporting Information

1. The Committee chose The Private Rented Sector in Hillingdon as a review topic in 2008/9 in building upon the findings of the most recent Housing Conditions Survey and the rapid expansion of this sector.
2. The aim of this review was to investigate the nature and role of the Private Rented Sector, determine current and likely future demand and supply of private rented sector accommodation in Hillingdon and also to consider the current standard of service offered by private sector landlords to tenants in Hillingdon.
3. The review took place between February 2008 and April 2009.
4. The Committee's report (attached) gives full details of the review.

Financial Implications

The recommendations contained in this will not result in additional costs for the Council. A number of these are already in hand and the proposed improvements will be contained within existing budgets including recommendation 14.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The Committee's recommendations will provide a springboard for the Council to take those steps necessary to improve the private rented sector in Hillingdon.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Committee took evidence from Lettings Agents, Landlords, tenants, officers and experts as described in the attached report (see page 9).

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

A corporate finance officer has reviewed the report and its recommendations, and is satisfied that the financial implications of the recommendations can be contained within existing budgets in the private sector housing service, and that there are no wider implications for the Council's resources as a whole.

Legal

There are no legal impediments implementing the recommendations in this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

Policy Overview Committee Recommendations

- 1. Overall, that officers seek out and develop opportunities and beneficial partnerships with the private rented sector in relation to the Council's responsibilities in the Housing area.**

Officer Response

Officers have already established a range of partnerships in relation to the supply of housing to house homeless or potentially homeless households, and continue to seek new opportunities

- 2. That the London Borough of Hillingdon seeks to encourage local landlords to register with the Association of Residential Lettings Agents (Arla) licensing scheme and publicise a list of those which do in the Hillingdon People monthly magazine.**

Officer Response

Officers will take this matter up through our next Hillingdon Private Landlords Forum, and will see if a representative of Arla can attend. Any list to be publicised in Hillingdon People will of course depend on Arla agreeing to release the list, with the consent of those owners on it, which may prove difficult to obtain

- 3. That Housing clients who are signposted to the private rented sector be encouraged to seek out those landlords with either Arla or similar accreditation as a means of quality assurance.**

Officer Response

We can recommend this, but there are only limited numbers of owners registered with Arla, or the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme, at present

- 4. That officers in the Housing Options / Needs Teams be requested to link the information provided to prospective tenants with accredited landlord schemes and to integrate this into the revised Private Rented Sector Strategy as a model of best practice.**

Officer Response

We will revise our information and integrate into the next revision of our Private Rented Sector Strategy

- 5. That officers do more to encourage landlords to enforce tenancy conditions in the Private Rented Sector in relation to damage to property, causing nuisance to neighbours or failing to fulfil their own obligations to maintain the garden and decorate internally etc.**

Officer Response

We will raise again as a topic issue at a Private Landlords Forum and with local agents. The London Landlord Accreditation Scheme and HMO Enforcement powers are also of assistance

- 6. That the current incentives to encourage Landlords Accreditation Scheme be welcomed. However, further incentives and information should be developed to encourage even more landlords to participate in the scheme.**

Officer Response

We will advertise gain, write to owners on our Landlord Forum lists and raise at a future Landlords Forum

- 7. That tenant and landlord management packs provided by Lettings Agents be reviewed and amended as necessary to include details of refuse and garden waste collection as a means of improving the street scene around some PRS properties.**

Officer Response

We shall take this up through our Private Landlords Forum and local agents

- 8. That Officers ensure consistent language is used both verbally and on printed materials when providing information, advice and guidance to all housing enquiries. Officers also to ensure the promotion of the Council Contact Centre as the single point of access for all Housing enquiries and complete the review already started in this area’.**

Officer Response

Written and website materials will be reviewed again. The website review will be completed

- 9. That Officers be requested to review the information contained on the Housing website to ensure that this is as helpful as possible to tenants.**

Officer Response

This will be reviewed again as above

- 10. That Officers promote information about low cost ownership schemes and shared ownership schemes as viable options to long term renting within the Private Rented Sector.**

Officer Response

This has already been done through the Housing Options Service and wider publicity/promotion. It will be continued through publicity programmes on available schemes

- 11. That partnership working with outside agencies and organisations/bodies (such as Brunel University) be developed further to ensure the success of future initiatives to address common problems (anti-social behaviour, noise nuisance, littering and street scene) associated with the Private Rented Sector.**

Officer Response

This will be pursued further

12. That the successful Hillingdon Private Landlord's Forum be developed further to undertake additional work in relation to partnership working, Local Housing Allowance and Housing Benefit and the further development of its activities and role.

Officer Response

This is already in hand

13. That everything possible be done to ensure that the application to the CLG to seek consent for additional HMO licensing for the South of the Borough is successful.

Officer Response

Officers are progressing this important issue

14. That the preventative work being carried out through the Tenancy Sustainment Team be further developed, with key partners, in assisting people to remain in their homes and avoiding homelessness, particularly repeat homelessness.

Officer Response

The work of the Team will be developed subject to overall resource constraints

15. To note that Officers will integrate the findings from the Rugg Review (where appropriate) into a revised Private Rented Sector Strategy.