

Appendix 1: Comments on recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of Private Rented Sector housing in Harrow

RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTIONS	BY WHOM AND WHEN
<p>Recommendation A: We recommend that the Council participate in the development of London-wide initiatives that enable councils to share intelligence about the quality and standards of emergency accommodation</p>	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan: The Council will continue to work collaboratively with members of the West London Housing Partnership, London councils and the GLA to tackle housing issues across local authority boundaries, share good practice, and carry out joint service procurement exercises in order to achieve economies of scale and to develop joint bids for funding.</p>	<p>Jon Dalton, Head of Housing Needs</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Recommendation B: We recommend that the Council continues to develop means to increase the financial, legal and other risks to landlords associated with deliberately providing sub-standard accommodation</p>	<p>Accepted on the basis this needs to be managed within current and predicted future resources and is included in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan. Also the Council successfully uses the powers afforded to it by the Housing Act 2004 in terms of enforcing property standards within the private rented sector, but at a time when the Council is seeking to try to increase private rented supply, a purely enforcement based approach could deter some landlords from offering their properties to accommodate homeless households or those needing homes at the lower end of the market. The proposed approach is that the Council continues to make full use of its powers to take action against those landlords who clearly and deliberately flout their responsibilities, but its overall strategic</p>	

	<p>approach is one of enabling and encouraging landlords to make improvements to their properties.</p> <p>Harrow Council's Housing Enforcement Team is currently revising its fee structure in relation to enforcement action against landlords who do not respond to informal requests to improve the condition of their property. It is proposed that a fee be introduced where the Council issues formal improvement notices, (as the power to charge a reasonable amount for certain administrative and other expenses is provided for in the legislation) and this would be registered as a charge on the title of the property. It is hoped that this additional charge will deter landlords from non compliance and will result in a reduction in the number of formal notices served.</p> <p>Although under the provisions of the Housing Act 2004 the Council has a legal duty to take appropriate enforcement action (such as serving improvement notices) where properties are identified as having category 1 hazards as per the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), consideration is being given to the extension of formal notices to cover certain category 2 hazards. This is in recognition that some of the higher level category 2 hazards under HHSRS can also have a significant impact on the health and safety of residents.</p>	<p>Shankar Sivashankar, SM-Licensing, Housing & Support Services by December 2012</p> <p>Shankar Sivashankar, SM-Licensing, Housing & Support Services by April 2013</p>
<p>Recommendation C: We recommend that</p>	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Private</p>	<p>Jon Dalton, Head of Housing Needs</p>

<p>the Council explores avenues for continuation of the successful leasing of properties from landlords through the Help2Let model.</p>	<p>Sector Housing Strategy and action plan: The Help2Let scheme is critical in assisting the Council to meet its homelessness duties. We are considering options that can enhance the offer to landlords and encourage more lettings.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Recommendation D: We recommend that the Private Sector Strategy be explicitly linked to the Economic Development Strategy. This should reflect the role of housing in facilitating the labour market. This also addresses the future benefit cap, in that households on lower incomes are more likely to be able to retain their accommodation if they are in work.</p>	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan: The link between housing and employment is more important than ever in terms of enabling families to be able to continue to afford to live in Harrow. The Council is considering a variety of options that will create new opportunities and increase the range of employment opportunities for the families that will be hit hardest by the welfare reforms.</p>	<p>Jon Dalton, Head of Housing Needs Mark Billington, Head of Economic Development and Research</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Recommendation E: We recommend the Council consider further initiatives for example through Help2Let, to help promote tenancy sustainability. This will be particularly important for households for whom the Council fulfils its homelessness duty through the private rented sector.</p>	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan:</p> <p>For example we will continue to operate through the Help2Let scheme Tenant Training to sustain current tenancies and show landlords that we will support both them and tenants: 220 tenants trained with certificates - very well received and being copied by other Councils.</p>	<p>Jon Dalton, Head of Housing Needs</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Recommendation F: We recommend that the Council use its best endeavours to encourage higher standards in the private rented sector by considering the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A landlord 'kitemark' or 'good landlord' 	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan:</p> <p>Examples of current initiatives include:</p> <p>The pilot Sustain Tenancy grant is intended</p>	<p>Jon Dalton, Head of Housing Needs Shankar Sivashankar, SM-Licensing, Housing & Support Services</p> <p>December 2012 and ongoing</p>

<p>scheme, which is branded and promoted locally;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A register of landlords; • A tenant and landlord ‘charter’, setting out rights and responsibilities; • Developing the ‘arbitration’ role of the council in bringing together tenants and landlords and identifying solutions; • Using enforcement action as a part of the suite of solutions to tackling poor standards. 	<p>to help prevent homelessness in cases where households in the private rented sector become homeless due to the condition of their property, and the landlord does not have the funds to pay for the cost of improvement. In return for a grant of up to £1,500 the landlord must agree to extend the tenancy period with the existing tenant to a period of two years. If the tenant leaves the property within this timescale the Council will have nomination rights on the property for the remaining nomination period to house those from the housing register.</p> <p>The London Landlord Accreditation scheme works to ensure that landlords are aware of their roles and responsibilities as landlords in the PRS. Members must prove that they are a fit and proper person to undertake the business of renting and to complete training sessions on required housing standards and good management practices. Work will continue in Harrow to encourage more landlords to become accredited and the scheme will be promoted through existing and new avenues such as local business forums. At the present time almost 100 landlords with properties in Harrow are members of the scheme.</p> <p>Planning Enforcement of substandard living accommodation is addressed in the planning enforcement policy.</p>	
<p>Recommendation G: We recommend that</p>	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Private</p>	<p>Jon Dalton, Head of Housing Needs</p>

<p>the Private Sector Strategy include a specific objective to engage with residents living in the private rented sector.</p>	<p>Sector Housing Strategy and action plan: An initial meeting of the Harrow Private Tenants' Forum was held in Summer 2012 and will be continued in order to allow tenants within the sector to share their views and have an influence over the future development of housing and new initiatives within the borough. It is intended that future meetings will be held twice a year and new members of the panel will be sought to ensure that it is representative of Harrow residents.</p>	<p>April 2013</p>
<p>Recommendation H: We recommend that an objective pertaining to bringing empty homes back into use be included in future strategy.</p>	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan: Empty properties are a wasted asset at a time when demand for housing is high and bringing them back into use would add to the local supply. Long term empties are blight on local communities and can also lead to antisocial behaviour, such as vandalism which impacts on the surrounding neighbourhood. In the period 2009/10 to 2011/12 The Council brought around 800 properties back into use through a combination of grant assistance and collaborative working with landlords.</p> <p>For a number of years the Council has offered grant schemes, using Government funding, to private sector landlords to bring empty properties back into use. In April 2012 a new Council funded grant programme was introduced in response to challenges arising from the housing market and government reform, which aims to maintain the commercial appeal to landlords of grant</p>	<p>Alison Pegg/Jane Fernley, Housing Partnerships and Strategy Manager</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

	<p>initiatives and to encourage more landlords to work with the Council. We will continue to develop further initiatives and seek to secure funds including using our own capital resources, to bring more empty properties back into use.</p>	
<p>Recommendation I: We recommend that the council include conversion of existing council assets - such as garages - into its objectives regarding bringing empty homes back into use, subject to planning considerations.</p>	<p>Accepted and the detail relating to this is included in the draft Housing Strategy objectives relating to the provision of new housing supply.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder for Housing is leading on the completion of a Garage Strategy which includes identifying sites that are no longer needed and will be made available as development sites. The list of sites is currently being prepared taking account of Planning advice and other site constraint information.</p>	<p>Cllr Bob Currie, Portfolio Holder for Housing Elaine Slowe, Housing Enabling Manager April 2013</p>
<p>Recommendation J: We recommend that Cabinet undertake an analysis of the risk involved before embarking on increasing the supply PRS in Harrow in the context of the council's debt and other inevitable demands for the council's capital.</p>	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Housing Strategy and draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan: The need to grow the sector has been recognised in the Government's national housing strategy and research was commissioned nationally to scope the barriers to institutional investment in the private rented sector. The Montague report (published in July) makes recommendations as to how the sector can be made more attractive to investors through the use of vehicles such as Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs). Locally there may be scope</p>	<p>Alison Pegg, Housing Partnerships and Strategy Manager Phil Loveland-Cooper, Head of Corporate Estate Stephen Kelly, Divisional Director of Planning July 2013</p>

	<p>to use the Planning Policy Framework (PPF) to include market rental properties as a requirement of new housing developments within the borough. A range of potential options are being explored by a cross directorate group to identify whether they would be feasible within Harrow. These may require investment by the Council whether in the form of land/capital or a combination of both. Proposals will be reported to Cabinet for approval and will have undergone a thorough risk analysis during the development process and will be included on the appropriate risk registers.</p>	
<p>Recommendation K: For O&S we recommend that the Standing Review of the Budget consider the policy objectives of the Private Sector Strategy as part of its work in reviewing the council's use of capital</p>	<p>Not applicable to the Cabinet response</p>	
<p>Recommendation L: We recommend that the Private Sector Strategy and forthcoming Climate Change Strategy be explicitly linked in order to ensure that tenants in the private rented sector can also benefit from energy efficiency and fuel poverty initiatives.</p>	<p>Accepted and is included in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan and Climate Change Strategy: New guidance, issued in June 2012 under the Housing Energy Conservation Act (HECA) requires the Council to establish a programme that will improve the thermal efficiency of all housing types, for all residents. The HECA guidance states that the Council must develop and publish a report to the Secretary of State by 31st March 2012 setting out the energy conservation measures that the Council considers</p>	<p>Andrew Baker, Head of Climate Change Nadeem Din, Housing Strategy and Performance Manager</p>

	<p>practicable, cost-effective and likely to result in significant improvement to the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in the area. Progress reports will then be required at two-yearly intervals.</p> <p>This is a significant challenge to achieve in view of the limited resources available to support it. The Green Deal, which is the government's flagship initiative to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty, will be introduced in Autumn 2012. The scheme will work on a 'Pay as You Save' basis, where finance is provided to install the measures and households repay the finance through the savings they make on their energy bills. This will be available to both owner occupiers and those living in the private rented sector. Active promoting of this initiative will be important in addressing this challenge.</p>	
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