

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	Cabinet
2. Date:	18th January, 2012
3. Title:	Scrutiny Review of the Private Rented Sector
4. Directorate:	Resources All wards

5. Summary

The attached report sets out the findings and recommendations of the *Scrutiny Review of the Private Rented Sector*, undertaken by members of the former Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel. The report and recommendations were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, at its meeting of 16 December 2011.

6. Recommendations

- a. That Cabinet receive the report;**
- b. That Cabinet's response to the recommendations be fed back to OSMB within two months of its submission.**

7. Proposals and Details

The former Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel undertook a scrutiny review into the “private rented sector”.

With high numbers of people seeking affordable housing across all sectors; the availability of decent properties to rent is an ongoing concern. This is reflected anecdotally in surgery reports from councillors who had both private sector tenants coming to them for advice and also local people concerned at the upkeep of private properties in their areas. There were other concerns raised through Area Assemblies and Safer Neighbourhood Teams about the condition of properties and impact on wider community.

Issues discussed include:

- The very short supply of housing in the social housing sector - both council and housing association and the changing economic circumstances of people entering the housing market during a recession;
- Proposed national changes to housing benefit which would see a reduction in local housing allowances;
- Shortages of affordable decent, private rented accommodation in some areas of the borough. Whilst social housing stock has been brought up to decent homes standards, there are pockets of poorly maintained and sub-standard properties in the private sector;
- The impact of poor maintained housing stock and tenant churn on the wider community;
- Tenant and landlord accreditation schemes;
- Difficulties of absentee landlords;
- Success of local initiatives to engage landlords; however, pressure on resources has meant a reduction in proactive work which may undermine these successes.

7.1 The review began its evidence gathering in summer 2010, concluding in early 2011. Unfortunately, because of staffing pressures it has not been possible to produce the report until this point.

7.2 The recommendations from the review are detailed in Section 7 of the review and include:

- The production of a long term sustainable development and action plan to improve the physical fabric of the Private Rental Sector in the borough, in line with neighbourhood based regeneration initiatives, local priorities and reflecting changes in Government Policy.
- Ensure that sufficient resources are aligned to the delivery of the action plan and that working practices across relevant teams are co-ordinated to support it.
- Alongside the Action Plan, the council should seek to engage landlords, tenants and councillors in its work
- There should be a re-launch of the Private Landlord Accreditation scheme built on the best of the models developed by other authorities

- That the Council takes robust enforcement action against those landlords (or tenants) who persistently disregard their responsibilities
- Consideration should be given to the Council's use of its powers to bring properties back into use
- Support is given to local agencies such as RoBond to ensure that vulnerable tenants have access to affordable bond guarantees, assistance and advice
- Designating one of the Advisers to the Cabinet Member for Safe & Attractive Neighbourhoods to a watching brief on the role of the private rented sector in Rotherham.

8. Finance

A number of the review recommendations may have financial implications if adopted. This would require further exploration by the Strategic Leadership Team and Partners on the cost, risks and benefits of their implementation.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

There is a risk that interventions will be short term and not achieve a sustainable impact. To avoid this, we will need to ensure that any new approaches are properly embedded within the council and partner agencies.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

see main report

11. Background Papers and Consultation

The report has been circulated to key individuals that participated in the review for their comments and to check for factual accuracy.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 16 December, 2011

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