

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

<b>1.</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> March 2012</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Scrutiny Review of the Private Rented Sector - Update</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Directorate</b>	<b>Neighbourhoods and Adult Services</b>

### **5. Summary**

On 18 January 2012, Full Cabinet agreed that the Scrutiny Review of the Private Rented Sector and its recommendations be noted and a response be submitted within two months, as outlined within the Council's Constitution.

This report, in the main, accepts the recommendations made by Members of the former Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel. However, due to the demise of the Housing Market Renewal and Regional Housing Board funding programmes, initiatives previously reliant upon external funding have been deferred whilst a cost benefit analysis is undertaken to establish whether there are sufficient resources to enable them to continue.

### **6. Recommendations:**

- **To note the contents of this report and Appendix 1.**

## **7. Proposals and details**

A review of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Rotherham was undertaken by Members of the former Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel and a report was produced, which set out in detail the key findings and recommendations.

The attached report, Appendix 1, highlights the proposed actions to be taken towards meeting the recommendations of the Scrutiny review. Of the eight recommendations, six of them are to be accepted with the remaining two recommendations deferred until cost benefit analysis work is undertaken to identify whether it is appropriate to support schemes that will contribute towards meeting the recommendations. Additional work will need to be undertaken to identify alternative sources of funding to deliver any schemes identified as providing value to the council.

Specific targeted work will consider the following:

- Engaging landlords, tenants and Councillors.
- The re-launch of a private landlord accreditation scheme.
- The Council using its enforcement powers to assist in bringing empty private sector properties back into use.

Continued support will be offered to local agencies that assist vulnerable adults to access private rented accommodation through the provision of affordable loans, guarantee bond schemes, assistance and advice.

Progress is already being made towards responding to the findings of the review and activity to date includes:

- The Community Protection Unit (CPU) now charges for enforcement notices served. All formal enforcement actions are resolved within three months. Over 800 private sector properties have been inspected and are found to be free from Category 1 hazards.
- Targeted proactive work, focussing on the vulnerable and improving the physical condition of housing stock and management within the private rented sector, has been undertaken in some of Rotherham's most deprived areas i.e. Eastwood, Canklow, Dinnington, Maltby and Ferham.
- Over 700 clients have been assisted with a rent in advance loan, to help to prevent homelessness and provide access to private rented accommodation, since its introduction in 2007. In this current year, through the provision of loans and bonds, 260 clients have accessed private rented accommodation free from Category 1 hazards.
- A Carbon reduction programme (CESP) is underway in Ferham and this scheme will contribute towards bringing approximately 30 properties back into use and tackle the excessive cold Category 1 hazard present in over 300 private sector properties.
- Key Choices Property Management manages 160 PRS properties on behalf of landlords who require assistance, ensuring an improved quality of accommodation for those accessing the Property Shop requiring housing.

## **8. Finance**

The majority of funding associated with current and future private rented sector activity is concentrated on officer time to enable, inform and assist those providing and accessing

PRS accommodation. However, since the demise of the Housing Market Renewal and Regional Housing Board funding programmes, there is reliance upon homelessness grant and recycled regional housing board monies to fund loans and support the provision of paper bond guarantees.

## **9. Risks and uncertainties**

There is a risk that insufficient resources, for continued and future activity needed to meet the recommendations of the review, are unavailable.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

The work carried out to improve Rotherham's PRS contributes towards the key themes reflected within the Vision for Rotherham outcome framework as follows:

Making sure no community is left behind – by creating opportunities to remove blight by bringing back into use empty properties, which have a detrimental impact on a community.

Providing quality education; ensuring people have opportunities to improve skills, learn and get a job – Landlord accreditation will enable landlords to understand their responsibilities and develop themselves and be recognised as responsible landlords.

Ensuring care and protection are available for those who need it most – through offering specific housing support to vulnerable adults and ensuring that they access private rented accommodation with no health and safety hazards present.

Helping to create safe and healthy communities – people are able to live in decent affordable homes of their choice and feel safe where they live .

Improving the environment - preparing Rotherham to address climate change challenges, by providing quality housing that will meet tenants' current and future housing aspirations.

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

- Overview & Management Scrutiny Review, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011 – Scrutiny Review of the Private Rented Sector
- Appendix 1: Cabinet's Response to Scrutiny Review – Private Rented Sector

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