

Subject:	Letting Agents		
Date of Meeting:	20 October 2014		
Report of:	Assistant Chief Executive		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Giles Rossington	Tel: 29-1038
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 The OSC Chair recently received a request from CAB (Citizens' Advice Bureau) to establish a scrutiny panel to look at issues relating to Letting Agents.
- 1.2 More information on this request is included in **Appendix 1** to this report (additional information provided by CAB).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That OSC members agree to appoint a sub-group of members (to be nominated by Political Groups) to scope the CAB request for scrutiny of Letting Agents; and
- 2.2 That (subject to the findings of this sub-group) OSC members approve the establishment of a scrutiny panel to further investigate this issue.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 CAB recently submitted a request for the establishment of a scrutiny panel to examine issues relating to Lettings Agents. Supporting information from CAB is included as **Appendix 1** to this report.
- 3.2 A scrutiny panel has previously considered the issue of the behaviour of city Letting Agents. This panel (Cllrs Paul Elgood, Bill Randall and Christine Simpson) reported in March 2011 and all its recommendations were agreed in principle by the Cabinet Member for Housing (Oct 2011).
- 3.3 However, much has changed since 2011, with local housing pressures becoming ever more acute and with increasing numbers of people reliant on private rentals. In addition, some of the central recommendations of the 2011 panel, such as the establishment of an 'ethical' letting agency, have not been successfully implemented, often despite the best efforts of the council and its partners.
- 3.4 Therefore, while this topic has been scrutinised in the relatively recent past, there is potential merit in re-visiting it, given the fact that concerns about aspects of the

topic have increased over the intervening period, and that previous attempts to improve things have had mixed success.

- 3.5 It is however suggested that any scoping of this issue by a member sub-group should begin by revisiting the findings of the 2011 Scrutiny Panel, and in particular tracking the implementation of all the panel recommendations approved by the council's executive.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 OSC members could decide either to reject the CAB request for a scrutiny panel; or to agree a panel immediately (e.g. with no sub-group to scope the issue); or to request an officer scoping report to the next OSC meeting (and decide whether to establish a panel at this point).
- 4.2 Should members choose to accept the scrutiny request, the recommendations of this report are intended to ensure that the issue is progressed in a timely fashion without fully committing OSC to undertaking a major piece of work until members have scoped the issue (requesting an officer scoping report would involve additional delay as the next scheduled OSC meeting is in January 2015).

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 This report has been compiled with the assistance of CAB and is in response to a request from CAB. The OSC has previously welcomed suggestions for scrutiny from key city partners, and has established several scrutiny panels in response to such referrals (e.g. Social Value in Procurement and Information Sharing for Vulnerable Adults).

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The CAB request for scrutiny of Lettings Agents/Private Sector Rentals is based on a worrying increase in the number of people seeking advice from CAB on these issues. Given the volume and the seriousness of some of these issues, this seems a worthy subject for scrutiny. Although scrutiny members have explored similar issues before, it is not clear that systems have improved.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The resources to support the scrutiny will be found within existing budgets. The financial implications of the recommendations of the scrutiny will be considered and reported back.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley

Date: 08/10/14

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 The OSC has the authority to establish scrutiny panels to examine issues that members consider to be of corporate or citywide significance.

Lawyer Consulted: Oliver Dixon

Date: 13/10/14

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 None directly. An EIA would be produced should members agree to establish a scrutiny panel.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 None to this report.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.5 None identified.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Supporting information provided by CAB

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

2011 Scrutiny Panel Report on Letting Agents

