

<b>Subject:</b>	Rent Smart Brighton and Hove
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	16 November 2016
<b>Report of:</b>	Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture
<b>Contact Officer:</b> Name:	Andy Staniford
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	All

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE****1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 A presentation was made to the Housing & New Homes Committee on 21 September 2016 from members of the new Rent Smart Brighton and Hove partnership.
- 1.2 This is a new citywide partnership of organisations committed to supporting tenants in the private rented sector. It is a community led self-help group that seeks to work collaboratively with the council as a formal partner.
- 1.3 Housing & New Homes Committee requested an officer report to the next meeting on the Council becoming a partner of Rent Smart.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Housing & New Homes Committee authorises the Chief Executive to sign the Rent Smart Partnership Agreement (Appendix 1) on behalf of Brighton & Hove City Council.

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Council's formal response to the Private Rented Sector Scrutiny Panel was approved by Housing & New Homes Committee on 11 November 2015 in relation to matters within the remit of the Committee.
- 3.2 While non-housing matters were to be reported to the relevant policy committee for consideration some Scrutiny Panel recommendations were outside the remit of the council as a whole. This included recommendations related to a city wide 'rate my landlord' scheme for all private rented housing, promoting the development of university endorsed landlords and lettings agents and joint working outside of our existing formal council partnership arrangements.
- 3.3 Following the Housing & New Homes Committee approval of recommendations relating to matters within their remit, Cllr Hill convened a private rented sector

workshop to consider responses to the PRS scrutiny report that are outside the remit of the Council. This has led to the Rent Smart initiative.

- 3.4 Rent Smart Brighton and Hove ([www.rentsmbrightonhove.org](http://www.rentsmbrightonhove.org)) is a new citywide partnership of organisations committed to supporting tenants in the private rented sector. Rent Smart aims to:
- Increase awareness of rights and responsibilities amongst private renting tenants and people looking for a place to live in the private rented sector
  - Give tenants/potential tenants more confidence in dealing with agencies and landlords
  - Signpost tenants to up to date information and advice about privately renting
  - Promote use of a ratings system for letting agencies
- 3.5 The Partnership is yet to be formally launched (planned for 22 November 2016), however, early work includes organisations such as:
- Brighton Housing Trust
  - Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau
  - Brighton Students Union
  - University of Sussex Students Union
  - University of Sussex
  - University of Brighton
  - Sussex Student Lettings
  - Southern Landlords Association
  - Brighton & Hove Estate Agents Association
  - Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership
- 3.6 This self-help group plans to base their objectives on the relevant recommendations of the March 2015 Scrutiny Panel report produced by Brighton & Hove City Council:
- 13: Promote the development of university-endorsed landlords and letting agents, and encourage these to be championed
  - 14: Promote the use of a city-wide rate-my-landlord scheme
  - 16: Development and promote the uptake and benefits to landlords of registration to PRS accreditation schemes
  - 18: Increase the supply of private sector housing with rental costs that are affordable
  - 20: Foster joined-up working between city council departments and other relevant organisations
- 3.7 These recommendations also support the Housing Strategy 2015 through the following strategic actions:
- Promote support services to students around tenancy management, rights, and responsibilities.
  - Promote the Student's Union "Rate Your Landlord" report across the city and the idea of rented accommodation that is 'fit for study'.
  - Support for landlords to better manage properties.
  - Up skill small and accidental landlords to improve tenancy management.
- 3.8 Rent Smart was invited to September 2016 Housing & New Homes Committee to present their work and officers were asked to bring a report to the next meeting

with a recommendation as to whether the council should, or should not, become a member of the partnership.

- 3.9 In signing the Partnership agreement, the Council will signal its support for this self-help group that aims to tackle some of the challenges in the city's private rented sector. The Partnership Agreement states that meetings will usually be held in the Housing Centre. It should be noted that this is subject to room availability and the council's ongoing use of the building.
- 3.10 The Council reserves the right to leave the Partnership.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The Council's formal response to the Private Rented Sector Scrutiny Panel was approved by Housing & New Homes Committee on 11 November 2015 and with progress reported to committee on 21 September 2016. These reports recognised that many of the recommendations were outside the control of the council.
- 4.2 The Rent Smart Brighton and Hove initiative has the potential to bring about a partnership of public, private and third sector organisations with the collective ability to tackle some of the issues identified that were beyond the council's remit.

#### **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Respondents to the consultation for the Housing Strategy 2015, the Private Sector Housing Scrutiny Panel 2015 and more recently, the Fairness Commission Report 2016 all call for the council to take action to improve the quality of homes and management across the private rented sector.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Joining the partnership does not preclude the council working through existing (or other new) groups and mechanisms to achieve outcomes aligned to the Housing Strategy 2015 and wider Community Strategy.

#### **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

##### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 Brighton and Hove City Council has not committed any funding to support his self help group. Therefore, any staff time or office accommodation provided will need to be met from within existing resources.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks*

*Date: 01/11/16*

##### Legal Implications:

- 7.2 The Housing & New Homes Committee has overall responsibility for the council's housing functions, including private sector housing, tenancy relations and the

provision of housing advice. Authoring the Executive Director to sign the Partnership Agreement is compatible with that responsibility. The agreement is not intended to create any legal obligations, enforceable against the council.

*Lawyer Consulted: Name*      *Liz Woodley*

*Date: 31.10.16*

**Equalities Implications:**

- 7.3 In seeking to tackle disrepair and management issues in the private rented sector, Rent Smart Brighton & Hove has the potential to have a positive impact on tenants including those with protected characteristics.

**Sustainability Implications:**

- 7.4 Evidence for the extension of discretionary licensing (see report to Housing & New Homes Committee, 16 November 2016) has identified poor property conditions in the private rented sector. Action to tackle this is expected to improve the quality of the city's housing stock, thereby improving its sustainability.

**Crime & Disorder Implications:**

- 7.5 Evidence for the extension of discretionary licensing (see report to Housing & New Homes Committee, 16 November 2016) has identified anti-social behaviour linked to properties in the private rented sector. Action to improve management standards in the sector expected to reduce anti-social behaviour and nuisance associated with these properties.

**Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:**

- 7.6 This is not a council run partnership. Whilst partners are entering into agreement in the spirit of co-operation to help improve conditions for the city's tenants, the council needs to be mindful of its public duty and as such, reserves the right to leave the partnership should its aims not be in keeping with our duties.

**Public Health Implications:**

- 7.7 Poor housing conditions, nuisance and anti-social behaviour impact negatively on health. Improvements to housing quality and management will have a positive health impact on tenants and neighbours.

**Corporate / Citywide Implications:**

- 7.8 The long term impact will be a higher quality and better managed private rented sector to the benefit of owners, tenants and neighbours. Improvements to living conditions and reductions in nuisance and anti-social behaviour will have a wider impact in reducing pressures for other services such as environmental health, the police and wider health services.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Rent Smart Partnership Agreement

## **Documents in Members' Rooms**

None

## **Background Documents**

1. Private Rented Sector Discretionary Licensing Scheme: The evidence and next steps, Housing & New Homes Committee, 16 November 2016:  
<http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=884&MId=6161&Ver=4>
2. Rent Smart, Housing & New Homes Committee, 21 September 2016:  
<http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=884&MId=6160&Ver=4>
3. Update on Private Rented Sector Scrutiny Panel Recommendations, Housing & New Homes Committee, 21 September 2016: <http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=884&MId=6160&Ver=4>

