

Subject:	Scrutiny Panel Report on Private Sector Housing		
Date of Meeting:	17 June 2015		
Report of:	Executive Director Environment, Development & Housing		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Andy Staniford	Tel: 29-3159
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 In 2014, a request was received from the Citizen's Advice Bureau to look at the private rented sector using a scrutiny panel, because of the '*...worrying increase in the number of people seeking advice from CAB*' in relation to the private rented sector and letting agents.
- 1.2 The request to set up a Panel was approved at the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th October 2014. The Panel members were Professor Darren Smith, Professor of Geography, Loughborough University (Chair), Councillor Chaun Wilson and Councillor Phélim MacCafferty.
- 1.3 This report presents the Scrutiny Panel's formal report and recommendations that were published in March 2015 (Appendix 1) and proposes that officers bring a report back to the Housing & New Homes Committee with a formal response to the recommendations for member consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Housing & New Homes Committee:
 - (1) Welcomes the Scrutiny Panel Report on Private Sector Housing and thanks Professor Smith, panel members and witnesses for their expertise and time.
 - (2) Requests a report from officers proposing a formal response to the Scrutiny Panel recommendations for member consideration.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 In 2014 a request was received from the Citizen's Advice Bureau to look at the private rented sector using a scrutiny panel, because of the '*...worrying increase in the number of people seeking advice from CAB*'¹ in relation to the private rented sector and letting agents.
- 3.2 The request to set up a Panel was approved at the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th October 2014.

¹ [http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Published/C00000726/M00005368/AI00042816/\\$LettingAgentsPrivateRentalsFINAL.docx.pdf](http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Published/C00000726/M00005368/AI00042816/$LettingAgentsPrivateRentalsFINAL.docx.pdf)

- 3.3 The Panel members were Professor Darren Smith, Professor of Geography, Loughborough University (Chair), Councillor Chaun Wilson and Councillor Phélim MacCafferty. The panel set their terms of reference to:
- Understand the current private sector housing market in the city, and how it has changed since 2011;
 - Consider the best ways of managing private sector housing and improving standards in this sector;
 - Determine whether the relevant actions identified for private sector housing in the Draft Housing Strategy 2015 tie up to the evidence gathered by the panel. Where possible the panel will suggest how these actions could be practically implemented.
- 3.4 Due to the pressure of timescales, the Panel decided to conduct a short inquiry with the aim of coming to some broad conclusions that would not only feed into the development of the action plan supporting the Housing Strategy 2015, but also inform considerations of the incoming Administration after the Elections in May 2015 in relation to Private Sector Housing in the city.
- 3.5 The Panel held three public evidence-gathering sessions in January 2015 and also attended the Strategic Housing Partnership. The Panel also received some verbal and written evidence submitted in confidence from people in the city living in private sector housing.
- 3.6 The Panel's formal report and recommendations were published in March 2015 (Appendix 1). Members recognise that there is a lot of good practice in the city, particularly in terms of organisations joining forces in new and innovative ways.
- 3.7 The Panel intends that the recommendations are to inform the implementation of the Housing Strategy and the development of even more effective partnership working around Private Sector Housing in the city:
- RECOMMENDATION 1 - To have a commitment to support a strong and buoyant local private sector housing market in the city.
 - RECOMMENDATION 2 - To more fully understand how the local private sector housing market has changed in Brighton and Hove since 2011, and to evidence the impacts of new purpose-built student accommodation on the wider private sector housing market.
 - RECOMMENDATION 3 - To provide more regular systematic reviews of the evidence-base underpinning the Housing Strategy.
 - RECOMMENDATION 4 - To more effectively regulate the conversion of owner-occupied, family dwellings into shared private rented housing in relevant areas of the city, using licensing schemes and other legislative powers, to assess and improve the management and standards in HMOs.
 - RECOMMENDATION 5 - To consider the effects of the Article 4 Direction on the proliferation of HMOs in the city, and the use of licensing schemes and other legislative powers.

- RECOMMENDATION 6 – To explore ways to increase the supply of affordable owner-occupied housing for first-time-buyers and key workers in the city.
- RECOMMENDATION 7 - To further improve the identification of empty homes and voids within private sector housing, and to maximise the use of private sector housing in more efficient ways.
- RECOMMENDATION 8 – To work in a more joined-up way with neighbouring local authorities to strategically plan housing supply and demand in a regional context.
- RECOMMENDATION 9 – To have a commitment to allow the universities to continue to grow their student populations across the Greater Brighton area, in recognition that they operate in a context of uncertainty and a more competitive (inter)national environment within higher education.
- RECOMMENDATION 10 – To consider the effects of the densification of affordable, purpose-built, student accommodation on university campuses within the city, and outside the Lewes Road corridor.
- RECOMMENDATION 11 – To explore the potential to identify/develop sites of opportunity for affordable student housing developments in other parts of the Greater Brighton area, which will appeal to students alongside the development of student-oriented infrastructures (i.e. transport, services).
- RECOMMENDATION 12 – To promote the development of student union and/or university letting agencies.
- RECOMMENDATION 13 – To promote the development of university-endorsed landlords and letting agents, and encourage the universities and student unions to champion these landlords to students.
- RECOMMENDATION 14 – To promote the use of a city-wide rate-my-landlord scheme for all private sector housing.
- RECOMMENDATION 15 – To develop ethical models for letting agents, estate agents and landlords, and create a website with a list of these ethical organisations.
- RECOMMENDATION 16 – To consider the development, and promote the uptake and benefits to landlords of registration to PRS accreditation schemes.
- RECOMMENDATION 17 – To create a register of landlords who have been proven to have undertaken retaliatory evictions.
- RECOMMENDATION 18 – To explore ways to increase the supply of private sector housing with rental costs that are affordable (e.g. for key workers in the city) and in line with representative household incomes in the city.

- RECOMMENDATION 19 – To explore ways to increase the supply of affordable ‘social housing’ for key workers and vulnerable people (i.e. older people living in PRS housing which is not suitable for them and not readily adaptable, and/or people with mental health conditions who might previously have been accommodated in social housing).
- RECOMMENDATION 20 – To further foster joined-up working between city council departments (e.g. housing, public health) and other relevant organisations (e.g. Southern Landlords’ Association, CAB, Brighton Housing Trust, city universities).

3.8 The Housing & New Homes Committee is expected to formally respond to these recommendations although it is not obliged to accept or act on those it deems not appropriate in light of factors such as strategic direction, resources and legislation.

3.9 It is proposed that Strategic Housing Partnership review the recommendations given their participation in evidence gathering and potential cross sector implications, in particular potential alignment to our planned refresh of the Student Housing Strategy.

3.10 It is proposed that officers review the recommendations in light of our legal powers, our strategic priorities in the new Housing Strategy 2015, any resource implications and the emerging national agenda of the new government, and bring a report back to the Housing & New Homes Committee with a formal response to the recommendations for member consideration.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1 None in respect of this report.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

5.1 None in respect of this report.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Scrutiny Panel investigations provide a useful independent insight into areas of concern. It is appropriate that the findings of these investigations are considered in full to assess their appropriateness in determining future strategic direction.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

7.1 This report proposes a detailed formal response to the Scrutiny Panel report to be presented at the next Housing and New Homes Committee. As such, there are no financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report..

Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks

Date: 04/06/15

- Legal Implications:
- 7.2 The council's Overview and Scrutiny Terms of Reference and Procedure Rules require policy committees to prepare a response to a Scrutiny report's recommendations detailing whether each recommendation is agreed or not agreed. The recommendation to provide a formal response to the next meeting of the Housing & New Homes Committee is compatible with the Rules' requirements.

Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley

Date: 04/06/15

- Equalities Implications:
- 7.3 None directly arising from this report.

- Sustainability Implications:
- 7.4 None directly arising from this report.

- Crime & Disorder Implications:
- 7.5 None directly arising from this report.

- Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:
- 7.6 None directly arising from this report.

- Public Health Implications:
- 7.7 None directly arising from this report.

- Corporate / Citywide Implications:
- 7.8 None directly arising from this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Scrutiny Panel Report on Private Sector Housing, March 2015

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Letting Agents, Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 24 October 2014
[http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Published/C00000726/M00005368/AI00042816/\\$LettingAgentsPrivateRentalsFINAL.docx.pdf](http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Published/C00000726/M00005368/AI00042816/$LettingAgentsPrivateRentalsFINAL.docx.pdf)

