

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting6th November 2014

1. Title of Item/Report

Private Rented Housing - Driving Up Standards

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on Private Rented Housing – Driving Up Standards.

The Private Rented Sector (PRS) had been growing nationally at an unprecedented rate over recent years, a position which was reflected in the Borough. Against this background local authorities across the country were seeking to work in a proactive manner with PRS landlords, one which sought to support good landlords and ensured unscrupulous landlords were targeted in an effective manner.

The report sought approval to support the introduction of a '10 Point Plan' (which includes the adoption of the 'Stockton Rental Standard'). The actions detailed in the '10 Point Plan' were aimed at sending a clear message regarding the Councils intention to promote best practice and drive up standards (both property condition and management) across the PRS.

Attached to the report was a table detailing tenure change (between 2001 and 2011) on a ward by ward basis. Members noted all wards had seen an increase in the levels of private rented accommodation. In Mandale and Victoria, Norton South, Parkfield and Oxbridge and Stockton Town centre the PRS now accounted for in excess of 20% of each wards tenure profile.

Also attached to the report was a draft of the '10 Point Plan', Members noted some of the points listed were already successfully undertaken by the Council however it was intended that they were re-launched with the aim of encouraging better take-up particularly with new landlords. In addition there were a number of proposed new approaches detailed such as a 'Know Your Landlord Service' and a 'Rogue Landlord Hit Squad'. The Rogue Landlord Hit Squad was specifically aimed at pulling together representatives from Council service teams who had a role in identifying and targeting poor landlords, landlords whose actions contribute to the

blight and decline of local communities. Led by the Private Sector Housing Team it would share intelligence across council service teams (and other partners such as the police / fire brigade) and target rogue landlords via the collective use of each partner's legal powers.

Also included within the '10 Point Plan' was the 'Stockton Rental Standard' that was also attached to the report. The aim of the 'Stockton Rental Standard' was to detail in an easy read format what the Council expected from all PRS landlords (managing and lettings agents) operating in the Borough in terms of detailing their legal requirements, plus what was expected in terms of best practice.

Given that all ward Members had a growing private rented housing market, a Member Seminar had been arranged for 10th December 2014. It was proposed to use this seminar as an opportunity to put the PRS 'in context', for example to explain its growing importance to the Boroughs housing market, explained the powers available to the Council to tackle poor PRS (condition and management) and sought Members views on the draft '10 Point Plan' and 'Stockton Rental Standard'. Running in parallel to this, consultation would also be undertaken with private landlords. The majority of private landlords were 'good' landlords and were keen to work with the Council to ensure that the sector was improved through educating and supporting accidental landlords and effectively tackling rogue landlords.

Following completion of the above, Cabinet were asked to delegate approval to make any necessary revisions to the '10 Point Plan' and 'Stockton Rental Standard' to the Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety. Copies of the final documents would be shared with all ward Members before the '10 Point Plan' was formally launched.

Subject to Cabinet approval, work would commence immediately to progress each of the work strands detailed in the '10 Point Plan'. Additional earned income (from within the Housing Service) had financed the addition of one new post in the Private Sector Housing team (increasing team numbers to 8), as well as providing a small fund to carrying out necessary works in default (i.e. were the PRS landlord had not complied with a statutory notice and prosecution action was being progressed). This new post would provide the additional capacity in terms of (a) enabling a dedicated lead to be identified to drive forward a pro-active private sector enforcement approach (supported by the wider team) and (b) acting as the co-ordinator for the Rogue Landlord Hit Squad.

Following consultation the '10 Point Plan' and 'Stockton Rental Standard' would be formally launched via a 2-strand publicity campaign:-

- i. Direct contact with all PRS landlords we are aware of.
- ii. A broader media campaign aimed at reaching those existing (or prospective) PRS landlords who are either not actively engaged with the council and those who may not fully understand their obligations.

A review report would be brought back to Cabinet twelve months after formal implementation. The review would evaluate each of the proposals detailed in the '10-Point Plan' to gauge their effectiveness and identify any (positive and negative) cost implications. At this present time to mitigate this concern the 'Hit Squad' will be piloted initially in the town centre wards (due to their high concentrations of PRS housing). The outcome of this evaluation exercise would also inform potential next steps and provide an essential evidence base for further exploring selective licensing should this be option the Council wish to further explore.

RESOLVED that:

1. The introduction of a '10 Point Plan' and 'Stockton Rental Standard' be supported.
2. Following completion of a detailed consultation exercise (as detailed in paragraph 14), approval be delegated to make any necessary revisions to the '10 Point Plan' and 'Stockton Rental Standard' to the Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety.
3. An evaluation report be brought back to Cabinet 12 months after the formal launch of the '10 Point Plan' / 'Stockton Rental Standard'.

3. Reasons for the Decision

A safe, healthy and sustainable PRS will play a key role in ensuring the viability of all communities across the Borough. In addition, given the significant concentration of PRS properties in central Stockton, a proactive and targeted approach to dealing with rogue landlords will play a supporting role in delivering a vibrant town centre.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Beall declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 4 - Private Rented Housing – Driving Up Standards as he owned a property that was rented out.

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday, 14th November 2014

Proper Officer
10 November 2014