

13 March 2013		ITEM: 6
Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
Private Landlord Partnerships		
Report of: Councillor Val Morris-Cook, Portfolio-Holder Housing		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Accountable Head of Service: Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing		
This report is Public		
Purpose of Report: To advise members of the work that is being carried out by the Private Housing and Home Solutions Teams, to progress partnership working with private landlords, ensuring the private rented sector remains part of our affordable housing offer.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report advises members of the on-going work, with private landlords, both informal and formal, to ensure the supply of good quality accommodation is maximised.

The recently agreed growth to increase the capacity of the Private Housing Service and the rebuilding of the Home Solutions Service, gives us the opportunity to plan how we want to jointly deliver this work with private landlords.

This work will contribute to our overall aim to ensure that all vulnerable households living in private sector housing should be given a realistic opportunity to live in a decent home. Those specific private housing strategic priorities that relate to our work with landlords include:

- Improving the conditions in private rented accommodation
- Enhance partnership and empowerment
- Improving knowledge of the private sector

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.1 To note this report and make any comments necessary to be taken forward as part of planned work of the Private Housing and Home Solutions Teams.**
- 1.2 That a further report will be presented to provide progress and outcomes as this partnership works progresses.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

- 2.1 Making best use of the private rented sector to maximise supply and ensuring high standards, is central to a thriving housing market. While many private landlords provide a good service, others do not have the expertise or knowledge to be competent landlords and a few seek to operate outside the regulatory framework.
- 2.2 The work of the Private Housing and Home Solutions Teams for private sector management standards has several strands:
 - To work with and encourage landlords that are providing good quality, well-managed homes
 - To educate and raise awareness of landlords who are well-intentioned but do not have the necessary knowledge and expertise, and
 - To enforce standards on those landlords not meeting good standards despite the Council's attempts to engage or advise them on ways to raise their standards
- 2.3 This work is of particular relevance as we start to progress the changes introduced by the Localism Act and Welfare Reform Act. These reforms will have a fundamental impact at both a national and local level. The powers available in the Localism Act will mean that we will start to discharge our homeless duty for some residents, to the private sector landlords and the benefits caps will put up demand for multi occupied accommodation, for single people under the age of 35.
- 2.4 It is estimated that 8% of the borough's total stock is private rented and based on the national trend we would expect the number of private rented households to increase. In Thurrock relatively few private landlords have large portfolios of property, with the majority purchasing one or two properties for investment.
- 2.5 Work that continues to be carried out to tackle the challenges/issues we face include:
 - ✓ The private housing service chair a sub regional working group and led in setting up a sub regional landlord accreditation scheme, with the aim of driving up standards across the sector. Accreditation has now been in place for just

over 1yr and is operating across the sub region. The scheme is currently mandatory for Thurrock landlords wishing to accommodate households nominated by the Council, principally through the Homes Solutions Service. Monthly accreditation courses are held locally and there are currently 90 accredited Thurrock landlords, who all have had a proportion of their portfolio inspected by the private housing service. 100% of those properties inspected, were found to meet the required Housing Act standard.

- ✓ To encourage private landlords to become accredited and to provide good quality, well-managed homes, a range of grants and loans are available for those accredited landlords to improve the home safety and energy efficiency of their homes i.e. new boilers/heating system and reducing the risk of falls on stairs.
- ✓ Regular Private landlord forums are held and open to all landlords, where information and views are exchanged. The forums allows us to hear what private landlords are telling us and is currently helping to minimise the impact of the welfare reform proposals and maintaining access to the private rented sector.
- ✓ The private housing service work with those landlords and agents with large property portfolios to ensure standards are maintained and properties become readily available, for use by the Home Solutions Service.
- ✓ The private housing service work with the Eastern Landlords Association, who continually support the local private housing landlord forums. The number of Thurrock landlords who have since joined this association, has made it possible for a new local branch to be set up, which the private housing service help to facilitate. The Association is important to help drive up knowledge and skills of local landlords.
- ✓ The private housing service have developed a landlord information pack which contains a number of fact sheets, informing landlords of the basic requirements of good management and housing standards. This pack is used by the Home Solutions service to support their rent deposit scheme.
- ✓ The private housing service will always balance partnership work with other appropriate action, having regard to its enforcement concordat and will make full use of the powers in the Housing Act 2004, where poor standards are found.
- ✓ The private housing service so far in 2012-13 have recorded that x129 vulnerable households were assisted to improve their homes and x170 housing hazards removed.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 The Private Housing and Home Solutions Teams will continue to work together and set up working groups to progress initiatives that will further build

on those existing private landlord partnerships. Options currently being considered are:

- To provide professional development opportunities to support the landlord accreditation members, so that they are able to maintain their knowledge and skills. Those landlords who attended previous forums have asked for more understand on how to end a tenancy. A 'practical possession' course, has since been carried out.
- The introduction of a tenant accreditation scheme, which will support the work of the Home Solutions Service to sustain tenancies. The option of how this can link to where the council discharge their duty into the private sector is being considered.
- The growth in the Private Housing Service will enable this service to consider how it can work more proactively to support those landlords who are currently failing in their management duties and help them to bring their portfolios back into use and securing where possible, nomination agreements. This increase in capacity will also allow for the service to gather more information about the private rented stock, including numbers, condition and areas of anti social behaviour linked to tenure.
- One of the new private housing post holders will work to Implement and manage a comprehensive borough-wide HMO service, including a mandatory licensing scheme. The option of selective licensing, which is a discretionary power to licence all privately rented properties, can be used in designated areas that are deemed to suffer from low housing demand and/or significant and persistent anti social behaviour. Such schemes are subject to local consultation and only concerned with the management of private rented property, not property condition. There is currently a lack of evidence to progress this type of discretionary scheme and the private housing service will consider how its increase in capacity can work to increase the evidence needed to explore all options, which will improve management standards.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 Ongoing partnership work with private landlords will support the need to ensure continuing access to the private rented sector and will form part of our offer of good quality affordable housing.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Consultation with landlords and tenants will take place throughout the work programmes and are going via forums and mailings and general marketing. The private housing service has recently consulted with over 1000 landlords as part of the review of their strategy and their feedback has helped inform the strategic objectives and actions.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

6.1 The private landlord partnership work will be considered in the context of the Housing and Private Housing Strategy and Thurrock's Allocation Policy, in terms of maximising the supply of good quality affordable housing.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652772**
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The report provides an update on the Private Landlord Partnership. There are no direct financial implications associated with the report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Alison Stuart- Principal Housing and Regeneration Solicitor**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652 040**
Alison.stuart@bdtlegal.org.uk

As this report is for noting, there are no legal implications at present.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
 Telephone and email: **01375652472**
sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

This report is a progress report and there are no equality or diversity implications to note.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

No other implications

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Draft Private Housing Strategy; Operational performance documents: Contact Louisa Moss Tel: 01375 652387

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- No appendices

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