



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 4th February 2016

Report of: Janet Sharpe

Subject: January 2016 Update on the private rented sector in Sheffield

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Summary:

Michelle Houston, Service Manager for Private Housing Standards previously attended Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee, and has provided reports. It was requested that a further update be provided in January 2016.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	Y
Other	

The Committee are asked to note the contents of the report and to seek clarification or further information where required.

Background Papers:

Category of Report: OPEN/CLOSED (please specify)

Report of the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services

The Private Rented Sector in Sheffield

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This is an update on activity as requested by Scrutiny in October 2015.

2. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SHEFFIELD PEOPLE?

2.1. The private rented sector is continuing to grow, and the local authority is the Regulatory and prosecuting body for the sector.

2.2. It is essential that we provide a safe and well managed private rented sector for the people of Sheffield. A person's home is integral to every other part of their life; wellbeing, education and social capacity.

3 UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT

3.1 Task and Finish Group

3.1.1 The Cabinet Member set up a two part Member task and finish group which was held in October 2015, to explain the make - up of the current private rented sector and to discuss initiatives for the future.

3.1.2 In line with the views of the Scrutiny committee, Members appreciated the work the team were doing, and were supportive of additional resources to meet the growing demands.

3.1.3 As a result of this and other meetings, the Service Manager started work on defining others where targetted activity was needed.

3.2 Compliance inspections in Page Hall

3.2.1 All licences have been issued to landlords for their properties in the Page Hall licensing scheme.

3.2.2 Along with the licence itself, an individual schedule of work and conditions are attached which the landlord must comply with to satisfy the licensing requirements.

3.2.3 The maximum timescales that landlords had to comply was 12 months after licence issue. That timescale has just passed, so a programme of compliance inspections is now underway.

3.2.4 As of end December 2015, 20% of the properties were already fully compliant without any formal action being required.

3.2.5 Should landlords object to conditions, or refuse to carry out works – legal action will commence on the basis that they are in breach of their licence.

3.3 Targetted enforcement

- 3.3.1 It has long been recognised that the majority of landlords and agents in the city are good. Their properties are safe and well managed.
- 3.3.2 It is therefore inappropriate to use resources on areas that are self-regulating.
- 3.3.3 But a small number of landlords and agents are of extreme concern to us. We have evidence of serious property defects where health and safety is an extreme risk.
- 3.3.4 And perhaps more disturbing; that vulnerable tenants are being targeted by rogue, criminal landlords so that they can be taken advantage of financially and in a bullying manner.
- 3.3.5 We have communicated our vision to landlords; that we are willing to target and drive out those who refuse to accept their responsibilities.
- 3.3.6 We have briefed the Cabinet Member that targeted action has now commenced on one particular landlord/agent. Our concerns are sufficient that we must take action to protect tenants, and indeed property owners that may fall foul of his management services.
- 3.3.7 This is the first time we have embarked on such a campaign, and demonstrates our commitment to making the sector safer and better.

3.4 Sharing approaches and knowledge

- 3.4.1 We continue to be asked for our expert opinions on various matters, especially where we have paved the way in new initiatives.
- 3.4.2 Our Legal and Policy officer Dave Hickling is nationally recognised for his housing/tenancy law expertise. He was recently commissioned by Chesterfield and the Derbyshire councils to train their officers on occupancy status and legal enforcement; having already carried out similar lectures in Clacton and Hereford.
- 3.4.3 The Service Manager continues to be asked to speak at local and national conferences about the Sheffield approach; speaking at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health conference in October, and the Association of Residential Letting Agents/National Estate Agents Association in January 2016.

4 Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to note the updates in the report

Michelle Houston
26 January 2016

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