



Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

29 June 2017

Time 6.00 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Scrutiny

Venue Committee Room 1 - 3rd Floor - Civic Centre

Membership

Chair Cllr Ian Angus (Lab)
Vice-chair Cllr Christopher Haynes (Con)

Labour

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Keith Inston
Cllr John Rowley
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Mak Singh

Conservative

Cllr Arun Photay

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the democratic support team:

Contact Neil White
Tel/Email Tel: 01902 550181 or neil.white@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Address Democratic Support, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

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Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

MEETING BUSINESS ITEMS

- 1 **Apologies**
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting** (Pages 3 - 5)
To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record.
- 4 **Matters arising**
[To consider any matter arising from the minutes]

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- 5 **Private Rented Housing Sector** (Pages 7 - 50)
To consider how the Local Authority should work with landlords, tenants and stakeholders to improve private sector housing in Wolverhampton.

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Agenda Item No: 3

Minutes - 23 March 2017

Attendance

Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Ian Angus (Chair)
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Keith Inston
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Tersaim Singh
Cllr Andrew Wynne

Employees

Christopher Hale
Tim Pritchard
Neil White

Head of Housing
Head of Corporate Landlord
Scrutiny Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
An apology was submitted by Councillor Chris Haynes.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
Councillor Tersaim Singh declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 Update on Housing Company.
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (2 February 2017)**
That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2017 be approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.
- 4 **Matters arising**
The Panel thanked the Chair for the fair, balanced and conscientious way he had chaired the meetings during the civic year.
- 5 **Update on Medium Term Financial Strategy savings within Corporate Landlord 2017/18**
Tim Pritchard, Head of Corporate Landlord, provided an update on the re-profiling of the medium term financial Savings proposed for Corporate Landlord in the Place Directorate for 2017/18.

The Head of Corporate Landlord explained how the savings totalling £150,000 following a service restructure; £997,000 through asset and estate management and £487,000 through facilities management would be achieved.

The Panel queried how the proposed income from the Council's commercial estate would be achieved and the Head of Corporate Landlord stated that this would be achieved through securing bad debts and arrears, filling voids and ensuring that all rents were closer to market levels.

In response to a question, the Head of Corporate Landlord advised that the analysis of asset utilisation should be ready in approximately three months.

The Head of Corporate Landlord commented that in respect of facilities management, the customer led review of services would entail getting intelligence from customers but for the catering and cleaning of schools this would need to be set against the market price for these services.

Resolved – that the report be received.

6 **Update on Housing Company (WV Living)**

Christopher Hale, Head of Housing, Education and Enterprise gave a presentation to the Panel on WV Living the City of Wolverhampton Housing Company.

The Head of Housing, Education and Enterprise advised that the Council's Cabinet had approved the setting up of a Housing Company in June 2016. Phase 1 which would include new homes at the former sites of:

- Danesmore Park Primary School
- Ettingshall Primary School
- Bilston Leisure Centre
- Wednesfield School Site

which were expected to be completed in summer 2018.

Phase 1 would provide 370 homes across the four sites with a mixture of new homes available through market sales, market rent and affordable housing.

The Head of Housing, Education and Enterprise added that over the next five years it was planned to provide 800 new homes across the city at a number of sites which would include areas marked for regeneration at Heath Town and in the city centre. It was hoped that the WV Living would be able to create a surplus by 2023 which could then be invested back into the company.

The Panel noted that www.wvliving.co.uk was now active and gave a range of information on the properties that would be available and the new proposed developments.

In response to a question, the Head of Housing, Education and Enterprise confirmed that WV Living would be providing homes themselves and were not available in any joint schemes with other developers. He added that it was intended to let the

properties through the market and would be rented as private rented properties and would therefore not be available to people on the housing register.

The Panel queried a recent press report that suggested that Wolverhampton had a high proportion of homes that remained unsold after a year on the market.

Resolved – that the Head of Housing, Education and Enterprise be thanked for the presentation.

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Vibrant and Sustainable Scrutiny City Panel

29 June 2017

Report title	Private Rented Housing Sector	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Peter Bilson Deputy Leader Housing and City Assets	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Lesley Roberts, Chief Executive Wolverhampton Homes	
Originating service	Housing/Scrutiny	
Accountable employee(s)	Anthony Walker	Homelessness Strategy and External Relationships Manager
	Tel	01902 551631
	Email	anthony.walker@wolverhampton.gov.uk
	Neil White	Scrutiny Officer
	Tel	01902 550181
	Email	neil.white@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel	29 June 2017

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Panel is asked to consider how the Local Authority should work with landlords, tenants and stakeholders to improve private sector housing in Wolverhampton.

1.0 Purpose

The Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel are being asked to consider the question:

‘How should the Local Authority work with landlords, tenants and stakeholders to improve private sector housing in Wolverhampton?’

2.0 Background

Key points regarding this issue and the private sector housing sector are set out in this report. Panel members are strongly encouraged to explore the further information regarding specific aspects where they are highlighted in the web links.

2.1 Scrutiny Review

The Panel may recall that a previous Review of Private Sector Housing concluded in June 2014 and its recommendations were signed off by Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 8 September 2015. A list of those actions can be found in Appendix 1.

A copy of the full report and Cabinet's response is available at:

<https://wolverhamptonintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=193&Ver=4> (Item 12)

- 2.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was in the group of bills that was agreed on 27 April 2017 before Parliament was dissolved and builds on the previous two major pieces of homelessness legislation:
- The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 that defined homelessness for the first time and placed duties on local authorities to house people with dependent children and other vulnerable people, and
 - The Homelessness Act 2002, which extended entitlements to rehousing to a wider group of 'single' homeless people, including care leavers and people fleeing violence. It also introduced a strategic approach to homelessness prevention.
- 2.3 The new Homelessness Reduction Act requires local housing authorities to help all eligible applicants, rather than just those with a 'priority need'. It builds on the preventative approach of the 2002 Act, by requiring public authorities (such as the NHS) to [notify the housing authority](#) if someone they're working with is facing homelessness.
- 2.4 It effectively adds two new duties onto the full rehousing duties introduced by previous Acts:
- [Duty to take steps to prevent homelessness](#): Councils will have to help people at risk of losing suitable accommodation where they have been threatened with homelessness within 56 days. This means that people should receive support on receiving a notice from their landlord if they are struggling to find a letting, rather than being told to come back when they have a bailiff's date.
 - [Duty to take steps to relieve homelessness](#): Councils be required to help all those who are homeless to secure suitable accommodation, regardless of whether they are 'intentionally homeless' or priority need. This should mean that all eligible households are offered help to find a home, rather than some people being turned away. It should also ensure that the true scale of homelessness is recorded.
- 2.5 The 2016-17 House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee [report](#) into homelessness states that "The problem of homelessness is multi-faceted. Much of the difficulty in quantifying it stems from the fact that the term 'homelessness' encompasses a wide range of experiences. Rough sleeping (people living and sleeping on the streets and in shop doorways) is the most visible form of homelessness, but there are many more people homeless than those on the streets. These 'hidden homeless' include people in night shelters, and also large numbers of people who have unstable arrangements such as sofa-surfing with friends and family. There have also been reports of people spending the night travelling on buses to avoid the streets."

2.6 It adds:

“The causes of homelessness can be roughly divided into those that are structural or societal, and those that are personal or individual. Both may contribute in individual cases as personal problems can often be exacerbated by the structural challenges of the housing system.

2.7 Jon Sparkes from Crisis argued:

“The structural reasons are around not being able to afford a property to live in, for whatever reason: the price of the property, level and reliability of income, and level of benefits versus rental on properties, so big structural reasons. Then there are the personal reasons that we are probably more familiar with, such as relationship breakdown, addiction and mental health issues, and then the very predictable reasons for people who leave the care system or who leave the prison system. There are probably some typical groups there, but they merge in to each other a lot.”

2.8 The February 2017 Government White Paper - [Fixing our broken housing market](#) states that:

“There are multiple and complex reasons why people become homeless. However, we know that high and increasing costs in the private rented sector can impact upon tenants who struggle to pay, and these households are more likely to be at risk of becoming homeless. Losing a private sector tenancy is now the main cause of homelessness.”

3.0 **Private Rented Sector**

The private rented sector in England has steadily increased to 20% of housing stock in 2015, surpassing the social rented sector in size. (Cambridge Centre for Housing Planning Research).

3.1 It is now the single biggest cause of homelessness with the proportion of households nationally made homeless due to the ending of a private rented sector tenancy has almost doubled since 2011.

3.2 The Homelessness Report states that:

“The ending of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) can be a major cause of homelessness. An AST is the default legal category of residential tenancy in the private rented sector in England. Most tenancies have an initial fixed term of six or twelve months, with the landlord able to choose whether or not they are renewed at the end of the fixed term. Landlords are also able to evict tenants by issuing a Section 21 ‘no fault’ possession notice, which may require tenants to vacate the property at short notice (two months). DCLG note that “In 2015, 30% of households accepted by local authorities as owed the main homelessness duty reported that the reason for their homelessness was the loss of an AST. This compares to 13% ten years earlier”. In many areas of the country, rents are increasing far faster than tenants’ ability to pay. Kate Webb from Shelter described how it had changed:

[The numbers of homeless people who were previously in private rented accommodation have seen] a 250% increase over the past five years. For statutory homeless ... it always used to be things like relationship breakdown or friends and family not being able to provide accommodation for someone. Overwhelmingly over the past five years, it has

become the very prosaic issue of someone losing a tenancy in the private rented sector and simply being unable to find anything else that is affordable.”

- 3.3 Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that private renters in the bottom fifth of the income distribution spend the highest proportion of their income on housing costs reflecting the increased risk of homelessness for those living on the lowest incomes.
- 3.4 In 2013/14, 1.1m households living in the private rented sector were claiming housing benefit to help pay their rent, an increase of 86 per cent since 2008/09 (in the same period the sector grew overall by 43 per cent). (DCLG (2016)).
- 3.5 A report by Crisis, *Home: No less will do* states that elements of welfare reform have played a significant role in making rents unaffordable at the lower end of the market. The majority (70%) of homelessness service users interviewed for research by Crisis, who had tried to access the private rented sector, reported difficulty finding somewhere to rent within the Local Housing Allowance rate (LHA).
- 3.6 Analysis by Crisis shows that across Great Britain, one in ten current LHA rates are already at least 5 per cent lower than the estimated 30th percentile of local rents. This includes 8 per cent of LHA rates that have already benefited from an additional increase due to TAF.
- 3.7 DCLG research shows that tenants are shouldering most of the burden, with 94 per cent of the shortfall between LHA rates and local rents falling on new tenants and just 6 per cent being absorbed by landlords in rent reductions. Between 2008/2009 to 2013/14 the amount of rent paid by the tenant, after housing benefit was accounted for, increased from an average of £39 to £56 per week.
- 3.8 The cost of the private rented sector is not the only challenge. Reports suggest that many landlords are unwilling to let properties to tenants in receipt of housing benefit, and even fewer to those who are homeless. Crisis found that nationally only 45 per cent of landlords surveyed were willing to let to tenants in receipt of housing benefit, and 18 per cent to homeless households. Of those who were willing to let to homeless households, 75 per cent were currently letting less than 10 per cent of their stock to homeless people and 27 per cent said that they were letting fewer properties to homeless people than they had two years previously.
- 3.9 Furthermore, 75% were deterred from letting to homeless applicants because they perceived that they would be required to provide more intensive management of the tenancy and 82% of landlords surveyed were deterred from letting to homeless households due to concerns about the risk of rent arrears.
- 3.10 The report also found that the barriers to accessing private rented properties often means that existing private tenants on very low incomes lack the ability to move from one home to another and can get stuck in unsuitable housing. Evidence from the Sustain study (A Roof Over My Head: The Final Report of the Sustain Project. Sustain: A longitudinal study of

housing outcomes and wellbeing in private rented accommodation) showed that many people felt strongly that they had limited options as a result of a lack of available properties that were affordable or that the landlord would be willing to rent to someone on housing benefit.

- 3.11 Housing and local market conditions and landlord behaviour did much to influence people's ideas about whether they could move or find somewhere suitable. It also deepened fears about their vulnerability in the private rented sector, particularly being asked to leave by the landlord, given their initial experiences of trying to find a property.
- 3.12 Recent Crisis research, drawing on large studies of homelessness across Britain, has shown that failing to tackle homelessness early costs local government between £3,000 and £18,000 for every person not helped in the first year alone.

The full report is available at (and Panel members are asked to read this)

https://community.crisis.org.uk/file/home-no-less-will-do/HOME-No-Less-will-do_web.pdf

4.0 Housing in Wolverhampton

The Scrutiny review referred to above found that:

- 18% of housing stock in the City is confirmed private rented sector. This is growing rapidly, doubling in ten years, and is estimated to account for more than 25% in the next six years.
- 52% of properties are owner occupier.
- 21% (over 23,000) are social housing properties.
- 2% (2,400) tenant association properties.
- 2% (2,000) housing association properties.
- There is an increase in demand for accommodation in Wolverhampton, especially affordable housing. (Affordable housing is 'subsidised' accommodation for those who can't afford to buy a suitable home on the open market. This can be through low cost private housing, affordable rented housing or shared ownership.)
- The Private Rented Sector is growing in Wolverhampton and is expected to overtake social housing in 5-10 years.
- Conversion of property to Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO's) is growing.
- At that time the electoral register indicated that there are 111,516 households in Wolverhampton, of these 9,030 (8.1%) gave no response to the electoral form to register for voting and secondary checks could not confirm whether the property was occupied and if so by whom.

5.0 How can Local Authorities Work with the private rented sector

There are a number of tools that local authorities can use when working with the private rented sector.

- 5.1 These are set out in Section 2 of [The Chartered Institute of Housing Report](#) – Ways and Means Local authorities' work with the private rented sector (pages 7 to 26).

- 5.2 The Council has used a number of these tools. The previous scrutiny review in 2014 looked at these in detail.
- 5.3 The Council has recently implemented various schemes and projects to assist in the development of working with private sector tenants and landlords. These include:
- [Rent with Confidence](#) star rating and assessment scheme for privately rented properties and landlords
 - Joined up working between private sector housing and housing options/support to assist vulnerable people access the private sector
 - Offering advice and support to landlords
 - Re launch of the rent deposit scheme to offer better incentives to landlords (cash bonds, rent in advance, etc.)
- 5.4 The aim is to encourage landlords and tenants to maintain their lettings in a way that brings a step change in how the private rented housing sector is perceived and how it can be used to provide accommodation for vulnerable people.

6.0 Approach

The Committee will hear from the following witnesses in evidence sessions to help the Panel answer the question – ‘How should the Local Authority work with landlords, tenants and stakeholders to improve private sector housing in Wolverhampton?’

The witnesses have been asked to provide written evidence and the Panel will have the opportunity to have questions of the witnesses on their evidence. The witnesses are:

6.1 Estate Agents

Lettings agents will typically offer a “let-only” service, where they will find, interview and vet tenants, do the paperwork and take the deposit and first month’s rent for a fee of around 10 per cent of the rent. There can also be a “full management” service, which can cost 15 per cent or more which can include collecting rent and dealing with the day-to-day running of the property.

At **18:05** Estate Agents from **L & A Lettings** and **Proactive Property** will attend to answer further on the written evidence they have given in response to the following questions:

1. What do you do when you have a “problem” landlord or tenant?
2. What education or training do you provide to Landlords?
3. What advice do you give to tenants?
4. Are you aware of the Rent with Confidence scheme, if you are what are your thoughts on it?
5. Has the redress scheme made any impact on your business?
6. How do you think the private rented housing sector can be improved?

The written responses are at Appendix 2.

6.2 Landlords

The primary role of the landlord is to provide accommodation. A tenancy agreement obliges the landlord to both to give out their property for use, but also service these properties and ensure the safety of their property and to keep it well maintained. This applies to the whole structural part of the property as well as interior fittings, furnishings and appliances. It is also the role of the landlord to make sure that the tenant is aware of their duties and responsibilities and to help address any issues. Landlords are also required by law to protect a deposit in a government approved tenancy deposit service.

At **18:30** Landlords from **L & A Lettings** and **UAS Properties** will attend to answer further on the written evidence they have given in response to the following questions:

1. What do you do when a tenant complains about poor conditions?
2. What process do you use to find tenants?
3. What effect has the national Rent Deposit Scheme had for you as a landlord?
4. Would you take on a tenant who is on Housing Benefit? Has the change to Universal Credit affected this?
5. What incentives can we offer to landlords to work with vulnerable tenants?
6. Are you aware of the Rent with Confidence scheme, if you are what are your thoughts on it?
7. What do you think would improve the standards in the private rented housing sector?

The written responses are at Appendix 3.

6.3 Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Housing was the fourth biggest issue that people sought advice on from the CAB in 2015/16 (CAB annual report 2015/16). In 2015/16 Citizens Advice advised clients nationally on over 160,500 private rented sector issues. That equated to 440 enquiries every day, for people hit by issues from illegal eviction to harassment to lost deposits and struggling to secure the most basic repairs.

They give a range of advice for those people who are renting privately -

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/housing/renting-a-home/renting-from-a-private-landlord/>

Citizens Advice has also been running a campaign throughout 2015 and 2016 aimed at getting better protections for private renters - https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/campaigns/current_campaigns/settled-and-safe-a-renters-right-campaign/settled-and-safe-a-renter-s-right/

At **18:55 Wolverhampton CAB** will attend to answer further on the written evidence they have given in response to the following questions:

1. How big a problem is the ending of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST)?
2. Why can't people move on to another private property?
3. Do you know of the Rent with Confidence Scheme, if you are what are your thoughts on it?

4. What would you like to see happen to reduce the amount of homelessness caused by the ending of ASTs and illegal evictions?
5. What would you like to see done to improve the private rented housing sector?

The written response is at Appendix 4.

6.4 Client Side Representatives

St. George's House Charity was founded in 1950 to support the most disadvantaged people in the community. It provides a range of services for vulnerable and socially excluded people, with a special focus on homelessness. Their service operates independently for the resettlement and support of people who were, are or at risk of being homeless, or who are socially excluded.

Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council (WVSC) exists to support the development and sustainability of an effective voluntary and community sector, promoting the principle and practice of voluntary and community activity, in order to facilitate the development of diverse, strong communities and to enhance quality of life within the City of Wolverhampton.

WVSC set up the Service User Involvement Team (SUIT) in February 2007 to give the users of Wolverhampton Substance Misuse Services a voice in the way that services are provided. The aim is to equip Service Users with the skills they need to ensure they have the best treatment services available.

The Refugee and Migrant Centre covers the Black Country area and Birmingham. They assist all members of new and emerging communities regardless of country of origin, ethnicity, legal status, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability. Their mission statement is to assist refugees and migrants through crisis and disadvantage, by removing barriers to their integration and enabling them to become equal citizens.

At 19:20 St Georges Housing, Wolverhampton VSC, Refugee and Migrant Centre will attend to answer further on the written evidence they have given in response to the following questions:

1. How does the private rented housing sector meet the needs of the clients you support?
2. What advice do you give your clients to help them be successful in accessing or living in the private sector?
3. Are you aware of the rent with confidence scheme?
4. What effects has the national rent deposit scheme had on your clients?
5. What would you like to see done to improve the private rented housing sector?

The written responses are at Appendix 5.

6.5 Panel Recommendations

From **19:40** the Panel will consider the evidence heard and decide how it may wish to the answer the question “how should the Local Authority work with landlords, tenants and stakeholders to improve private sector housing in Wolverhampton”.

7.0 Financial implications

There are none at this stage as the Scrutiny Panel is looking at how the Council could develop its policy in this area. Any recommendations from the Panel’s consideration of the evidence may have financial implications but these would be included, if needed, in a report to the Cabinet in response to those recommendations. [JM/21062017/Y]

8.0 Legal implications

There are none at this stage as the Scrutiny Panel is looking at how the Council could develop its policy in this area. Any recommendations from the Panel’s consideration of the evidence may have legal implications but these would be included, if needed, in a report to the Cabinet in response to those recommendations. RB/14062017/Y

9.0 Equalities implications

There are none at this stage as the Scrutiny Panel is looking at how the Council could develop its policy in this area. Any recommendations from the Panel’s consideration of the evidence may have equalities implications but these would be included, if needed, in a report to the Cabinet in response to those recommendations.

10.0 Environmental implications

There are none at this stage as the Scrutiny Panel is looking at how the Council could develop its policy in this area. Any recommendations from the Panel’s consideration of the evidence may have environmental implications but these would be included, if needed, in a report to the Cabinet in response to those recommendations.

11.0 Human resources implications

There are none at this stage as the Scrutiny Panel is looking at how the Council could develop its policy in this area. Any recommendations from the Panel’s consideration of the evidence may have human resources implications but these would be included, if needed, in a report to the Cabinet in response to those recommendations.

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

There are none at this stage as the Scrutiny Panel is looking at how the Council could develop its policy in this area. Any recommendations from the Panel’s consideration of the evidence may have corporate landlord implications but these would be included, if needed, in a report to the Cabinet in response to those recommendations.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

Links have been added within the report where background papers have been used.

Appendix 1 -Tracking and Monitoring of the Private Rented Sector Housing Scrutiny Review

Appendix 2 - Estate Agents written responses

Appendix 3 - Landlords written responses

Appendix 4 - CAB written response

Appendix 5 - Client Side Representatives written responses

Appendix 1

EXECUTIVE RESPONSE: Scrutiny Review of Housing – Private Rented Sector

Recommendation 1 Rent with Confidence		
<p>a) That Cabinet approve in principle the draft 'Rent with Confidence' (RwC) campaign as a positive way forward to encourage a more professional private rented sector and allow potential tenants to exercise choice when selecting property and a reliable landlord or agent, and ask employees to consult in greater detail.</p> <p>b) That consideration is given to the future resources required to move forward with the 'Rent with Confidence' (RwC) campaign and agree the need to implement RwC when resources become available for effective enforcement to help drive improvement in PRS housing in the City.</p>		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
<p>a) RwC proposals are only in very draft form and the detail needs to be worked up and consulted on.</p>	<p>Consultation with the Landlord Steering Group has begun with regards to the draft RwC proposals.</p> <p>Aim to introduce RwC from October 14</p> <p>This is now being done as part of the wider public health outcomes and the reconfiguration of housing services. The level of service demand has meant that progress has been limited within existing resources (as anticipated); however funding has been established and the proposals are being developed. RwC will commence from April 2016 as part of a package of measures to improve standards in the PRS and improve health outcomes for PRS residents.</p>	Lesley Williams
<p>b) The resourcing of the RwC confidence proposals will be</p>	<p>The principles regarding changes to the</p>	Chris Hale

considered as part of the approach to the delivery of services to improve the private rented sector. It is likely this will require a reconfiguration of existing priorities and partnerships. This will be considered as part of the delivery of wider housing services.	configuration of the Private Sector Housing Service to proactively engage with the Private Rented sector and deliver the rent with confidence strategy have been considered by the Improving the City Housing Offer Board. This is likely to involve the reconfiguration of existing services away from a reactive service dealing with complaints regarding housing conditions to a service proactively promoting and facilitating an improved private sector offer. This will be actioned to support the RWC strategy implementation outlined above.	
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Recommendation 2 Review the PRS Enforcement Procedure		
That a review of PRS enforcement procedure is carried out with the aspiration to strengthen the processes, make them fairer across the range of landlords, to improve the quality of accommodation in the city, to promote processes and to identify where resources need to be re-aligned or strengthened.		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
The aim is to ensure that the enforcement policy is clear and fair towards all landlords by allowing employees to target persistently bad landlords sooner and by charging them earlier.	<p>New proposals are being considered in partnership with the Landlord Steering Group and National Landlord Association (NLA)/Registered Landlord Association (RLA) representatives. Cabinet will be required to formally adopt any changes; this will be complete by October 2014.</p> <p>This is part completed, and Officers are waiting for further statutory guidance around prevention of retaliatory eviction (due October 2015) which will need to be incorporated into the enforcement policy. Once this has been incorporated the consultation and approval process can be undertaken and the new policy implemented. Anticipated completion by January 2016.</p>	Lesley Williams

Recommendation 3 Additional Licensing of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)		
That Cabinet approves Additional Licensing as a mechanism to licence and regulate all Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) locally and across the city as an alternative and more cost effective way of addressing problems with HMOs.		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
There is a lot of challenge about “blanket” licensing policies i.e. City wide from the NLA and employees will	Initial scoping has been carried out, and Officers are continually finding evidence to support the case. We	Lesley Williams

<p>take this into account when consulting on proposals to additionally licence all HMOs. These proposals will not be welcomed by landlords; however providing the scheme aims to tackle to worst offenders and is fair and transparent. Any proposals to introduce licensing schemes over and above the mandatory requirements must be supported by appropriate evidence including the potential outcomes to be achieved.</p>	<p>have begun to consult with some landlords and the proposal to Additionally Licence forms part of the wider RWC proposals. The Council has the opportunity for independent, free research to be undertaken by a Master of Science (MSC) student from University of Birmingham (June – September 14). A full consultation will run with a proposed implementation of April 15 if the evidence is supported and Cabinet then approve of the designation. There are insufficient resources available to carry out this work to date. In addition, new legislation around Selective Licensing has been implemented to curtail blanket schemes. The Government has recently indicated a clamp-down on rogue landlords through the Immigration Bill, and there are indications that Government will address HMO licensing as part of that initiative. In addition, Planning Officers are looking again at Article 4 with a view to restrict numbers of new HMOs. New timescales for consultation on Additional Licensing will be developed as part of the wider RWC proposals.</p>	
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Recommendation 4 More Selective Licensing in Inner City Areas		
<p>That Cabinet gives consideration to tackling problems associated with poor housing standards and overcrowding in inner areas of the City, and to consider the use of Selective Licensing, such as the All Saints Selective Licensing scheme, in other priority areas as identified by the Police and the Housing Standards Team, providing the case for licensing is fully made in line with legislative guidance.</p>		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
<p>Selective Licensing powers are always under review in order to tackle problematic areas of the City. Park Village, Blakenhall, Pennfields and Whitmore Reans remain in</p>	<p>Ongoing In addition, the All Saints scheme is nearly half way through and a review will be completed at the three year</p>	<p>Lesley Williams</p>

focus as areas of concern for the Council and its partners (i.e. the Police). As with Additional Licensing any proposals to introduce licensing schemes over and above the mandatory requirements must be supported by appropriate evidence including the potential outcomes to be achieved.	<p>point. An exit strategy and resilience proposal may be brought before Cabinet nearer to the end of the scheme for consideration.</p> <p>An audit of the scheme will be carried out by January 2016 with a view to ending the scheme or continuing for a further 5 years. Whilst there have been notable improvements in the All Saints area especially around anti-social behaviour, many landlords are still not compliant with scheme requirements around property management.</p> <p>Further use of Selective Licensing is being considered for Park Village and Hawkesford Crescent and proposals for new schemes are being developed.</p>	
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Recommendation 5 Regulation of Letting Agencies		
<p>That Cabinet recommend to the Local Government Association that there is a need to regulate letting agencies and to highlight the need to the Housing Minister, Shadow Housing Minister and Parliamentary Select Committee.</p>		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
<p>This is a matter of national policy debate and the Council will continue to provide evidence to support this debate wherever practicable. In addition, Trading Standards continue to work with Letting Agents on contractual matters, and the RWC proposals could easily be extended to incorporate a rating of Letting Agents (though the detail is to be further explored)</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Legislation for Letting Agent Redress is in place and Officers have been working with trading Standards to ensure that Letting Agents are signed up to Redress Schemes (and implementing fines where this is not the case). Further work needs to be done around fees and transparency and this work is on-going.</p>	<p>Lesley Williams</p>

Recommendation 6 Parliamentary consultation papers	
<p>That Cabinet note that a response has been submitted to the parliamentary consultation paper relating to property standards in the PRS and</p>	

the need to consider a reformed approach, taking into account the evidence and findings of this review with regard		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
The PSH team give an undertaking to respond to all further correspondence and consultation relating to the PRS	Ongoing as required Offers are working with DCLG and the Home Office on the Right to Rent pilot and subsequent roll-out. Wolverhampton is an active member of the Landlord Consultation Panel, and respond to any PRS consultations as required.	Lesley Williams

Recommendation 7 Establishment of a Housing Steering Group		
<p>139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000</p>		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
Wolverhampton has a Housing Executive Board (HEB) and Housing Operational Group (HOG) with Task and Finish Groups considering specific work areas as part of its approved governance arrangements. It is proposed that the issues raised in this review will inform the work programme of both the HEB and HOG.	Ongoing as part of the governance and development and delivery of the city Housing Strategy Rent with Confidence proposals form part of the work programme for the Improving the City Housing Offer Board. Recommendation 1 comment (b) above outlines the progress.	Chris Hale

Recommendation 8 Review of the current Private Leasing Scheme

That a review of the current Private Sector Leasing (PSL) Scheme is carried out in light of rising demand for PRS housing in the city and consider financial incentives, such as Homes and Communities Agency funding, for encouraging landlords with empty properties to join the scheme.

Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
It is intended that the existing PSL is reviewed including the engagement of wider participants to consider the market drivers for owners of properties who may wish to make use of the service. Opportunities may exist to consider other more commercially viable services tailored to owner's requirements.	By April 2015 Work is on-going with Wolverhampton Homes on how the scheme can be expanded to provide additional accommodation through PSL.	Lesley Williams

Recommendation 9 Universal Credit (UC) rent adjustment period

That Cabinet and Welfare Reform Programme Board agree that the Council and Wolverhampton Homes work together with landlords to keep people in their homes during the introduction of Universal Credit.

Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
The agreed work programme with Housing Managing Agents is to continue to work to assist tenants to maintain their tenants, and there has been and continues to be a particular emphasis on providing support to households adversely impacted by welfare reforms. Housing Allocations policies and investment programmes consider welfare reform impacts as part of the option appraisal processes.	The Council's housing managing agents continue to work proactively with households which will be impacted through the welfare reforms including the introduction of Universal Credit. Action focusses on being "money smart" and preparing for impending changes. The Housing Options and Outreach Teams provide support for people experiencing housing insecurity to assist them in remaining in the existing tenancy, if possible, through supporting them to manage the impact of changes to the welfare system, including the	Chris Hale

[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

	impending introduction of Universal Credit.	
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Recommendation 10 Homelessness Prevention Team funding

That Cabinet note that DCLG funding for the Housing Options Homelessness Prevention Team ends March 2015 and give consideration of funding options for a five year period to embed changes to benefits.

Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
The specific Homelessness Prevention Grant from DCLG is currently subject to single year allocation. Work will be undertaken to review the services across housing options and the wider housing service to reduce any impact of any reduction or loss of this Grant. The Council will continue to provide sound evidence base to DCLG to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of prevention work on homelessness and the wider impacts on the City.	The Homeless Prevention Grant has been confirmed for 2015/16 with the Council providing evidence to central government of the impact of the funding on preventing homelessness. Engagement with Housing Options Services forms part of the Corporate Plan reporting. The Council will continue to make the case for sustaining the level of prevention funding provided through government grant.	Chris Hale

Recommendation 11 Other Funding Sources to Improve the PRS

That Cabinet give consideration to other funding sources to improve Private Rented Sector Housing in Wolverhampton in relation to the impact of poor housing on children, educational attainment and anti-social behaviour, and that Cabinet further consider the wider impact that not meeting decent home standards has on the most vulnerable residents, mental and environmental health issues, overcrowding, the impact on communities and the financial burden of these implications on the Council.

Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
Employees will continue to work across all partnerships to maximise the impact of private sector housing interventions to the wider outcomes for individuals and the city as a whole and bid for funding both from within the Council and external sources to maximise the impact. The evidence base of the impact of intervention will continue to be strengthened and used to demonstrate the wider impacts and benefits to the city	The reconfiguration of the housing services (recommendation 1 comment (b) above) to promote of a responsible private rented sector through the rent with confidence strategy will enable residents utilising the sector to have a wider housing choice of accommodation which meets better housing standards and experience housing management	Chris Hale

of having a stronger and vibrant private rented housing offer.	which supports their health safety and wellbeing. This will also enable other services and partners to access and promote appropriate private sector housing solutions safeguarding their customers well being. This will be delivered in accordance with the RwC implementation timetable	
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Recommendation 12 Displacement of Homeless people		
That Cabinet note that displacement of homeless people was raised as a concern by the Review Group. More evidence is needed to establish the number of cases and the impact on the City more statistical evidence and data.		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
<div>Page 26</div> <p>Employees will consider how further evidence can be provided demonstrating the wider impact of work to prevent homelessness and the impact of the threat of homelessness on residents.</p>	<p>December 2014</p> <p>In 2014/15 end of Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST - the most common way of ending a tenancy) had become the highest reason for homelessness applications; 323 homeless applicants or 23% of all homeless applicants.</p> <p>Over the last two years the numbers of households who are homeless due to end of AST has increased by over 100 each of the previous years.</p> <p>This has meant that the level of prevention in relation to working with this client group will have to increase to understand the reasons behind why the notices are being served, how to engage with landlords to prevent notices being served, how to work with tenants at risk of</p>	Anthony Walker

[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

	homelessness and finally what advice and information is needed for landlords and tenants.	
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APPENDIX 2- Estate Agents

Proactive Properties

As a brand, new company what attracts me initially to the scheme is the accreditation of working alongside Wolverhampton council whilst incorporating a star rating on our business which I view as can only be beneficial.

As a business owner, my aim is to offer a service level in estate agency that surpasses the company's that I have worked for previously. As you can see in the attached picture we have created a professional high standard estate agent's office in line with how I wanted it to look.

Whilst the office hours are set, our answerphone has my personal mobile number on it so that I am contactable at all times and emails are picked up 24/7, both myself and my colleagues are available to do business at evenings and weekends.

All of our sellers, landlords, tenants will have my mobile number and I encourage communication all round.

Whilst our property stock levels are low the last 2 tenants that have moved in I have met them in Starbucks and Costa (bought them a coffee) rather than at the property to do contracts and discussed my desire that we have mutually beneficial communication and no problems where possible !!

(One of our tenants WhatsApp me if there are any problems or questions and I just call the landlord)

We have set up our fees to be attractive to landlords at 6% part managed and 8% fully managed plus vat and help us grow our portfolio.

Where the scheme would of real benefit to ourselves is if it is possible to be promoted to existing and new landlords that we can meet and discuss our standards, services and prices.

Courtney Downing

Director

Proactive Property (Sales and Lettings) Ltd

69a Darlington Street

Wolverhampton

WV1 4ND

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6 June 2017

**F.A.O NEIL WHITE
SCRUTINY OFFICER**

Dear Neil,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate in the current scrutiny process. As a letting agent and landlord, we are eager to participate, as we feel that we have much to contribute and feel it is important that the council hear our views and feelings, as both landlords and agents, in what are quite challenging times for the private rented sector.

As I explained on the phone yesterday, I am personally on holiday on 19 June, however, my son, Richard, a landlord in his own right and also the Manager of L&A Lettings will attend both scrutiny sessions, as requested.

Please see our written responses to your questions below;

1. What do you do when you have a “problem” landlord or tenant?

This is a difficult one as there are many many difficulties that arise during tenancies – we deal with human beings and some are quite vulnerable.

Tenants

The main issues which could be classed as problems are rent arrears and neglect of property, even damage of property.

Rent Arrears

The early detection of a problem is essential and to this end as soon as a payment is late, we make contact to establish the reasons behind the late payment. We will already have developed a good working relationship with our tenants during the vetting procedure and commencement of the tenancy. (Most tenants do not want to leave us they tell us it is because we answer the phone 24 hours a day and deal with maintenance issues).

Most tenants do not want to lose the roof from over their heads and we will be trying to establish whether they are in long term financial difficulty, or is this simply a blip which they can rectify. If there appears to be a long term issue, we would sign post to appropriate services, or in most cases make contact ourselves, to for example – Mark



Perlic at Welfare Rights, Housing Benefits (maybe to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments) etc

Maybe encourage involvement of family (if appropriate)

We will be looking to agree a payment plan with the tenant, whereby they overpay each month to recover their rent position and get out of arrears.

The main point here is that we do not move towards eviction, only as a last resort.

Neglect/Damage to Property

We attend all reports of maintenance issues and also have a framework of regular inspections, so these issues are detected early. Neglect is mainly centred on lack of knowledge around cleaning, ventilation (condensation issues), etc.

We will provide advice on cleaning the kitchen, bathroom toilet etc. at the commencement of the tenancy and this may need to be reinforced. In cases of criminal damage. We need to establish who is responsible? In many cases this is a visiting individual (we look for DV issues and report to safeguarding authorities if necessary). We attempt to resolve all issues with tenants and only as a last resort will we evict.

Landlords

This is covered below, but essentially, they sign up to our working practices and if they renege on that, we will end the contract.

2. What education or training do you provide to Landlords?

All of our landlords are vetted and are signed up to our working practices. We provide safe, good standard accommodation, which is properly maintained. Landlords understand that this isn't a one way cash flow operation and that sometimes cash has to transfer back into the property for maintenance. Of course landlords have to make a profit. It helps that we are landlords and understand the situation perfectly well. If landlords do not fit our criteria, they need to engage with another agent!

3. What advice do you give to tenants?

Some of this is covered above, but the biggest advice is that they can trust us and to report everything to us. If finances are getting tight or there are maintenance issues, problems with neighbours, absolutely anything – TELL US!

4. Are you aware of the Rent with Confidence scheme, if you are what your thoughts on it are?



L&A Lettings were consulted by The City Council during the setting up and development process of RWC. This is a good thing and should enable the council to be more proactive in identifying and taking action against rogue landlords. At the same time we will be interested to see what incentives develop in relation to 4 and 5 star landlords and agents.

5. Has the redress scheme made any impact on your business?

Not one scrap of difference at all. We welcome it but hopefully we are doing the right thing and no one should need it.

6. How do you think the private rented housing sector can be improved?

We think that the implementation of RWC should help the council direct resources in the right areas by identifying and targeting rogue landlords. Having said that the majority of landlords are good people trying to do the right thing, however, the only publicity that landlords are subjected to is bad publicity. The minority of bad guys are always on TV and in the headlines. We need more positive publicity and incentives for the majority. Satisfaction surveys for tenants continually report high levels of satisfaction in the PRS.

I would add that the biggest issues facing the sector right now is the continuing government assault on landlord tax issues! Restriction of mortgage interest tax relief (taxing of turn over as opposed to profit) this will have catastrophic consequences for landlords who are highly geared and will inevitably result in some landlords having to sell up, thereby reducing supply to renters. Another major concern is the introduction of Universal Credit. After years of developing good relations with local housing benefit teams, this is all being swept away to be replaced by a system of dealing with DWP call centres. Rent areas in the areas where UC has been rolled out are sky high and we are apprehensive about applying for and obtaining 'alternative payment arrangements (direct payment).

Richard Hall
Manager L&A Lettings

Lyndon Whitehouse
Director and Owner L&A Lettings

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UAS Properties

1, What do you do when a tenant complains about poor conditions;

Firstly is to make an appointment with the tenant, see what the problems are. If the problems are genuine call our maintenance team and get all the works done quickly. We will do the works quickly as an unhappy tenant will make excuses of paying the rent. If all the works are completed that should give no excuse for the tenant not to pay the rent. Main problems we have with poor conditions are condensation as educating a tenant about condensation is always difficult. Also with the cost of gas/electric tenants find it harder to keep the property to a warm temperature, and this has a knock on effect with living conditions.

2, What process do you find tenants

70% of tenants are normally are found word of mouth, I always feel if you treat your tenants fairly and you have a good working relationship this is the best source of finding good tenants. For this you need to provide good service on repairs and be flexible on rent, also no administration charges should be charged to the tenants. 20% of our other tenants are refereed by the council homeless team who have genuinely fallen on hard times, but are good tenants and have learned the hard way so they will always behave. The remaining 10% are found by letting agents who play a good role in finding suitable tenants.

3, What effect has the national Rent Deposit Scheme had for you as a Landlord:

This has had very little effect with my business the only effect would be the hassle of registering the deposit and updating when an tenancy comes to an end, I find this rather time consuming. We as landlords always return the deposit to the tenant up until now, as minor wear and tear to save time and keep a good reputation the best and easier option is to return the deposit back in full.

4, Would you take a Tenant on housing benefit? Has the change of Universal credit affected this?

Over the past 20 years in this profession I find the Universal Credit the biggest problem to any social Landlord. Over the years we have worked closely with Wolverhampton Council homeless team in rehousing tenants that claim Housing Benefits. There has always been obstacles problems with the Housing benefit system, but you could always work with the Benefits section in collecting rents. New rules in April 2011 regarding LHA rates were introduced, but as Landlords we would reduce the rents on each property to LHA in order for rent payments made directly to the Landlords. The negative would be reduced rent but the positive was that we would always get paid, and weighing up the options we decided to reduce all rents to LHA rates. If there were any problems you would ring housing benefits or even go in and you could deal with the problem. This Universal credit is the biggest problem facing Landlords and tenants, to request direct payment you have to be in 8 weeks in arrears. If you need to contact Universal credit your morning or afternoon would take up most of your day dealing with one tenant. You cannot see anyone in person, just an obstacle after another. We have over 120 Tenants claiming housing benefits from, Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall, Stafford and Sandwell; we have only 3 tenants on Universal Credit. All 3 tenants are in rent arrears of 4 to 12 weeks, as they have spent the rent instead of forwarding for rental payments. For this reason

we do not accept anyone on housing benefit. This has made us have more voids to our properties, but frankly this is far better than having tenants live in your properties and not pay rent. We will continue move our business model away from Housing Benefits, as we struggling with the Universal Credit. Any existing tenants that would be put on Universal credit in the future, we would most likely evict using correct procedure as this system does not work at this moment in time.

5, What incentives can we offer to Landlords to work with vulnerable tenants

Firstly the support has to be there not just in writing, a landlord would need a contact who he or she can contact 24hrs. As I have worked with these types of tenants who have been offered support, but they never receive nowhere near the support required. I always find it is the Landlord picking up the pieces, and something I have stayed well away from after having my fingers burnt. The only other alternative would be to give more housing allowance to vulnerable tenants.

6, Are you aware of the rent to confidence scheme, if you are what are your thoughts on it ?

I am very aware of this scheme; I have held meetings in my office with the council picking my brain about this matter. I have registered about 20 properties on this scheme the reason being only to help the scheme take off. Will the scheme take off, I think it will struggle a good idea in principle but there no incentives for Landlords to advertise on the scheme. Also I find the prospective tenants that ring you are time wasters and you should have a telephone vetting scheme before you pass any details on for landlords.

7, What do you think would improve the standards in the private rented housing sector.

For some reason all landlords are tarnished with the same brush by the public and tenants and for this reason makes my job much harder. I do feel the good landlords need to reward for the job they do, as most Landlords become social workers for some tenants. So some reward system should be in place, not a star reward but something different. Also with all the rules and regulations red tape Landlords have to provide such a good service these days but the rents remain stagnated, I do feel in Wolverhampton the Local Housing allowance needs to rise as rents have remained or decreased since 2008.

Also I feel with the Universal Credit I feel rouge landlords who can work the system will be cashing in on venerable tenants, when they have nowhere to go.



6 June 2017

**F.A.O NEIL WHITE
SCRUTINY OFFICER**

Dear Neil,

Please read this in conjunction with our responses as letting agents.

1. What do you do when a tenant complains about poor conditions?

In the rare event of this applying to our properties, we would attend and attempt to deal with their concerns. The biggest reported issue is condensation issues, where walls have spore deposits of moisture which turn black. We always provide advice and supply literature in how to combat this common problem. If all else fails we request the attendance of a local authority housing standards officer.

2. What process do you use to find tenants?

The usual methods are 'To Let' board, rightmove, On the Market and local pad portals. We also liaise where appropriate with homeless services, probation Service etc.

3. What effect has the national Rent Deposit Scheme had for you as a landlord?

Only that the extra administrative procedure takes up more time. Our methods are unaltered, we compile comprehensive inventories etc.

4. Would you take on a tenant who is on Housing Benefit? Has the change to Universal Credit affected this?

We have historically rented to many housing benefit tenants without too many issues. We have excellent relations with local housing benefit departments. However, yes the introduction of Universal Credit fills us with trepidation in relation to tenants who cannot deal with their own finances and the procedure to obtain direct payment (alternative payment arrangements). All areas where this has been rolled out are reporting high levels of rent arrears.



5. What incentives can we offer to landlords to work with vulnerable tenants?

A local authority officer to advocate with DWP in relation with UC claims.

A robust rent deposit scheme, that will pay rent in advance and either a cash bond or an underwritten pledge to cover rent arrears and damage to the property, with no end date.

6. Are you aware of the Rent with Confidence scheme, if you are what your thoughts on it are?

As per 'Agent' response

7. What do you think would improve the standards in the private rented housing sector?

As per 'Agent' response

Richard Hall
Landlord

Lyndon Whitehouse
Landlord

Evidence on the Private Rented Sector

From Citizens Advice Wolverhampton to the Vibrant & Sustainable City Panel

Citizens Advice Wolverhampton are grateful to the members of the Vibrant & Sustainable City Panel for the opportunity to provide evidence on our client's experiences of renting in the private sector.

Our evidence is drawn from our own local data and experience, and set in the national context by our membership organisation, Citizens Advice, for whom Rights for Renters is a key campaign.

I would recommend the panel look at "The State of Disrepair" report by Imogen Parker and Mette Isaksen, February 2017, (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/policy-research-topics/housing-policy-research/a-state-of-disrepair/>) which draws on Citizens Advice evidence about the private rental sector.

We have been asked for our view on the specific questions below.

1. How big a problem is the ending of Assured Shorthold Tenancies (AST)?

Citizens Advice data tells us that nationally the ending of ASTs is the biggest single cause of homelessness. Locally, our data tells us that a combination of rent arrears and family breakdown are bigger factors in homelessness, but there are other social problems associated with ASTs ending.

Lack of security of tenure makes it difficult for tenants to plan and put down roots in a community. This has particular consequences for social isolation and well being, because people are not building strong links in their locality. Tenants with children find ASTs particularly difficult because of planning for school places and finding local childcare.

Moving from an AST to a periodic tenancy also prevents tenants from making legitimate complaints to their landlord about disrepair because they fear retaliatory eviction. As a result people continue to live in poor quality housing, which is detrimental to their health and wellbeing. The reduction in scope for housing Legal Aid in 2013 has meant that only disrepair that is evidenced as being a threat to health and safety is eligible for legal aid funded advice and representation. This is a high bar.

Where tenants do want security of tenure and seek a further fixed term agreement, landlords can and do charge additional fees.

Even having been given correct notice, the statutory notice period is inadequate for people to find somewhere else suitable to live, particularly where they may need to outlay finance for letting agents fees, deposits and moving costs.

2. Why can't people move on to another private rented property?

Our evidence and anecdotal experience suggests that people cannot afford to move. There are often large upfront costs - like letting agents fees, deposits, moving costs - which can be prohibitive.

Universal Credit has made significant changes to how housing costs are paid. The benefit is paid in arrears, and has a minimum waiting period of 5 weeks before the first payment is received. This puts the vast majority of claimants we have advised into immediate rent arrears, which they struggle to repay. The reasons for being granted an alternative payment arrangement (whereby housing costs are paid directly to landlords) are much reduced under Universal Credit. Universal Credit is also paid monthly in arrears, meaning rent can only be paid monthly. These changes have made landlords more wary of renting to people who are currently claiming Universal Credit or other working age benefits (who will migrate to Universal Credit at some point in the future). This has therefore reduced the pool of available properties for those on the lowest income.

3. Do you know of the Rent with Confidence Scheme, if you do, what are your thoughts on it?

Yes, we know about it. We think it is a good idea to drive up standards in the local private rental sector.

The scheme is clearly new and growing. Our clients tend to be living on lower incomes, and there seem to be fewer landlords offering low cost properties using the scheme. It may take different incentives to encourage landlords with this type of housing stock to join given that their prospective tenants do not have much choice or market power.

4. What would you like to see happen to reduce the amount of homelessness caused by the ending of ASTs, and illegal evictions?

Deposit guarantee schemes and rent guarantee schemes can help people to move to new properties. We would welcome exploration of these schemes in Wolverhampton.

Under the Housing & Planning Act 2016 local authorities have been given the power to apply civil penalties as an alternative to prosecuting landlords, and as a means to potentially fund future enforcement action. We would like to see these powers used.

From October local authorities will be able to access a 'rogue landlord and agent database', but they have no duty to share this information with local advice agencies or tenants. Opening up access would help tenants avoid the worst offenders.

We would encourage the government to broaden scope of Legal Aid in housing to enable people to challenge evictions or obtain compensation in more cases.

We would like to see a range of measures to encourage a greater security of tenure and longer tenancies. This could include the creation of 3 year terms with break clauses, and including a willingness to offer longer terms as part of quality mark schemes for landlords.

5. What would you like to see done to improve the private rented housing sector?

There are clearly issues with the private renting sector. In Wolverhampton we deal with a disproportionate number of issues about the sector compared to local housing tenure: in 2016-17 21% housing issues presented related to private sector rentals, but they represent only 13% of housing stock.

Benefit changes have meant that social housing can be unaffordable for people with the lowest incomes (benefit cap, bedroom tax, amongst many other issues). This means the most marginalised and vulnerable people can be moved into the private rental sector. They have the lowest bargaining power because the amount of rent they can afford to pay is usually fixed by their benefit income. They are also often unable to raise letting agency fees and deposits, making them stay in less than satisfactory accommodation, which can be prohibitively expensive to heat and in poor repair.

We would welcome greater engagement with landlords and letting agents, as we have with the social housing sector. This can be challenging as private landlords are a very diverse group, but we believe there will be better outcomes for everyone if we can increase engagement.

We would like to see local authorities have the power to ban landlords who repeatedly fail to fix disrepair issues. We are also seeking an amendment to the Civil Procedure Rules to allow courts to adjourn section 21 hearings where a defence of disrepair has been raised but an Environmental Health inspection has not yet been completed.

We would like to see measures to incentivise energy efficiency improvements in private rented property. Some of our clients are living in homes they cannot heat because of poor insulation or inefficient heating systems.

We welcome the continued funding of housing advice in Wolverhampton as part of the advice contract. This means we can challenge poor practice and defend the rights of tenants.

Helen Child
Citizens Advice Wolverhampton
June 2017

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APPENDIX 5 – Client Side Representatives

Private Rented Housing Sector Information - St. George's HUB

1. How does the private rented housing sector meet the needs of the clients you support?

We currently have 150 live profiles, since February 2017, which is when St. George's HUB started working specifically with vulnerable and isolated men in the City. Currently a third of our clients live in private sector tenancies of varying quality. The lack of social and affordable housing in the City means the private rented sector is the only realistic option. Experiences of private sector tenancies have been variable; traditionally there has been collusion between chaotic, challenging clients and somewhat unsavoury landlords. Historically this has led to both poor quality accommodation and unstable tenancies. Clearly intensive support is required and learning essential life-skills is paramount for client's to maintain a home. Our experience is that this is particularly relevant for private sector tenancies. Clients are vulnerable during the early, precarious stages of a tenancy when extra support is required.

2. What advice do you give your clients to help them be successful in accessing or living in the private sector?

The key advice we give to clients is to make them aware of their responsibilities, which are key to the roll-out of Universal Credit. Many of our clients have issues with substance misuse and/or mental health and were use to a culture where Housing Benefits paid directly to the landlord. A key element of our work is to give advice, support and guidance on money management and budgeting skills to enable them to take responsibility. Landlords understandably wish to receive their rent on time and failure to comply can lead to rent arrears and potentially eviction orders. This is clearly not satisfactory for either party. As a result some landlords do not work with tenants on benefits which is a problem for the City.

Our clients do not tend to be perceived as the most desirable of potential tenants, particularly if they have a chequered housing history or have underlying health issues, for instance. This can result in clients being offered sub-standard tenancies in a poor state of repair. Over the last 12 months we have sought to address the problems at its root cause and this has involved a changed mind-set of both landlord and tenants. We have sought to bring positive solutions, effective mediation has always at the core of our work. We encourage clients to make informed decisions from the outset when taking on a tenancy. There has been we strongly advise clients

to sign a proper tenancy agreement which make sure appropriate safeguards are in place. We have seen a number of clients forcefully evicted by people claiming to work on behalf of landlords without the appropriate papers being served. Often these clients are reluctant to complain for the fear of reprisals. Tenants under 35 are becoming less desirable tenants for landlords and this may be a problem for the City in the medium term.

3. Are you aware of the rent with confidence scheme?

We have been made aware of the scheme by colleagues at the local authority. Any regulation or quality standard can only be a positive for both landlords and clients, resulting in both superior quality accommodation and effective use of housing stock. A good quality tenancy has a monumental effect on the health and well-being of vulnerable and excluded people.

4. What effect has the national rent deposit scheme had on your clients?

The effects of the rent deposit scheme on our clients have been mixed. We have had a number of clients who have been successfully accepted for the scheme and it has played a major role in giving them housing stability. However we have also had a few clients who have had a less satisfactory experience, after being presented with a list of landlords who accept the rent deposit scheme by the local authority. Several of these landlords have stated that they are no longer on the scheme or had never participated.

5. What would you like to see done to improve the private rented housing sector?

For St. George's HUB the quality, affordability and accessibility of private rented sector housing is crucial. Many of our clients are a distance away from becoming employable, particularly if they have health or other multiple needs, but it is important for the City to avoid ghettos of poor quality private tenancies. The rent with confidence scheme has the potential to drive up standards across the City and may enable competition to improve the private sector rented stock locally. Our male clients, particularly in the middle age with substance issues, are seldom priority needs and as such invariably 'expect' poor accommodation. Changing this mind-set is essential. Increased regulation and identifying poor landlords and sub-standard accommodation is vital. A continued commitment to prosecuting 'slum' landlords can send out a message to the City and build on existing Partnerships between the local authority and the Voluntary Sector.

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**Private Rented Housing Sector
SUIT (Service User Involvement Team)
Wednesday 7th June 2017**

1. How does the private rented housing sector meet the needs of the clients you support?
A. The private rented housing sector provides an opportunity for those that access our service to gain housing as part of their recovery from addiction.
2. What advice do you give your clients to help them be successful in accessing or living in the private sector?
A. Ensure that they are made aware of the processes in place to be considered for housing within the private rented sector. Things such as -:
 - a. **Acceptance of DSS applicants**
 - b. **All costs involved (including pre tenancy, furniture, top up's etc.)**
 - c. **Requirement to have a working guarantor in place**
 - d. **Assessing whether there are any previous rent arrears & addressing them**
3. Are you aware of the rent with confidence scheme?
A. Yes
4. What effects has the national rent deposit scheme had on your clients?
A. The rent deposit scheme is a vital resource for the vast majority of our clients with housing needs.
5. What would you like to see done to improve the private rented housing sector?
 - **Standardisation of the basic requirements (inc. fixtures and fittings) on properties that are available**
 - **Clarity over the type of tenancy that is being offered**
 - **A charter for landlord and tenants, in order to minimise confusion, conflict and discrepancies**
 - **To see housing benefit rates increase in accordance with market conditions**
 - **A training package for landlords to undertake, in order to increase knowledge and understanding of social issues that vulnerable people face (inc. addiction, mental health, criminal justice etc.)**

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The Refugee and Migrant Centre

1) how does the PRS meet the needs of the clients we support?

- Shared living
- Access in emergency
- Accommodation option

2) What advice do you give your clients to help them be successful in accessing or living in the PRS?

- Check landlord details/ contract
- Check property- standards
- Ensure you understand terms
- Best site to look on
- Discussion about PRS vs Social housing

3) Are you aware of the rent with confidence scheme?

Yes

4) what effects has the national rent deposit scheme had on your clients?

- N/A- not had many clients if any who have accessed this.

5) What would you like to see done to improve the PRS?

- More/clear guidance on access of PRS schemes
- More scrutiny on standards- quality housing
- Essential responsibility to upkeep properties-maintenance and repairs
- Longer tenancies- offering security.
- DSS accepting properties/ low rent.

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