

## **CABINET**

### **DATE OF COMMITTEE**

**14<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

## **REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR QUALITY OF LIFE**

### **TITLE OF REPORT**

Development of the Council's approach to Private Sector Housing

### **EXEMPT INFORMATION**

None

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to approve changes in the way Tamworth Borough Council engages with and intervenes in the private sector to provide a wider choice of suitable housing options for those wishing to reside in the Tamworth area. A strategic review has been undertaken of the challenges Tamworth will face in terms of housing demand and the proposals are a response to ensure the Council's private sector housing service is fit for purpose to meet the future challenges.

The proposals in this report will assist in the delivery of priorities identified by the Tamworth Strategic Partnership and within the Council's Healthier Housing Strategy.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Cabinet approves the extension of the landlord accreditation scheme to include managing agents

That Cabinet approve the development of the advice and assistance service provided to empty homes owners to include the provision of lists of approved landlords, managing agents and quality tradesmen.

That Cabinet approve in principle the development of a social lettings agency to enable the Council to increase access to private sector accommodation.

That a further report be submitted during 2012/2013 for final approval for the development of a social lettings agency

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Working with the private rental sector is an important area of activity in ensuring privately owned homes are utilised and let at an acceptable standard and in increasing the overall supply of housing and in particular affordable housing within Tamworth. Ensuring a supply of decent privately owned homes for rent will assist in securing housing opportunities for all ends of the market ranging from discharging homelessness duty to top end private rents for those moving to the area for employment opportunities. Equally important is the work undertaken by the Council to prevent homelessness and to support vulnerable households in housing difficulty.

During the past twelve months the Council has continued to improve outcomes in these areas. In particular 47 empty homes have been brought back into use. In addition the Council continues to prevent homelessness in most cases despite the

continuing pressures arising from the economic downturn.

All the changes proposed in this report are aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the Council in relation to increasing access to good quality affordable housing and supporting households experiencing housing difficulty.

### **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

Delivery of the above proposals relating to landlord accreditation and developing methods of advice and assistance will be met from within previously agreed budgets.

### **LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND**

Each proposed change in this report has been fully risk assessed and where possible risks have been eliminated or mitigated. Whilst each activity poses a level of risk there is also a risk to service provision and ability to deliver housing solutions to Tamworth residents if the Council does not actively pursue engagement with private sector supply.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

By working with private sector landlords, offering an extended range of options to bring empty homes back into use and in the future developing a Council run, not for profit letting agency will increase the supply of decent housing across the social, affordable and private rented sector.

Additionally, delivery of the projects identified above will contribute to improved health outcomes for local residents. The prevention of homelessness and other associated outcomes will contribute towards the delivery of key priorities identified by the Tamworth Strategic Partnership and adopted by Tamworth Borough Council.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### *Accrediting Managing Agents*

The Tamworth Landlord Accreditation Scheme is already established and along with the Landlord Forum is growing in strength and support. Positive engagement with the private sector is now increasingly important. Extending the scheme to include managing and letting agents will widen the scope of involvement and help extend good practice further than individual landlords.

The proposed social letting agency will act as an additional tool to engage with the private rental sector and it is anticipated the agency approach will encourage landlords and managing agents to become accredited. If a property has been taken onto the social letting agency by enforcement then it will be a requirement that the landlord becomes accredited before the property is handed back to them. This provides a joined up approach to raise standards and ensure landlords have access to a wide range of services.

#### *Assistance and advice*

In order to provide a wide range of assistance to owners of empty properties and landlords it is proposed that the Council make available lists of approved landlords, managing agents and quality tradesmen. This information can be utilised for those

wishing to rent privately or to renovate the home for sale. This approach widely accepted as a method of assistance in raising standards in the private sector.

### *Social Lettings Agency*

It is proposed that the Council develop a Social Lettings Agency to enable the Council to discharge its duty of homelessness into the private sector, offer wider housing choice to home seekers and directly manage empty homes brought back into use and homes acquired as a result of enforcement activity. The scheme will be developed to meet the needs of Tamworth residents by ensuring a co-ordinated approach to private sector housing activity and making best use of the existing housing stock. Detailed proposals will be submitted to Cabinet during 2012/2013 once all financial, legal and administrative considerations have been undertaken.

### **REPORT AUTHOR**

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### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

### **APPENDICES**