

17th October 2012**REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING****Revised Arrangements For Landlord Accreditation****EXEMPT INFORMATION**

None

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide members with the rationale for reviewing the Private Sector Landlord Accreditation Scheme and putting forward a proposal to end the scheme. It is proposed that lessons learned from the operation of the current accreditation scheme are taken into account and utilised to further develop positive relationships with local landlords. This will assist the Council to comply with Government policy and legislation that is actively encouraging making better use of the private rented sector to assist in meeting local need.

RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet approves ending the Private Sector Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2010 Tamworth Borough Council introduced an in-house landlord accreditation scheme. The aim of this scheme is to encourage engagement between the Council and landlords operating within the Tamworth boundary. The scheme awards accreditation to landlords who complete training and have their properties inspected by TBC's private sector enforcement team.

The accreditation scheme has been actively promoted to Landlords through the Council's thriving Landlords Forum. Unfortunately take-up has been poor and only two landlords are currently accredited.

As a result the scheme has been subject to a review in order to put in place revised arrangements that both better meet the needs of local landlords and continue to make effective use of resources that are available to the Council. As putting into place a revised scheme that is acceptable to both the Council and landlords has proved problematic, it is proposed the current scheme is ended and not replaced with a local scheme. However the Council will continue to work in a positive manner with landlords and encourage, where appropriate, landlords to become accredited via national or regionally operated accreditation schemes.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no costs associated with the recommendation to formally end the Private Sector Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

There are no direct risks associated with ending the Private Sector Landlord Accreditation Scheme. The Council has fully assessed the current scheme and continuing dialogue with landlords indicates take up will not increase for the reasons highlighted below. The Council will continue to explore other avenues to positively work with local landlords whilst at the same time maintaining its enforcement activity.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Working in partnership with local private sector landlords will remain a priority for the Council and will positively contribute to increasing the supply of private rented housing options for local people in need. Government policy and legislation is actively encouraging making better use of the private rented sector to assist in meeting local need. It will therefore be crucial to the success of local initiatives designed to achieve this aim that local landlords are effectively engaged in a manner that enhances partnership working.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2010 Tamworth Borough Council introduced an in-house landlord accreditation scheme. The aim of this scheme is to encourage engagement between the Council and private landlords operating within the Tamworth boundary. The scheme awards accreditation to landlords who complete training and have their properties inspected by the Council's private sector enforcement team.

The Council's Strategic Housing Team has worked with landlords to encourage accreditation as well as organising forums, training events and the production of newsletters etc. to encourage engagement. Despite considerable effort only 2 landlords are currently accredited. All avenues have been explored ranging from free training sessions to the provision of incentives.

From discussion with both landlords and other local authorities the lack of success with the scheme is attributed to a number of factors.

1. There are no real incentives for landlords to join, discounts are meaningless and landlords get them anyway.
2. Most landlords who engage are already members of national or larger regional schemes.
3. Some landlords have expressed a reluctance to engage with the scheme as they perceive there is a tension between the Council's enforcement role and the Council's well publicised intentions to work more closely with private landlords (in line with current direction of government housing policy / strategy).

Options considered

1. *Continue with current scheme*
2. *Adapt and enhance the current scheme*
3. *Close the scheme with no replacement*

1. *Continue with the current scheme.*

As detailed above a number of factors mean that this is not a viable option. The current scheme is time intensive for little or no output.

2. *Adapting and enhancing the current scheme.*

This option was explored but any revised scheme would need to be a landlord education

scheme only. The current scheme is based on both education and inspection. The feedback from landlords who attended training sessions but did not become accredited indicated concern over the consequence of an inspection as being a barrier to them accessing the scheme.

It is of course recognised that an inspection is a reflection of property conditions at a fixed point in time. If a landlord is operating his / her business in the appropriate manner in line with the principles on which accreditation was awarded, inspection should not pose a significant problem.

However, as highlighted above, some landlords have expressed a concern about inspection although they are striving to become good landlords that are willing to work with the Council.

This prevailing viewpoint and attempt to develop an education only approach has proved problematic and so it is proposed that the council ends its current scheme and does not replace it with a revised local scheme.

3. Close the scheme with no replacement

In the absence of a credible alternative scheme, it is recommended the current scheme should be ended. However, it is recognised that strategically, it is more important than ever to engage with landlords and help the private rented sector to grow in Tamworth. The Council will continue to explore opportunities via the Landlords Forum to work constructively with landlords and will encourage them to become accredited (if they have not done so already) with external schemes such as the nationally recognised National Landlords Association (NLA) accreditation scheme.

REPORT AUTHOR

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