

North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE ADULT SERVICES AND HOUSING POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 12 APRIL 2018

**SUBJECT OF REPORT: STEERING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS -
HOUSING CONDITIONS IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR**

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

**OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: COUNCILLOR RUTH JACOBS, CHAIR
ASH HOUSING STEERING GROUP**

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Panel retrospectively endorse the Housing Steering Group's following recommendations to the Executive Member for Planning, Highways, Transport, Housing and Economic Development:-

"On behalf of the ASH Scrutiny Panel, the Panel steering group supports and recommends the implementation of the following proposal:

- to target improving poor housing conditions in the Private Rented sector in the area of Weston-super-Mare using the Area Action approach set out in the Review report. [see appendix 2 attached]

However, in supporting the proposal for "regular reviews" of the effectiveness of the new scheme and the Action Area boundary, the Panel also recommends that:

- the first review should be undertaken no later than 12 months after the commencement of inspections;
- that serious consideration be given to the implementation of targeted selective/additional licencing scheme(s) should on-going reviews of the proposed approach clearly prove it to be unsuccessful; and
- that the steering group/ASH Panel consider the findings from the review(s) of the Action Area approach."

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Housing Steering Group met with officers to consider and feedback on proposals set out in the Council's recent review and subsequent consultation on housing conditions in the private rented sector (PRS) in North Somerset. The Steering group's findings and recommendations are set out at appendix 1.

2. POLICY

The Adult Services and Housing Policy and scrutiny Panel supports the council's corporate aims of improving the way we work and enhancing well-being in the district.

3. DETAILS

On 5th March 2018, the ASH Steering group met with the Head of Strategy and Housing, the Private Sector Housing Service Leader, and The Private Sector Rented Housing Team Manager to hear and discuss the options considered in the PRS Review, the rationales underpinning the preferred options and the outcomes from the public consultation (see the consultation outcomes report at appendix 3).

On balance, Members agreed that they preferred the proposed Action Area option as they felt this was the more practicable solution bearing in mind resource limitations and the acknowledged need to focus those resources where they would be most effective. The Area Action approach would allow officers to prioritise inspections on properties that were not accredited or where intelligence from the accreditation schemes (eg complaints) directed them.

The alternative option, a licencing scheme, would involve significant administration costs, would require landlords of properties that met all relevant standards to pay a licencing fee and would involve a universal inspection regime throughout the defined Action Area, diluting the effective use of resources as they would not be targeted on the homes where they were most needed.

In addition, unlike the Area Action approach, the cost of implementing a licencing scheme could be passed on to tenants.

In relation to the size of the area to be targeted Members supported the area as set out in the review report (Page 36 Appendix 2) because if the size of the area were increased it would create a risk that the poorest properties would not be targeted whilst if the size of the area were reduced it would risk poor properties being excluded from the area and not improved.

Members agreed, however, that the implementation of the Area Action approach including the area boundary needed to be kept closely under review to check that it was successful and ensure that other options are considered, including Selective/Additional licencing scheme(s), if it were found to be unsuccessful.

The Steering Group concluded that it make a recommendation, for endorsement by the full ASH Panel, that the Executive Member implement the proposals as set out above. However, it was noted that the next meeting of the Panel was not until 29th March 2018 and this would cause a delay to the decision making process. In the circumstances, and in accordance with the Panel's "new ways of working", it was agreed that the Steering Group draft a recommendation report and consult all Panel members on its contents by email, prior to it being submitted to the Executive Member (with the expectation that it be retrospectively endorsed by the Panel at its next meeting). Panel Members were consulted on 9th March and the recommendations were submitted on 13th March 2017.

4. CONSULTATION

All Members of the ASH Panel were consulted by the Steering Group.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

N/A

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

9. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

N/A

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HOUSING STEERING GROUP

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