

Private Rented Housing Review



- Adult Services and Housing Policy and Scrutiny Panel
- 25 February 2021

Private Rented Housing

Many forms:

Houses

Self-contained flats

Self-contained bedsits

Shared houses

Bedsits – shared facilities

Hostels

Park Homes

HMOs

Corporate Plan

- Improving housing conditions in the private sector delivers the priorities of the Corporate Plan
- Improves health outcomes
- Contributes to enhancing community cohesion
- Reduces carbon emissions
- Helps discharge homelessness duty

Achieved through:

- Strong enforcement of standards
- Mandatory licensing of HMOs
- Partnership working with private landlords

Area Action



Area Action Approach

- Comprehensive review housing conditions (2018) confirmed concentration poor accommodation in areas Weston-super-Mare
- Decision taken to embark on a targeted area action approach of education, promotion and enforcement
- Enforcement Policy was updated – civil penalties introduced
- Preparations for expanded mandatory HMO licensing regime commenced
- Other regulatory changes were scheduled for the sector around gas safety, improved energy performance and tenant rights reform
- Local landlords had embraced self-regulation with a clear commitment to education and training

Progress

First critical task to identify PRS stock in area completed using range of data sources – historic records, EPC's, deposit bond records, engagement with local landlords.

Enforcement should only follow period of education, promotion and advice.

- Estimated 4500 private rented sector dwellings in area
- 2863 letters sent to landlords with links to information, accreditation, inspection proposals
- # Improvement notices served under HA04 19/20 = 12; 20/21 = 9
- # Prohibition notices served under HA04 19/20 = 2; 20/21 = 3
- # civil penalties issued & value 19/20 = 1 (£4,600); 20/21 = 3 (£32,917 – appeals pending)
- Cumulative total where works in progress, outstanding or delayed = 33 plus 9 live prohibition orders
- Since April 2020 inspections of 162 dwellings including HMOs completed 117 within action area
- Actionable hazards have been identified in around 6%.
- Recent inspections are finding most serious hazards – fire safety, dampness

Pandemic recovery plan

- In line with government advice, Enforcement Policy revised to take account of restrictions including suspension of proactive inspections
- Limited availability of contractors, statutory compliance excepted
- Detailed risk assessments required for inspections
- Experiencing some resistance lockdown “2”
- Continue pragmatic approach
- Proactive inspection regime will slowly increase subject to pandemic – aiming 10 per week
- Monitoring contractor availability
- Unpredictable Impact on sector post-Covid e.g. eviction ban removed

Rent with Confidence

In conjunction with WoE authorities, the Rent with Confidence standard was developed which recognised organisations who offered accreditation status for landlords and agents.

- Scheme standards include all statutory requirements for the sector including behaviours and importantly sets out minimum property standards
- NLCE – National Landlords Code of Excellence have fully embraced the standard, with 91 members covering over 2250 dwellings
- NLCE has robust membership conditions which landlords must sign up to comply
- Remote training has continued throughout pandemic on electrical safety, tenancy relations, energy efficiency
- Full membership is conditional on completion of mandatory training which has been suspended through pandemic
- Randomised inspections commence, when pandemic restrictions permit



Lettings Team work

NSC Lettings Team have done tremendous job recruiting new landlords to help discharge the homelessness duty and provide support to maintain tenancies.

- Since April 2019 almost 700 bed spaces have been found
- New landlords are continually being recruited 47 in 2019/20 and 48 to date in current year
- Currently working with over 150 landlords, majority portfolio in Weston-super-Mare
- 12 month tenancies as minimum usually at LHA rates
- Small grants available for typical work improved security, fire safety, electrical upgrades. Many landlords carry out complete refurbishment e.g. new windows, bathrooms or Kitchens
- Good working relationship, landlords responsive to requests, helping to form sustainable tenancies



Review of Housing Conditions

Housing Act 2004 requires local housing authority to keep housing conditions under review, to identify if any action may be needed

- A review would primarily incorporate information from a Stock Condition Survey (last conducted 2017)
- Critical information on stock condition is valuable which can be reported at ward level or lower
- Analysis of EPC data can help map areas with the worst energy efficiency and fuel poverty
- Local enforcement and other data can enhance the analysis and improve the reporting
- In addition to NSC interventions, there is evidence to suggest landlords have voluntarily made improvements e.g. home energy work, electrical upgrade
- A stock condition report would be a useful in drafting the refresh of the Housing Strategy
- Rogue landlord funding (MHCLG) has helped focus our resources on the worst properties



Conclusions

Periodic reviews of the outcomes of the area action approach was planned from the outset - scheduled in Q1 21/22. The pandemic has impacted on the project in many ways but primarily the number of proactive inspections possible.

- Comprehensive data on location, numbers and target areas has been compiled
- Education and advice phase has concluded
- Despite pandemic restrictions, significant progress has been made and indications are the rogue landlord element are being identified for inspections
- The number of good and well-intentioned landlords should be acknowledged also work of NLCE
- A review of progress would be timely including a refresh of the Stock Condition Survey
- The review to be concluded in Q3 21/22 to allow for the pandemic recovery plan to be implemented
- Rogue landlord reporting link on NSC website to be encouraged

Question Time

