



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 8th October 2015

Report of: Janet Sharpe

Subject: Update on the private rented sector in Sheffield

Author of Report: Michelle Houston, Service Manager
0114 2734680 or michelle.houston@sheffield.gov.uk

Summary:

Michelle Houston, Service Manager for Private Housing Standards attended Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee in July 2015. It was requested that she provide a brief report to the committee in October 2015 to set out any updates since the July report.

This report provides an update on activity since July 2015.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	Y
Other	

The Committee are asked to note the contents of the report and to seek clarification or further information where required.

Background Papers:

Report to Scrutiny July 2015 titled “The private rented sector in Sheffield”

Category of Report: OPEN/CLOSED (please specify)

Report of the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services

The Private Rented Sector in Sheffield

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Michelle Houston, Service Manager for Private Housing Standards attended Scrutiny in July 2015.

1.2. It was requested that she provide a brief report to the committee in October 2015 to set out any updates since the July report.

2. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SHEFFIELD PEOPLE?

2.1. There are around 35,000 privately rented properties in Sheffield, which means that around 16% of the city's residents live in the sector.

2.2. A healthy and reasonable quality private rented housing sector is key to providing a choice and range of properties to house the people of Sheffield.

2.3. As a local authority, it is our duty to take account of and regulate the sector.

3 UPDATES SINCE LAST REPORT

3.1 Disposal of owner occupied property at Nether Edge

3.1.1 The Council had worked on this property for over 10 years. It was a complex and frustrating case where an owner occupier continually did unsafe and inappropriate building work on his home.

3.1.2 The work was carried out in unsociable hours, was noisy and caused severe anti social behaviour to his neighbours.

3.1.3 The owner was aggressive, he was prosecuted for an assault on a council officer and had verbally assaulted and threatened many others.

3.1.4 For health and safety reasons, the council had to carry out emergency works on many occasions to protect the public and to rectify Building and Planning breaches. This resulted in many thousands of pounds worth of debt owed to the Council.

3.1.5 Private Housing Standards were the lead on this case for the Council and succeeded after many years to force the disposal of this property.

3.1.6 The Council's debts of over £40,000 were repaid to the Council and the property now has a new owner!

3.1.7 This is the first case in the country where this particular procedure has been used to success.

3.2 Continuing prosecutions

- 3.2.1 The service has continued to take prosecution action in the Courts for a range of housing non-compliance.
- 3.2.2 The Service Manager has raised concerns on a number of occasions regarding the disappointing fines being awarded, and the apparent lack of understanding of the legislation by Magistrates.
- 3.2.3 The Service Manager has communicated this to her Head of Service as well as the Head of Legal Services. He has assured that he will be exploring how to present this to the Courts in the hope that we can receive fines and outcomes more consistent with other towns and cities prosecuting for similar issues.
- 3.2.4 Despite this – we are continuing to use this legal action, especially as ours are criminal offences. Albeit receiving low fines, the outcome of a criminal record is often more of a deterrent. The action is also sending very strong messages out to the landlord community that these issues are being addressed and taken seriously by the Council.

3.3 Letting and Managing Agents Redress scheme

- 3.3.1 We have been one of the first councils to implement this and certainly one of the first outside London to enforce it.
- 3.3.2 The lead officer has now attended the first Tribunal appeal regarding one of these cases and the outcome is due any time.

3.4 New Stock condition survey

- 3.4.1 We have been working with colleagues in the housing strategy team to commission a new stock condition survey. This will provide more up to date information about the properties in the private sector, where the problems are and focus on any individual issues that need addressing.
- 3.4.2 There will be reports of the outcomes of the survey later this year.

3.5 Voluntary Registration scheme review to Cabinet Member

- 3.5.1 When the Page Hall Selective Licensing scheme was designated, a surrounding area was also agreed as a voluntary registration area.
- 3.5.2 This was the idea of the landlords, rather than having Selective Licensing all way across the neighbourhood.
- 3.5.3 The scheme was an opportunity for landlords to volunteer to register themselves and their property and to achieve the standards being enforced in the Page Hall core area.
- 3.5.4 Out of around 500 properties – landlords of only 5 properties have come forward to register.
- 3.5.5 This demonstrates that landlords have not supported their own scheme to work with the Council on a voluntary basis.

3.5.6 A report is now being drawn up which will be presented to the Cabinet Member. It reviews the success of the voluntary scheme and makes recommendations as to what any follow up action should be.

3.5.7 The report is likely to be ready in November 2015.

4 Recommendation

4.1 The Committee is asked to note the updates in the report

Michelle Houston
29 September 2015

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