

Template Scoping Document

Community Select Committee	
Scrutiny Review Title:	Private Rented Sector
Background issues to review – rationale for scrutinising this issue:	Local Authorities have a vital role to play in the housing private rented sector. The form that engagement takes will differ depending on the position of the housing market and any specific local challenges.
Is the issue highlighted as one of the Council's corporate aims and objectives of the Council's draft Corporate Strategy , – 'Sharing the Dividends'? If so which one:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Vibrant Town – Improve the economy and encourage financial resilience. Regenerate the Town Centre and neighbourhoods. • A Quality Environment – Provide affordable homes and housing growth. Help people feel safe.
Is this issue one that raises interest with the public via complaints or Members' surgeries?:	
Focus of the review: (State what the review focus will be)	<p><i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting. Officers have suggested the following possible Options:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Rented Sector (PRS) and Stevenage Borough Council • Enforcement of house condition standards Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). • Best practice and advice on house conditions; advice to private tenants on a range of landlord and tenant issues – principally aimed at preventing homelessness. • Role in tackling unlawful eviction and landlord harassment. • Best practice advice on responsibilities and liabilities. • Assisting families threatened with homelessness to find an affordable settled home.

- **Disrepair, lack of amenities, external appearance and vacant premises**
We have the benefit of an accurate picture of conditions in the private sector as a result of the survey carried out in 2013. There is a high expectation from public e.g. to deal with overgrown gardens, general 'eye-sores.' Which are difficult to meet under current legislation.
- **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)**
HMOs are an invaluable source of accommodation for single people but are recognised as providing some of the poorest living conditions. In Stevenage, however, the standard of known HMOs is generally good. As of 30/06/14, 98.4% of known HMOs were free from Category 1 hazards and, licensed (where required).
- **Challenges**
 - Increase in "amateur landlords" expected to increase due to pension rules being relaxed.
 - Welfare reform and the impact of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.
 - Rising rents and affordability issues.
 - Predicted rise in inflation/interest rates.
 - Population move out of London pressure on local PRS.
 - Immigration Act and requirement of landlords to check tenant's immigration status.
 - Limited security of tenure that leaves PRS tenants not having a stake in their community or home and also vulnerable to eviction just for making a legitimate complaint about their landlord
 - Cold and hard to heat homes and affordable warmth issues.
 - Perceptions of renting as undesirable / temporary / no community commitment against Landlord perceptions of benefit dependent tenants.
- **Areas for further consideration**
 - ✓ Accreditation Scheme?
 - ✓ Develop Policy on prosecuting in cases of landlord harassment and unlawful eviction.
 - ✓ Develop a social lettings agent.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Develop a landlord forum / landlords group. ✓ Provide support a private tenants group ✓ Work with council leaseholders 50% of who are absent and renting their property by offering commercial services for example, a repairs service.
<p><u>Timing issues:</u> Are there any timing constraints to when the review can be carried out?</p>	Officers will advise at the meeting if there are any timing issues to consider. The review will have to fit in with the timing of the other Select Committee review work programme items.
<p>The Committee will meet on (provide <u>dates</u> if known):</p>	Dates: Day/Month/Time/Venue
<p><u>SBC Leads</u> (list the Executive Portfolio Holders and SD's Heads of Service who should appear as witnesses):</p>	<p><i>Officers have suggested the following people:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Councillor Ann Webb (Housing)</i> • <i>Matthew Partridge – Strategic Director (Community)</i> • <i>Jaine Cresser – Head of Housing Management Services</i> • <i>Sue Waller – Strategic Housing Solutions Manager</i> • <i>Emma Williams – Housing Options Officer – Private Sector Liaison</i> • <i>Jim Archibald – Senior Environmental Health Officer</i> • <i>Dave Rusling – Development Control Manager (Planning)</i>
<p>Any <u>other witnesses</u> (external persons/critical friend)?:</p>	<p>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting. <i>Possible options identified by officers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ken Staunton – Head of Regions, National Landlord's Association</i>
<p><u>Allocation of lead Members</u> on specific individual issues/questions:</p>	<p>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting.</p> <p>Members will ask questions on the following areas XXXXX (list the issues to address during the interviews):</p>

<p>Any other Questions Members wish to cover:</p>	<p>Cllr will lead questioning on (suggested area)</p> <p>Cllr will lead questioning on (suggested area)</p> <p>Cllr will lead questioning on (suggested area)</p> <p>Cllr will lead questioning on Equalities & Diversity Issues – Are there any E&D issues to consider in this review?</p>
<p><u>Site visits and evidence gathering in the Community</u></p>	<p><i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting XXXXX</i></p>
<p><u>Equalities and Diversity issues:</u> The review will consider what the relevant equalities and diversity issues are regarding the Scrutiny subject that is being scrutinised</p>	<p><i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting XXXXX</i></p>
<p><u>Constraints</u> (Issues that have been highlighted at the scoping stage but are too broad/detailed to be covered by the review):</p>	<p><i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting XXXX (These issues can be captured and dealt with via other means – Briefings/email/officer action etc)</i></p>
<p><u>Background Documents/data</u> that can be provided to the review</p>	<p><i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting XXXXX</i> <i>Possible options suggested by officers:</i></p>