

Private Rented Sector Offer Policy (Housing, Andy Kefford)

Synopsis of report:

Approval for consultation is requested for a reviewed Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) Policy

Recommendation(s):

Members approve a consultation exercise on the reviewed PRSO policy

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced offers within the Private Rented Sector as a lawful means of discharging a homeless duty. Prior to this unless it was with the agreement of the applicant an offer of social housing would be made to a household to whom a main homeless/housing duty was owed. Recognising the increased pressure on social housing and the expanded role of the private sector this legislation enabled Local Authorities to change the way they operated.
- 1.2 The Private Rented Sector Offer Policy (PRSO) was implemented in 2015 but has not been reviewed since that date.

2. Report

- 2.1 A new draft policy is attached at Appendix A.
- 2.2 Where possible homelessness will be prevented or relieved through an offer of a private sector tenancy. Where immediate and suitable offers of accommodation can be found in the private sector these will be made to households threatened with homelessness, thereby avoiding the need for them to go into temporary accommodation which is costly for applicants and the Council and is disruptive for households.
- 2.3 If a household is placed in temporary accommodation the Council will continue to look for an offer within the private sector to offer them. Applicants are encouraged to look for their own accommodation and where appropriate the Council will assist with a deposit and rent in advance if the property meets the required standards and is considered suitable. If a household wishes to live in a particular area of the Borough, they will be encouraged to source their own offer as the Council is unable to consider area preference other than in exceptional circumstances. The small geographical area of Runnymede means that an offer anywhere in the borough is likely to be deemed suitable due to the short distance from existing employment, education, support network etc.
- 2.4 In order to support the PRSO policy the Council has invested in the Magna Carta Lettings service which works with private landlords and incentivises them through payments and management schemes to take tenants nominated by the Local Authority.

- 2.5 The use of the PRSO policy ensures that properties are available through the Housing Register for households seeking to access social housing; many of whom are in the private sector or unsuitable accommodation. Subject to meeting the eligibility and qualification criteria households made an offer within the private sector can join the Housing Register.
- 2.6 When determining whether a PSRO unit is suitable consideration will be given to the individual needs of the household, any disabilities requiring adaptations and the affordability of the offer.
- 2.7 It is appreciated that the PRSO policy is not always popular with households it is applied to, due to most applicants seeking assistance with their housing needs aspiring to a social housing tenancy but the demand for social housing in Runnymede considerably exceeds supply. It is essential to balance the needs of those facing homelessness with the need for a Housing Register that enables people to access social housing within a reasonable timescale and that homelessness is not incentivised by a perceived fast track into social housing.
- 3. **Policy framework implications**
- 3.1 This policy operates alongside the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme June 2021, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-24, and Tenancy Strategy 2022-26
- 4. **Resource implications/Value for Money (where applicable)**
- 4.1 Use of the private sector for preventing and relieving homelessness has reduced the Temporary Accommodation costs to the Council
- 5. **Legal implications**
- 5.1 The Localism Act 2011 (sections 148 and 149) introduced provisions which enable local housing authorities to bring their statutory housing duty under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996 to an end, by making an offer of a private rented sector tenancy rather than a social housing tenancy. The creation of a policy enables the local housing authority to set out the basis on which it will use that power.
- 6. **Equality implications**
- 6.1 This is a review of an existing policy with no significant changes. An EIA (Equality Impact Assessment) screening with updated data has been shared with the Equalities Group
- 7. **Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**
- 7.1 None identified
- 8. **Consultation**
- 8.1 An 8-week consultation will take place with stakeholders to include applicants who have approached as homeless and current applicants on the Housing Register. The policy will be placed on the consultation area of our website with a short questionnaire to capture feedback

9. **Timetable for Implementation**

- 9.1 Results of the consultation will be brought back to the March 2023 meeting of this Committee.

10. **Conclusions**

- 10.1 Members are asked to approve the revived PRSO policy for a consultation with Stakeholders

(To resolve)

Background papers

- 1) Housing & Community Services Committee 9/1/2013 Use of The Private Rented Sector To Discharge Homeless Duty
- 2) Housing Committee 2/9/2015 Private Rented Sector Offer For Homeless Households And Out Of Area Policy Including Temporary Accommodation