

Private Rented Sector Offer (Housing, David Dakin)

Synopsis of report:

The Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) Policy which uses offers of accommodation within the private rented sector to prevent or relieve homelessness was introduced in 2015 and has been reviewed. Members approved a consultation on the new draft policy in November 2022 and this report provides the results of the consultation and requests approval for the policy.

Recommendation(s):

Members approve the Private rented Sector Offer Policy 2023-2026 (Appendix A)

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 homelessness duty. Prior to this unless it was only with the agreement of the applicant that an offer of a private rented tenancy 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.

2. Report

- 2.1 A reviewed 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 could be deemed suitable due to the short distance from existing employment, education, support network etc. Offers will be considered on a case by case basis with specific consideration being given to children within an academic year with external examinations such as GCSE or A level.
- 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**

- 4.1 Use of the private sector for preventing and relieving homelessness has reduced the Temporary Accommodation costs to the Council and maintains the level of social housing available for Choice Based Lettings

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 took place with stakeholders including targeted contact with applicants who have approached as homeless and current applicants on the

Housing Register. A dedicated webpage was set up which had 191 views and a short questionnaire which 6 people completed.

- 8.2 Emails were sent to applicants on the Housing Register and those currently in Temporary Accommodation directing them to the consultation page. A reminder was sent a week before the consultation closed.
- 8.3 Only 6 responses to the questionnaire were received but due to the number of visits to the web page it is believed that that if there were significant objections to the policy people would have utilised the short questionnaire to voice this.
- 8.4 The results of one question have led to improved communication, the one offer policy is repeatedly made known to applicants throughout the process but it appears it is often ignored with a belief that social housing will be the outcome so applicants will be asked to sign to confirm that they understand the policy.

Q7 The Council makes one offer of suitable accommodation only. How clearly do you feel this rule is communicated?

Figure 1

Response	%	No
Extremely clear	33	2
Very clear	17	1
No so clear	33	0
Not at all clear	0	1
Total	17	6

9. **Timetable for Implementation**

- 9.1 Implementation on approval by Members, there are no changes to the existing policy so there will be no discernible impact for service users other than an updated document.

(To resolve)

Background Papers

None