

## **ITEM No ...4.....**

**REPORT TO:** NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE – 13 NOVEMBER 2017

**REPORT ON:** PRIVATE LANDLORD SUPPORT OFFICER PROJECT – UPDATE REPORT

**REPORT BY:** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

**REPORT NO:** 344-2017

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To update Committee on the progress of the Private Landlord Support Officer (PLSO) project in its second year.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. Committee are asked to note the successful outcomes and increasing interest in this project.
- 2.2. Committee are also asked to note the proposal to consider options to continue with the project beyond December 2017 when the partnership agreement with The Oak Foundation and Shelter Scotland ends.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1. Any ongoing costs associated with continuing the project will be contained within the Neighbourhood Services Revenue Budget.

### **4. MAIN TEXT**

#### **4.1. Background**

- 4.1.1. The project is a partnership between The Oak Foundation who fund the project, Shelter Scotland and Dundee City Council. The overall aim of the project is to continue to improve standards in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and in particular to target those landlords who are inexperienced or unaware of the vast range of legislation affecting the sector. The desired outcome is that Dundee has more engaged, legislatively compliant landlords. Private Rented Sector Housing makes an important contribution to the housing needs of our citizens and now outstrips Social Housing. It is, therefore, important to ensure it operates to a high standard.

- 4.1.2. Scottish Government, the Scottish Association of Landlords and other key stakeholders recognise the value of supporting landlords who require assistance, whilst freeing up resources for tougher, targeted enforcement where needed.

#### **4.2. Progress to Date**

- 4.2.1. Demand on the project remains high amongst the landlord community and the project has maintained the level of engagement with a total of 331 landlord cases in year one and 340 cases to date in the current year. The number of tenant cases has risen to 49. This is an additional benefit of the project and involves providing support to vulnerable tenants with multiple and complex needs as well as tenancy issues.

#### **4.3. Type of Cases**

- 4.3.1. The Matrix devised to identify key areas of interest continues to provide useful information and helps inform our approach to Dundee Landlord Accreditation Seminars. The checklists develop from this information continue to be used widely by Landlords, Letting Agents, other Agencies and Authorities and may well help inform the Scottish Government's review of Landlords' compliance with the Repairing Standard and other legal obligations.

- 4.3.2. One to one assistance remains the most common form of support to landlords and has become increasingly important at a time of significant and ongoing legislative change, regulation and governance. This service together with the quarterly seminars delivered by Dundee Landlord Accreditation remains an important element of our strategy to maintain and improve standards in the private rented sector.

#### 4.4. **Communication and Referral Routes**

##### 4.4.1. **Influencing Hard to Reach Landlords Through Their Tenants**

It has been recognised that to reach landlords who are operating 'under the radar' we need to educate vulnerable tenants and those that work with these tenants on the minimum standards they should expect.

Awareness sessions/Information updates on the private rented sector have been delivered to a range of internal services and external agencies in contact with private sector tenants.

- Advice Workers Forum through Welfare Rights.
- Welfare Reform teams including CONNECT, DEEAP and the Scottish Welfare Fund.
- Brooksbank money and debt service.
- The Housing Support Team, Homefinders and Housing Options
- Young Scot – targeting young people entering the private rented sector
- Secretariat to the Independent Race Equality adviser within Scottish Government – targeting the reduction of inequalities in housing and home life.
- Community Outreach – Lochee Community Hub, the Boomerang Community Centre, Ninewells Advice Centre and Stobswell Forum.

- 4.4.2. Informal advertising checks in informal advertising portals such as Gumtree with support from Shelter Scotland volunteers.

- 4.4.3. The PLSO continues to engage with landlords by a variety of methods to reach as many landlords as possible.

#### 5. **DUTY TO PROVIDE ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE**

- 5.1. Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Landlord Registration, issued in August 2017, emphasises the duty of local authorities to provide advice and assistance to tenants and landlords across the full range of private rented sector issues. Dundee is recognised as being well placed through a combination of Dundee Landlord Accreditation, delivering a code of practice for accredited landlords and the input of the PLSO targeting inexperienced or ill-informed landlords, enabling limited enforcement resources to target those landlords avoiding their obligations. To maintain this position it is intended to create a permanent post for a Private Landlord Support Officer within the Private Sector Services Unit. This approach enables the council to maintain a positive working relationship with private landlords and agents within the City and is evidenced by repeat self-referrals from some landlords.

#### 6. **TENANCY SUSTAINMENT WORK**

- 6.1. The strategic plan for Dundee includes aiming to improve the pathway for homeless people and reduce repeat homelessness. As a major housing option, the private rented sector has a vital part to play. The project has highlighted the scope for financial savings to the local authority than previously anticipated as well as the obvious health and wellbeing outcomes for tenants and corresponding benefits to landlords of being able to avoid costly repossession procedures and void periods. The PLSO is now a member of the lead professional Implementation Monitoring Group, bringing private rented sector knowledge to that group.
- 6.2. Effective partnership working with Dundee City Council First Contact Social Work Team and a pilot with the Housing Support team, as well as linking in with Shelter Scotland Dundee Hub ensures that the correct safeguarding measures can be put in place for these tenants.

## **7. PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

7.1. The development of joint working continues and key relationships now exists with a range of internal and external partners including:

- Dundee Homefinders - working closely with the local deposit guarantee scheme 'Homefinders', meeting with all their new landlords and also referring landlords to them.
- Home Energy Scotland – providing advice and information on energy efficiency to both landlords' and tenants' recognising the detrimental impact fuel poverty can have on a tenant's wellbeing and financial capability.
- Dundee City Council Housing Support Team – an approach together with the Housing Support team, where vulnerable tenants identified by the PLSO can be referred directly for Housing Support with the aim of increased tenancy sustainment and wellbeing.

The diagram at Annex A provides a visual representation of the links developed between the PLSO within PSSU, internal and external partners.

## **8. IMPACT OF THE PROJECT**

8.1 The project to date has had a very positive impact on engagement and helped build positive working relationships with the private rented sector in Dundee. Out with the council the project has generated significant and widespread interest. Externally it has helped develop online training for landlords through Shelter Scotland, has been included as an example of good practice in the Scottish Government's Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Landlord Registration and has led to the creation of a similar post within Glasgow City Council as well as interest from a number of local authorities and a Landlord Advice project in Northern Ireland. Within Dundee City Council it has helped develop increased partnership working and delivered practical help to over 650 landlords and generated a range of checklists being used across the sector.

8.2 The continued delivery of this service is seen as very positive to the regulation of the private rented sector. The agreement with the Oak Foundation and Shelter Scotland comes to an end in December 2017. Options are currently being explored to allow Neighbourhood Services to continue the project outwith the partnership agreement.

## **9. CONSULTATIONS**

9.1 The Council Management Team have been consulted in the preparation of this report and agree with the content.

Elaine Zwirlein  
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3rd October 2017



# Partnership Working to Ensure Improved Housing Quality in the Private Rented Sector

