

## **Private Rented Sector Working Group**

### **Notes – 13<sup>th</sup> January 2023 – 1pm via MS Teams (recorded)**

#### **Present:**

- Councillor John McNeill (Chair) (JM)
- Councillor Tracey Coulson (TC)
- Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan (PHC)
- Councillor Stephen Bunney (SB) (arrived at 13.44 due to internet issues)

#### **In Attendance:**

- Nova Roberts: Director, Change Management, ICT and Regulatory Services(NR)
- Andy Gray: Housing and Environmental Enforcement Manager (AG)
- Rebecca Ward: Senior Housing Standards and Enforcement Officer (RW)

#### **Apologies:**

- Councillor Tom Regis (TR)
- Councillor Trevor Young (TY)

### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

The meeting was recorded on MS Teams and sent to those Councillors not present for information.

Cllr McNeill (JM) opened the working group meeting and welcomed all attendees. The format of the discussion was set out with a guiding steer towards the focus of the meeting being on the policy position that the Council should consider for selective licensing.

Ideally a consensus on the preferred approach or approaches is needed so that the recommendation can be prepared for Prosperous Communities Committee with clarity. It was also reiterated that the working groups recommendations will also be considered, developed and informed by the Chairs of Committee prior to the meeting in March.

### **2. Discussion on Preferred Recommendations**

Councillors were asked to consider the information shown within appendix 1 (Private Sector Housing Options Table) and to provide a response to two questions:

- a) What is your preferred way forward for Selective Licensing that should be built into the proposed recommendations to PCC?
- b) Depending on your position for question a) what are your preferred options laid out in the table for the way forward generally for the PRS?

JM invited members of the group to put forward their views in relation to the two questions.

Cllr Howitt-Cowan (PHC) felt that he did not wish to pursue selective licensing in any form at this point in time. His preference was to focus on the status quo and maximise use of the powers that are currently available.

Cllr Coulson (TC) requested clarity on the resources in relation to the options table. AG clarified that the status quo resources are in place and that any additional projects or targeted work will require further approval from the Council's Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

TC also identified that the theme of housing is key within the Corporate Plan that is being revised and is a key priority for the Council moving forward, therefore would not want to take any options fully off the table. It was recognised however that any scheme may need tweaking based on the feedback on the proposals that were brought to a halt.

TC suggested that there has to be priority given to making resources available for housing related work as it aligns and contributes to so many broader objectives. It was suggested that the UKSPF should be considered as an option.

Generally, TC was happy to consider something more targeted, which may include selective licensing at some point.

In addition, PHC felt that raising revenue should not be the priority, if the matter was that important it should be funded appropriately via the general fund and not by landlords, many of which he felt didn't require the intervention. PHC also did not feel selective licensing would be appropriate, even if the cost was offset.

A discussion was then undertaken as to the variances between enforcement within the PRS and within social housing and whether there was any scope to ensure that the Council could do more with this. The consensus here was that this work is focussing on the PRS, but that there may be some further work to be done in relation to social housing standards.

JM fed back on his conversation with Cllr Regis (TR), who was reported to be not totally opposed to a selective licensing scheme, but was against the previous proposals in terms of their scale and geography.

JM then set out to summarise the position in terms of whether a selective licensing scheme would be better to be kept on the table given the timeline relating to the up and coming local elections and the potential general election that could happen in 2024 or at the latest 2025. JM also suggested that we should consider a way to enhance the status quo and in turn add interventions in between any potential review and revisit of selective licensing. It was clear that focus has to be on addressing some of the challenges in relation to sector and in particular the standards within the stock.

JM also requested a steer in regards to the speed of any PRS reforms that were set out in the white paper. AG advised that there does not appear to be a timeline for these as yet, but that the key elements relating to the abolition of Section 21 notices and the introduction of a landlord portal type scheme are due in 2023 at some point.

TC provided a view on how the Council need to be realistic in regards to what any interventions can achieve, for example, the expectation that any intervention can control individual people's behaviour is unrealistic from a housing perspective.

A conversation between all participants considered whether option D in relation to selective licensing (revisit it at a further point in time) would be appropriate. JM suggested that 24 months may be a good timeframe for this to be considered as it would provide time to then consider other interventions.

Cllr Bunney (SB) joined the meeting at 13.44pm. JM provided an overview of the discussions that had taken place so far to inform SB. On that basis SB was happy that option D be endorsed. SB is also keen to see the tenancy support aspect of the options given further consideration as part of any proposals.

### **3. Summary**

The overall discussion led the working group to agree that option D should be taken forward for selective licensing. The working group also believed that other targeted interventions and projects should be developed in the meantime, alongside continuing to deliver the status quo.

The following matters were requested to be covered within the committee report:

- An overview of the work that the working group has covered.
- Reference to the future need for any PRS working group, given that this is scheduled to be the last meeting of the group.
- A timeline to be included to set out how the work will now progress.

JM also requested that contact be made with TR and Cllr Young outlining the summary position that the working group has reached to seek their approval on this. AG has been tasked to do this.

NR thanked the working group for their ongoing commitment to the process and for their engagement and feedback during the working group meetings.

### **4. Any other business**

None noted

**END**