

SUBJECT:	Homeless Prevention – Development of Private Sector Housing Proposal
MEETING:	Single Cabinet Member Decision
DATE:	26th October 2016 (deadline 07.10.16)
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek approval to appoint a temporary Private Sector Housing Policy Officer until 31st March 2017, to kick-start and drive the development of the Council's private sector housing service relating to the Housing Options Team.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To agree to the appointment of a Temporary Private Sector Housing Policy Officer until March 2017.
- 2.2 To develop proposals to increase landlord engagement and increasing private sector housing as a viable housing option to help increase homeless prevention.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 In April 2015, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 placed a duty on the Council to prevent homelessness. In addition to the prevention duty, a key element of the legislation is the power for the Council to discharge duties using private rented housing. Although this was a positive change, the challenge of accommodating homeless households and preventing homelessness continues to be a challenge. This is due to both the on-going shortage of social housing and local issues associated with accessing private rented housing. Seeking to identify and develop private sector opportunities, therefore, has been and continues to be a priority.
- 3.2 In this context, officers in the Housing Options Team are increasingly focused on not only looking to re-house households in private sector accommodation, but also to positively and pro-actively engage with private landlords to encourage more landlords to work with the Council in different ways. Also, there is a need to better promote and assist private sector housing to potential tenants, as a viable alternative to social housing. A recent success has been the shared housing service, which not only has supported prevention performance, it has created a new housing option for single people and is also generating income. An overview of services that private landlords can benefit from is provided in **Appendix 1**. The intention is to package and promote these services as the 'Landlord Offer.'
- 3.3 Considerable private sector development work has been undertaken by the Housing Options Team over recent years to create additional accommodation, engage with landlords and facilitate access. Although positive progress is being made, the rate of this development has and will continue to be limited due to staff capacity and the on-going need to meet both the statutory homeless related and property management responsibilities. A priority activity that particularly needs to be further progressed is landlord engagement and the marketing of related services. In terms of marketing, there is a need for services to be 'packaged and branded' and for marketing activity to be undertaken more routinely.

- 3.4 It is considered that in seeking to materially take private rented housing services forward, there would be advantages in giving the necessary development work a short-term and ring-fenced injection of staffing resource that is able to temporarily focus on increasing the profile and 'visibility' of the service without the distraction of day to day management activity.
- 3.5 It is, therefore, proposed to create a temporary Private Sector Housing Policy Officer that will provide the said role up until the end of March '17. **See Appendix 2.** Key priorities will include: updating the website; developing a brand; developing marketing and raising the profile; material and undertaking engagement and marketing activity on a weekly basis and ultimately expanding private sector housing opportunities, whether directly (such as shared housing or private leasing) or indirectly.
- 3.6 Largely based on current practice, but also reflecting options for further improvement, an outline delivery framework has been established, the development of which has been shaped in partnership with the Council's Communications team. This framework will provide the focus for the said post.
- 4. REASONS:**
- 4.1 Strategic drivers and the business case for increasing private sector housing opportunities include the legal duty to prevent homelessness through the Housing (Wales) Act 2014; reducing the use of B & B accommodation and increasing housing provision in Monmouthshire due to the shortage of accommodation and local need. An established and successful private sector housing service also lays the foundations for an income generating initiative for the Council and contribute to the 'Future Monmouthshire' policy.
- 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**
- 5.1 The salary costs for the post will be approximately £19,153 for a 5 month period. This can be funded through existing resources. The expectation is to look to recruit to this post through an internal secondment and subsequently backfill.
- 6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:**
- 6.1 Implications have been identified. **See Appendix 3**
- 7. SAFEGUARDING & CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS**
- 7.1 The service has an important role in relation to both safeguarding and corporate parenting in the context of preventing homelessness.
- 8. CONSULTEES:** Chief Officer for Enterprise; Head of Planning; Cabinet Member for Community Development
- 9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:** None
- 10. AUTHOR:** Ian Bakewell, Housing & Communities Manager
- 11. CONTACT DETAILS:** Tel: 01633 644479 Email: ianbakewell@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Current Landlord Offer:

Advice & Assistance

- The availability of specialist staff
- Availability of a Landlord Advice Line
- Landlord Hub
- Landlord newsletter
- Landlord mailing list

Find a Tenant/Tenant Introduction

- Tenant income checks
- Tenant history
- Tenant references

Housing Benefit

- Dedicated housing benefit phone line and email
- Fast tracking of housing benefit (availability subject to assisting the Council to provide accommodation)
- Option for housing benefit direct (availability subject to assisting the Council to provide accommodation)

Management Services

- Room Leasing
- Private leasing
- Direct lets
- Written and photographic inventories
- Prepare tenancy agreements
- Property advertising and marketing
- Accompanied viewings
- Tenant sign-ups
- 2 month tenancy checks visits
- Assisting tenants with signing up for utilities
- One-off inspections
- Landlord accreditation and licencing
- Housing Health & Safety Rating assessments
- Support with ending a tenancy

Landlord Related Support

- Helping with Rent Smart Wales
- Supporting landlord accreditation
- Tenant referral by landlords to Money Advice Service, perhaps due to tenant being in arrears
- Landlord training
- Bond scheme
- Special offer vouchers (subject to availability)
- Interest free Home Improvement Loan – preferential landlord fee
- Interest Free Empty Homes Loans

Tenant related Support

- Money advice (eg budgeting, debt etc) for tenants

- Bond scheme
- Rent in advance (subject to eligibility)

Further Proposals/Options for Future Development

- Establish new web-pages
- Shared Housing expansion
- PLS development
- Return of Melin PLS to MCC
- Emergency Night-Stop
- Lodging
- Finish packaging approach to Tenant Accreditation eg certificate for tenants and agreement to sign
- Investigate and scope out Rent Guarantee
- Landlord Loans for buying
- Landlord welcome pack
- Investigate and scope our Landlord incentives as per Waltham Forest eg payment for taking a tenants
- Become an accredited trainer for landlord accreditation (attract fee income)
- Out of hours and/or holiday
- Maintenance service

