

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

North Area Council Extraordinary Meeting:

20th March 2017

Agenda Item: 6

Report of North Area Council Manager.

North Area Council's Proposal to Commission Private Sector Housing & Environmental Support

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To update the Area Council regarding the progress of the intention to recruit a Private Sector Housing and Environment Officer.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That members note the appendix which lays out the information about the North Area and specific neighbourhoods of interest for a private sector housing and environment officer.

3. Background

3.1 The North Area Council invited Safer Communities officers to the North Area Council Meeting on the 19 September 2016. Safer Communities officers Jane Brannan and Cath Fairweather provided Members with an overview of the Private Sector Housing and Environment Service. It was explained that the service proactively deals with all issues capable of having a detrimental impact on others in the community, including anti-social behaviour and criminal activity, environmental issues, property/housing conditions, fly-tipping and littering. This is done in conjunction with other agencies such as SYP, SYFRS, Social Care, Landlords/letting agents and local residents.

3.2 Following the presentation on the 19th September the Area Council elected not to proceed with any further consideration of this specialist area until the Safer Communities completed its restructure and confirmed what its core service offer would be from April 2017.

3.3 A further workshop was held on Monday 6th February 2017. It was attended by Cllrs Leech, Platts, Grundy, Howard, Tattersall, Charlesworth, Cherryholme and Lofts. Invited officers included Jane Brannan, Cath Fairweather, Jeanette Millward (Private Sector Housing and Environment Officer – North East Area) and Paul Jolley. The core private sector housing offer was confirmed which clarified that there will only be three private sector housing officer from April 2017 and it is anticipated that the vast majority of their work will be relative.

An informative and lively discussion followed which enabled the councillors present to learn more about the breadth and volume of issues that officers are required to deal with. Case studies were provided to help explain these in more depth. It was highlighted that often the intervention required is supportive in nature rather than

enforcement focussed. This leads to the empowerment of individuals and intervening at the right level can prevent a costly escalation processes being required.

The Tasking Officer explained that this type of private sector support was immeasurably helpful in delivering coordinated pieces of work which can involve a whole street. Three locations were referenced that would benefit from this type of intervention.

3.4 At the conclusion of the workshop the Members were in agreement that they wished to proceed and commission private sector housing support for the North Area without delay.

3.5 An extraordinary meeting of the Area Council was held on the 20th February 2017. The decision to recruit was agreed.

4. Private Sector Housing Support Outline

4.1 Based on initial findings the project would be in the region on £33,000 plus equipment and the possibility of a small working budget to enable larger projects to proceed without delay.

Project	Outline costings
<p>Private Sector Housing Management & Enforcement</p> <p>This programme provides a full time worker at Grade 7 to be employed within the BMBC Safer Communities Service to tackle issues surrounding private landlords & their tenants in identified hotspot areas across the North Area.</p> <p>This programme has already been funded by 4 out of the 6 Area Councils Central, where the impact has been substantial.</p> <p>Please see Appendices 1 – 5 of this report for further details.</p>	<p>£33,000 per year to fund 1FTE worker. There is no management fee. Additionally purchase of a personal bodycam is recommended plus a small working budget to ensure larger projects can be realised.</p> <p>It should be noted that although the worker would be employed by BMBC, this is not ‘buy back’ activity, as it is work which has never been undertaken by the Council and is additional.</p> <p>There is a possibility that this post could eventually become mainstreamed if BMBC choose to introduce selective licensing schemes for private landlords.</p>

5.0 Progress Update

5.1 Safer Communities have submitted a delegated report to Human Resources and the recruitment authorisation form has been approved by the Interim Assistant Director of Communities.

5.2 Stronger Communities will have line management responsibility for the post and will therefore lead on recruitment to the post. The advert to recruit to the post is due to be posted imminently.

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Appendices 1: Further details of the Private Sector Housing Management and Environment Provision

Appendix 1:

Private Sector Housing and Environment Officer Role

Context

The private rented sector is growing rapidly in Barnsley and is projected to overtake social housing as the second largest tenure within the next few years. Whilst the tenure is not a singular market and standards vary greatly Barnsley does have a growing number of poorer quality low value properties in the sector. To some extent the poorer quality accommodation is becoming the housing of last resort and consequently social and environmental problems are often more pronounced in areas of high density poor quality and low value private rented property. Barnsley still has in excess of over 2000 empty private homes in the borough further demonstrating both lack of demand/desire and an unequal market when compared to the social housing sector. (For example Council housing has waiting lists in excess of 7000 and very few empty or unlettable properties)

Recent analysis undertaken by the Community Safety and Enforcement service has shown that crime and antisocial behaviour rates are on average much higher in areas of high density private rented accommodation and in some locations these can be up to 4 times the borough average. In addition where this type of accommodation is becoming the tenure of last resort, often people and families with the most complex needs and or newcomers and transient communities can gravitate to the sector which in itself can generate local problems and issues. Compounding all these factors is the fact that other than physical property standards the sector is largely unregulated and there is a danger that local environments and the sustainability of certain locations can be jeopardised due to both physical decline and cohesiveness of communities living in these areas.

By comparison the social housing sector has a “housing management offer” which dedicates resources to the management of standards of estates, streets, physical condition of property, behaviour, tenant’s welfare and so on. The private sector does not typically benefit from any of these other than what is provided by a landlord or agent and subsequently decline can be more accelerated and more difficult to reverse in these locations.

North Area Council.

Most villages and townships in Barnsley have to varying degrees clusters of relatively cheap private sector rented property. The North Area is no different. Therefore Old Town, Darton East, Darton West and St Helens each have streets and properties where physical and social decline is evident.

The most significant areas in need of proactive intervention include:

Old Town

Summer Lane, Stocks Lane, Hilton Street, Johnson Street, Darley Terrace, Cresswell Street, Winter Road, Avenue, and Terrace, Blackburn Lane, Cockerham Lane, Smithies Lane, Honeywell St, Lane, and Grove , Queens Avenue, Gawber Road, a small pocket on Woodstock Road and Rowland Road.

Darton West

Dearne Hall Road, St Austell Drive, Higham Common Road, Longley Street, Medina Way, Church Street and Mill Lane. In addition to these areas, Kexborough while predominantly Council owned includes a number of ‘right to buy’ properties where the owners have moved on and the properties let on the private rented market. These include Brookhill Road, Birthwaite Road, Cooper Road, Airedale Road, Ballfield Lane and Churchfield Lane

Darton East

School Street, Dearne Street, Bridge Street, Station Road, Sackup Lane, Pye Avenue, Longsight Road, New Road, Spark Lane, Greenside, Towngate (block of private rented flats especially), Church Street, parts of Blacker Road, and Right to Buys on Grasmere Crescent, Windhill Drive, Coniston Avenue, Keswick Road.

St Helens

Many of the new build properties on New Lodge have been bought up by private landlords, most of them 'absent' in so far as many of them do not live within the Barnsley boundary area, and a lot of work has been done on the following locations in particular to address issues arising from ASB, vulnerability, environmental blight, etc. from the private rented sector (It might also be noted that there have been some hostilities towards "new" residents moving to the area, not always necessarily those of ethnic minorities from other EU countries. There has been a similar issue noted in Athersley North) Kirkstall Road, New Lodge Crescent, Standhill Crescent,

The New Build properties at the back of Athersley North have a high proportion of private rented accommodation and a number of issues are being reported there regarding waste, condition of property/garden, etc., namely: Stoney Royd, North Royds Wood, Carr Furlong, Wood Park View

Elsewhere, featured locations are/have been: Lindhurst Road, Laxton Road, Ollerton Road, Laithes Lane, Richard Road, Carlton Road, Ravenfield Drive, Highfield Ave, Rotherham Road, Wakefield Road, Carlton Road/Hill and pockets of the Brettas Park Estate.

These areas have all experienced change and some of the problems described above in recent times. Moreover each of these locations and others in the area have also witnessed some population changes with new and more transient communities, physical decline, environmental decline and decline in behavioural standards. Should the Area Council chose to commission the approach as part of their priorities a further scoping exercise would be undertaken drawing from local intelligence and knowledge to ensure that the correct locations issues and problems are being considered and targeted. Ideally the role would focus on around 400 to 500 properties across the whole Area Council area.

Key Activities Of The Post

The main objective of the role of Housing Management & Environment Officer is to contribute towards creating and sustaining safe and pleasant communities within private rented sector housing. This is achieved by proactively case managing issues that have a detrimental effect on others in the locality and by identifying and protecting our most vulnerable tenants and residents. An officer would work with families and individuals, getting to know the communities they serve and getting access to homes that previously have not had the benefit of any kind of support or intervention. We are identifying problems and issues and using effective risk assessment to decide on the most appropriate responses (see attached role profile and employee specification)

Who Would Employ the Person

BMBC within the Community Safety and Enforcement Team unless the Area Council should chose to commission the work elsewhere. The roles employed by other Area Councils sit within this service structure to ensure seamless connectivity to the wider private sector housing and antisocial behaviour agendas.

The role is not buy-back and is a new approach to managing and intervening in a sector which is emerging as a real challenge across the borough. There may be some scope to mainstream this activity at a later date should the council chose to introduce selective licensing schemes in the borough.

Cost

Grade 7 with no added management costs as these would be absorbed into the mainstream Community Safety and Enforcement Service existing infrastructure. From 1st April, £26,882-£29,323. With on costs this is approximately £33,000 per annum. Community Safety and Enforcement would not seek to levy a management charge as the role would provide added value to mainstream services and would hopefully help to reduce reactive demand across the range of core functions the service discharges.

What Impact against Strategic Priorities

- Environment – Direct responsibility for improving the lived environment through negotiation, prevention, support and enforcement. Proactive environmental management is part of the estate management function embedded in the role.
- Supporting Young People- The proactive nature of the role will inevitably lead to contact with vulnerable and otherwise isolated people this will include young people. The experience of the role elsewhere demonstrates that the impacts made around improving life-chances and experiences and outcomes for some of our more vulnerable residents is being invaluable.
- Locally Available Information and Advice- The role is necessarily bespoke to the locality and will respond to the needs of individuals, streets and communities in the South Area. One of the key functions is to proactively work with local residents providing direct assistance and clear signposting to other appropriate local services.
- Thriving Economy – The role is designed to try and maintain sustainable and cohesive communities and contribute towards avoiding the physical and social decline of certain locations. Housing decline is directly linked to economic decline and therefore if successful the role would contribute towards sustaining the local economy and housing market.

How Has This Worked In Other Area Council's.

Quarterly report information from Central Area has previously been circulated and is available on request. This helps to show how this role has evolved and is currently delivered. Clearly this role would be bespoke to the North Area Council and issues identified may not be exactly the same however the report should give a clear indication as to what could be expected and achieved by the role.