

Central Area Council

Review of the Private Rented Sector Housing Management and Enforcement Service

1. Introduction

At its meeting on 7th July 2016, Central Area Council agreed the following revised priorities:

- **Building emotional resilience and wellbeing in children and young people**
- **Addressing loneliness and isolation in vulnerable adults and older people**
- **Family Support**
- **Clean and Green**

It was agreed that these priorities would be underpinned by the following principles:

- **Ensuring cohesion and integration**
- **Early help and prevention approaches**

2. Purpose of this document

Since 1st April 2015, and as part of Central Area Council's delivery against its Clean and Green/environmental priority, a Private Rented Sector Housing Management and Enforcement Service has been delivered through a Service Level Agreement, with BMBC's Safer Communities Service.

This Central Area Council service will come to an end on 31st March 2018.

The purpose of this document is to review the service delivered to date and present a proposal for addressing the identified need in the private rented housing sector in the Central Council area post 31st March 2018.

The aim is to:

- Review and learn from the existing Central Area Council Private Rented Sector Housing Management and Enforcement service.
- Understand the need, value and benefit of the current service
- Understand the strategic and local context for any future Central Area Council private rented housing sector intervention/s.
- Identify a way forward to address the identified need.

It should be noted that BMBC's Safer Neighbourhood Service has delivered the specified service to a very satisfactory level throughout the contract period to date, with no significant areas of concern highlighted at any time. The service provided has in fact exceeded expectations in many areas.

3. Background and Context

The Central Area Council identified 'improving the environment' as one of its key priorities when Area Councils were first established in 2013/14. Within the context of this priority, members were keen to see a balance between services that would positively support the delivery of environmental improvements across the area and services that would provide robust enhanced enforcement around environmental issues.

Also identified as an issue at the same time was the significant proportion of high density poor quality privately rented housing in the Central Council area. Problems associated with this tenure link to all the key areas of enforcement activity, with much higher than average levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and environmental blighting. Often issues in these areas escalate to "problem" levels before any core service intervenes.

Given the above, Central Area Council was keen to develop a service that would complement any existing "core" offer and would deliver the following outcomes:

- Improve the physical/living conditions of the private rented stock in the Central Council area and reduce the number of private sector housing condition complaints.
- Reduce the levels of crime and anti-social behaviour relating to private rented sector housing stock in the Central Council area.
- Reduce the levels of littering and fly-tipping in and around the private rented housing stock in the Central Council area.

At a meeting of Central Area Council on 5th May 2014 it was agreed that the desired outcomes of the service would be achieved through the appointment of the following 2 full-time officers, who would sit within the Community Safety & Enforcement Service as follows:

- Central Area Private Sector Housing Management Officer
- Central Area Enforcement and Investigation Officer

At a later meeting on 8th September 2014, approval was given for Central Area Council to enter into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Safer Neighbourhood Service to provide a Private Rented Sector Housing Management and Enforcement service for a 22 month period (1st April 2015 to 30th January 2017), at a cost of £141,708.

Further approval was given at a Central Area Council meeting on 9th May 2016 to extend the service to 31st March 2017, at a cost of £12,897.

Following consideration of a Business Case for the continuation of the Private Rented Sector Housing Management and Enforcement service (beyond 31st March 2017) at a Central Area Council meeting on 17th October 2016, approval was given for the service to be extended for a further 1 year period (1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018) at a cost of £76,175.

4. Delivery of the Service: 1st April 2015-31st December 2017

Please note that as stated at the beginning of this document, BMBC's Safer Neighbourhood's Service has delivered the specified service to a satisfactory level throughout the SLA period to date, with no significant areas of concern highlighted at any time.

This section therefore provides more general service delivery information.

The Service has been delivered primarily through the following 2 posts:

i. Central Area Private Sector Housing Management Officer

- This post has provided a proactive, reassuring, practical and visible customer focused housing and environmental management service to the private rented housing of greatest need in the Central Council area. The post holder has been responsible for the delivery of a range of frontline elements of private sector housing support, environmental management, community and tenancy support, and community safety/cohesion.

Key areas of work have included:

- Working with partners to ensure that areas of private sector housing and the surrounding local environment is attractive, safe, desirable, and where people want to live.
- Ensuring that the involvement of residents and property owners is embedded in the delivery of the service in the targeted areas
- Identification and delivery of private sector housing and environmental support/enforcement actions in liaison with the Central Council Enforcement and Investigation Officer
- Gathering appropriate information to enable the development and implementation of relevant projects that will ensure the sustainability of areas of private sector housing stock in the Central Council area. This has included, but is not limited to: Selective Licensing Scheme and Empty Dwelling Management Orders.

It should be noted that this post has not been filled since 1st January 2018, however the cost of the overall service has been reduced accordingly to reflect this.

ii. Central Area Enforcement and Investigation Officer

- This post holder has worked closely with the Community Safety & Enforcement Service and the Central Area Private Sector Housing Management Officer (above), and has effectively case managed and resolved a significant number of serious/persistent problems in the private rented housing stock in the Central Council area.

Key areas of work have included:

- Providing specialist support, guidance, advice to the Central Area Private Sector Housing Management Officer, Safer Neighbourhood Teams and

Generic Enforcement Officers, with regard to legislation, conducting thorough investigations, proportionality and timeliness.

- Effective case management utilising thorough investigations, evidence gathering, effective recording, appropriate interventions, inspections, structured case files for court and giving evidence.
- Working in conjunction with the Anti-Social Behaviour Response Team tasking and coordinating duties within complex cross organisational matrix management arrangements, providing a uniformed presence where appropriate, and discharging duties in real time in response to environmental/ anti-social behaviour issues.
- Gathering evidence and appropriate information regarding current and emerging legislation and initiatives to enable the Central Area Council to develop and implement relevant projects to ensure the sustainability of areas of private sector housing stock in the Central Council area, including, but not limited to, Selective Licensing Scheme and Empty Dwelling Management Orders.

Each of these officers has focussed 100% of their time and attention on the areas of private rented sector properties with the greatest need within the Central Council area. This has involved officers proactively identifying and/or visiting private rented sector houses across the 5 Central Area Council wards.

4. Outcomes Achieved

The following outcomes were to be achieved through the Private Rented Sector Housing Management and Enforcement Service:

- i. Improve the physical/living conditions of the private rented stock in the Central Council area and reduce the number of private sector housing condition complaints.
- ii. Reduce the levels of crime and anti-social behaviour relating to private rented sector housing stock in the Central Council area.
- iii. Reduce the levels of littering and fly-tipping in and around the private rented housing stock in the Central Council area.

From 1st April 2015 to 30th December 2017:

2527 properties/households have been identified and visited by the Central Area Council officers.

1012 of these have been identified as vulnerable households who have engaged with the service/officers 3 or more times

277 Housing Inspections have been carried out.

Although anecdotal evidence has been captured that indicates progress in achieving outcomes 1 & 2 above, no hard data/evidence of this is available. However, it is strongly felt that the proactive approach taken by the service and the early help provided to many households visited has ensured that issues have been “nipped in the bud” and have not been allowed to escalate.

Very good working relationships have been developed with landlords and letting agents to ensure that they carry out their responsibilities, with issues of housing disrepair often being effectively resolved on an informal basis.

In relation to outcome 3 above, there has been no reduction in the levels of **reported** littering and fly-tipping incidents around the private rented housing stock. However, given the efforts and focus of this service to address the issue from both an educative and enforcement perspective it is more likely that due to the positive profile of the service within these areas, and the improved responsiveness of Neighbourhood Services, people are now more likely to report fly-tipping and littering incidents when they occur, thus the increase in reported incidents.

There is still however a significant issue with the fly-tipping of household waste and furniture in and around the areas of dense low cost private rented sector housing in the area. This issue is currently being reviewed by a Central Area Council Fly-tipping Working Group.

Given that the poorer quality private rented stock has now been acknowledged as the tenure of last resort with significant numbers of vulnerable tenants, it is not surprising that the Central Council officers have had to support and/or signpost tenants to address a range of other social problems/issues.

Although the 4 main presenting issues for the service have been: fly-tipping, waste issues, housing disrepair and anti-social behaviour (ASB), when an initial visit is made to the property/household, other issues are often identified. These regularly include: drug and alcohol misuse, domestic violence, rent arrears, debt, safeguarding and vulnerability issues, and landlord and peer exploitation.

This is supported by anecdotal evidence from other workers in the area who have also identified similar issues when visiting people living within the low cost private rented sector.

This is an area of great concern because unless existing interventions continue and/or new interventions are developed and delivered to address the issues identified, and support our most vulnerable private rented tenants, some of the more clustered locations of low cost private rented houses are likely to become areas of serious social decline.

5. Current Situation

A private sector stock condition survey will be undertaken during 2018 with the brief for this piece of work currently being written. However, in the absence of any up to date private rented housing stock condition information and/or any detailed information about the diversity of people living in these areas of high density poor quality private rented accommodation currently, the intelligence gathered by Central Council officers since 2015 has helped build a more accurate picture of the private rented sector across the Central Area Council area, and its associated problems and issues.

In response to this information, and taking account of the learning from the Area Council Housing Management and Enforcement role as part of the review of the Council's Community Safety Service, a new Safer Neighbourhoods Service (SNS) structure was introduced in April 2017.

This structure incorporates a new Private Rented Housing and Environment Officer post for each of the 3 areas across the Borough that will focus primarily on housing disrepair, waste and environmental issues.

Community Safety Officer posts and Case Management posts are also incorporated within the core structure to ensure that appropriate enforcement action can be effectively taken.

The SNS is also working towards the introduction of a Selective Licensing Scheme with one proposed pilot area in Central Ward. This should provide additional learning to assist in sustaining a regulatory approach in the sector.

More recently, and as part of Barnsley's successful Controlling Migration Fund bid, three Housing and Migration Officers have recently been appointed to work with Barnsley's migrant community across the Borough. The focus of this work will be building relationships with landlords and employers, addressing environmental and housing condition issues, and building cohesion.

However, given the volume of reactive and enforcement work coming into the service, and the regulatory and enforcement focus of the new SNS, "core" officers will not have the capacity to work proactively to provide the early help and prevention support to tenants that they need in relation to addressing some of the other more general housing and social issues presented – debt and money management, housing advice, fire safety checks, waste management, tenant and landlord responsibilities etc.

Given the following statistics for tenure types across the 5 Central Area Council wards (see Table 1 below), and the fact that a significant proportion of this private rented housing is of low cost and poor quality, means that this has become the tenure of last resort for many of Barnsley's residents.

Table 1: Tenure type by ward - 2011

Ward	Owned	Social rented	Private rented
Central	57.1%	14.1%	27.1%
Dodworth	75.1%	15.1%	8.4%
Kingstone	53.0%	20.3%	23.9%
Stairfoot	57.5%	30.3%	9.8%
Worsbrough	58.7%	30.7%	8.0%

It should be noted that the numbers of private rented properties has increased significantly since these figures relating to 2011 were published.

In addition to the known migrant population living in low cost private rented housing in the Central Council area, anecdotal evidence from Central Area Council Providers

also suggests that people/families are now moving to Barnsley from other parts of the UK as a direct result of the low levels of rent. These people often experience acute social isolation with the associated low level mental health and other issues, due to them being distanced from their friends and family.

6. Proposed Future Central Area Council Service

Building on the early help and prevention approach that Central Area Council has adopted in its commissioning to date, it is anticipated that the proposed Private Rented Housing Tenant Support “early help” intervention, would help reduce demand for more costly interventions/services at a later date, thus saving the Council money/resources further downstream.

Key Outcomes for the service:

- Build stable, resilient, sustainable neighbourhoods/communities in areas of low cost private rented housing across Central Council area by supporting/signposting tenants at the outset of their tenancy, thus reducing environmental issues and turnover of tenants.
- Reduce isolation, build confidence and motivation in individuals living in areas of low cost private rented housing across the Central Council area by signposting to local services, community groups and volunteering opportunities.
- Increase participation in neighbourhood and community activity in areas of low cost private rented housing across Central Council area.

Service to be delivered:

Building on the positive links already established with landlords in the area and In order to address the issues identified above and complement the existing “core” offer, the following Central Area Council service is proposed:

A service focused on **new** tenants/households in the low cost, poor quality private rented sector that will provide early help and prevention support/signposting to new tenants/households. Support/signposting will be focussed on the following areas:

- Tenant and landlord responsibilities
- Waste management/bins/recycling
- Condition of property
- Fire Safety check referrals
- Debt and money management/budgeting
- Drug and alcohol misuse

The service should develop a Private Tenants Resource Pack that will be given to tenants at the initial visit.

The service should identify any property/landlord/waste issues at the outset of the tenancy, and ensure these issues are addressed through liaison with the landlord/letting agent and/or the Council’s Enforcement service.

The service should also link with Central Area Team and Ward Alliances, making all new tenants aware of local provision, events and contacts including:

- Local services available
- Local community groups and activity
- Volunteering opportunities

Given the importance of day to day liaison, collaboration and data sharing with colleagues in the SNS, it is proposed that the above service is delivered through a revised and extended Service Level Agreement with the Safer Neighbourhoods Service, and the associated appointment and deployment of a Central Area Council Grade 6 Housing Officer. Recently advertised Grade 6 posts have attracted more good quality applicants than previous advertised Grade 7 posts, largely due to the requirement for applicants for a Grade 7 post to have a Level 5 qualification.

The Central Area Council Housing Officer post would undertake delivery of the service areas as outlined above, and would work the same shift pattern currently used within the SNS.

Clarity about the role and scope of the Controlling Migration Fund Housing and Migration Officers would be sought to ensure the Central Area Council post complements/adds value to their key areas of work.

Proposed cost and length of revised service:

Revised SLA for 1 year, with an option to extend for 1 further year

Grade 6 post with on costs: £ 34,000

Working budget for resource packs, business cards: £ 3,000

Total cost for 1 year = £ 37,000

Total cost for 2 years = £ 74,000

Proposed Milestones for Revised Service: (dates to be agreed)

Delegated report to approve revised Grade 6 post.

Develop KPI's for revised Service and include in amended SLA documentation

Advertise and appoint to post (Area Council Manager to be involved in selection process)

Successful candidate in post

Essential local training undertaken

In liaison with SNS colleagues, other Directorates and service Providers, develop a Barnsley Private Rent Tenant Resource pack (hard copy and electronic)

Undertake initial visits to new tenants using the new resource pack as an "in."

Performance Management and Reporting:

The same performance monitoring and management framework currently in place for all Central Area Council contracts and SLA's would be used. This includes the submission of quarterly quantitative and qualitative performance information with

case studies, followed by a quarterly performance management meeting with the Central Area Council Manager. This information would then be included in the overall quarterly performance report presented to Central Area Council.

It is proposed that a review of any revised Service would be undertaken after an initial 9 month period.

Carol Brady

12th February 2018.