

## **Private Sector Housing Management 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 a 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.

### **South Area Council.**

Most villages and townships in Barnsley have to varying degrees clusters of relatively cheap private sector rented property. The South Area is no different. Therefore Wombwell, Darfield, Hoyland Milton and Rockingham each have streets and properties where physical and social decline is evident. Areas around Blythe Street at Wombwell, New Street, Snape Hill Road and College Terrace at Darfield and Welland Crescent at Elsecar 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. 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. With on costs this is approximately £32 000 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.**

See attached the quarter 4 report and milestones for the Central Area Council showing how this role has evolved and delivered in this area. Clearly this role would be bespoke to the South 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.

**How Soon Could It Start.**

Community Safety and Enforcement are currently recruiting to a Housing Management & Environment Officer post for the North East Area Council and therefore recruitment to this post could be done at the same time, however this would require progressing a delegated report quickly through the Council. Normal recruitment timescales are around 12 weeks.

P Brannan – 8<sup>th</sup> April 2016