

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	8 June 2021
<b>Subject:</b>	Private Rented Sector Housing Scheme
<b>Report of:</b>	Interim Housing Services Manager
<b>Corporate Lead:</b>	Head of Community Services
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Lead Member for Housing
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	One

## **Executive Summary:**

The Private Rented Sector (PRS) Housing Scheme has now closed with just over £290,000 funding from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) used to support 234 households into PRS accommodation across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire districts.

The report found at Appendix 1 provides some background to the scheme, details of actions completed and some learning points to inform future work in this area.

## **Recommendation:**

**To NOTE the achievements of the scheme and that it has now closed.**

## **Reasons for Recommendation:**

To provide Councillors with feedback on the success of the scheme.

## **Resource Implications:**

Tewkesbury Borough Council will continue to use its allocation of MHCLG homeless prevention funding to support prospective tenants into the private rented sector and to maintain their tenancies wherever possible.

## **Legal Implications:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **Risk Management Implications:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **Performance Management Follow-up:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **Environmental Implications:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** The Private Rented Sector Access Fund was launched on World Homeless Day (10 October 2018) by Communities Secretary, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP. It was a one-off bidding opportunity through competition with a bidding process close date of 21 November 2018.
- 1.2** In March 2019, MHCLG confirmed that the proposed pilot project met the bid criteria and complemented the existing partnership activities for homelessness across the County and those which will be undertaken through the current new funding streams. They notified the bid had been successful and had been awarded £363,408 – for an initial 12-month pilot project. Following initial delays this was reduced to £292,333.
- 1.2** The principal objective of the fund was to support innovative measures that provide additional support for single homeless people and/or reduce the numbers of households in temporary accommodation. This scheme identified the Private Rented Sector as an area that could help meet these objectives. Tewkesbury Borough Council developed this initiative to deliver incentives to landlords and provide support to both landlords and tenants to ensure that they can build relationships and give the tenants the best chance of success whilst minimising the risk for the landlord.
- 1.3** The fund also had a further aim to develop an evidence base of what effectively tackles homelessness and rough sleeping and will enable the introduction of new schemes or bolster and extend existing schemes.

## **2.0 THE SCHEME IN TEWKESBURY BOROUGH**

- 2.1** The Housing Advice Team at Tewkesbury Borough Council were able to use just over £45,000 to support 34 households that applied as homeless or threatened with homelessness. These would have included a variety of cases from single homeless cases to larger families. The team have built relationships with landlords and secured a level of trust in our financial support and assessment of tenants.
- 2.2** Incentives offered to landlords included:
- One off finders' fee.
  - Rent in advance and deposits.
  - Local Housing Allowance (housing benefit) shortfall payments.
  - Contribution to Energy Performance Certificates or House of Multiple Occupation licences.

In addition to financial assistance, Officers were able to offer an ongoing relationship with the landlord or letting agent to provide advice to them or support the tenant with any problems. Regular meetings were offered to both landlords and tenants to try and ensure the tenancy was a success.

- 2.3** The value of working closely with housing applicants as well as landlords has been identified to ensure they are ready to take on a tenancy and present themselves as good prospective tenants. This will not only benefit applicants considering the private sector but also other housing solutions.

### **3.0 BENEFITS OF ACCESSING PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR ACCOMMODATION**

- 3.1** Accommodation can become available a lot more quickly in the Private Rented Sector than social housing through the housing register. This speeds up the process of rehousing applicants, reducing stress felt by households, reducing financial insecurity and reducing total cost to a local authority of assisting a homeless case.
- 3.2** Applicants have a greater number of property types and areas they can be considered for. Social housing can be limited by traditional areas of stock and build type. Access to the Private Rented Sector provides more options and better outcomes for households that need to be in a particular area e.g., for family support or particular property type due to health needs.
- 3.3** The impact on timely assistance with a homelessness case is felt much more widely than within a Local Authority Housing Team. Health, Criminal Justice, Social Care and Drug and Alcohol services are just a few of the departments that see benefits from early intervention for homelessness cases.
- 3.4** The scheme has helped develop positive and trusting relationships with landlords through careful consideration of the tenants suitability to maintain the tenancy. This has meant that landlords and agents have a better understanding of how we work and are open to future arrangements.
- 3.5** It is to be noted however that in a buoyant housing market, landlords do not need to rely on local authority 'business' to let their properties and financial incentives have been seen to have some limits to securing tenancies. There is still work to be done to break through the barriers such as the, "No DSS" attitude (refusing applicants who are getting assistance with their rent) and stigma around getting support from a local authority in any form. There is also often resistance from applicants to consider Private Rented accommodation with rogue landlords, less secure tenancies or affordability raised as concerns.

### **4.0 LESSONS LEARNT**

- 4.1** The scheme took some time to show results as there were delays in getting approval from each district involved and different ways of working across the partnership developed. Future joint ventures will need to address this and/or factor it into the early stages of a project.
- 4.2** The different ways of working and different interpretation of how the scheme should run led to diverging versions of the scheme within the partnership. Future schemes can seek to avoid this by having:
- Clear agreed guidance and monitoring process set out at beginning, that is followed.
  - Timeframes set in place to claim back money.
  - Consistent following of agreed guidance.
  - Clear ownership of project/scheme at managerial level required.
- 4.3** Management of a future scheme could fall under the remit of the new Housing Partnership Team to provide consistency and oversight rather than relying on one district to lead.

## **5.0 NEXT STEPS**

**5.1** The intention is to continue providing financial support to our homeless applicants to help them secure PRS properties. Engagement with landlords will also continue to keep improving our relationship with the sector and challenge myth and misunderstanding about what we can offer.

**5.2** We also aim to support and engage with future 'Tenancy Ready' projects on a County-wide basis and improve employability outcomes by working with Going the Extra Mile. Both of these channels will help open up PRS to a wider number of households. This interaction can also help challenge some of the concern around Private Rented accommodation from potential tenants.

**5.3** The Gloucestershire Strategic Housing Partnership will continue to seek innovative ways to support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and will continue to work to incentivise private sector landlords to take tenants on lower incomes wherever possible.

## **6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

**6.1** None.

## **7.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

**7.1** None.

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)**

**8.1** None.

## **9.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)**

**9.1** None.

## **10.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)**

**10.1** None.

## **11.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS**

**11.1** None.

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**Appendices:** Private Rented Sector (PRS) access scheme report.