

Private Rented Sector (PRS) access scheme – Closing summary and recommendations

This report provides a closing summary of the County-wide PRS access scheme.

The partnership was initially awarded £363,408 following a successful bid to the MHCLG but following initial delays this was reduced to **£292,333**. Forest of Dean District Council became the lead authority, taking ownership from Tewkesbury Borough Council several months into the scheme.

The partnership was due to close later this year, but two partner members tidied up their administration and claimed for £54,000 through the scheme (46 properties). With £2,544 left in the pot to cover potential hidden costs and further reconciliation the PRS partnership has ‘closed’ in terms of funding.

The partnership members are keen to meet on a regular basis as it is agreed that the shared learning and practices has and will continue to be beneficial.

There will be a closure meeting and information provided to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. Publica provided the administration of the scheme, were the budget holders, and will lead on this.

To summarize we can look at the initial proposal and targets that were set.

| Proposal/target | Achieved? |
|---|-----------|
| Landlords Forums and launch event | ✓ |
| 200 properties secured and let through the scheme | ✓ |
| Provision of a ‘menus of incentives’ for landlords | ✓ |
| Properties to be ‘fit for rent’ | ✓ |
| Provision of HHSRS training to all relevant officers | ✓ |
| Agreed advertising package across the partnership | ✓ |
| Introduction of a new private rented arm to Homeseeker Plus | ✗ |

Number of properties secured:

| Local authority partner | Total Expenditure | Number of Properties August 2020 | Number of properties at closure – Jan 2021 | Cost per property |
|----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Cheltenham Borough Homes | £87,310.41 | 60 | 89 | £981 |
| Cotswold District Council | £9,431.76 | 5 | 6 | £1,571 |
| Forest of Dean DC | £16,249.30 | 4 | 8 | £2,031 |
| Gloucester City Council | £59,597.57 | 37 | 56 | £1,064 |
| Stroud District Council | £31,274.05 | 4 | 28 | £1,116 |
| Tewkesbury Borough Council | £45,694.16 | 6 | 28 | £1,631 |
| West Oxfordshire DC | £40,930.54 | 13 | 19 | £2,194 |
| Running Total | £290,487.79 | 129 | 234 | £1,241 |

Key successes

The number of homes secured, and foundations laid for future working relationships with landlords and letting agents were the primary success stories from the scheme.

- 234 properties secured
- Enhanced relationships with landlords and letting agents
- Trust and rapport developed
- Foundation laid with many landlords, and ‘word of mouth is working’ that LA can be trusted
- Additional options for housing teams, and applicants applying as homeless now more aware that the PRS is a realistic option
- Opportunities provide for non-priority applicants who were previously unlikely to have secured a property
- Deposits coming back to be recycled to the individual local authorities where correct process followed
- Increase in landlords on board and awareness of local authority homeless services
- Training opportunities maximized
- Legislative standards met

Learning points and recommendation

There were some initial delays in the scheme commencing, around cabinet approvals and agreement for some of the scheme proposals, which led to a reduction in monies made available. This is a known issue across multi-authority schemes with varying levels of approvals required and different timescales.

Other issues were LA's bulk claiming back for properties (24 and 22) six to 12 months after the properties had been secured. This caused some issues as it was considered that there were 'surplus' monies available and the MHCLG were not willing to support further bids for PRS monies within the next steps funding.

A menu of options to incentive landlords was set up but in most cases landlords wanted to be able to trust the local authority in terms of transparency, and on-going support if they experienced issues with the tenancy. The incentives became less necessary.

In future would suggest

- 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

It could be in the remit of the new Partnership manager within the County-wide Strategic Housing network to oversee future schemes of this nature.

The officers involved in securing PRS solutions have agreed to continue to meet on a regular basis to share good practice and ongoing experiences.

Every local authority partner is committed to working with the PRS sector, and many now have solid foundations in place. Monies will need to be made available through homeless prevention funding, discretionary housing payments, or other funds secured.