

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

11 November 2013

### Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

#### 1 LANDLORDS FORUM UPDATE

##### Summary

**This report updates Members on the way the West Kent Landlord Forums operate and reports on the success of the most recent event.**

#### 1.1 West Kent Landlord Forum

1.1.1 Members are aware of these forums that have now been operating since 2006 and still well attended by both speakers and landlords.

1.1.2 They are a partnership between Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the National Landlords Association. Until 2013 there were three forums a year – one in each of the local authority areas. From 2013, in response to landlord feedback, this has reduced to two forums a year – usually in March and October. They are chaired by the relevant Cabinet Member of the hosting authority.

1.1.3 The aims of the forum are to:

- to promote good quality standards of accommodation in the Districts;
- to provide an effective arena for landlords and agents to share their experiences of letting accommodation with each other and with the council;
- to increase awareness of changes in legislation and procedures;
- to exchange information and ideas so that we can learn from each other; and
- to encourage good practice.

1.1.4 The partnership holds a central email list of landlords who are informed of the forthcoming forums (as well as other information as is deemed appropriate) and all partners also mail out to relevant landlords in their areas. The forums are advertised via a press release from the hosting authority just before the event. In

addition as new landlords come to the attention of the local authorities they are informed of the forums and asked if they wish to be added to the email distribution list.

- 1.1.5 The forums play a major role in engaging with private rented sector landlords. As Members will recall our private sector rehousing policy now gives us the power and opportunity to discharge the main housing duty owed to homeless households by way of an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector. This applies to all homeless households where the Council has accepted a statutory duty, subject to affordability and suitability. It is therefore crucial that we work with and encourage private sector landlords to supply suitable accommodation for such households.
- 1.1.6 In a wider context the forums provide an ideal opportunity to update landlords on both local and national issues, for example on welfare reform, available financial assistance and legislative changes. We have also used the forums to obtain feedback from landlords on topics such as accreditation. All these initiatives are in recognition of the important role of the private rented sector in providing appropriate accommodation in meeting housing need and the importance of maintaining standards.
- 1.1.7 Landlords are always asked to evaluate the forum on a feedback form and we use this to plan future forums. For example landlords wanted to know more about how they could better market their properties and we invited an on-line letting company to speak to them. The feedback is always very positive and all landlords find the forums useful.

## **1.2 Forum held on 9 October 2013**

- 1.2.1 A forum was held last at Sevenoaks District Council on 9 October 2013. Approximately 40 landlords attended. On the agenda were presentations on tax strategies for landlords, universal credit and the law around electrical installations for landlords. In addition there was a general update for landlords from the National Landlords Association.
- 1.2.2 There were two workshops held on the rent deposit bond schemes available to help tenants into the private rented sector and also the Housing, Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which is the standard used to assess private rented accommodation.
- 1.2.3 The next forum is due to be held at Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council in March 2014.

## **1.3 Legal Implications**

- 1.3.1 None arising from this report.

## **1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.4.1 Successful joint working share the cost and resources of the planning of these events.

**1.5 Risk Assessment**

1.5.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

contact: Linda Hibbs

Nil

Steve Humphrey

Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health