

To: City Executive Board

Date: 15 October 2015

Report of: Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Title of Report: Additional Licensing Scheme for HMOs

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee on the Additional Licensing Scheme for HMOs decision

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Linda Smith

Executive lead member: Councillor Ed Turner, Board Member Finance, Asset Management and Public Health

Policy Framework: Meeting Housing Needs and Efficient, Effective Council

Recommendation of the Housing Panel to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the two recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Introduction

1. The Housing Panel pre-scrutinised the Additional Licensing Scheme for HMOs decision at its public meeting on 8 October 2015. The Panel would like to thank Adrian Chowns and Ian Wright for presenting this report and supporting a detailed and wide ranging discussion.
2. The Panel previously looked at the Review of Houses in Multiple Occupations decision in June 2016 and supported the extension of the scheme for a further 5 years, making two recommendations to the City Executive Board that were both agreed.

Summary of the discussion

3. The HMO Enforcement Team Leader introduced the report and summarised the findings of the consultation. He advised that the

proposed changes to the additional licensing scheme for HMOs included the introduction of 5 year licenses for accredited landlords, and changes in fees that would reduce costs for compliant landlords and increase costs for non-compliant landlords. The scheme had been making a difference to the standards of HMOs in the city but there was more to do to improve conditions in this sector.

4. The Panel asked a number of other questions, including about; the impacts and fairness of the scheme on families that wanted to take in more than two lodgers and on weekday lodgers who worked in the city, the problem of bidding wars created by agents, whether longer licenses could lead to a drop in standards, what happens if landlords breach their license, whether the finances of the scheme were sustainable, whether there was a public register of HMOs, the validity of various points raised by the Residential Landlords Association, and the types of landlords operating in the city.
5. The Panel questioned whether there was an opportunity to build additional security for tenants into the scheme, such as longer tenures and rent level guarantees. The Panel suggested that longer tenancies could encourage tenants to take more care of HMO properties and could help to address other issues often associated with HMOs, such as unkempt gardens. The Panel heard that it was unlikely that these controls could be built into the licensing scheme for legal reasons. It was suggested that there may be an opportunity to influence the market by including these as discretionary criteria within the Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

Recommendation 1 – That the City Council should encourage landlords and agents offer longer term tenancies and rent level guarantees, and explore the option of including these as discretionary criteria within the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

6. The Panel noted that each household was entitled to two free bulky waste collections per year but that many tenants of HMOs were unable to access these because the free collections were used by landlords, and were often required to pay for bulky waste collections. The Panel suggested that the City Council looks at ways of addressing this issue, possibly through changing waste collection policy in relation to HMOs or by encouraging landlords to pay for tenants' bulky waste collections.

Recommendation 2 – That the City Council should consider whether there is anything that can be done to address the inequity whereby many tenants living in HMOs are unable to access free bulky waste collections.

7. The Panel also agreed that the following comments should be referred to the City Executive Board:
 1. That the Housing Panel restated its support for the additional licensing scheme for HMOs;

2. That the Housing Panel welcomed the success of the consultation and that officers should be commended for the high level and quality of engagement achieved.

Executive response

To be tabled at the City Executive Board meeting on 15 October 2015.

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