

Agenda Item 5

To: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Date: 22nd March 2022
Report of: Head of Regulatory Services and Community
Safety
Title of Report: Update on Council motion on DSS discrimination

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To update the Panel on the progress made following the motion to Council on DSS Discrimination on 26 th July 2021
Key decision:	No
Corporate Priority:	Deliver more affordable housing, Support thriving communities
Policy Framework:	None
Recommendation(s): That the Panel notes:	
1.	All of the actions requested by the motion to council have been carried out.
Appendices	
None	

Introduction

1. At the Council meeting on 26th July 2021 a cross party motion was passed regarding DSS discrimination and a series of actions were agreed.
2. The purpose of this report is to update the Panel on the actions.

Actions & responses

3. The following actions were agreed by the Council

Action 1

Revise the OCLAS code, adding the following wording: 'you must not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, language, sexuality or any other factor that might place an individual at a disadvantage. This includes indirect discrimination such as 'no DSS' or related practices, namely refusing to let prospective tenants on housing

benefit or universal credit view affordable properties and requiring guarantors in cases where a prospective tenant's income is sufficient';

The OCLAS code has been updated and now contains the wording approved by Council.

Action 2

Advertise and ensure that the Welfare Reform Team will look out for and follow up on reported cases of discrimination;

The council has not identified any landlords who are continuing to use this form of discrimination but continue to be vigilant with all teams directly involved in the Private Rented Sector in Oxford.

Action 3

Ensure that duty housing officers are informed about the issue and refer cases to the Welfare Reform Team and independent advice centres;

Training and guidance has been given following the changes in the legislation and we continue to actively observe the situation. To date, no cases have been identified which have required referral for enforcement action.

Action 4

Establish a permanent "tenants' forum", which should:

- *Be composed of community groups and stakeholders representing tenants, both in private and council housing;*
- *Be invited to consult directly with the Housing and Homelessness Panel bi-annually at least and whenever decisions significantly impacting the rental sector come before Council;*

Councillor Thomas has been leading on setting up a tenant's forum and has recently issued a press release asking for tenants to express interest and send an email directly or register online. Once established and operational the intention is that the forum will contribute to Panel business and become a valuable stakeholder group.

Action 5

Use official communication and media activities to improve awareness, as well as denouncing discrimination against benefits claimants clearly on the Council website, with a dedicated page detailing ways to recognise DSS discrimination and what actions to take in response

Substantial national media coverage was obtained following the motion, with Oxford being recognised as the first council in the country to pass a motion stamping out DSS discrimination and receiving praise from Shelter and other organisations. An enquiry was also received from Bristol City Council regarding the motion and the proposed actions.

The website has been updated and a dedicated page set up regarding discrimination against tenants who are claiming benefits.

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20267/private_housing_tenants/1515/discrimination_against_benefits_claimants

Conclusion

4. All the actions have been completed successfully and the motion has raised the profile of the important work the council carries out in this area.

Report author	Ian Wright
Job title	Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety
Service area or department	Regulatory Services and Community Safety
Telephone	01865 252553
e-mail	iwright@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None

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