

Hastings Housing Strategy – Sub-Group Summary

Name of Subgroup	Private Rented Sector (PRS)
Lead Officer	Sandra Thornton
Subgroup members (full names & Organisations)	<p>In attendance</p> <p>Dawn Dublin – Black Butterfly Neal Purvis Sabina Arthur - Acorn Renters Union Karen Simnett – Local Resident / Renter / Member of Acorn Sandra Thornton – Housing Improvement and Compliance Manager Chris Hancock – Head of Housing</p> <p>Wider subgroup</p> <p>Naomi Gunn – Acorn Renters Union Christopher Maynard – Citizens Advice Bureau Chris Rogal – Private Landlord</p>

Thinking about the Strategy Vision for Everyone in Hastings to have a decent home to live in...

<p>Challenges <i>What are the challenges in meeting the Vision? What isn't working? How do we know? Add bullet points</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the realities of the current housing situation and what we are dealing with now – not just use the same tools to try and fix issues – need to understand what is creating the barriers in the private rented sector (PRS) market for everyone using it. • As evidenced by multiple sources Hastings PRS tenants do experience significant issues with disrepair, especially with damp and mould. • Affordability of the PRS is exceptionally challenging given relative income levels versus the changes to the local housing market in the last few years. Costs of renting and the system tends to favour owner occupiers. Regulation of the market with regards to rental caps – whilst as a council we cannot change or implement legislation – need to ensure what we do supports fair market rentals and campaigns for it. • Lack of true partnership/joint working by HBC with businesses, landlords and tenants. Need to utilise all these groups so we can work together to improve the sector. How does the Council power share in terms of info and action so that wrap around services can be provided to better support renters? • Tenants do not know they can go to the council and complain about their issues and often a lot won't complain because they are frightened of the consequences, which could include rent increases or a retaliatory eviction. • Private landlords are not always aware and/or do not comply with their legal responsibilities. This can occur for different reasons and the Council approach to dealing with non –compliance should address those issues. • Speed of Change in the PRS and being able to react to that in a timely manner. • Treatment of tenants in temporary accommodation. They are often given only short notice to move, conditions can be poor and not provide sufficient room, and no pets and visitors are allowed as accommodation with communal entrances/exits as they have to be safe for all residents, but that leads to restrictions on how people can lead their lives.
<p>What are the opportunities for us to meet the Vision? Add bullet points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Strategy must acknowledge the previous missteps taken and the gaps in current working and approach – need to think differently and demonstrate how we are changing our approach. This will foster more trust over time and show the Council is trying to learn from everyone. • Housing Licensing – a strong licensing scheme that improves rental standards and targets the areas where problems are occurring. (both HMO and selective licensing). Separate consultation would have to take place on the scope and extent of this. Should not just need complaints to justify inspection. • Fair Rent for Average Earnings – using peer pressure from other landlords to show what can be achieved and encourage their peers to lower rents and / or rent with more of a social purpose. • The Strategy can set out the concept and be more open to supporting the foundation of a local ethical social lettings agency and keeping rents lower for the benefit of all.

- Incentivising Best Practice – how do you use incentives alongside an enforcement / regulatory approach to improve best practice? E.g. Charter Mark, Trust Mark / Approved Landlord scheme
- A Genuine Joint Approach – a commitment to involve and make use of the range of agencies and partners who can support and fill the gaps that the Council does not have the capacity to fill. E.g. making all tenants aware of their rights, contacting tenants early when notices have been served and ensuring landlords are aware of the consequences of not meeting legal responsibilities.
- Awareness Raising – targeted work that campaigns around issues facing those operating in the PRS and where to get additional advice / info/assistance. Letting tenants know about their rights (this would need to be managed with resources so we do not create demand we cannot fulfil and thus create further negative impression). Campaigns need to align and be timely in their messaging.
- The Renters Rights Bill presents challenges but also creates an opportunity to realise the opportunities it presents collectively to educate landlords and tenants but also make a case for the resources needed to implement it successfully. Potential for a joint publicity campaign between statutory, community and voluntary sectors.
- HBC could / should help to build capacity in the voluntary sector – perhaps through providing similar sessions as had been provided to Lettings Agents to outline roles and powers open to the Council to tackle disrepair / poor management.
- Proactive inspection of all properties to landlords who have been served a formal notice (compliance inspections do take place where notices are serviced)
- Higher fines for landlords used to fund enforcement work

What questions does the strategy need to answer? Add bullet points

- How can the Strategy influence the setting of fair rents when that sits with central Government?
- How does the Council work alongside other partners to maximise the capacity to support, educate and advocate for tenants?
- How do we respond to the challenges (and opportunities) presented by the Renters Rights Bill?
- What does good practice look like? What is the expected standard for a tenancy agreement?
- How can we incentivise good practice at the same time as addressing poor / illegal practice?
- How can the Strategy create increased supply of good quality, affordable private rented homes?
- How can we increase the use of aids and adaptations in the private rented sector?
- How do we measure what has been achieved against the aims of the strategy? Need clear objectives that can be tangible measured on a regular basis. This allows the approach to be reviewed and where not working as anticipated revised.

What are the non-negotiables? (What must be in the Strategy) Add bullet points

- How can we address affordability and how do we campaign / lobby for those things we can't control?
- Standards on repairs and management of homes should be clear and non-negotiable themselves.
- The Strategy must consider the potential for a zero-tolerance approach to enforcement against outstanding repairs
- Evidence-based licensing schemes which support improved management and standards of properties

Areas for negotiation / development – what do we not agree on at this stage, or we don't know enough about it yet...?

- The size and scope of any proposed licensing schemes
- An enforcement/compliance approach that will deter non-compliance and appropriately penalise those that do / balance with incentivisation for landlords to comply and recognising many do wish to operate in the sector and provide good, compliance accommodation

What are the priorities? Add bullet points

- To set out the foundations for a licensing scheme
- The Council should challenge landlords who do not know their responsibilities. Clearly communicate these legal responsibilities to landlords as well as information about fair rents in relation to local income levels/minimum wage.

Are there any Cross Cutting Themes which apply right across the Strategy? – e.g., Climate Change / Inequalities / Community

- Ensuring measurement of the success of interventions by their social value and not just their financial value
- Planning should promote “build to rent” not just for sale
- Many holiday lets are becoming uneconomic in this town. Owners should be encouraged to convert to private rentals

- Availability of accessible properties in the PRS for those who may need adaptations to their home so they can live more independently. Are we utilising the Disabled Facilities Grant in this sector as effectively as possible? How can we improve this?
- Accessibility of the PRS for those who may face other hidden barriers which the council has not considered or are fully aware of.

Good Practice

Add any examples of good practice – links/ evidence/ data etc

- **Brighton City Council** – Borough wide licensing scheme for houses of multiple occupation (HMO's) and Selective Licensing on Rental Properties in certain wards