

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**PLACE SHAPING AND CONNECTIVITY
AND STRONGER, SAFER COMMUNITIES - ASHBY,
BOTTFESFORD & SCUNTHORPE ('URBAN')
CABINET MEMBERS**

LANDLORD ACCREDITATION SCHEME

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To update members of the work carried out to progress an enhanced Landlord Accreditation Scheme in North Lincolnshire.
- 1.2 That the Cabinet Members approve the development of a scheme in partnership with DASH commencing in April 2022.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Under the Housing Act 2004 the council has a responsibility to ensure residential houses and flats are safe and secure, warm, and dry and free from potential hazards that impact on the health and safety of occupants.
- 2.2 The Private Rented Sector (PRS) is an important part of the housing offer in North Lincolnshire and a safe, well managed sector contributes to the Council achieving its outcomes of Safe and Well. It also delivers safe, secure warm homes which fulfil a basic need and provide the springboard for life.
- 2.3 The PRS is operated by many good landlords, however there are some landlords that operate illegally and allow their homes to be rented to vulnerable tenants with a disregard for housing standards and the impact this has on the health of tenants and the wider community.
- 2.4 The council operates a risk-based approach to the enforcement of housing standards which is targeted at those properties and landlords that pose the greatest risk to their tenants and the surrounding community.
- 2.5 We currently run a small landlord accreditation scheme within North Lincolnshire but recognise if we wish to further enable the sector to develop to maintain a robust and healthy housing offer we need to review and deliver a strengthened scheme. This enables us to support our good landlords and help address minor disputes between landlords and tenants without the recourse to enforcement and targets our

enforcement resources towards criminal landlords and creating space within the market for more good landlords as criminal landlords leave the marketplace.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Option 1: To introduce a new enhanced accreditation scheme in partnership with DASH.
- 3.2 Option 2: To maintain the status quo and not introduce a refreshed scheme.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 Option 1 is the preferred option. Discretionary Landlord Accreditation Schemes aim to recognise and promote good quality and safe accommodation, ensuring that landlords have and maintain a good level of knowledge and practice. This helps them to fully comply with their responsibilities, keep tenants safe and well and avoid the need for formal intervention by regulators whilst maintaining a healthy relationship with tenants.
- 4.2 Following a review of available schemes we have carried out some initial work with an organisation called DASH (Decent and Safe Homes) who deliver landlord accreditation on behalf of councils.
- 4.3 Landlords opting to participate in the scheme are subject to an initial vetting process including inspection of 10% of their property portfolio prior to accreditation. The schemes also include a complaints and disciplinary procedure which allows DASH to intervene in disputes between landlords and tenants at an early opportunity. DASH also provide an independent mediation service in possession cases.
- 4.4 Being part of the DASH Accreditation Scheme offers the following additional benefits over and above other commercial schemes that landlords can choose to join independently of the council.
 - Facilitate, promote, and run an annual Landlords Forum
 - Landlord bi-monthly newsletter
 - Discounted Local Authority (LA) Officer training
 - Yearly LA Officer benchmarking exercise for Housing Health and Safety Risk Assessments
 - Free LA Subscription to RIAMS a legal and policy resource.
- 4.5 The details of the proposed scheme have been considered and we are satisfied that the DASH scheme will deliver on the aspirations of the relevant Cabinet Members to improve standards across the private rented housing sector. We continue to engage with landlords about the proposed DASH scheme with initial feedback from our existing licensed landlords being very encouraging.

4.6 Option 2 will result in us maintaining the current landlord accreditation scheme. This will result in resources within Environmental Health and Housing being spread more widely across the sector and detract from our need to target the highest risk landlords in the sector.

5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)

5.1 There is a cost to the council of £2500 for DASH to run the scheme in our area which includes vetting of landlords and property inspections. There is also a nominal cost to landlords which is set by DASH according to the size of their portfolio.

5.2 We also propose that landlords joining the DASH accreditation scheme receive a discount towards any future licence applications or renewals for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

5.3 Our membership costs can be met from the civil penalty income received from landlords following enforcement action.

6. OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)

6.1 Having a healthy, vibrant, and safe private rented sector improves health outcomes for occupiers. It also helps create stable and resilient communities, reduces the impact on other council services and our partners and reduces crime and disorder. This contributes to achieving our outcomes of safe, well, prosperous and connected and prioritising our most vulnerable.

7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

7.1 A Stage one Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been completed but has not indicated any adverse impacts in relation to the introduction of a landlord accreditation scheme.

8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

8.1 There are no known conflicts of interest to highlight.

8.2 We have spoken to all the HMO licensed landlords and 10 have indicated that they would consider membership of the scheme. We will be contacting all the previously accredited landlords in due course to determine interest.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That the Cabinet Members approve the development of the scheme in partnership with DASH with the scheme rollout commencing in April 2022.
- 9.2 That the Director of Economy and Environment be authorised to approve the discount to future licence fees and renewals resulting from participation in the DASH scheme.

DIRECTOR OF ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Nil