

**REPORT TO:** Safer Policy & Performance Board

**DATE:** 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Communities

**PORTFOLIO** Neighbourhood, Leisure & Sport /  
Health & Adults /  
Community Safety

**SUBJECT:** Scrutiny review of Anti Social Behaviour in the  
Private Rented Sector

**WARDS:** Borough

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Board on the outcomes from the PPB scrutiny review, to seek comments on the report attached as Appendix 1 and advise on the issues raised.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**It is recommended that the Board**

- (1) note the outcomes from the scrutiny review;**
- (2) comment on the report attached as Appendix 1; and**
- (3) Note that a further report detailing cost implications will be presented to the Policy and Performance Board in June and following this a similar report would be presented to the Executive Board.**

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**3.1 Background**

3.1.1 The topic group was formed in response to a number of issues identified by Members relating to the private rented sector including poor property conditions, anti social behaviour caused by private tenants and absentee landlords who were reluctant to take action against tenants who caused problems. The group is chaired by Councillor Pamela Wallace.

3.1.2 The scrutiny review consisted of three meetings of the topic group which were also attended by relevant officers from Housing, Environmental Health and Community Safety disciplines who

responded to questions from Members. Members also visited Wirral to meet with their Housing Standards and Anti Social Behaviour Teams.

3.1.3 Members of the topic group have now made their recommendations and these are outlined within the Action Plan contained in Annex 4 of the attached PPB report, which also gives further details of the project and outcomes from meetings.

## 3.2 Issues

3.2.1 The topic group recommends that a zero tolerance approach to anti social behaviour, poor condition and rogue landlords be adopted in two areas of the Borough (West Bank and parts of Halton Lodge).

3.2.2 The recommendations include wider promotion of the Landlord Accreditation Scheme in an effort to boost the number of accredited landlords. Thought needs to be given as to how to effectively manage a possible large increase in the number of applications including undertaking internal inspections of the properties, since around 80% of the Landlord Accreditation Officer's time is currently spent administering the Bond Guarantee Scheme a service which prevents statutory homelessness.

3.2.3 Wirral's Landlord Accreditation Scheme accredits the property rather than the landlord and members of the topic group have recommended that Halton's scheme be changed to follow suit. Halton's current scheme requires that all of a landlord's portfolio of properties meets the required standards for that landlord to be accredited. If only one of their properties fail to meet these standards, accreditation for the landlord can be withdrawn and consequently it is in their interests to bring the property up to standard. Under a property accreditation scheme the landlord can choose which properties to put forward for accreditation while leaving their remaining properties in a sub standard condition.

3.2.4 One of the recommendations is to explore the possibility of bringing in additional staffing resources to support the project through either re-organisation of existing staff, secondment from another organisation, external funding bids, use of volunteers or graduate work experience. While it may be possible to use volunteers, careful thought would need to be given as to the type of work they could assist with given the technical nature of the work and this would need to be very sensitively handled in the current climate of potential redundancies. In line with the proposed Volunteer Policy any volunteer role profile developed would need to be approved by the Unions. At the time of writing officers have entered into discussions with Housing Associations with stock in the pilot areas with regard to the possibility of their staff providing support for the project.

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 A number of the proposals will require some changes to the Council's policy on housing and further clarification on data protection will be required.

#### 5.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCILS PRIORITIES**

##### 5.1 **A Healthy Halton**

Poor housing conditions can have an adverse effect on health, consequently, improving the housing stock can bring about positive health benefits.

##### 5.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The topic group recommends that the possibility of additional staffing resources be explored to support delivery of the proposals, including considering the use of volunteers or through secondment, which, if successful, would present an opportunity for someone to gain valuable employment experience.

##### 5.3 **Children and Young People in Halton**

Research suggests that poor housing conditions can have an adverse impact on educational attainment.

##### 5.4 **A Safer Halton**

The topic group recommends that appropriate advice and support be given to private landlords whose properties are occupied by anti social tenants.

##### 5.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

Improving housing conditions has a positive effect on the visual appearance of neighbourhoods.

#### 6.0 **FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Effective delivery of the recommendations of the topic group will have staffing implications and it is likely that a small budget will be required to hold a promotional event, produce additional promotional material for the Landlord Accreditation Scheme and undertake a survey of private landlords. Resource implications are explored more fully in section 5 of the report attached at Appendix 1.

#### 7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 The private rented sector in Halton has grown considerably in recent years and in the current housing market conditions is providing a relatively affordable housing solution for households unable to secure mortgage finance due to high deposit requirements or access social rented housing due to long waiting lists. While the Council wants to ensure that the highest possible standards are

achieved in the sector through its enforcement role and the voluntary accreditation scheme, an approach that is too heavy handed could discourage potential growth in the sector thereby further limiting the housing options for Halton residents.

7.2 There is a risk that delivery of the recommendations could adversely impact on the delivery of other local authority functions including enforcement of air, noise and environmental quality and the statutory homelessness duty.

## 8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 An EIA has not yet been produced for the proposals but will be completed in due course and the outcome reported to June's Policy and Performance Board.

## 9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.