



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Thursday 19 November 2020
Report Number	Agenda Item 10
Subject	Private Tenants Forum
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Andrew Beaney Chairman Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee Email: andrew.beaney@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Jon Dearing – Group Manager for Resident Services Tel: 01993 861221 Email: jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk
Author	Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Operational Support and Enabling Tel: 01993 861232 Email: mandy.fathers@pubicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the purpose, benefits and outcomes of forming a Private Rented Sector Tenant's Forum.
Annexes	None
Recommendation/s	That the Committee considers the data gathering options set out in section 2.
Corporate priorities	Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council. Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities. Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. A motion was proposed during the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 September 2020 for a paper to be submitted to the Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the benefits and implications of establishing a Private Tenant's Forum.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. The private rented sector has grown considerably over the last two decades. Nationally, it houses 19 per cent of households compared to 11 per cent in 2001. It has therefore become an integral part of the housing market.
- 2.2. West Oxfordshire currently has approximately 50,521 domestic properties; of which 17 per cent (8,588) are rented out by private individuals.
- 2.3. The Council has statutory duties under the Housing Act 2004, as amended to ensure:
- Properties are fit for human habitation;
 - Houses of multiple occupation are licenced;
 - Pest control is addressed;
 - Neighbour complaints such as excessive noise, anti-social behaviour or illegal activity are dealt with;
 - Rogue landlord concerns are addressed; and,
 - Homelessness is prevented or addressed.
- 2.4. During the 2019/2020 financial year, and the first two quarters on 2020/2021, the Council, under its statutory duties have administered the following:

	April 2019 to March 2020	April 2020 to Sept 2020	Comment
How many complaints we have received in respect of landlords	112	34	It is not possible to distinguish between complaints about landlords and complaints about the property. Usually the complaint is about both – poor condition because the landlord has not acted.
How many complaints about the property (ie. Damp etc)			These figures relate to complaints about tenanted properties. They may not include complaints made about a property during the HMO licensing process – these would be dealt with under the HMO licence application.
How many neighbour/noise issues	116	192	These are all noise complaints about neighbours whether rental or owner occupied. They exclude complaints about/or from commercial premises.
How many illegal evictions	5	4	These figures may not include cases of landlord harassment - – it depends on how the complaint was originally recorded by customer services

2.5. The Council already commission services from Citizens Advice, West Oxfordshire (CAWO) to support its core service and help meet its statutory functions whilst contributing to the Council's priorities. Part of the commissioning contract is in respect of 'Housing Advice' of which private rented sector issues fall in to. During the first two quarters of 2020/2021, CAWO have supported the following clients in respect of private sector rental issues:

No:	Issue Type	No. of cases
1	Repairs/Maintenance	32
2	Rents and other charges	26
3	Tenancy Deposit Protection	24
4	Possession action (not arrears)	20
5	Fitness for human habitation	19
6	Problems with Letting Agents	13
7	Cost of deposits/rent in advance	11
8	Quality of Service	10
9	Letting Agent charges	4

2.6 It is therefore clear that there are already formal routes for Private Rented Sector tenants to receive advice and make complaints regarding their landlords; through the Council's existing regulatory services and (Council commissioned) CAWO service. This could be improved by adding a specific page/s to the Council's website, as in Option 1 (paragraph 3.1).

2.7 A Private Tenant Forum would not be an appropriate place to raise/discuss individual complaints. The purpose of such a forum therefore needs careful consideration, as suggested in Option 2 (paragraph 3.1).

3. **OPTIONS**

3.1. There is potentially three options to consider:

- 1) Create a webpage specifically for the private rent sector. This would be an informative area for customers giving advice, guidance and signposting to other organisations, such as CAWO and Shelter. Through our Customer Satisfaction Web Survey, we could then establish what other needs these tenants have.
- 2) Conduct a Needs Survey with Private Rented Sector tenants; directly where we have the contact details (e.g. Housing Benefit recipients) or on the Council's Website front page. This survey could be conducted in parallel with the above data collection process.

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1. Neither of the above options have any significant financial implications.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1. There are no known legal implications in respect of this report

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. There is a risk that such a forum would become an opportunity for individuals to raise complaints, which they should do through existing processes, rather than improving the private rental experience more widely.
- 6.2. Members would need to consider what the main aim of a Forum is and what its 'core objectives' would be to ensure its purpose.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1. Members may consider other options that have not been listed.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1. None