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**To: Communities and Housing Policy Board**

**On: 7 March 2023**

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**Report by: Director of Communities and Housing Services**

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**Heading: Private Rented Sector - Advocacy and Enforcement Initiative-  
Update**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The Council meeting of 4 March 2021 approved funding of £200,000 to allow the appointment of officers to provide direct support, advocacy and representation for private tenants as well as private landlord enforcement activities. This was in recognition of the challenging time that would be experienced as temporary legal protections for tenants that had operated during COVID19 were transitioned away.
- 1.2 This report provides the Board with an update on progress with the Initiative.
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## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Policy Board:
- (i) notes the progress with the initiative; and
  - (ii) agrees that a further update will be provided to a future meeting of the Communities and Housing Policy Board.
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## **3. Background**

- 3.1 Recognising the challenges which residents living in the private rented sector may be faced with as Renfrewshire transitioned into the period of Covid recovery and beyond, the Council meeting of 4 March 2021 allocated £200,000 to fund resources to improve access to support, housing options advice and advocacy for tenants, and where appropriate to support the use of enforcement powers in the private rented sector.

- 3.2 Three new temporary posts were established within Homeless Services, the Housing Support team and Environmental Health - Enforcement, with close links being established across the three services to create an integrated support approach for tenants in the private rented sector.
- 3.3 The three posts have forged close partnerships which has resulted in a number of success stories through tenants being supported to address, amongst other matters:
- issues with landlords in relation to their tenancy conditions;
  - preventing homelessness;
  - accessing rent deposit guarantee schemes;
  - managing finances and dealing with benefits claims;
  - resettling into a tenancy;
  - the physical condition of their rental property;
  - enforcement action against landlords, including unregistered landlords; and,
  - general counselling and advice.
- 3.4 The posts have been in place from December 2021/January 2022 and an interim review has found that to date 131 service users have been in contact regarding help and support via the 3 new posts. Where service users were happy to engage with the services, there was assistance provided by at least 2 of the different services in almost half the cases. In the other cases, a single officer was able to provide the advice or support required.
- 3.5 The initiative has signposted service users to a broad range of other agencies as appropriate, including Adult Services, the Community Mental Health Team, Advice Works, Womens Aid and Citizens Advice Bureau, and there have been several cases where tenants have been helped to access social rented or private sector tenancies, whilst others have been helped to remain in their current private let property following the advice and support provided by the officers concerned.
- 3.6 Liaising with landlords/agents has also brought benefits to a number of tenants in the private rented sector, including circumstances where relationships had broken down. This has resulted in positive outcomes, either through property disrepair issues being addressed, or where there may have been anxieties in dealing with a landlord/agent, emotional support for tenants has enabled matters to be resolved.
- 3.7 Feedback on this support has been extremely positive with many stating they wouldn't have managed without this. Similarly, several landlords and agents having had contact with all three areas of the initiative have expressed their positive support for the initiative.
- 3.8 A number of unregistered landlords have been identified through this initiative and through work by the team they have now registered as a private landlord which will improve the market generally and ensures that these landlords are subject to the fit and proper test and that they are suitable to practice as a landlord.

- 3.9 Two private landlords have been reported by officers to the Housing and Property Chamber First Tier Tribunal for failing to address disrepair matters within their property and these cases remain ongoing with the Tribunal. One landlord has been issued with a Repairing Standard Enforcement Order by the Tribunal and it will be the officers' intention to refer this to the Council's Regulatory Functions Board for the landlord's fit and proper status to be determined. The other case remains in process with the First Tier Tribunal.

## 4 Conclusions

- 4.1 The initiative has proven to be a positive measure and the close working relationship developed between services has demonstrated the value of an integrated approach to supporting tenants within the private rented sector.
- 4.2 There has been an improvement in living conditions for those tenants where this had been an issue, as well as the provision of bespoke advice/support ensuring tenants are being signposted to the correct services at an early stage. This is proving to be of benefit in terms of finances and mental/emotional wellbeing.
- 4.3 Overall, this initiative has been welcomed across tenants, landlords and agents, and a full evaluation including feedback from service users will be carried out later this year.
- 4.4 The current funding allocated to the project will allow the temporary posts to continue until January 2024 and a further update on activity and evaluation results will be presented to a meeting of the Policy Board prior to that date.

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## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - the costs of the new temporary posts will be met from the budget of £200,000 allocated for this initiative.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - None
3. **Community/Council Planning** –
  - Building strong, safe and resilient communities - those living in private rented sector will have enhanced access to support
  - Tackling inequality, ensuring opportunities for all - those living in private rented sector will have enhanced access to support
  - Working together to improve outcomes - those living in private rented sector will have enhanced access to support
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** - None

7. **Equality & Human Rights**

- (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8. **Health & Safety** – None

9. **Procurement** - None

10. **Risk** - None

11. **Privacy Impact** - None

12. **Cosla Policy Position** – *not applicable*.

13. **Climate Risk** - None

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**List of Background Papers**

- (a) Background Papers- None

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