

**To: Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board**

**On: 17 August 2021**

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

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**Heading: Private Rented Sector – Advocacy and Enforcement Initiative**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The Council meeting of 4 March 2021 approved funding of £200,000 to support additional officers to provide direct support, advocacy and representation for private tenants and private landlord enforcement activities, recognising the very challenging time that will be experienced as temporary legal protections for tenants that have operated during COVID19 transition away.
- 1.2 This report details how this new funding can be utilised, and the outcomes that can be delivered.
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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Policy Board:
- (i) authorises the Director of Communities and Housing to implement the measures set out in this Report to improve the range of help and support being provided to those living in or entering the private rented sector; and
  - (ii) agrees that updates on activity will be reported to future meetings of the Communities, Housing & Planning Board.
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### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Recognising the challenges that may be faced by residents living in the private rented sector as Renfrewshire transitions into the period of Covid Recovery, the Council meeting of 4 March allocated £200,000 to provide resources to improve access to advice and advocacy for tenants and where appropriate to support the use of enforcement powers.
- 3.2 Following consideration of the opportunities to maximise the impact of this expenditure the Policy Board is asked to approve that the following posts are established within the Communities & Housing Service to create a cohesive and multi faceted support programme that delivers support to tenants facing challenging circumstances in the private rented sector.

### **4 Housing Options / Homeless Prevention**

- 4.1 It is proposed to create 1 new designated post of Senior Housing Options Adviser – Private Rented Sector (GRH) on a temporary basis to receive both self-referrals and referrals from a range of services of tenants in the private rented sector who may benefit from being provided with, inter alia:
- Help with issues in relation to their housing options,
  - Assistance in addressing issues with their landlord in relation to their tenancy, including mediation,
  - Advice and support to avoid homelessness if they are at risk of having their tenancy repossessed
  - Access to a rent deposit guarantee scheme to support those who want to enter the private rented sector
- 4.2 The postholder will have close links with the posts referred to below which relate to the provision of support and dealing with registered landlords.

### **5 Housing support**

- 5.1 It is proposed that a new specialist Housing Support Officer – (Private Rented Sector) is established on a temporary basis to deliver the support needs of those living in the private rented sector who are having difficulty sustaining independent living.
- 5.2 The postholder will have close links with the other 2 new temporary posts covered by this report, and the support that this officer will provide will include:
- Support to manage finances and dealing with benefit claims etc.,
  - Assistance to contact and link in with health services and other bodies that will enhance quality of life,
  - Commissioning and monitoring of specialist support for individuals dealing with issues such as addiction, mental health needs etc.,

- Advice and assistance to deal with relationships and any disputes with neighbours,
- Personal safety and security,
- Support to re-settle into a tenancy and obtain furniture,
- Support to seek employment and/or meaningful activity and to participate in social activities within the wider community,
- general counselling and advice.

## 6 Enforcement

- 6.1 It is proposed that a new Regulatory Assistant – (Private Rented Sector) is established on a temporary basis to deliver enforcement activities which will support tenants and improve conditions within privately rented accommodation.
- 6.2 the post holder will have close links with the other two new temporary posts covered by this Report, with the Officer:
- Offering advice, assistance and support to tenants to address issues with physical conditions within any privately rented accommodation
  - Taking relevant enforcement action against unregistered landlords to ensure they become registered
  - Taking relevant enforcement action against landlords to ensure that their rental property meets the minimum housing standards and refer to the Housing and Property Chamber First Tier Tribunal for Scotland and the Regulatory Functions Board where landlord fails to improve property

## 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The impact of this additional resource and the benefits delivered to residents will be monitored during the period when funding is available and will inform future budget considerations. In this respect, it is noted that reports on activity will be presented to future meetings of the Community, Housing & Planning Board.

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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** – All temporary posts will be filled in line with HR policies and procedures

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 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**

none

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