

PRS Improvement Action Plan

The purpose of this action plan is to facilitate implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Communities Review Committee 'The Private Rented Sector'. Progress in implementing the action plan will be reviewed annually.

Key REH: Residential Environmental Health, Islington Council
 PHP: Private Housing Partnerships
 HAC: Housing Aid Centre
 HOPS: Housing Operations
 IR: Islington Residential
 TS: Trading Standards
 HS+R: Housing Strategy and Regeneration

PRS: Private Rented Sector

Recommendation 1: A better deal for Islington's Private Renters; develop a Social Lettings Agency					
Ref	Action	Who leads	When	Progress / Comments	Timeline
1.1	Carry out a feasibility study for the development of a social lettings agency (SLA) in Islington and produce a business case.	PHP	Sept '14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feasibility study was undertaken, including market research, landlord survey, benchmarking with other authorities, assessment of various service models and products, and risk assessment completed. Report presented to Exec on 23rd October 2014, detailing findings of feasibility study and a detailed business case proving financial viability. Exec approval received to proceed with development of the agency, to be launched in April 2015. 	Completed
1.2	To set up a Project Team to oversee the development and delivery of the SLA and to appoint a Lead Officer will take day to day responsibility for setting up the scheme.	PHP	Oct '14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project board set up with representatives from Legal, Digital Services, Comms, Finance, REH, PHP, HAC, HOPS, IR, Strategy & Development. The full board meets monthly, with smaller ad hoc groups meeting in between to discuss specific themed issues. Expert consultancy support commissioned and appointed to act as Lead Officer. 	Ongoing

1.3	To produce, deliver and monitor an SLA development project plan.	PHP	Oct '14 – April '15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project plan in place with progress monitored monthly by Project Board. • Achievements to date include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name and logo agreed for SLA: 'Islington Lettings' (IL) - Agreement reached on landlord offers (guaranteed market rents / or guaranteed rent 6 months in advance for sub market rents) - Legal docs, including management agreement with Landlords, SLA with internal services, and tenancy agreements in process of being drawn up - Communications plan in place to market and promote IL (incl articles in resident publications, bus shelter campaign, posters, IL email address etc) - IL website signed off and with developers for production - Development of in-house repairs service through HOPS - Financial systems and processes being set up - Client sourcing and referral pathways being established - Staffing arrangements being finalised - Property standards been agreed • Risk register been produced • Budget awaiting sign off • Discussions ongoing re integration of IR into IL 	Ongoing
1.4	To launch the SLA in April 2015.	PHP	April '15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch event planned for 25th March 2015, 6-8 pm, in Town Hall. • Council set to launch IL from April 2015 	Ongoing

Recommendation 2: Root out poor landlords – Carry out feasibility study into discretionary licensing in specific parts of the borough

Ref	Action	Who leads	When	Progress / Comments	Timeline
2.1	Carry out feasibility and consultation on discretionary additional licensing scheme in Caledonian Road and Holloway Road	REH	Jan '15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposals to introduce an additional HMO licensing scheme to cover all shared accommodation on Caledonian Road and Holloway Road were put out for public consultation at the end of October 2014 and the views of private tenants and landlords likely to be affected by the scheme were collected alongside those of other residents and representatives from national organisations and local community groups. A wide range of views were received with the majority of respondents supporting the scheme. Those views have been considered and have helped to inform both the residents' impact assessment and the design of the scheme. 	Completed
2.2	Present findings of feasibility and consultation to Exec and make recommendation for an additional licensing scheme	REH	Mar '15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Officers have reviewed the proposals which are due to be decided upon by the Executive on 12 March 2015. If the Executive approves the scheme then the Council will formally designate the scheme and publicise it so that implementation of the requirements for landlords to license all HMOs in the two Roads can take place from September 2015 onwards. 	Ongoing

Recommendation 3: Bear down on lettings agents – ensure that letting agents in the borough have fair and reasonable terms and conditions, and fees that are clearly advertised.

Ref	Action	Who leads	When	Progress / Comments	Timeline
3.1	Ensure lettings agents in the borough are aware of new government guidance and requirements;	TS	Sept '14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TS have written to all letting agents in the borough about: June '14 guidance from the CMA (Competition and Markets Authority) ; 'Guidance for lettings professionals on consumer protection law'; https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319820/Lettings_guidance_CMA31.PDF This strengthens requirements on lettings agents to ensure their standard contract terms are fair and reasonable; a 2014 decision by the Advertising Standards Authority requires them to clearly advertise all fees; and new redress schemes were introduced in October '14 that agents are now required to join. TS have produced their own good practice advice leaflets for Lettings agents in the borough. 	Ongoing
3.2	Carry out a programme of targeted visits to lettings agents	TS	March '15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visiting programme being delivered, informed by local intelligence and tip-offs from residents. Training will be offered to local agents in order to improve standards and promote good practice. When letting agents are failing to act responsibly we will take enforcement action against them; TS have successfully prosecuted one lettings agent in the borough in 2014. 	Ongoing
3.3	Promote GLA's London Rental Standard	TS	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LRS is being promoted as part of the communication and liaison with agents as under 3.1 and 3.2 	Ongoing

3.4	Step up partnership working with other boroughs	TS	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership working is regularly taking place through London Trading Standards (LOTSAs) network, national primary authority partnership and current involvement in the Office of Fair Trading (OFT)'s National Lettings Working Party funded by National Trading Standards Board (NTSB). An audit will be made of all regional/national letting agent chains that have an Islington presence and contact will be made with relevant primary authority to share local concerns. 	Ongoing
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Recommendation 4 : Supporting private tenants - ensure that Islington residents needing any advice about renting privately know where to turn.

Ref	Action	Who leads	When	Progress /Comments	Timeline
4.1	Launch a one stop telephone information service for all private sector queries	PHP	In place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2014 saw the launch of a new, one stop telephone service – 0207 527 3001 – which puts renters or landlords needing any advice in touch straightaway with the relevant officer in the council who can help. 	Complete
4.2	Improve the council's private sector web pages	PHP/REH	Dec '14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council's web pages have been reviewed, updated, and improved in relation to private sector housing issues, so that they are clear and accessible, easy to navigate and are regularly reviewed to ensure they contain up to date information. The council invited Islington Private Tenants Group to take part of this review. 	Complete

4.3	Work closely with the Islington Private Tenants Group (IPTG) towards common goals of creating a better deal for private renters and increase awareness of their rights and services available for their benefit	PHP / REH	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islington council held a joint event with IPTG in the council chambers in 2014 and further ad hoc meetings have taken place between officers, councillors and IPTG. • We aim to undertake further work to enhance partnership working with IPTG, to share information and awareness of private sector housing issues; to run campaigns for public awareness and for changes in legislation. 	Ongoing
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Recommendation 5: A call for change – Make representations to government where we consider existing legislation does not adequately protect private sector tenants including security of tenure, rent control, and minimum housing standards.

Ref	Action	Who leads	When	Progress / Comments	Timeline
5.1	Make representation to the Government seeking the suspension of Right to Buy Sales in Islington and London as a whole.		Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing. The council has launched a programme of 'buy backs' of leasehold properties, with the aim to include them in the council social housing stock portfolio in the long run, after using the units for temporary accommodation for an agreed period. 	Ongoing
5.2	Comment on 'Homes for London; the Mayor's draft London housing strategy'	HS+R	Done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have forwarded Islington's comments on 'Homes for London; the Mayor's draft London housing strategy'. We have made Islington's case for a more secure, decent, and affordable private rented sector. 	Complete

Updated for Housing Scrutiny Committee March 2015