

Council: Tuesday, 15 July 2014

Opposition Business Item: Councillor Ross Houston

Fairness and good standards in the private rented sector

Council notes that:

- The private rented sector is not regulated, standards in the sector are variable with action taken by the council against hazards at 469 tenanted dwellings in the last three years, and poor standards can lead to anti-social behaviour.
- Barnet has some of the highest private sector rents in outer-London, with some landlords charging rents at a higher Local Housing Allowance rate than market rents - a practice that costs the tax payer more in housing benefit.
- There is a voluntary accreditation scheme (London Landlord Accreditation Scheme) for private landlords endorsed by Mayor Boris Johnson and LB Barnet which aims to ensure good standards and fairness in the sector, as well as Mayor Johnson's London Rental Standard which sets universal standards for landlord accreditation schemes.
- Only 425 Barnet based landlords are currently members of the LLAS, whereas there are thousands of private landlords based in Barnet.
- While LB Barnet and Barnet Homes encourages private landlords to join the LLAS it does not require landlords it places tenants with to be a member.
- Both LLAS and the London Rental Standard are only voluntary schemes that promote good standards but offer little real enforceable protection for tenants.

Council therefore asks that the Housing Committee:

- Considers implementing a private landlord licensing scheme and investigates the best practice models available, including what level to set any license fee, but considering a range of between £150 and £500 to cover the cost of services that protect tenants and give landlords support, advice and training.
- Ensures that Barnet Homes only discharges their housing duty with landlords who are members of LLAS and are licensed under any future Barnet licensing scheme.
- Ensures that any private landlord offered or in receipt of incentive payments by Barnet Homes must be a member of LLAS and licensed under any future Barnet licensing scheme.
- Monitors LHA rates charged by landlords, and ensures Barnet Homes only use landlords who offer fair and predictable rents in order to protect tenants and the public purse.

- Ensures that Barnet Homes only use landlords who offer fair and lawful tenancy agreements.