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<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Report Track:</b>	<b>Housing Policy Development Committee 28 November 2012</b>

**HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**  
**28 NOVEMBER 2012**  
**PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To inform the Housing Policy Development Committee of the current housing situation in regard to the Private Rented Sector in the District.
- 1.2 To outline the work of the Council does to assist private rented sector tenants and landlords in the District.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Housing Policy Development Committee consider:
  - (i) the situation regarding the private rented sector in the District;
  - (ii) the work of the Council to assist private sector tenants and landlords.

**3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The private rented sector (PRS) in Cannock Chase plays an important role in providing housing for a number of households with varying different needs. In particular it provides housing for households in need of accommodation but who are not considered a priority for social housing. It is also often home to would be first time buyers who are saving for deposits, to those households unable to afford homeownership and households who move regularly for work.

- 3.2 In accordance with the decision of Cabinet on 21 June 2012 the PRS is also now used to house homeless households and discharge the Council's statutory re-housing duty under homelessness legislation.
- 3.3 The PRS in Cannock Chase is relatively small in size (estimated at approximately 4,200 dwellings) and therefore competition for accommodation is strong. Rent levels are similar to house prices, in the respect that they are low compared with regional and national levels but are considered unaffordable for households on low incomes in the District.
- 3.4 For households dependant on Local Housing Allowance to assist them with their housing costs, accessing affordable private rented accommodation is difficult. In the case of single people under 35 and larger families, the situation is much worse. Single people under 35 years of age are restricted to the shared room rate for LHA, £63.50 per week. This means they can only afford to live in shared accommodation, and in Cannock Chase this type of accommodation is very limited. For families requiring properties with four or more bedrooms, the LHA is capped to the top rate 4 bed, £167.31 per week. This is insufficient to cover the rent on a large proportion of the larger properties in the District and so such families struggle to find affordable accommodation or have to resort to over-crowding in smaller properties.
- 3.5 The Council fulfils a pro-active role within the private rented sector in Cannock Chase, and the latter part of this report details the range of work that is carried out. In short, the services provided include:
- Maintaining Property and Applicant Registers to match up tenants and landlords;
  - Administering a property accreditation scheme;
  - Holding landlord forums and other events;
  - Partnership work with the Cannock Chase Churches Housing Coalition;
  - Statutory enforcement for illegal eviction; and
  - Encouraging landlords to bring empty properties back into use via the private rented sector.
- 3.6 Many Landlords in the District work in co-operation with the Council. A large number regularly attend the landlord forums and many have properties accredited with the Council. As a result of the generally good working relationship between Landlords and the Council there have been very few incidents where enforcement action has been required as a result of poor housing conditions or tenancy issues such as illegal evictions.

<b>4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities</b>
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- 4.1 This report supports the Council's Corporate Priorities as follows:

**Place** – an improved living environment. The work the Council carries out for private rented sector tenants and landlords goes some way towards an

improved living environment by helping people enter and sustain affordable accommodation and improving standards in the private rented sector.

## 5 Report Detail

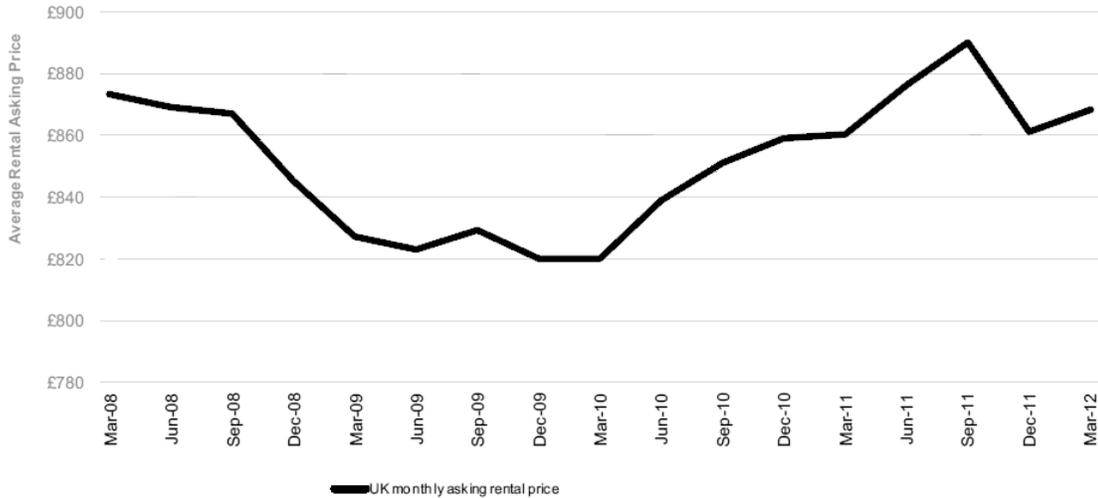
- 5.1 Nationally, households are returning to renting their homes in the private sector, a phenomenon that has been dubbed 'generation rent'. The move to private renting has accelerated since the credit crunch, as a result of constrained mortgage finance and the significant deposit hurdle for would-be home buyers. By 2016 it is estimated that one in five households – or 5.9 million households – in England will be renting in the private sector.
- 5.2 The private rented sector in Cannock Chase plays an important role in providing housing for a number of households with varying needs. It provides housing for households in need of accommodation but who are not considered a priority for social housing. The private rented sector is often home to would be first time buyers who are saving for deposits or to those households that find homeownership out of their grasp. Private renting also offers more mobile households, for example those who move for regularly for work, more freedom.

### ***Private Rented Stock***

- 5.3 According to the Cannock Chase Private Sector Housing Condition Survey 2010 there are 4,240 private rented sector dwellings in the District. This accounts for approximately 10% of the total District housing stock. As a comparison, the District's social housing stock accounts for approximately 17%.
- 5.4 The size and proportion of the District private rented stock is relatively small in comparison with national and regional levels. According to 2011 DCLG estimates the national proportion of private rented stock stands at approximately 18%, whilst the West Midlands PRS stock is estimated to be in the region of 15%.
- 5.5 The Council will have a better understanding of the private rented stock when detailed information from the Census 2011 is released. It is expected that the 2011 Census information will show an increase on the 10% proportion of the total stock shown in 2010.

### ***Current rent levels***

- 5.6 Rent levels across the country have recovered much faster than house prices from the economic downturn. As demand has increased from households unable to enter or sustain homeownership, the rent that landlords charge has also increased due to the competition for supply. The graph below illustrates the national private rental picture. Monthly asking prices have increased on the last quarter of 2011, after a quarter of decline in asking prices in the autumn of 2011. Asking prices reached a low in Spring 2010 and then started a recovery back to 2007/08 levels.



**Source: Findaproperty.com Rental Index 2012 Quarter 1.**

- 5.7 According to the Findaproperty.com Rental Index (as cited by the Government) the average rent for a private let in the West Midlands in the first quarter of 2012 was £659 pcm. This was similar to the level last year (£662 pcm), but shows a 6.3% increase on 2010 as the rental market started to recover.
- 5.8 As with house prices, local rental costs are at a lower level than national and regional averages. An assessment of the current average asking prices for rental property in the District is shown below.

Property Size	Range (£ pcm)	Median (£ pcm)	Lower Quartile (£ pcm)
1 bed	350-450	375	365
2 bed	360-695	495	450
3 bed	395-850	575	540
4+ bed	675-1595	800	735
Flat/apartment	350-595	450	380
Terraced	395-600	495	475
Semi-detached	450-675	530	500
Detached	560-1595	695	600

**Source: Rightmove, June 2012**

- 5.9 As previously mentioned, the recording and monitoring of information regarding private rented sector is limited, including very little record of historic rental costs. The table below shows the figures recorded by the Rent Officer for the Valuation Office Agency during 2010/11 and 2011/12.

Average Rent	2010/11	2011/12

<b>1 bed</b>	374	380
<b>2 bed</b>	476	488
<b>3 bed</b>	558	565
<b>4+ bed</b>	779	792

**Source: VOA**

5.10 The above figures show that rents have increased but not by a particularly large amount. This level of increase is similar to that of inflation at around 2%. This would suggest the supply to demand ratio has remained fairly constant and the rental market is fairly stable.

***Local Housing Allowance***

5.11 Information from the Council's Housing Benefit Department indicates that at September 2012 there were 3271 Local Housing Allowance claimants, as demonstrated in the table below. A breakdown of the monthly figures from April to September is provided, split between private tenants of working age and elderly applicants.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Working Age</b>	<b>Elderly</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>April</i>	2634	639	<b>3273</b>
<i>May</i>	2666	635	<b>3301</b>
<i>June</i>	2670	634	<b>3304</b>
<i>July</i>	2655	633	<b>3288</b>
<i>August</i>	2658	627	<b>3285</b>
<i>September</i>	2646	625	<b>3271</b>

**Source: Housing Benefit Team, CCDC**

5.12 The figures show that there has been little increase in the number of private tenants claiming local housing allowance between April and September. This would suggest that prospective tenants are thinking twice before entering the private rented sector. Due to the negative economic climate, concerns about affordability in the event of loss of employment may encourage residents to remain where they are currently living, possibly with family or friends, or people are just waiting longer before attempting to find their own accommodation.

5.13 As a result of changes made in the Welfare Reform Act 2012, Local Housing Allowance levels have been pegged at April 2012 levels to enable them to be updated annually rather than monthly. Local Housing Allowance is calculated for Broad Rental Market Areas, which consist of a number of local authority

areas; Cannock Chase comes under the Mid Staffs BRMA and the current rate for the area is presented in the table below:

Dwelling Size	LHA per week
Shared Accommodation	£63.50
1 bed	£90.00
2 bed	£114.23
3 bed	£126.92
4+ bed	£167.31

**Source: VOA**

- 5.14 The first annual update will come into effect in April 2013, but the actual calculation will be made in advance in Autumn 2012. The April 2013 to March 2014 LHA rate will be set at either: the previous annual rate up-rated by the September Consumer Price Index; or the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of local rents (whichever is the lowest). Where the CPI is a negative number or zero, the LHA will be the last determined rate. Each annual update in April will follow the same process.
- 5.15 Due to the previous updating mechanism of Local Housing Allowance rates, whereby they were calculated every month based on the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of recorded local rents, levels have fluctuated since LHA was introduced in April 2008. The table below presents historic LHA levels for comparison.

Property size	April 2008	April 2009	April 2010	April 2011	April 2012
<b>Shared</b>	£64.62	£69.46	£68.33	£62.61	£63.50
<b>1 bed</b>	£91.15	£96.92	£97.81	£91.15	£90.00
<b>2 bed</b>	£109.62	£115.38	£115.07	£114.80	£114.23
<b>3 bed</b>	£126.92	£132.69	£134.63	£126.92	£126.92
<b>4 bed</b>	£183.46	£183.46	£182.96	£167.31	£167.31
<b>5 bed*</b>	£288.46	£224.43	£228.99	-	-

\* After April 2011, LHA was restricted to 4 bed rate as the maximum.

- 5.16 The figures show initial increases in 2008 and 2009, but LHA dropped back to just under 2008 levels by April 2012, with the exception of the 2 bed accommodation. The 3 bed rate has returned to the 2008 level, after increasing in 2009 and 2010; and most significantly, the 4 bed rate has

decreased around £16 since being first set in 2008, despite the removal of the 5 bed rate.

**Local Housing Allowance v Local Rents**

5.17 The gap between rent and LHA is shown in the table below. No direct comparison at 30<sup>th</sup> percentile is possible hence the median (50<sup>th</sup>) and lower quartile (25<sup>th</sup>) values are provided. The figures suggest that LHA covers the median and lower quartile rents on 1 and 2 bed properties, and as a result households requiring smaller accommodation should be able to find suitable accommodation that is affordable with the assistance of LHA.

<b>Property Size</b>	<b>LHA monthly equivalent (April 2012)</b>	<b>Median Private Rent (pcm)</b>	<b>Lower Quartile Rent (pcm)</b>
<b>Shared</b>	£275	£350	£300
<b>1 bed</b>	£390	£375	£365
<b>2 bed</b>	£495	£495	£450
<b>3 bed</b>	£550	£575	£540
<b>4+ bed</b>	£725	£800	£735

5.18 The table does however provide further evidence about the issues of affordability for larger accommodation with LHA. Whilst lower quartile rents for 3 bed properties are covered by LHA, median rents are not. It is considered that 30<sup>th</sup> percentile rents should be affordable with LHA. However, as the 4 bed LHA rate does not cover lower quartile rents it cannot cover the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of market rents which the LHA is supposed to cover.

5.19 It should be noted that where the LHA rate covers the median and/or lower quartile rent, it is unknown how many properties that accounts for. The District stock is relatively small and so there is much competition for rented housing. Evidence from estate agent consultation supports the fact that demand is far outstripping supply, which does mean that some households will have difficulty finding affordable rented accommodation.

5.20 The supply of shared accommodation in the District is very limited. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 now restricts single persons under 35 years old to the shared room LHA rate, which has increased the competition for an already stretched resource. The shared room LHA rate does not cover lower quartile rents in the District, most landlords charge in the region of £300-350pcm for shared accommodation – a shortfall of at least £25 a week. This has made finding affordable private rented accommodation very difficult for young single people in Cannock Chase.

5.21 As previously mentioned, the new LHA awards will be updated annually by CPI, this will lead to local housing allowance not keeping up with increases in market rents. This means that local rents will become even more unaffordable for households that rely upon assistance through local housing allowance. According to a report commissioned by Shelter (*Private Rent Watch Report one: Analysis of local rent levels and affordability*), by 2030 60% of local authority areas will be unaffordable for LHA renters. More specifically, the

report predicts that by 2023 renting in Cannock Chase will become unaffordable for LHA claimants. Unaffordable for the purposes of the report was classed as where less than 10% of properties are affordable at maximum LHA rate.

### ***Discretionary Housing Payments***

- 5.22 Discretionary Housing Payments are a useful homelessness prevention tool in providing temporary assistance to households who have had a genuine change in their circumstances after moving into private rented accommodation, allowing them to bridge the shortfall between LHA and their rent. The Housing Options Team has made a contribution of £5,000 from the Government Homelessness Prevention Fund for 2012/13. Figures from the Council's Housing Benefit Department demonstrate that from 1<sup>st</sup> April until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012, 73 private tenants have received assistance through the award of DHP; this is an increase on the same period last year where 59 tenants received assistance.
- 5.23 A significant increase has similarly been shown in the award of DHP to the under 35 year age group who are renting in the private sector. Information from the Housing Benefit Department shows that in the period 1 April 2012 - 30 September 2012, 42 private tenants had received assistance through the award of DHP and this figure was double the same period last year of 21 tenants.

### **Current work by CCDC in Private Rented Sector**

#### **Applicant Database and Private Rented Property Register**

- 5.24 The Housing Options Team has successfully operated a Private Rented Property Register and Applicant Database for several years. The Private Rented Property Register is a list of currently available private rented accommodation put forward by landlords seeking tenants. Whilst the Applicant Database is a list of applicants seeking private rented accommodation which is used by the Housing Options team to refer suitable applicants to landlords with vacant property.
- 5.25 Customers can attend a housing options interview to have their circumstances assessed and receive relevant advice and assistance under s179 of the Housing Act 1996. In cases where either – the household has no existing accommodation or the household need to obtain alternative accommodation and are “not highly placed” for social housing – the household are encouraged to consider private rented accommodation as a viable option. The household completes an application for private rented accommodation and they are entered onto an Applicant Database. Applicants are then referred to landlords with available properties on the Private Rented Property Register. Applicants are contacted every three months to check if they are still seeking accommodation and if there has been any change in their circumstances.

- 5.26 A private landlord can contact the Housing Options team to provide details of their property together with the criteria they are seeking for a tenant i.e. smoker/non smoker, pets/no-pets, working/non working, and be entered onto the Private Rented Property Register. The property is then inspected by an officer from the Housing Options team and, if it is considered to be satisfactory, a shortlist of prospective tenants is drawn up from the Applicant Register database which are referred to the landlord to consider. The landlord will subsequently invite suitable applicants to view the accommodation and usually offer the tenancy to one of the referrals.
- 5.27 Both tenant and landlord can continue to seek advice from the Housing Options Team during the term of the tenancy. In cases where a landlord's property is considered not to meet the Housing and Health Safety Rating System, general advice will be offered and where appropriate the property will be reviewed by the Private Sector Environmental Health Team who will investigate any items of disrepair. Where a property does not meet the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) a referral will not be made.
- 5.28 As of 15 October 2012 a total of 317 applicants were registered as detailed in the table below.

<i>No of Applicants</i>	<i>unemployed</i>	<i>employed</i>
<i>One bed</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Two bed</i>	<b><i>75</i></b>	<i>42</i>
<i>Three bed</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Shared accommodation</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Total of all applicants</i>	<b><i>317</i></b>	

The figures show that:

- two thirds of registered applicants are unemployed;
  - two bedroom accommodation is in greatest demand by applicants, both unemployed and employed;
  - there are 41 applicants seeking shared accommodation (this is required by all single persons under 35 who need to claim LHA, as they are only entitled to the shared room allowance).
- 5.29 During 2011/12 a total of 87 households were housed in accommodation suitable to their needs via the property register, and from April to September 2012 a further 36 households have been re-housed. As a comparison, the Council made 339 lettings to new tenants in 2011/12. Many of the 87 households were on the Council's housing register and by being accommodated in the private rented sector it has decreased the demand on the Council housing stock.
- 5.30 Landlords who register their properties on a regular basis with the Housing Options Team have an average of 5 properties in their property portfolio, although many of those landlords are now increasing their portfolios. It is the

landlords who manage their own properties, rather than through lettings agents, who engage with the Housing Options Team and are appreciative of the free advice and assistance provided as part of the service.

- 5.31 Landlords who register their properties offer a good range of 1, 2 and 3 bed accommodation, although only a small number of 4 bed houses and one bed bungalows become available. Historically there has always been an acute shortage of shared room accommodation, as landlords are less inclined to rent their properties as shared rooms. This is due mainly to the higher risk envisaged in renting to a stereotypical “young single person” and a more rapid turnover of tenants. There is also an initial cost of converting a property to legally allow multiple occupation which deters many landlords. Although in financial terms, a landlord can collect more rent from a shared house rather than through a letting to a single household. For example, renting a three bedroom property as a shared house could yield £190.50 per week (three times the shared room rate), as opposed to £126.92 per week letting to a single household.
- 5.32 Whilst most local authorities are now actively engaging with the private sector by holding Landlord Forums and establishing accreditation schemes, it is considered that few neighbouring authorities have established a direct referral system as successful as the one operated by the Council. Although landlords in other local authority areas will attend events and training few succeed to the stage of actively accepting direct referrals in respect of their properties without specific incentives, such as grants.
- 5.33 The main issue, which has already been highlighted, is that the majority of households on the Applicant Register claim Local Housing Allowance. In most cases where landlords are willing to accept housing benefit tenants, they set the rent at a level in line with the LHA rates to avoid a shortfall arising and the possibility of arrears. It is very difficult for LHA claimants to access private rented accommodation via lettings agents, as the majority of agents only consider working people, and increasingly many are insisting on a guarantor for the household. It has also been reported that many lettings agents now charge administration fees that claimants of LHA struggle to find. Therefore the Housing Options team provide a service which makes access to private rented accommodation possible for households on low incomes.

#### **Property Accreditation Scheme**

- 5.34 A Property Accreditation Scheme was established in 2004 and was re-launched in November 2011. There are currently 101 properties accredited with several more awaiting inspection. The scheme compliments the work in respect of the private property register and landlords who put forward property to the property register are encouraged to pursue accreditation.
- 5.35 The scheme is property based and a defined set of standards covering the physical conditions of a property must be met. Environmental Health will inspect the property to ensure it meets the necessary standards in accordance with the Housing Act 2004. However checks are also made regarding suitability of the landlord and landlords are given guidance on the general

management of properties to which they are expected to comply. The Scheme is entirely voluntary and free to join. A landlord may submit one or all of their properties for accreditation, and if successful will receive an Accreditation Certificate for each particular property.

- 5.36 In addition to the landlord being recognised publically for having accredited properties, landlords who accept tenants eligible to claim Local Housing Allowance are able to access a designated Housing Benefit Officer to deal with landlord enquiries. This is of particular benefit to those landlords letting via the property register, as the majority of households on the applicant database are unemployed and almost certainly claim LHA.

### Landlord Forum and Other Events

- 5.37 The Housing Options Team has arranged and hosted Landlord Forums since 1998. The Team currently host two forums a year, in spring and autumn, and they always attract a good attendance of up to 40 landlords each time. The meetings are held in the evenings at the Civic Centre and consist of guest speakers who cover a range of topics. Representatives from both Housing Benefit and Environmental Health regularly attend to provide information on changes in legislation or best practice. Companies from the private sector also regularly attend, and include Price Waterhouse Coopers and Manby Bowdler Solicitors.
- 5.38 Mandy Bygrave, the current West Midlands Representative for the National Landlords Association (NLA), commented that ***“Although nearly all local authorities have long since recognised the benefit of forging a ‘good relationship’ with landlords in their local area; it is recognised by myself and my predecessor at the NLA that Cannock Chase Council have for many years been exceptionally proactive in promoting a credible and effective partnership with the private rented sector in Cannock Chase, both with the Landlord Forum, which has always attracted good attendances, and by also providing easier access to the private sector via the property register. Since my appointment last year, I am very pleased to continue to support and attend the forum meetings on a regular basis. With more and more people renting rather than buying it has never been more important for local authorities to work with landlords by promoting good working practices and initiatives for both landlords and tenants”***.
- 5.39 The last landlord forum was held on 13 November 2012. Invited guest speakers included: Mandy Bygrave (National Landlords Association) who talked about the Green Deal; Ian Halton (National Association for Professional Inspectors and Testers) who spoke about Electrical Safety in the Private Rented Sector; and David Willmore (Housing Benefit team) who talked about Welfare Reform.
- 5.40 The Housing Options Team also organises ‘bite size’ half day training sessions for landlords, which have proved very popular. Discussions with Stafford Borough Council are underway to consider jointly providing landlord training, with plans for one session in each Council area. The topics under

consideration include housing benefit, notice and repossession procedures, and Gas and Electrical Safety. The sessions will be free of charge and help to reinforce the information provided at the Landlord Forums.

- 5.41 A Housing Options promotional event was recently held at Morrisons Supermarket in Rugeley. The purpose of the event was to promote the Council's advice services that are available to local residents either in sustaining or securing accommodation, entitlement to welfare benefits and the process of applying for Council housing. Staff from the Housing Benefit and the Tenancy Services department also participated. The event at Rugeley was the second of three events, the first one being held at the Cannock Asda supermarket in December 2011. It is proposed that a further event will be held at the new Tesco Supermarket in Hednesford next year. The general consensus of opinion from shoppers was positive, in respect of the Council going out into the community to promote and inform residents of the help and assistance that is available.

#### **Landlord Incentive Scheme**

- 5.42 Cabinet on 21 June 2012 Cabinet agreed a Landlord Support Scheme funded through the Government Homelessness Prevention Grant resources. The scheme is intended to encourage landlords to offer an assured shorthold tenancy for a minimum of 12 months to a homeless applicant nominated by the Local Authority, providing the property is considered suitable and affordable for the household. An offer of a 12 month private sector tenancy enables the Council to discharge its homelessness duty under section 193 of the Housing Act 1996.
- 5.43 The scheme will act as a safety net for landlords in the event that the tenancy 'breaks down' and repossession action is the only alternative. In short, the scheme will underwrite both the costs of entering a case into County Court and of 2 months or 8 weeks rent arrears where incurred during the fixed term of the tenancy. The Landlord Support Scheme will be managed by the Housing Options Team, who will endeavour to utilise the properties made available by landlords via the Private Property Register.

#### **Cannock Chase Churches Housing Coalition**

- 5.44 The Cannock Chase Churches Housing Coalition (CCCHC) is a registered charity who assist households that have secured the offer of a property within the private rented sector but need financial assistance with the 'up front' costs. Their Scheme comprises two elements:
- (a) Rent advance bridging loan scheme; and
  - (b) Deposit guarantee against loss and damage to property.
- 5.45 The Rent Advance is a bridging loan paid directly to the landlord/agent on behalf of the tenant to cover the first four weeks rent required by the landlord before the tenant can move into a property. It is not a deposit (which is repaid at the end of a tenancy) but a short term loan to enable the tenant to move in and is to be repaid to the Coalition by the landlord once the rent has been paid

by the tenant. The rent advance loan only covers the rent which is eligible for LHA.

- 5.46 The Deposit Guarantee provides a written contract of guarantee against loss or damage to the landlord's property. It is not a guarantee against loss of rent. The guarantee is limited to the sum stated in the contract and is not more than the equivalent of four weeks rent. The contract is initially for six months, but can be extended at the end of the period, at the request of the landlord/agent. The CCCHC will also offer a cash deposit in some circumstances, subject to their budget and only when it is appropriate to do so.
- 5.47 Customers approach the CCCHC directly or are referred by the Housing Options team. The CCCHC liaise with the landlord and tenant to offer assistance by offering a rent advance loan and/or a deposit guarantee. The majority of landlords in the District ask for one month's rent in advance and an equivalent amount for a cash deposit. For example, a landlord of a two bedroom property requests a £500 cash deposit and one month's rent advance of £500; £1000 in total. Most households find it difficult (if not impossible) to provide the £1,000 'up front' payment and the scheme is crucial to enable households on low incomes to access private rented accommodation.
- 5.48 As with the Private Rented Property Register and the Property Accreditation Scheme, the Environmental Health team will inspect the property to see that it meets the necessary standards of the HHSRS. The property is inspected before the CCCHC provide either the rent advance or deposit guarantee and before the tenant moves into the property. The CCCHC and the Council want to ensure that households are only entering accommodation that is safe and of a good standard.
- 5.49 The Scheme is operated by volunteers, who work "a couple" of mornings each week. The CCCHC have a successful partnership with the Housing Options team, and the Council provide them with office space in the Civic Centre, and funding support. For 2012/13 £5,000 from the Government Homelessness Prevention Fund was allocated to the CCCHC.
- 5.50 During 2011/12 the CCCHC assisted 47 households to obtain private rented accommodation. A further 16 households have been assisted during 2012/13 to 30 September. The scheme complements the private rented sector work carried out by the Housing Options Team and in many cases once a successful referral has been made via the private property register the same person then receives financial assistance from the CCCHC to enable them to access the property.

#### **Enforcement and Statutory Duties**

- 5.51 The majority of landlords follow the procedure for bringing a tenancy to an end by the correct service of notice and obtaining a possession order from the local County Court. As a result there are very few cases where enforcement action is required. However, in cases where a complaint is made by the tenant that a landlord is harassing or has carried out an illegal eviction, the matter is

investigated by the Housing Options Team. In cases where the landlord's action is considered to constitute a criminal offence under the Protection from Eviction Act 1977, the Council has powers to prosecute the landlord.

- 5.52 Whilst responsibility for dealing with empty homes lies primarily with Environmental Health (Private Sector) Team, the Housing Options Team contributed to bringing 7 empty properties back into use during 2011/12, by encouraging owners to rent out their property. The Housing Options team keep a database of long term empty homes which is updated every month from Council Tax records. Letters are sent out to owners advising that advice and assistance is available if they wish to consider renting the property to a private tenant. Empty property owners that express an interest in renting out their property then receive an information pack, which contains information on a range of subjects that a prospective landlord needs to know when renting out their properties. The Council Tax Department also include the Housing Options Team contact details on mail shots that are sent out informing owners of changes to legislation or charges. A further report in relation to private sector empty properties will be reported to Housing Policy Development Committee on 19 March 2013 which will cover the Council's empty property work in more detail.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

The 2012-13 net controllable Budget for the Housing Strategy service is £247,450 which delivers the Council's services mentioned in the report and includes the Housing Options Team.

The 2012-13 net controllable Budget for the Homelessness and Housing Advice service is £25,700 and includes expenditure and grant funding associated with the Council's homelessness elements of the services mentioned in this report.

### **6.2 Legal**

The legal implications are set out in the report.

### **6.3 Human Resources**

None

### **6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)**

None

### **6.5 Human Rights Act**

None

**6.6 Data Protection**

None

**6.7 Risk Management**

None

**6.8 Equality & Diversity**

None

**6.9 Best Value**

Considering the economic, efficiency and effectiveness of social value; all the services offered by the Council are free of charge and therefore offer best value to the customer. Many people are assisted in entering affordable accommodation that would otherwise not be a viable option.

**7 Appendices to the Report**

None

**Previous Consideration**  
Cabinet 21 June 2012: Discharge of Homelessness Duty – Landlord Support Scheme.

**Background Papers**  
None