

REPORT TO CABINET

REPORT OF: Head of Housing Services

REPORT NO. HSG158

DATE: 4th April 2005

TITLE:	Private Sector Accreditation Scheme
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COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Cllr. Peter Martin-Mayhew / Housing
CORPORATE PRIORITY:	Support to Vulnerable Persons - A Diversity - A Access to Services - A Anti Social Behaviour - A Affordable Housing - B
CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:	By working with landlords and managing agents we will be able to assist them in dealing with anti social behaviour issues.
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:	The Accreditation Scheme will be subject to these provisions.
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	Accreditation Network UK(ANUK) - National Model Accreditation Scheme ANUK - Key Good Practice Points DETR - Voluntary Accreditation for Private Landlords, No. 114 2001

1. INTRODUCTION OR SUMMARY

In June 2002 an initial meeting of the Landlords Forum for private sector landlords and managing agents was held. A follow-up meeting was held in October 2003. Since then the group has met on a regular basis, working to improve standards in the private rented sector and the next step in that work is a voluntary Accreditation Scheme for private landlords.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet endorses and approves the establishment of the South Kesteven Private Sector Accreditation Scheme.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

Accreditation of private landlords is supported by central government as a way of promoting self-regulation and the improvement of standards in the private rented sector.

The proposed Accreditation Scheme, which is attached as Appendix 1, has been designed with advice from ANUK and also input and consultation with Lincolnshire Trading Standards, the Rent Service, Lincolnshire Fire & Rescue Service and the landlords and letting agents in the district.

A unique feature of the proposed Accreditation Scheme is that managing agents are incorporated within the scheme, whereas the norm is for such a scheme only to apply to individual landlords. The purpose in doing so is to increase the coverage of the scheme and to recognise the very important contribution to be made by managing agents.

The key parts of the Accreditation Scheme are:

Property Standards

The Accreditation Scheme standards are considerably higher than the current fitness standard as detailed in S604 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended). The accreditation standard represents good practice in the private rented sector.

Management Standards

Fair and equal treatment of tenants with written tenancy agreements, including written details for the return of deposits and repair contacts and procedures.

Benefits for Accredited Landlords and Agents

The benefits available include greater access to support from housing benefit and the trading standards service. I am also currently negotiating discounts with local suppliers for services used by landlords and agents, i.e. key cutting, access to builders materials, etc.

Self-Regulation

The Accreditation Scheme proposes that a Steering Committee be established by the accredited landlords and managing agents and that that Steering Committee also acts as a complaints and regulation panel, ensuring compliance with the standards of the scheme.

Procedure

The procedure would be that a landlord or managing agent applying to be accredited would need to complete the necessary application form, providing details of the properties for which they sought accreditation. Initial indications from talking to landlords and letting agents are that interest is high and that in excess of 1,000 properties could be accredited in a short period of time.

On receipt of the application form, a membership card will be issued along with a certificate for display in the accredited properties. The logo proposed for the Accreditation Scheme will also be available to accredited landlords and agents for them to display as part of their marketing and publicity.

To ensure compliance with the scheme it is proposed that a sample of properties will be inspected each year to ensure that the standards of the Accreditation Scheme are being met and that the principles of self-regulation are working to the benefit of the community.

There is no request for additional resources to administer the proposed scheme.

4. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND ASSESSED

An alternative course of action would be not to introduce an Accreditation Scheme but to continue with the Landlords Forum and to promote good practice through that Fora. The difficulty is that the landlords and agents are keen on accreditation because such a scheme would differentiate them for the high standards they operate. It also demonstrates their commitment to working in partnership with the District Council. If the Accreditation Scheme was not actively considered then it is likely that interest would wane in the Landlords Forum.

5. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND STRATEGIC RESOURCES

To be supplied at the meeting.

6. COMMENTS OF CORPORATE MANAGER, DEMOCRATIC AND LEGAL SERVICES (MONITORING OFFICER)

To be supplied at the meeting.

7. COMMENTS OF OTHER RELEVANT SERVICE MANAGER

To be supplied at the meeting.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The approval and development of a Landlord Accreditation Scheme would be a valuable step forward in relation to the private rented sector that clearly links to Council Corporate Objectives. The willingness of the landlords and agents to work with the District Council on this scheme presents an ideal opportunity to promote partnership working.

9. CONTACT OFFICER

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