

Present: Councillor McLaren (Chair)
Councillors Ghafoor and Iqbal

Also in Attendance:

Rhys Attwell	Constitutional Services
Neil Crabtree	Head of Service - Public Protection
Nasir Dad	Director of Environment
Elaine Taylor	Cabinet Member for Housing and Licensing

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were apologies for absence received from Cllr Ibrahim, Cllr Williamson and Cllr Moores.

2 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There was no Public Questions received

5 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS PLACE, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY BOARD MEETING**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

6 **SELECTIVE LICENSING OF PRIVATE LANDLORDS**

The Selective Licensing of Private Landlords presentation delivered by Cabinet Member for Housing and Licensing Elaine Taylor, Director of Environment Nasir Dad, and Head of Public Protection Neil Crabtree.

The purpose of the report and presentation was to provide an update on the progress of phase 1 of the Selective Licensing Scheme, which had commenced in specific neighbourhoods of the Borough from the 4th July 2022. In addition, the report also outlined the statutory consultation timescales and process prior to consideration of Phase 2 of the scheme.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Licensing stated that this report which looked at the selective licensing of private landlords was important for the standard of housing in Oldham, with this being a local solution to a national crisis.

Members heard that a secondary aim of the report was to find a middle ground where the Oldham Council could better support landlords and tenants alike, as there continues to be a surge in privately rented properties.

Members were informed that the figures provided in the presentation were from the Office of National Statistics.

Members were advised that the 5-year scheme would be looking at selective licensing of private landlords. At the time of the meeting the Council had received 667 applications, 474 intentions to licence had been issued, and 264 condition audits had been actioned.

Members were asked to note that Oldham Council had met the low housing demand criteria, with below 20% of the borough's private privately rented stock.

Members noted the benefits of Selective Licensing of Private Landlords, noting that the scheme allowed for inspection of properties, how a landlord manages conditions in properties, how tenants behave in said properties and being able to identify the most vulnerable who do not report issues for various reasons.

The Committee recognised that Landlords would pay for the scheme and services which were on offer, and that this could be counted as a cost for tax purposes.

Members noted the ambition of Selective Licensing of Private Landlords scheme, with approximately 1800 properties within the scheme since it started on 4th July 2022, with the scheme expected to last for five years.

In addition, it was noted by Members that there was a need to consult with the Greater Manchester Mayor as well as GMCA who had provided £75k which was intended to fund data analysis and the consultation work necessary to explore phase 2 option in other locations within Oldham.

Members heard that Phase 2 preparation work was currently underway with a timeline being provided from 1st April 2024 until 30th September 2024. The consultants were looking at the following: the data for other phase 2 locations and produce a report based upon the findings, to design and implement a consultation process, to produce a final report for submission to Cabinet. The Committee were advised that if this were to be approved by Cabinet then implementation of Phase 2 would take place from March 2025.

Members asked questions concerning Housing Associations, and if they would have to operate to the same standard as Private Landlords. The answer given in response was that Housing Associations were exempt from the selective licensing scheme, but the strategic housing team would hold them to account on any issues which may arise.

The Head of Public Protection urged Members to come to them with any issues concerning Housing Associations, so it may be dealt with accordingly.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Licensing noted the differences between Housing Associations and Private Landlords but insisted that it was right to raise issues which may have happened with Housing Associations.

Members asked if there was a policy in place for a time period a property under the Selective Licensing Scheme would be inspected. In response the answer provided to Members was that there would be one inspection within the five years however there would be no precise time within those five years for the inspection to take place. In addition, it was stated that on the basis of complaints, it would be passed onto other agencies for appropriate inspection.

It was also noted that under the “Renter Reform Bill” there had been suggestions of a Landlord Portal, which would allow access to Landlords information and the locations of properties which would be rented.

The Director for Environment noted that as part of the Selective Licensing Scheme, it would be easier to identify what problems there may be with housing, especially in relation to vulnerable tenants.

Members asked about issues around staffing, raising concerns that two inspectors and two analysts might not be sufficient. In response to questioning around staffing, it was noted that the two officers had been brought in from other teams, with the purpose of having the right skillset for the job. The Business Support Officer would be conducting the analytical side of the process. In addition, it was noted that funding was not an issue, however obtaining employees with specific skills and experience for the occupation had been an issue.

Members were concerned that 1,800 properties might be too many for only four council staff to manage. The Director of Environment stated that there was an effect on the enforcement team if Landlords do not engage in the Selective Licensing Scheme. However, it was noted that at the moment there was capacity to respond and the potential of recruiting new staff members.

Members asked how council tax fraudulent crimes would be dealt with. It was responded that this would be an issue for the treasury not the enforcement team.

Members asked if there had been any progress on the standardised tenant agreements. The response was that there had been some Landlords who are doing this, however they have had to pay privately. It was noted that many landlords in Oldham are only owners of one or two houses and do not have massive property portfolios.

Members asked if charging £580 for the Selective Licensing Scheme was cost effective for Landlords. The response was that it was an excellent value for money over a five-year period, and

it was recognised as an expense, which does come with great benefits.

In response to the question concerning whether Landlords could pay the fee over a five-year period, it was advised that it would be difficult to split over a five-year period due to staffing and resources. In addition, Members were informed that the fee was split over two parts, with the goal of encompassing both phases of the selective Landlord Scheme.

Members asked questions concerning which areas would be involved in phase 2 of the scheme and were informed that a report would be produced which would rank the locations in Oldham to work out the targeted areas for Phase 2.

In response to questions around whether the consultant for Phase 2 would be a single person, Members were informed that the Consultant was operating as a private company that would be working on the project for 25 weeks.

The Chair asked for an update to take place in the near future, with an a further updated suggested for October 2024.

Resolved: that the Place, Economic Growth and Environment Scrutiny Board Committee

- 1) Note the progress achieved as part of Phase 1 Selective Licensing scheme.
- 2) Note the proposals and timelines outlined for Phase 2 expansion.

7 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

The Chair reported that there was no Key Decision Document related to this meeting.

8 **RULE 13 AND 14**

The Chair noted that there was no Rule 13 and 14 relating to this meeting.

The meeting started at 6:00pm and ended at 7:04pm.