

<b>Item No.</b> 16.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 14 June 2022	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Cabinet
<b>Report title:</b>		Report of the Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission: Licencing in the private rented sector	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That cabinet note the recommendations from the housing and community engagement scrutiny commission arising from the scrutiny review of licencing in the private rented sector, paragraphs 6 to 10.
2. That cabinet request that the relevant cabinet member reports back to cabinet on the recommendations within eight weeks.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. At its meeting on 23 November 2021 the housing and community engagement scrutiny commission received a report from Cabinet member for a Safer Cleaner Borough on private rented housing. The commission also received a presentation from the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Manager, and Director of Environment and Leisure on private rented housing, including licencing and the renter's union.
4. At the same meeting the commission asked questions and had discussions around the evidence base for phase of the new pilot scheme, previous licencing scheme running from 2016 to 2020, and classification of properties in different designations, assessments, non-compliance and appeals process of the Gold Standard Charter.
5. The commission considered and agreed the set of recommendations at its meeting on 24 March 2022. The rationale and commission recommendations are set out in paragraphs 6 to 10.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Set out below are the recommendations of the housing and community engagement scrutiny commission.

6. It would add great value to this new pilot scheme under the Gold Standard

Charter to use the properties in the previous private rented scheme (2016 - 2020) as an evidence base. The council needs to ensure that the properties covered under the previous scheme are not at a detriment. An assessment of the impact of the areas that are now out of legislation and not included in the 20% for this new pilot scheme needs to be carried out, it is critical to ensure conditions have not deteriorated in such properties affecting the welfare of the renters.

Recommendation 1 - The Cabinet Member asks officers to carry out an assessment of the impact on the private rented sector which once fell under regulation (between 2016 and 2020) but is now outside of regulation. The Cabinet should also review whether housing conditions have deteriorated as a result of this and also develop a roadmap to bring further wards within the scope of the new Private Rented Sector (PRS) scheme, particularly those areas covered by the 2016-2020 regulations.

7. In light of the recent influx of refugees from Ukraine and other parts of the world who are trying to escape war and terror from oppressive and fascist regimes, it is urgent that the council includes landlords that offer affordable housing to refugees under their new licencing scheme, giving them a reduction in the licencing fee as an incentive as proposed under the Gold Standard Charter.

Recommendation 2 - Landlords who apply for the current “gold standard” license receive a reduction in their fee as an incentive. The Cabinet Member should extend this incentive to landlords who offer affordable housing to refugees arriving in the borough. This recommendation is clearly of a more urgent nature because of recent tragic developments in Ukraine.

8. It is important that the council look at empty homes with regards to length of time and reasons for vacancy such as demise of occupants, it would be financially beneficial for the council to follow-up with landlords of empty homes.

Recommendation 3 - The Cabinet Member considers extending landlord licencing to cover inhabitable homes that have been empty for more than three months. Some elements will not be relevant to them but extension of those elements which could help tackle negative environmental impacts and discourage landlords from leaving homes empty.

9. In order to ensure the successful delivery of phase one and phase two of the pilot licencing scheme, it's imperative that thorough testing of the processes is carried out in phase one. Therefore, it's crucial to have additional resources to carry out the required tasks especially with regards to environmental health officers in housing enforcement. The council should also strive to provide better customer experience for landlords through online applications.

Recommendation 4 - During our scrutiny of this issue it became clear that

shortages of, and difficulties recruiting environmental health officers in housing enforcement was a risk to Southwark's plans for extending licencing. The Cabinet Member should work with the Leader and Cabinet colleagues to investigate what steps could be taken via the council's HR processes to strengthen Southwark's recruitment in this area.

10. Given the climate emergency it would also add value to include the energy efficiency of private rented homes in the licencing scheme.

Recommendation 5 - The Cabinet member considers that the rental properties having a higher ranking on their energy performance certificate receive a reduction in their licencing fees to encourage landlords to improve energy efficiencies of their properties.

11. It is for the cabinet to decide whether or not to accept the scrutiny commission's recommendations.
12. Overview and scrutiny procedure rule 15.3 requires the cabinet to consider and provide a written response to the report within two months.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 23 November 2021	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva <a href="mailto:Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk">Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=551&amp;MId=7029&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=551&amp;MId=7029&amp;Ver=4</a> (see item 5)		
Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission agenda and minutes- 24 March 2022	Southwark Council Website	Amit Alva <a href="mailto:Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk">Amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk</a>
<b>Link (please copy and paste into browser):</b> <a href="https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=551&amp;MId=7031&amp;Ver=4">https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=551&amp;MId=7031&amp;Ver=4</a> (see item 7)		

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Member</b>	Councillor Gavin Edwards, Chair, Housing and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission		
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny		
<b>Report Author</b>	Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer		
<b>Version</b>	Final		
<b>Dated</b>	30 May 2022		
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No		
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>			
	<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
	Director of Law and Governance	No	No
	Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
	<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
	<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>		30 May 2022