

Overview and Scrutiny



Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task and Finish Group

Agenda

Thursday, 21 September 2023

7.00 pm,

Civic Suite

Lewisham Town Hall

London SE6 4RU

For more information contact: Nidhi Patil (nidhi.patil@lewisham.gov.uk)

This meeting is an open meeting and all items on the agenda may be audio recorded and/or filmed.

Part 1

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Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task and Finish Group Members

Members of the committee, listed below, are summoned to attend the meeting to be held on Thursday, 21 September 2023.

Jeremy Chambers, Monitoring Officer
Wednesday, 13 September 2023

Members Councillor Bill Brown Councillor Will Cooper Councillor Jack Lavery Councillor Rosie Parry Councillor Sakina Sheikh	
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Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task and Finish Group

Declarations of Interest

Date: 21 September 2023

Key decision: No

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Jeremy Chambers (Director of Law and Corporate Governance)

Outline and recommendations

Members are asked to declare any personal interest they have in any item on the agenda.

1. Summary

1.1. Members must declare any personal interest they have in any item on the agenda. There are three types of personal interest referred to in the Council's Member Code of Conduct:

- (1) Disclosable pecuniary interests
- (2) Other registerable interests
- (3) Non-registerable interests.

1.2. Further information on these is provided in the body of this report.

2. Recommendation

2.1. Members are asked to declare any personal interest they have in any item on the agenda.

3. Disclosable pecuniary interests

3.1 These are defined by regulation as:

- (a) Employment, trade, profession or vocation of a relevant person* for profit or gain
- (b) Sponsorship –payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than by the Council) within the 12 months prior to giving notice for inclusion in the register in

respect of expenses incurred by you in carrying out duties as a member or towards your election expenses (including payment or financial benefit from a Trade Union).

- (c) Undischarged contracts between a relevant person* (or a firm in which they are a partner or a body corporate in which they are a director, or in the securities of which they have a beneficial interest) and the Council for goods, services or works.
- (d) Beneficial interests in land in the borough.
- (e) Licence to occupy land in the borough for one month or more.
- (f) Corporate tenancies – any tenancy, where to the member's knowledge, the Council is landlord and the tenant is a firm in which the relevant person* is a partner, a body corporate in which they are a director, or in the securities of which they have a beneficial interest.
- (g) Beneficial interest in securities of a body where:
 - (a) that body to the member's knowledge has a place of business or land in the borough; and
 - (b) either:
 - (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or 1/100 of the total issued share capital of that body; or
 - (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person* has a beneficial interest exceeds 1/100 of the total issued share capital of that class.

*A relevant person is the member, their spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom they live as spouse or civil partner.

4. Other registerable interests

4.1 The Lewisham Member Code of Conduct requires members also to register the following interests:

- (a) Membership or position of control or management in a body to which you were appointed or nominated by the Council
- (b) Any body exercising functions of a public nature or directed to charitable purposes, or whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy, including any political party
- (c) Any person from whom you have received a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £25.

5. Non registerable interests

5.1. Occasions may arise when a matter under consideration would or would be likely to affect the wellbeing of a member, their family, friend or close associate more than it would affect the wellbeing of those in the local area generally, but which is not required to be registered in the Register of Members' Interests (for example a matter concerning the closure of a school at which a Member's child attends).

6. Declaration and impact of interest on members' participation

- 6.1. Where a member has any registerable interest in a matter and they are present at a meeting at which that matter is to be discussed, they must declare the nature of the interest at the earliest opportunity and in any event before the matter is considered. The declaration will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. If the matter is a disclosable pecuniary interest the member must take not part in consideration of the matter and withdraw from the room before it is considered. They must not seek improperly to influence the decision in any way. **Failure to declare such an interest which has not already been entered in the Register of Members' Interests, or participation where such an interest exists, is liable to prosecution and on conviction carries a fine of up to £5000**
- 6.2. Where a member has a registerable interest which falls short of a disclosable pecuniary interest they must still declare the nature of the interest to the meeting at the earliest opportunity and in any event before the matter is considered, but they may stay in the room, participate in consideration of the matter and vote on it unless paragraph 6.3 below applies.
- 6.3. Where a member has a registerable interest which falls short of a disclosable pecuniary interest, the member must consider whether a reasonable member of the public in possession of the facts would think that their interest is so significant that it would be likely to impair the member's judgement of the public interest. If so, the member must withdraw and take no part in consideration of the matter nor seek to influence the outcome improperly.
- 6.4. If a non-registerable interest arises which affects the wellbeing of a member, their, family, friend or close associate more than it would affect those in the local area generally, then the provisions relating to the declarations of interest and withdrawal apply as if it were a registerable interest.
- 6.5. Decisions relating to declarations of interests are for the member's personal judgement, though in cases of doubt they may wish to seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer.

7. Sensitive information

- 7.1. There are special provisions relating to sensitive interests. These are interests the disclosure of which would be likely to expose the member to risk of violence or intimidation where the Monitoring Officer has agreed that such interest need not be registered. Members with such an interest are referred to the Code and advised to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer in advance.

8. Exempt categories

- 8.1. There are exemptions to these provisions allowing members to participate in decisions notwithstanding interests that would otherwise prevent them doing so. These include:-
 - (a) Housing – holding a tenancy or lease with the Council unless the matter relates to your particular tenancy or lease; (subject to arrears exception)
 - (b) School meals, school transport and travelling expenses; if you are a parent or guardian of a child in full time education, or a school governor unless the matter relates particularly to the school your child attends or of which you are a governor
 - (c) Statutory sick pay; if you are in receipt
 - (d) Allowances, payment or indemnity for members

- (e) Ceremonial honours for members
- (f) Setting Council Tax or precept (subject to arrears exception).

9. Report author and contact

- 9.1. Jeremy Chambers, Director of Law and Corporate Governance-
Jeremy.Chambers@lewisham.gov.uk , 0208 31 47648



Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task and Finish Group

Scoping Report

Date: 21 September 2023

Key decision: No

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Director of Law and Corporate Governance (Nidhi Patil, Scrutiny Manager)

Outline and recommendations

This report defines the role of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Lewisham Task and Finish Group (TFG) and outlines the scope of the work it will carry out.

Members of the TFG are asked to:

- consider and comment on the content of the report.
- define the Group's intended outcomes.
- agree the Group's key lines of enquiry.
- agree a timetable for the completion of this work.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

The subject of this TFG was proposed by Councillor Will Cooper.

The subject and membership of the TFG were agreed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the 4th of July 2023.

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report asks the members of the Task and Finish Group to consider the scope of its work and define its intended outcomes.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Members of the TFG are asked to:
- consider and comment on the content of the report.

- define the Group’s intended outcomes (Section 7).
- agree the Group’s key lines of enquiry (Section 6).
- agree a timetable for the completion of this work (Section 12).

3. The role of the Task and Finish Group

- 3.1. The role of this Task and Finish Group (TFG) is to understand how the Council can enhance its services for, and communication and interaction with, private renters in Lewisham. With a clear focus on the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Lewisham, the TFG aims to gain insight into prevailing challenges and examine the existing support provided to residents in the PRS to identify areas for potential improvements. The TFG also intends to explore and utilise benchmarking and good practices from other councils, with the purpose of enhancing the services within Lewisham’s PRS.
- 3.2. The proforma for the TFG, written by the proposing Councillor, is attached as Appendix A.

4. Context

London’s Private Rented Sector Landscape

- 4.1. London’s Private Rented Sector (PRS) has witnessed a substantial surge since the 1990s, with the number of private renters reaching approximately 2.7 million as of 2021 (Census, 2021). Privately rented properties now account for 30% of homes in London, much higher than the national average of just over 20%¹.

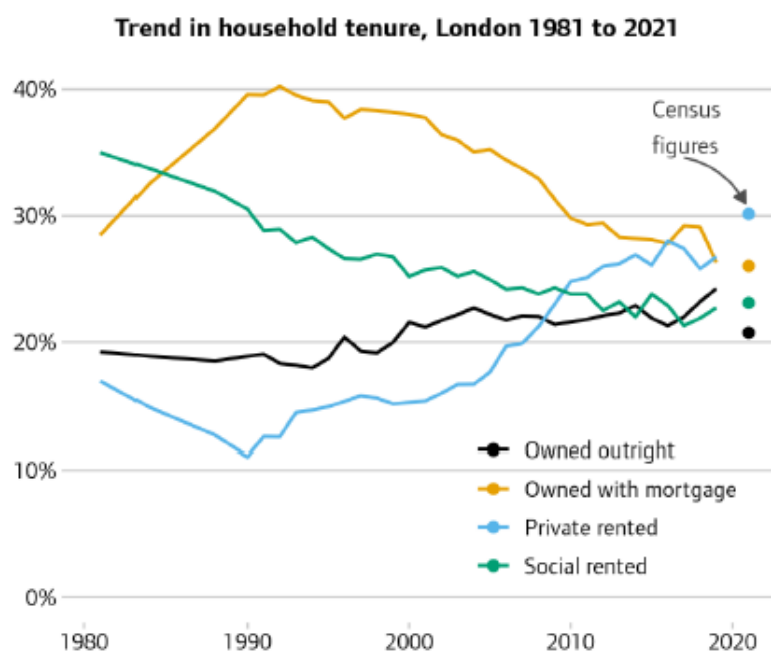


Figure 1- Data from Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey, ONS

- 4.2. However, a rise in demand for housing in the PRS hasn’t translated to a rise in supply; in fact, it’s quite the opposite. Market data reveals that demand for rental properties reached record levels in late 2021 and continued its upward trajectory in 2022, following dramatic declines during pandemic lockdown. But the number of private rental properties available in London has experienced a

¹ [Supply of Private Rented Sector Accommodation in London](#)

substantial decrease since the mid-2020s, leaving the supply significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels². This disconcerting trend calls attention to the challenges faced by private renters.

- 4.3. One of the consequences of the decreased housing supply in the PRS has been the sharp increase in rental prices, creating an affordability crisis for private renters which has contributed considerably to the cost-of-living crisis. In the period spanning February 2022 to February 2023, annual rental growth in London reached an astounding 15%, with asking rents in February 2023 surging nearly 20% higher than they were in March 2020¹.

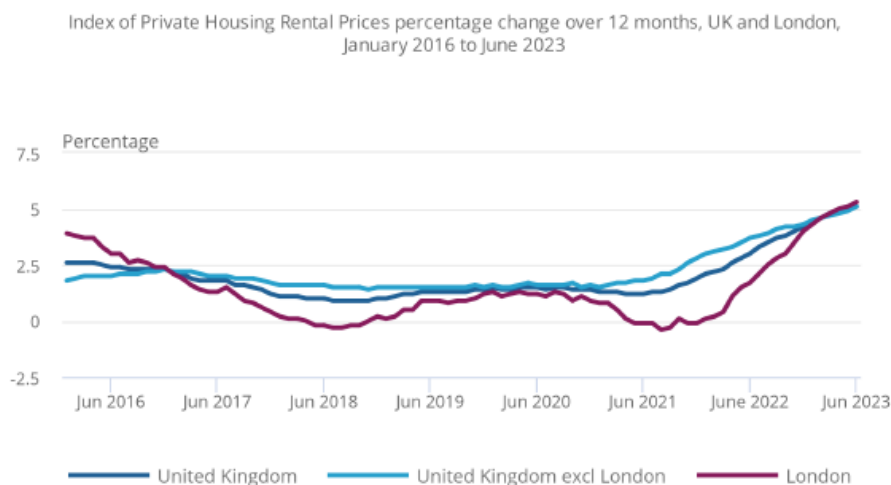


Figure 2- The UK annual private rental price percentage change rose to 5.1% in the 12 months to June 2023

- 4.4. Alongside the surge in rent prices, the quality of housing in the PRS has become a growing concern. In 2021, the PRS exhibited the highest proportion of non-decent homes, standing at 23%. Of particular alarm is the sector's highest prevalence of Category 1 hazards, which pose the greatest risk of serious harm or even death. In 2021, 9% of occupied dwellings in England had a Category 1 hazard. Notably, these hazards were more prevalent in PRS properties, accounting for 14% of them, compared to 10% in owner-occupied homes and 4% in the social rented sector³.
- 4.5. In addition to the escalating rent prices and concerning housing quality within the PRS, another pressing issue that tenants face is tenancy insecurity and a lack of long-term stability. Many renters in the PRS are burdened with short-term leases and often endure uncertainty about lease renewal, leading to stress and hindering their sense of home and belonging. This instability leaves individuals and families vulnerable to sudden rent increases and even eviction, underscoring the need for PRS reforms to secure tenants' rights.

Private Rented Sector in Lewisham

- 4.6. The growth in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Lewisham over the past two decades has mirrored the broader trend observed across London. As per the findings of the Housing Stock and Stressors Report⁴ and the Office for National Statistics, the PRS in Lewisham has grown from 24% in 2011 to 31% in 2021, marking a remarkable increase of around 30% over the course of a

² [Understanding recent rental trends in London's private rented market](#)

³ [English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: headline report](#)

⁴ [Housing Stock and Stressors Report, Metastreet, 2021](#)

decade.

- 4.7. Based on Lewisham Council's Housing Strategy 2020-26⁵, the number of households relying on the PRS has nearly doubled in the past two decades and the rents in the sector have surged by 50% in the last 10 years which has made renting privately less affordable than before.
- 4.8. The rising rents in the PRS and the lack of affordable options has forced individuals and families to compromise on living conditions, exposing them to potential health and safety risks. The PRS in Lewisham has 22.7% of properties with at least one Category 1 hazard, much higher than the national average⁶.
- 4.9. Even after paying exorbitantly high rents and tolerating sub-standard, non-decent properties, renters still face tenancy insecurity. Many tenants choose to bear high rental costs and sub-par living conditions as they are afraid to voice complaints. They fear possible repercussions such as rent increases or receiving a Section 21 notice, which could lead to eviction.
- 4.10. Eviction from an Assured Shorthold Tenancy is the 2nd leading cause of homelessness in Lewisham⁷. Eviction resulting from a Section 21 notice is a subset of this. The possibility of being evicted without reason at 2 months' notice (no-fault Section 21 eviction) puts tenants in a position where they find it uncomfortable to raise their voice against poor living conditions. In 2018, Citizens Advice found that if a tenant complained to their local council, they were 5 times more likely to be evicted using Section 21 than those who stayed silent⁸.

Tenants who receive a section 21 notice are:



Figure 3- Information gathered by a survey conducted by ComRes on behalf of Citizens Advice, 2018

- 4.11. Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to investigate residents' reports of harassment, illegal eviction and disrepair in their properties, and to take action where they find evidence of these issues. But the reluctance of renters in reporting these issues poses significant challenges for local authorities in fulfilling this duty.
- 4.12. A London-wide shortage of socially rented homes has also meant that London boroughs, including Lewisham, have become more reliant on the private rented sector as a means for prevention and relief of homelessness. Since

⁵ [Lewisham's Housing Strategy 2020-26](#)

⁶ [Private Rented Sector Licensing in Lewisham- Evidence for Consultation 2022](#)

⁷ [Emergency Housing at Housing Select Committee- 6th of June 2023](#)

⁸ [Touch and go- How to prevent private renters from retaliatory eviction in England: Citizens Advice](#)

2011, there has been a 45% reduction in the number of social housing lets for households on the housing register in Lewisham⁵ which has led the Council to explore alternative solutions for housing homeless people which includes the PRS. This has further exacerbated the existing pressures and challenges within the sector.

- 4.13. With increasing demand for houses in the PRS, supply is consistently going down as number of properties requested back by landlords has risen by 150% across London. In Lewisham, this meant 181 properties requested back as of March 2023⁷ which is equal to 19% of Lewisham's total leased Temporary Accommodation stock.
- 4.14. While discussing the challenges faced by renters in the PRS, it is also important to acknowledge that responsible and supportive landlords do exist. In addition to its role in homelessness prevention, the PRS is also utilised by the Council for initiatives such as the Refugee Resettlement programme and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. It is imperative to note that the successful implementation of these programmes in Lewisham has been significantly facilitated by the cooperation of conscientious and supportive landlords.
- 4.15. Evaluating the available support and guidance for landlords in the borough will also be an important part of the TFG's work, given their pivotal role in the PRS. The TFG will endeavour to establish interactions with landlords in Lewisham's PRS, with the goal of assessing their access to necessary support and advice.

Lewisham's Present Policies in the Private Rented Sector

- 4.16. With regards to the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Lewisham, current policies encompass a range of initiatives, including licensing schemes and the Council's Private Sector Housing and Enforcement Policy, aimed at ensuring better living standards and stronger tenant protections.
- 4.17. Licensing schemes play a crucial role in regulating the PRS. Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing targets properties with multiple tenants who share facilities, ensuring that landlords meet specific safety and management standards. On the other hand, Selective licensing covers single-occupancy properties and aims to improve property management, tenant safety and the overall condition of the rented homes in specific designated areas.
- 4.18. There are 2 licensing schemes for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in Lewisham-
 - the National Mandatory Scheme
 - a Lewisham Additional Scheme
- 4.19. Under the National Mandatory Scheme, an HMO must have a mandatory licence if it has five or more people in more than one household and shares amenities such as bathrooms, toilets and cooking facilities.
- 4.20. The Lewisham Additional Licensing Scheme applies to certain HMOs that fall outside the scope of the National Mandatory Scheme⁹.
- 4.21. HMO licensing, including Additional HMO licensing schemes like the Lewisham Additional Scheme, has undoubtedly had a positive impact on addressing some critical housing issues. It has been instrumental in tackling

⁹ [Lewisham Additional Scheme](#)

overcrowding and has promoted better property management. Nonetheless, it's important to acknowledge certain adverse consequences associated with these schemes, such as a potential reduction in rental properties. This has been primarily driven by landlords' hesitation to obtain licenses due to the associated costs. In some instances, landlords of larger properties have resorted to converting them into individual flats to circumvent licensing fees¹⁰. These flats are priced beyond the reach of residents who typically afford rooms in a HMO, catering instead to professionals, thereby significantly impacting the rental market dynamics. The TFG will aim to understand the full impact of the Council's policies on PRS stock and will utilise this understanding to inform its efforts.

- 4.22. Proposals for a Selective Licensing Scheme that would cover nearly all privately rented properties in Lewisham were approved by the Mayor and Cabinet on the 8th of March 2023 and have been submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for final approval.
- 4.23. If approved and implemented, the Selective Licensing Scheme would cover an additional 20,000 privately rented properties in Lewisham that are not covered by the existing licensing schemes.

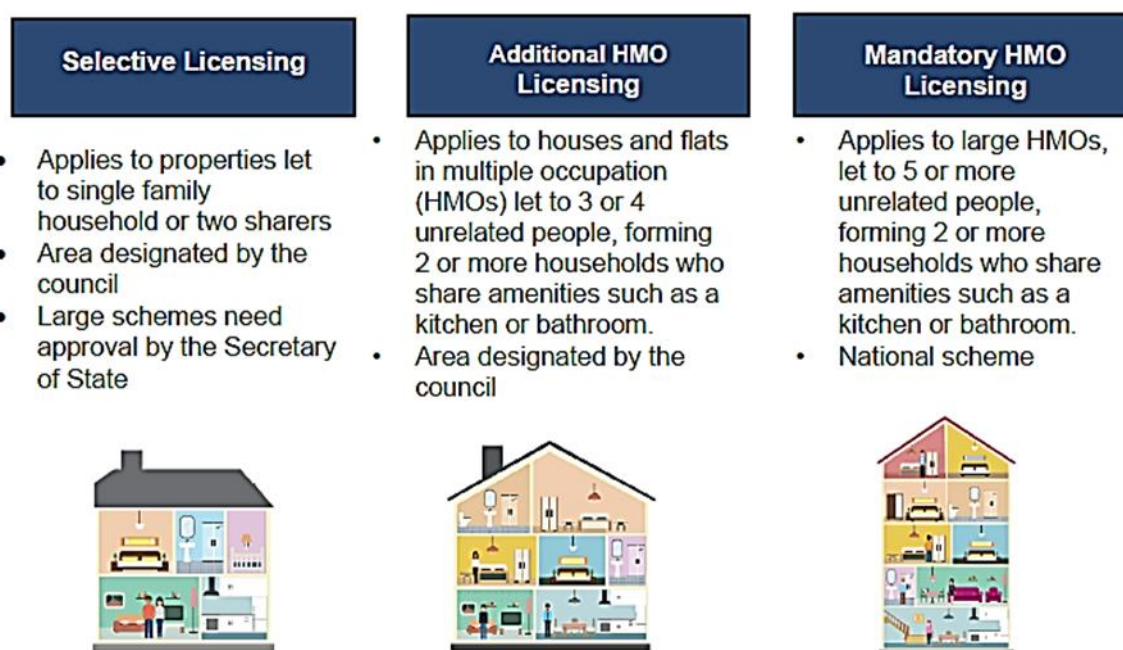


Figure 4- Different property licensing schemes

- 4.24. The Council's Private Sector Housing and Enforcement Policy supports the key objectives of the Housing Strategy 2020-26 and sets out its enforcement objectives. The Council operates a four-level enforcement policy -
- Level 1- Emergency Enforcement (this includes Emergency Prohibition Orders and Emergency works in default)
 - Level 2- Formal Enforcement (this includes serving statutory notices, revoking or varying licenses, issuing civil penalties, referring cases to Council's legal department, etc.)
 - Level 3- Informal Enforcement (this includes providing schedules of

¹⁰ [Private Rented Sector Licensing: Policy and Practice- Future of London](#)

work, writing letters and commencing a dialogue with tenants, landlords and agents)

- Level 4- Information, advice, support and signposting (this includes posting information about the rights and duties of tenants and landlords on the Council's website, providing advice on compliance, assisting those seeking information, etc.)

4.25. It is also useful for the TFG to be informed of the Renters Reform Bill that reached the House of Commons on the 17th of May 2023 and is currently in the Second Reading stage. The TFG received a written briefing as well as a virtual briefing on this Bill from Lewisham Council officers in August 2023. This Bill aims to abolish Section 21 and Assured Shorthold Tenancies which will improve the security of tenure for private renters. The legislative proposal appears to be a significant stride in enhancing and streamlining regulations within the PRS.

4.26. However, it is worth noting that many of the Bill's specifics will be outlined in regulations after the primary legislation has passed so it is difficult to assess the potential impact of key aspects of the proposed legislation. The TFG will closely monitor the progress of this integral legislation as it holds the potential to significantly influence the landscape of PRS.

Lewisham's Corporate Strategy 2022-26

4.27. The work of this Task and Finish Group will be consistent with the Council's policy framework. It supports the achievement of the Corporate Strategy objective of providing 'Quality Housing'.

4.28. In its Corporate Strategy 2022-26, the Council commits to providing more support to renters in the borough through further landlord licensing, enforcement of poorly managed homes, holding landlords to account and giving a voice to renters in the borough.

4.29. The efforts of this Task and Finish Group will contribute significantly to achieving this corporate strategy objective.

Lewisham's Housing Strategy 2020-26

4.30. Lewisham's Housing Strategy 2020-26 sets out its priorities and actions for delivering quality housing in the borough. The priorities listed in the strategy are as follows:

- delivering the homes that Lewisham needs;
- preventing Homelessness and meeting housing need;
- improving the quality, standard and safety of housing;
- supporting our residents to live safe, independent and active lives;
- strengthening communities and embracing diversity.

4.31. The strategy acknowledges the vital role of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in fighting homelessness and overcrowding in the borough, promising to make the best use of the PRS to solve housing need.

4.32. It also acknowledges the current state of the sector with high rents and sub-par living standards and states that ensuring the quality and standard of the PRS is a priority for the Council. It promises to achieve this by:

- expanding Lewisham's licensing regime;

- working with landlords and landlord associations to improve standards and practice across the borough;
 - making the best use of grants and loans for private homeowners to improve the quality and standard of their homes;
 - ensuring private landlords are held accountable for health and safety breaches.
- 4.33. The efforts of this Task and Finish Group will be guided by the Council's Housing Strategy 2020-26, aligning closely with its objectives and providing valuable support towards achieving the strategy's goals.

Lewisham's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-26

- 4.34. One of the key priorities listed in the Council's Housing Strategy 2020-26 is preventing homelessness and meeting housing need. The strategic approach to doing this is outlined in the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-26. In accordance with the approach outlined in this strategy, the Council effectively aids PRS tenants facing Section 21 notices by verifying their validity, thus averting homelessness. The Council's efforts extend to negotiating with landlords initiating evictions and providing essential support to applicants navigating the court process.
- 4.35. Increasingly unaffordable PRS and not enough social homes have contributed massively to the increase in homelessness in the last decade. The strategy acknowledges that due to the scarcity of social and council housing and the lengthy waitlists for accommodation, the Council is increasingly relying on preventing homelessness by supporting people to remain in their PRS properties or supporting them to find alternative PRS accommodation. However, the decrease in supply of PRS properties is hampering the Council's ability to secure alternative housing, giving rise to numerous challenges in the process.
- 4.36. The work of this TFG will be informed by this strategy, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the pivotal role played by the PRS in homelessness prevention. This approach will enable the Group to effectively understand how the challenges within the PRS impact the homelessness and rough sleeping landscape in Lewisham.

5. Areas of Focus for the TFG

Lewisham's Private Rented Sector (PRS) residents face a multitude of challenges. In a proactive effort to address these issues, the TFG will focus its attention on the following overarching themes/ areas:

Improve understanding of current challenges in the sector

- 5.1. By conducting an in-depth investigation, the Task and Finish Group (TFG) will aim to gain a clear understanding of the challenges faced by tenants, landlords and policymakers in the PRS in Lewisham. This comprehensive understanding will serve as a crucial foundation for devising effective solutions to address the issues at hand.
- 5.2. The TFG's approach will involve conducting thorough research and analysis, and most importantly, seeking direct input from tenants, landlords, and advice and support organisations in the borough. The TFG is dedicated to ensuring inclusivity and equity in its research efforts by actively seeking input from all demographic groups and communities. By engaging with all stakeholders, the

TFG will aim to ascertain the true extent of the issues and concerns experienced in the local PRS.

- 5.3. Some challenges such as rising rents and a reduction in housing supply are influenced by national market trends and fall outside of the direct control of the TFG, so the TFG's primary objective will be to identify issues and factors that it can effectively address and influence within its scope.

Evaluating the current support offer for residents in the PRS

- 5.4. The Task and Finish Group (TFG) will aim to evaluate the current support offer for residents in the PRS. By scrutinising the current support infrastructure, the group can ensure that vulnerable tenants are safeguarded, their rights are protected, and their living conditions are conducive to well-being. This evaluation will also help the group to ensure that appropriate support and advice is available to responsible landlords in the borough.
- 5.5. Both tenants and landlords within the PRS should be well-informed about available support mechanisms, understanding that seeking assistance from the local council is a viable option. The TFG will aim to explore whether residents in Lewisham are aware of the existing support mechanisms and what the barriers are to accessing this support. Knowledge of the support available ensures that tenants can access help for issues such as housing quality, tenant rights, and financial challenges, while landlords can receive guidance on legal obligations and dispute regulations.
- 5.6. The TFG will seek to evaluate the extent to which residents in the PRS are informed about the full array of support and guidance at their disposal, spanning from the local council to voluntary sector organisations.



- 5.7. Recognising the constraints of limited resources and capacity within the Council, it will be imperative to assess the potential value of alternative channels of support for residents within the PRS, such as a wide range of support and advocacy organisations in the voluntary sector. The TFG will try to evaluate the presence and scope of such organisations in Lewisham, comprehend the breadth of assistance they provide, their role in addressing gaps in support, and determining ways in which the Council can enhance promotion and effective signposting to maximise the overall support framework for PRS residents.
- 5.8. It will be crucial for the TFG to gain insights into the extent to which the current support system accommodates the varying needs of diverse demographic groups within the PRS. The TFG will aim to discern any existing

gaps in the support landscape, explore avenues for improvement, and consider whether the potential establishment of a permanent renters forum/network could facilitate the exchange of support resources, potentially addressing unmet needs.

Communication with residents in the PRS

- 5.9. In tandem with assessing the existing support provisions for residents in the PRS, the TFG will also seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of how these resources can be more effectively communicated to residents. Local authorities bear certain essential duties and responsibilities concerning the PRS and the TFG also wants to understand how these obligations can be better communicated to residents.
- 5.10. Recognising the paramount significance of clear and accessible communication, the TFG will aim to explore which communication methods resonate most effectively with residents in the PRS.
- 5.11. By engaging in benchmarking and drawing insights from successful practices employed by other councils across England, the TFG is committed to unravelling effective communication strategies tailored to residents within the PRS. This approach will seek to tap into proven methodologies and innovative approaches that have demonstrated efficacy in enhancing resident engagement and information dissemination. Through this exploration, the TFG will aim to identify good practices and adapt them to foster a more transparent, responsive, and supportive communication framework for PRS residents.
- 5.12. By investigating effective ways of communicating with residents in Lewisham's PRS, the TFG will seek to ensure that residents are well informed about the support and resources available to them.

Learning from good practice across England

- 5.13. To investigate how the Council can enhance its services for residents in the PRS, the Task and Finish Group (TFG) will aim to draw insights from and analyse successful case studies from other councils across England, thereby identifying effective approaches.
- 5.14. Engaging with other councils will offer the TFG an opportunity to glean insights from successful practices. Studying how these practices have contributed to positive outcomes will help the TFG acquire a wealth of knowledge that can inform its own strategies and initiatives.
- 5.15. The TFG also wants to actively explore good practice from other councils to determine if Lewisham can enhance proactive enforcement efforts within its limited resource constraints. The TFG understands the inherent challenges of conducting proactive enforcement work within the PRS while grappling with limited resources and is therefore eager to explore how other councils are navigating this complex landscape.
- 5.16. To improve services within the PRS, the TFG will investigate the potential benefits of increased intelligence sharing among councils. By fostering an environment of information exchange, councils can collectively tap into a wealth of insights, experiences, and successful strategies. The collaborative approach will not only empower us to address challenges more effectively but will also promote a unified effort towards elevating standards and ensuring a higher quality of living for residents across the PRS landscape.

6. The TFG's Key Lines of Enquiry

Understanding the current challenges:

- 6.1. What are the most common challenges faced by private renters in the area and are there specific demographic groups or communities that experience unique difficulties in the Private Rented Sector (PRS)?
- 6.2. How do these challenges impact the overall well-being and stability of private renters?
- 6.3. What are the key areas of improvement in Lewisham's PRS according to tenants and landlords?

Evaluating the current support offer for residents in the PRS:

- 6.4. What is the existing support framework for residents in the PRS, and how effectively does it meet their needs?
- 6.5. What are the gaps in the existing support framework and what barriers do PRS residents face when trying to access support services?
- 6.6. How many tenant support and advice organisations exist in Lewisham, and is their utilisation effective in addressing the needs of tenants and landlords in the area?
- 6.7. How can support services be customised to cater to the diverse needs of different private renters, including families, students, seniors, and individuals with specific requirements?
- 6.8. How can the Council support the establishment of a network specifically designed for private renters in Lewisham, in line with its Corporate Strategy 2018-22 commitment?

Enhancing communication channels:

- 6.9. How can we ensure effective communication to inform PRS residents about the Council's responsibilities within the sector?
- 6.10. How can communication between Lewisham Council and PRS residents be improved to effectively convey information about available support services, and what communication channels prove most effective for this purpose?

Learning from successful case studies:

- 6.11. How can we utilise benchmarking and good practice from other councils to improve our services for PRS residents in Lewisham?
- 6.12. Considering the constraints of limited resources, how can the Council draw insights from successful case studies and good practice to develop proactive enforcement initiatives and enhance support services for PRS residents?

7. Nature of expected outcomes

- 7.1. The intended outcomes of this Task and Finish Group's work aim to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges in Lewisham's PRS, enhance the support available to residents, improve communication between the Council and residents in the PRS, and draw lessons from successful experiences across other councils to drive positive change.
- 7.2. The TFG will work with Council officers and stakeholders and consider local and national expertise. The group will use its research and stakeholder engagement work to ensure that:

- the Council has a comprehensive understanding of the most prevalent issues faced by tenants and landlords in the PRS and can understand the specific challenges faced by vulnerable or marginalised groups within the PRS.
- there is an improved understanding of the regulatory gaps and enforcement challenges that affect PRS in Lewisham for all stakeholders.
- there is an assessment of the effectiveness of the existing support services provided to PRS residents by the Council as well as by other advice and support organisations in the borough, including financial assistance, legal aid, and housing advice.
- the Council can identify the gaps in the support system for PRS residents, particularly for under-served populations and propose solutions for addressing these gaps.
- collaboration and coordination amongst various agencies and organisations involved in supporting PRS residents is evaluated in order to enhance the overall effectiveness of services provided to PRS residents.
- there is a better understanding of the Council's current communication methods with PRS residents.
- the effectiveness of Council's different communication channels (e.g., online platforms, community meetings) in reaching and engaging PRS residents is thoroughly evaluated.
- innovative policies, programs, initiatives and good practices that have positively impacted PRS residents and landlords in other councils across England are identified, analysed, and considered for potential adaptation in Lewisham.

8. Stakeholder Engagement

8.1. There are a wide range of relevant stakeholders for this TFG, including:

- Cabinet Member for Housing Management, Homelessness and Community Safety, Cllr Sophie Davis, and Cabinet Member for Housing Development and Planning, Cllr Brenda Dacres.
- Chair of the Housing Select Committee, Cllr Stephen Penfold.
- Lewisham Council officers in the Housing directorate from a wide range of teams such as the Private Sector Licensing and Home Improvements team and the Housing Needs and Refugee Services team.
- Various tenant advice and support organisations such as Shelter, Renters Rights, Advice Lewisham, Citizens Advice, Crisis, Generation Rent and Lewisham Renters.
- Tenants, landlords and letting agents in Lewisham.
- Tenant advocacy organisations such as London Renters Union and housing support organisations such as Capital Letters.
- Key officers from other councils in England (for benchmarking purposes and to learn from successful case studies).

- Greater London Authority (GLA), London Councils and Local Government Association (LGA) (for insights into regional and national contexts).

9. Sources of Evidence and Engagement

- 9.1. The constructive involvement of the Cabinet Members for Housing Management, Homelessness and Community Safety and Housing Development and Planning will be an important aspect of the Task and Finish Group's (TFG) work. To ensure an effective understanding of policy objectives and priorities, the TFG will engage in early discussions and have an ongoing dialogue with these key decision makers. Virtual and in-person meetings will be leveraged as valuable platforms to facilitate insightful interactions with these stakeholders.
- 9.2. Engaging with key council officers in the housing department will also be vital for the TFG's work. It will add substantial value to the TFG's work by providing essential expertise and first-hand knowledge of the local housing landscape. This engagement will be facilitated through a combination of virtual and in-person meetings.
- 9.3. Gathering insights into tenant issues and concerns will also be a crucial aspect of the TFG's work. To gain a comprehensive understanding of tenant experiences and perspectives in Lewisham, the TFG will hold virtual, or in-person focus group discussions with tenant advice and support organisations. Additionally, soliciting written submissions from these organisations may also be a valuable method to gather insights.
- 9.4. The TFG also recognises the significance of engaging directly with tenants and landlords in the borough. The TFG may wish to undertake a survey or explore options for conducting consultation sessions that will enable it to capture their valuable views, experiences, and expectations, fostering a deeper understanding of their specific needs and concerns.
- 9.5. The TFG will actively engage in meetings with key officers from other councils in England, fostering a valuable exchange of good practices and mutual learning. Additionally, the TFG may explore establishing regular communication channels to facilitate this exchange of ideas.
- 9.6. Engaging with Greater London Authority, London Councils and Local Government Association will also be valuable for the TFG, enabling a broader perspective and a deeper understanding of the bigger picture. This interaction will offer insights into regional and national contexts, enriching the TFG's approach to addressing housing issues effectively.

10. Out of Scope

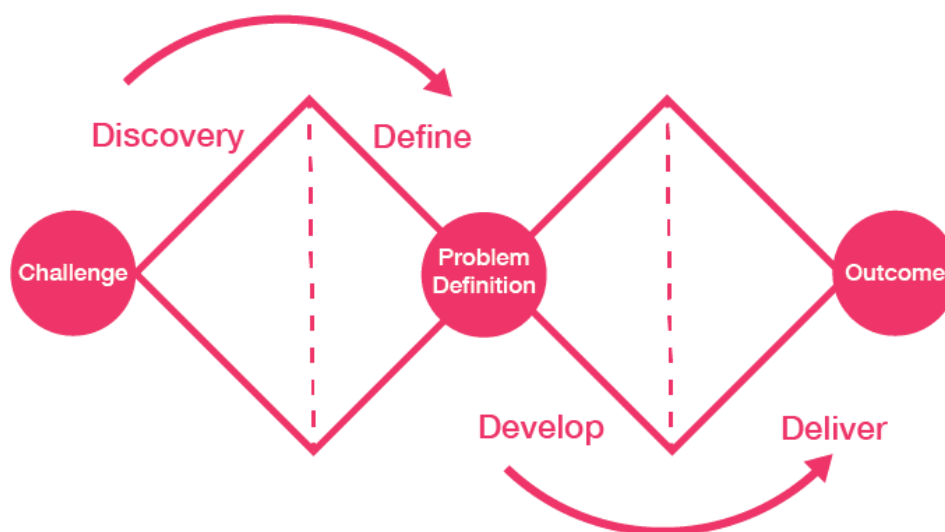
- 10.1. The Task and Finish Group should consider the scope carefully to decide whether there are any areas that do not need to be included in the review. This will ensure a focused approach on other pertinent aspects. Additionally, if the TFG intends to include additional areas, it must carefully assess the allocation of time and resources to ensure the analysis reaches a sufficient level to achieve the group's intended outcomes effectively.

11. How the Task and Finish Group will be run

- 11.1. It is intended that this task and finish group be:

- Collaborative – scrutiny officers, directorate officers and councillors working together to address a topical issue of concern
- Time limited – to suggest solutions in a timely manner, with allocated tasks, progress checks and deadlines
- Flexible – with a mixture of formal and informal meetings, visits, research, user engagement etc.
- Focussed on residents – the issue will be clearly defined, and solutions suggested, on the basis of understanding residents’ experience
- Focussed on solutions – the aim is to take evidence from a wide range of sources and good practice to develop affordable, practical solutions that are evidence based and implementable and that will have a positive impact on the lives of residents.

11.2. A ‘double diamond’ approach will be taken which will split the project into two parts (diamonds). The first part is the ‘discovery’ stage. The issue (the topic of the task and finish group) is the starting point and then research and evidence collection is carried out to really understand the issue and define it more clearly. Once the issue is well understood and well defined, the second stage begins. Further research and evidence collection is carried out, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and working with a range of different stakeholders and experts to investigate potential solutions. Then a clear set of recommendations can be produced.



12. Timeframe and resources

12.1. The proposed timeframe for this TFG is approximately 9 months from its initial meeting, depending on the extent of the final agreed scope of the review. During these 9 months, the TFG will conduct additional desktop research, gather evidence, and engage with stakeholders. The TFG’s work will culminate in a final formal meeting to assess and present their recommendations to the Mayor and Cabinet.

13. Financial implications

13.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Elements of the work of the Task and Finish Group may have financial implications, and these will need to be considered in due course.

14. Legal implications

- 14.1. The Council's Constitution provides at paragraph 6.9, Article 6 that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may from time to time appoint sub-committees, to be known as task and finish groups which will exist for a period of no less than 3 months, nor more than 12 months from the date of their creation. It further adds that "Any task and finish group shall consist of 5 members and be established for the purpose of examining a particular issue in depth. The terms of reference of any task and finish group shall be agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which shall also appoint members to it."

15. Equalities implications

- 15.1. The Equality The Equality Act 2010 (The Act) legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It replaced the previous anti-discrimination laws with a single act. It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 15.2. The Act also imposes a public sector equality duty. This means that in public bodies, of which this Council is designated, they must consider all individuals in carrying out their day-to-day work when shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It also requires public bodies to:
- Have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination
 - Advance equality of opportunity
 - Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities
- 15.3. Scrutiny tries to make sure that its work reflects the diversity of Lewisham's communities and that the views of residents are fairly represented in scrutiny processes. Any recommendations arising from scrutiny work support the Council's corporate strategy and reflect the needs of local residents.
- 15.4. There are no direct equalities implications arising as a result of the implementation of the recommendations in this report but there are likely to be equalities implications arising as part of the Task and Finish group's work and they will need to be considered in due course. During its stakeholder engagement process, the TFG must make a concerted effort to connect with diverse demographics, varying income groups, and vulnerable residents who are often underrepresented, despite constituting a significant proportion of the Private Rented Sector.

16. Climate change and environmental implications

- 16.1. There are no direct climate change or environmental implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Matters considered by the Task and Finish Group may have climate change implications and the Task and Finish Group will need to give due consideration to this.

17. Crime and disorder implications

- 17.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from the

implementation of the recommendations in this report. Matters considered by the Task and Finish Group may have crime and disorder implications and the Task and Finish Group will need to give due consideration to this.

18. Health and wellbeing implications

- 18.1. There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report but there may be health and wellbeing implications arising as part of the Task and Finish group's work and they will need to be considered in due course. The review of Private Rented Sector in Lewisham aims to examine the challenges in the sector and make efforts to address them, with a focus on enhancing the support provided to residents, which may lead to positive impacts on their health and wellbeing.

19. Appendices

- 19.1. Appendix A- Task and Finish Group Proforma (attached)
- 19.2. Appendix B- Additional sources and background reading

20. Report author and contact

- 20.1. If you have any questions about this report please contact the scrutiny manager:

Nidhi Patil, 020 8314 7620, Nidhi.Patil@lewisham.gov.uk

Appendix B- Additional sources and background reading

GLA Housing and Land- Understanding recent rental trends in London's private rental market: [Housing Research Note](#)

HomeLet- The Rental Index June 2023: [Rental Index Report](#)

Housing Insight Report June 2023: Property Mark [Housing Insight Report: June 2023 | Propertymark](#)

Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK June 2023: ONS [Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

Lewisham Housing Strategy 2020-26 [Lewisham Council - Housing strategy](#)

Policy Paper- A fairer private rented sector: DLUHC- [A fairer private rented sector - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Private Rented Sector Licensing in Lewisham- [Evidence for Consultation 2022](#)

Private Rented Sector: Housing Stock Condition and Stressors Report, London Borough of Lewisham, 2021: [Report by Meta Street](#)

Reforming Private Renting: [The Mayor of London's Blueprint: GLA](#)

Supply of Private Rented Sector Accommodation in London, July 2023, London Councils: <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/40692>

The London Model: Reforming Private Rented Sector Tenancies: GLA https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_model_technical_paper_-_reforming_prs_tenancies.pdf

The private rented sector in the UK- an overview of the policy and regulatory landscape: [UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence Report](#)

Touch and go- How to protect private renters from retaliatory eviction in England, 2018: [Citizens Advice Report](#)

Overview and Scrutiny



Task and Finish Group Proforma

This proforma has been designed to capture the information that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will need in order to decide which task and finish groups to establish.

This proforma can be completed by individual councillors on their own or by colleagues working together and support is available. If you would like support in completing this proforma, you can approach the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, one of the Select Committee Chairs or any member of the Scrutiny team.

<p>Proposed title <i>This should be written as a question. What is the main question that you are looking to answer? Ideally use "how" i.e. "How can we improve.....XXX?"</i></p>	<p>How we can improve our services for, and communication and interaction with, private renters across Lewisham.</p>
<p>Overview <i>Provide 2-3 sentences explaining the proposed investigation in more detail including the key areas that you are proposing to look at.</i></p>	<p>This task and finish group will look at the London Borough of Lewisham's services for, and communication and interaction with, private renters in a deepening private rented sector crisis.</p> <p>The task and finish will look across local government to find best practice and innovation in delivering advice and services for private renters in local authorities. We will also ask Private renters across Lewisham about their priorities and what they want to see more of from the council.</p> <p>Our main areas we will be looking in to are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How we make private renters aware of our responsibilities and services we offer as a council - How we can use innovation and best practice to transform our online offer for private renters - How our advice service funded by LBL can transform advice services for the borough's private renters - To explore a permanent forum or network with the borough's private renters
<p>Reason for proposal <i>Why do you think that a task and finish group is the most appropriate way to address this issue / answer this question? Where has the suggestion come from? (i.e. through resident engagement, casework, external inspection, performance information.)</i></p>	<p>We are facing an acute crisis in the private rented sector across the borough and the whole of London.</p> <p>Rightly, on the Housing Select committee and in much of the work of Cabinet leads we have focussed on the enormous task of bringing Lewisham Homes in house whilst maintaining a good standard of housing for our social tenants and homeless residents.</p> <p>After discussions with the Director of Housing, lead officers and Cabinet leads, we felt a task and finish group will be able to give members and officers the space and time to be able to do a deep dive on our offer to private renters, looking at refining our services,</p>

	<p>communications and interactions to ensure we are offering a well-used, effective service.</p> <p>We are not alone in facing the private rented sector crisis as a borough and this task and finish group will allow us to look for best practice in local government, have discussions with leads in other boroughs and have the time to create recommendations to make our services the best they can be.</p> <p>The task and finish group will also allow us to open channels of communications with private renters, housing advocacy groups and local organisations to see what our residents want us to offer and what private renters expect from the local authority. The T&F also allows us to look at ongoing communication with private renters via forums and networks and the feasibility of this, something we have been unable to do as a large piece of work due to capacity.</p>
<p>Policy Context <i>How does the proposal support delivery of the Lewisham Corporate Strategy; national/regional policies, initiatives; legislation etc.</i></p>	<p>In our last two manifestos we have had robust policies to support private renters amongst our housing policies, something which is now in our corporate strategy:</p> <p><i>'We will provide more support to renters through further landlord licensing and enforcement of poorly managed homes, holding landlords to account and giving a voice to renters across the borough.'</i></p> <p>Also, when it comes to resident voice:</p> <p><i>'Across Lewisham, we recognise that there are communities whose voices are seldom heard and others who may feel as if they are not heard at all. We will develop an approach to engage our community that is fairer, accessible and even more inclusive, acting as a listening organisation and working in tandem with our residents to improve the services we deliver for them.'</i></p> <p>This task and finish group both supports and expands on these areas of Lewisham corporate strategy, expanding on our support for private renters, whilst also exploring how to put the voice of private renters front and centre.</p> <p>It is a tumultuous time in the private rented sector, with a significant amount of new legislation being passed or due to be announced nationally.</p> <p>The ending of s21, new damp and mould legislation and laws around disrepair and decent homes present tenants more opportunities to be protected, but in the short term could lead to bad practice from landlords as legislation comes in to effect, we are also unsure of the level of protection for renters from abuse of new legislation.</p> <p>It has never been more important that the council is prepared for a potential influx of issues surrounding this legislation, this task and finish group will support us to ensure that we are.</p>
<p>Criteria for the investigation <i>(Essential)</i></p>	<p>Criteria for the investigation <i>(Essential)</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is the proposed investigation timely? Why?</i> • <i>Is it a strategic and significant issue? How?</i> • <i>Is it of concern to one or more sections of the population? Who?</i> <p><i>(Desirable)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is the issue of concern to partners or stakeholders? How?</i> • <i>Will the investigation add value in terms of improving the council's or partner's performance or service delivery? How?</i> • <i>Will the investigation be duplicating any other work? What?</i> • <i>What control or influence does the Council have in this area?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is the proposed investigation timely? Why?</i> • <i>Is it a strategic and significant issue? How?</i> <p>As previously stated, in Lewisham we are currently in the worst housing crisis for generations, which just as apparent in our private rented sector than elsewhere.</p> <p>The onset of new legislation, our own new licensing schemes and the ongoing crisis mean LBL needs to be ready to support our private renters and we are at a crossroads in the way we can transform our support in the sector.</p> <p>Alongside the rapidly changing environment, I have also set out how the T&F supports our manifesto commitments and the corporate strategy earlier in this proposal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is it of concern to one or more sections of the population? Who?</i> <p>Over 30% of the housing stock on Lewisham is privately rented. Private renters in the borough cover anyone from students to families in insecure work and increasingly older adults. Renters are present in every demographic and every area of our borough.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is the issue of concern to partners or stakeholders? How?</i> <p>The crisis in the private rented sector doesn't just affect tenants and our council services, it also affects a number of stakeholders and partners.</p> <p>Our already overburdened advice services have seen a huge increase in private renters seeking support with little designated and specific services, this is why we have included a look at centrally funded advice services for private renters as part of this T&F.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Will the investigation add value in terms of improving the council's or partner's performance or service delivery? How?</i> <p>In forming this T&F proposal I have met with Cabinet members, directors and officers to chat through how this group can best support the work of our overstretched teams.</p> <p>The aspects set out in the summary of this T&F are agreed key lines of enquiry that are most useful for our private sector housing team and can support their work.</p> <p>The improvement in communication with renters, our interaction with renters via forums and networks and our online resources are key areas of investigation that we can use to support delivery of the corporate strategy and the work already underway to support private renters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Will the investigation be duplicating any other work? What?</i> <p>We have made sure that our key lines of enquiry compliment other work happening at LBL rather than duplicating work already underway.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What control or influence does the Council have in this area?</i>
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	<p>LBL has increasing responsibility in the private rented sector. Alongside the statutory responses to disrepair and rogue landlords, there is now increased responsibility with landlord licensing and in upcoming legislation, such as new powers to tackle damp and mould.</p> <p>We currently have a chance to transform our offer to private renters, ensuring our services reach those who need it the most whilst also ensuring our services are shaped by tenants themselves.</p> <p>LBL continuing to improve in the private rented sector not only improves standards for renters but ensures that landlords in Lewisham understand the council will take action if properties are not correctly licensed or if they are flouting tenancy law. We can and should stand with our private renters and make our service as robust and effective as possible.</p>
<p>Sources of evidence <i>Do you have any thoughts/ideas on where you might gather evidence from? e.g. research or site visits. (Officers will be able to recommend suggestions and help with this.)</i></p>	<p>The Task and finish group will gather evidence from the following places:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other local authorities in areas with a high number of private rented properties that are similar demographically. - Other local authorities that have a strong track record of private sector enforcement and services for private renters - Private renter advocacy groups in Lewisham and across London - Our advice services across Lewisham. - Private renters themselves of which we have engaged a number through consultation for selective licensing
<p>Co-optees / Technical advisors? <i>Would the task and finish group benefit from having expert input such as an academic or local expert?</i></p>	<p>Yes, the T&F group would benefit from expert advice in legislation that is being introduced affecting our statutory duties toward private renters.</p>
<p>Suggested timeframe <i>Do you estimate / suggest that the investigation take 3, 6, 9 or 12 months? Outline your suggested timetable for evidence gathering.</i></p>	<p>The suggested timetable for this task and finish group is 9 –12 months due to the size and scope of the investigation.</p>
<p>Equalities Impact <i>Identify any equalities issues that might be applicable.</i></p>	<p>Part of this task and finish group is talking to our private renter community in Lewisham. In this process we must be robust in ensuring we are connecting with demographics, incomes and vulnerable residents we don't often hear from but who make up a huge proportion of our private rented sector.</p>
<p>Councillor(s) submitting the proposal <i>Please list the names of the submitting councillor(s)</i></p>	<p>Cllr Will Cooper</p>