

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>

- *Is the proposed investigation timely? Why?*
- *Is it a strategic and significant issue? How?*
- *Is it of concern to one or more sections of the population? Who?*

(Desirable)

- *Is the issue of concern to partners or stakeholders? How?*
- *Will the investigation add value in terms of improving the council's or partner's performance or service delivery? How?*
- *Will the investigation be duplicating any other work? What?*
- *What control or influence does the Council have in this area?*

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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.

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.

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.

- *Is it of concern to one or more sections of the population? Who?*

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.

- *Is the issue of concern to partners or stakeholders? How?*

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.

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.

- *Will the investigation add value in terms of improving the council's or partner's performance or service delivery? How?*

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.

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.

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.

- *Will the investigation be duplicating any other work? What?*

We have made sure that our key lines of enquiry compliment other work happening at LBL rather than duplicating work already underway.

- *What control or influence does the Council have in this area?*

	<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>