

Leeds Housing

LEEDS PRIVATE RENTED HOUSING STRATEGY

2009 – 2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Private rented housing provides an important component of the structure of housing provision in Leeds. It comprises a number of sub-sectors. In particular, it provides housing for young professionals and workers on lower incomes; those relocating or moving to Leeds for employment or to study, people leaving marriages or relationships, and young mobile and often vulnerable people. The strength of the private rented sector in Leeds lies in its flexibility and adaptability to changing housing demand and choice, and changing housing market conditions. Where there are areas of high concentrations of private rented housing, there can be neighbourhood management or housing management issues to address. There can also be significant weaknesses relating to condition of some stock and the quality of management by some landlords. This strategy seeks to both encourage and promote good quality private rented housing while taking action to tackle issues of concern.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out the strategic direction for private rented housing in Leeds over the coming three years. It aims to enable the creation and maintenance of a prosperous private rented sector that provides choice and offers good quality and well-managed rented accommodation which contributes to sustainability of the communities in which it is located.

It is a city-wide strategy aimed at all the various parts of the private rented sector. It has been formulated to be firmly linked to, and informed by, the broader Leeds Housing Strategy, especially strategic priorities 10 and 11 of the Quality Housing strategic theme. It sits within the context of the Leeds Strategic Plan and the strategic outcomes of Leeds City Council and its partners, in particular those of Thriving Communities, Health and Wellbeing, and the Environment. It aligns with market developments beyond the Council's boundaries, within the Leeds City Region, where all housing markets are influenced by key drivers such as employment, the economy and transportation.

The strategy document provides a background of the national, regional and current local picture on private rented housing, in terms of stock condition information derived from the English House Condition Survey and Local House Condition Survey, and the recent findings in the Rugg Review, independent research commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to consider the capacity of the sector to meet a range of future housing needs and aspirations. Within this context, the strategy sets out future direction for private rented sector strategy in Leeds over the next three years (2009-2012), with the aspiration :

“To enable good quality, well-managed private rented housing to be an essential part of sustainable and balanced housing provision across Leeds and in individual neighbourhoods”.

The document sets out what is believed to be the key strategic drivers and issues during the formulation and implementation of the strategy, and the key priorities for action which can be summarised under the following headings :

- Promoting and supporting the private rented sector to meet needs and provide choice
- Ensuring good standards of housing and management
- Providing effective advice, information and support

Finally, the document seeks to identify key partners and roles and responsibilities, essential for the successful delivery of the strategy, including a tabulated action plan to give clarity of purpose and a practical way of monitoring progress against specific targets.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

Private rented housing provides an important component of the structure of housing provision in Leeds. It comprises a number of sub-sectors. In particular it provides housing for young professionals and workers on lower incomes; those relocating or moving to Leeds for employment or to study, people leaving marriages or relationships and young mobile and often vulnerable people. The strength of the private rented sector in Leeds lies in its flexibility and adaptability to changing housing demand and choice and changing housing market conditions. Where there are areas of high concentrations of private rented housing there can be neighbourhood management or housing management issues to address. There can also be significant weaknesses relating to condition of some stock and the quality of management by some landlords. This strategy seeks to both encourage and promote good quality private rented housing while taking action to tackle issues of concern.

The Strategy has been informed by a range of research including that undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University for the West Yorkshire Housing Partnership, the recent Government commissioned Ecotec report on HMOs and the Rugg Review on the PRS.

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This strategy seeks to set out the roles and responsibilities of the range of organisations and agencies involved in the provision, management and regulation of private rented housing along with advice agencies, the Leeds Benefits Service and the Rent Officer Service. It also includes an action plan with targets and milestones to deliver the strategy over the next 2-3 years.

A Private Sector Housing Programme Board has been established by Leeds City Council to coordinate and drive forward work to improve the range and quality of private housing. It is chaired by the by the Lead Council member for housing, with representation from key partner agencies.

2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The development of this strategy has taken place against a backdrop of a major recession and changing housing market conditions, the emergence of choice and aspiration as the most powerful driver of use of housing and a large increase in the number and proportion of households renting privately.

National Context

There has been considerable recent interest from Government in the role and quality of the private rented sector, recognising the increasing role that the sector plays in meeting housing needs, responding flexibly to changes in housing demand and market change. There is concern, however, that housing conditions in the sector are proportionally worse than other tenures, as reported in the most recent English House Condition Survey 2007 (published January 2009).

The following table (1) confirms that nationally the PRS has the greatest proportion of non-decent homes (45.4%) of all tenures, equating to over 1.2 million at the last estimate , although the reduction in non decency between 2006 and 2007 is significant and in part explained by the number of new build and existing properties entering the sector.

Table 1: Non-decent homes by tenure, 2006 and 2007

	number (000s)		percentage	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
owner occupied	5,335	5,304	34.6	34.1
private rented	1,223	1,244	46.8	45.4
all private	6,558	6,548	36.3	35.8
local authority	676	652	32.4	32.8
RSL	465	486	25.2	25.5
all social	1,142	1,138	29.0	29.2
all tenures	7,700	7,686	35.0	34.6

Base: all dwellings

The most frequent reason homes nationally did not achieve the decent homes standard was the presence of one or more category 1 hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HH&SRS) as illustrated in table 2 below. Privately rented homes were the most likely of all tenures to have Category 1 hazards present (30%) . The predominant hazard relates to excess cold.

Table 2: Homes failing decent homes criteria by tenure, 2007

	Category 1 hazard (HHSRS)	thermal comfort	modern facilities	repair	all non- decent
number (000s):					
owner occupied	3,458	2,281	395	999	5,304
private rented	834	625	140	341	1,244
all private	4,292	2,906	535	1,340	6,548
local authority	292	265	125	151	652
RSL	224	252	57	88	486
all social	516	517	182	239	1,138
all tenures	4,808	3,423	716	1,579	7,686
percentage:					
owner occupied	22.2	14.7	2.5	6.4	34.1
private rented	30.5	22.8	5.1	12.5	45.4
all private	23.5	15.9	2.9	7.3	35.8
local authority	14.7	13.3	6.3	7.6	32.8
RSL	11.8	13.2	3.0	4.6	25.5
all social	13.3	13.3	4.7	6.1	29.2
all tenures	21.7	15.4	3.2	7.1	34.6

Base: all dwellings Note: some dwellings fail on more than one criterion

In terms of vulnerable households (households in receipt of at least 1 of the principal means tested or disability related benefits), again the national situation is that the PRS is seen to be the tenure where the greatest proportion of vulnerable households live in non decent homes (43.3%), as can be seen in the following table (3).

Table 3: Households living in decent homes, 2006 and 2007

	number (000s)		percentage (%)	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
Decent homes:				
private vulnerable:				
owner occupied	1,543	1,575	63	64.9
private rented	334	354	45	48.2
all private vulnerable	1,877	1,929	58.8	61
private non-vulnerable:				
owner occupied	8,418	8,531	66.4	66.7
private rented	922	985	56.7	56.6
all private non-vulnerable	9,340	9,516	65.3	65.5
all owner occupied	9,961	10,106	65.8	66.4
all private rented	1,256	1,339	53	54.1
all private	11,217	11,445	64.1	64.7
all social	2,690	2,649	72.2	71.9
all households	13,907	14,094	65.5	65.9

	number (000s)		percentage (%)	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
Non Decent Homes				
private vulnerable:				
owner occupied	905	851	37	35.1
private rented	408	380	55	51.8
all private vulnerable	1,313	1,231	41.2	39
private non-vulnerable:				
owner occupied	4,262	4,264	33.6	33.3
private rented	704	754	43.3	43.4
all private non-vulnerable	4,966	5,018	34.7	34.5
all owner occupied	5,167	5,115	34.2	33.6
all private rented	1,112	1,134	47	45.9
all private	6,279	6,249	35.9	35.3
all social	1,034	1,037	27.8	28.1
all households	7,313	7,286	34.5	34.1
Base: all households				

It should be borne in mind that the private rented sector has never benefited from significant public funding and that investment in stock condition by landlords has to take place within a context of housing market and economic change, and the impact that can have on the rate of return for landlords.

The Rugg Review [The Private Rented Sector its contribution and potential] of the private rented sector (PRS) was commissioned by CLG and undertaken in the context of change for the sector and considered the capacity of the sector to meet a range of housing needs. The review, published in October 2008, identifies the range of sub markets within the private rented sector. It notes that many people will have some experience of renting privately during the course of their lives and that private renting offers a multitude of roles in housing biographies across the whole social spectrum, serving as a first port of call for new households, a 'bolthole' when housing circumstances change, a stopping-off point as people change jobs and move house, and – for many households – a long-term home.

The review acknowledges that the sector presents a number of policy challenges relating to such issues as property quality, management standards and security of tenure. The review concluded that the PRS is a key component of the housing market in England; that the flexibility of the PRS needs to be protected, and policy interventions should flow with the market rather than seek to change its essential characteristics. The Rugg Review sets out six policy 'directions of travel' for the sector under the following headings :

- Developing a sound evidence base
- Promoting housing management
- 'Growing' the business of letting
- Equalising the rental choices
- Light-touch licensing with effective redress
- Tenancy frameworks

The Review included acknowledgment of private rented sector initiatives in Leeds in recent years and endorsed the success of local accreditation, stressing that accreditation had improved management and property standards in the area. It also identified that accreditation, particularly when worked in partnership with others, could enable the Local Authority to concentrate its limited enforcement resources more effectively on poorer housing suppliers." (page 66/76).

There have been some strong views expressed about the Rugg Review and its conclusions, many critical. The Government has now issued a response and consultation paper (13 May 2009) inviting responses on a series of potential policy developments for the sector, to be submitted to Government Office for consideration by 7th August 2009. The proposals in the consultation paper are designed to encourage the growth of professionalism, tackle bad landlordism and improve consumer protection. The Government's ambition is for a PRS that:

- continues to react flexibly to housing market conditions;
- continues to offer a high quality alternative to those choosing not to buy;
- continues to provide a robust safety net to those who cannot access alternative forms of tenure; and
- continues to strike the right balance between rights and responsibilities for both tenants and landlords.

At the same time, there is a need to move towards a sector that :

- is growing in confidence;
- encourages professionalism for landlords; and
- no longer provides a climate in which it is possible for bad landlords to operate.

The aims of the local PRS strategy are broadly consistent with many of the recommendations set out in the Rugg Review and Government response. The response has now been published: CLG, *The private rented sector: professionalism and quality* (May 2009).

The West Yorkshire Context

Research into private rented housing commissioned by the West Yorkshire Housing Partnership (Covering Leeds, Bradford, Kirklees, Calderdale and Wakefield) published in February 2008 outlines the ways in which private rented housing provides for housing needs and requirements across the sub-region, and charts possible future trends .

In particular the research identified that the sub region had a significant PRS (85,000 rented households), has an important student sub market, the largest part of which is in Leeds, and also other sub markets such as that which caters for "professionals" within city centres and elsewhere. However, the largest in the region is the housing benefit/low income sub market, which comprises 35% of the whole market in West Yorkshire. The report identified a number of recommendations relating to support and intervention in the sector : v

- local authorities/West Yorkshire Housing Partnership (WYHP) should continue to develop joint working with the PRS and develop consistent approaches across authorities to help landlords serving several local markets

- local authorities/WYHP should work with landlords on support and enforcement functions at the neighbourhood level
- local authorities/WYHP should ensure good links with the PRS on Housing Benefit prior to the roll out of Local Housing Allowance
- local authorities/WYHP should work with other PRS stakeholders (such as Building Societies) to encourage landlord membership of accreditation schemes and professional bodies and training updates etc
- despite the recent market for new property in the PRS, the sector overall has a lot of pre-1919 property that may need investment for maintaining standards and energy conservation targets. Investment benefits low income tenants as much as landlords so targeted investment can be justified. Authorities may want to try to link this to leasing schemes (through housing associations) to ensure long term rental supply through their investment
- local authorities/ WYHP should consider contingency planning for the possible impacts of market collapse and investor landlord withdrawal from the sector
- more specifically, concerns about the empty property in city centres justifies consideration of policy options such as exercising empty property powers in targeted areas. Consistency of approach across authorities should help prevent local displacement of problems. For example, consistent application of empty property council tax charges prevents investors concentrating in the cheapest borough. Information sharing could also target owners with multiple vacant stock across Authorities
- local authorities/WYHP should work with planning authorities to try to rebalance long term supply with household demand/needs/aspirations rather than developer profits.

The West Yorkshire Housing Partnership is to be disbanded shortly with the prime sub-regional focus moving to the Leeds City Region (comprising the five West Yorkshire Authorities plus York, Harrogate, Selby, Craven and Barnsley). It is important that the findings from the West Yorkshire research are carried forward to inform the development of the emerging Leeds City Region Housing Strategy and that investment in private rented housing remains an important part of that strategy.

The Local Context

The picture relating to stock condition, both within the sub region of West Yorkshire and locally in Leeds , is similar to the national situation and reflects national trends. The most recent survey in Leeds (The Leeds House Condition Survey 2007) provides the following headline information on the PRS and some of the future challenges the sector faces:

- The sector now represents 13% of all tenures (41,600 properties), up from 11% at the last survey in 2001, with a trend for continuing growth.
- 56% of the PRS in Leeds was built before 1919, compared to only 20% of owner occupied homes, with related problems such as poor thermal efficiency, poor internal arrangement and greater related risks associated with fire and falls
- 44% of the stock is non decent, marginally less than the national average
- Category 1 hazards are more strongly associated with the PRS than other tenures at 20%, nearly twice the proportion for owner occupiers, for which an investment of approximately £38 million is required over the next 5 years to eliminate them
- 38% of local private sector tenants are in receipt of benefits
- 33% of private tenants live in fuel poverty

- There are an estimated 3,000 mandatory licensable HMOs in Leeds. This is the largest concentration of such housing in the country and reflects the higher risks inherent in 3 and 4 storey late Victorian housing which is prevalent in the City. The Council's dedicated HMO Licensing Team have, to date, issued approximately 2,600 full licences, dealt with 90 licence variations and 105 revocations. The success of the Leeds HMO licensing regime is due in a large part to a productive working relationship developed with landlords locally in the lead up to the implementation of these Housing Act provisions.

The Council and its partners have long recognised the importance of the private rented sector and developed the existing private rented housing strategy based on the following aspiration:

“ To enable good quality ,well managed private rented housing to be an essential part of sustainable and balanced housing provision across Leeds and in individual neighbourhoods”

An inquiry into private rented housing by the Council's Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods), conducted over a period of 6 months and reporting in mid-2009, makes a series of recommendations for future policy development, account of which has been taken in formulating this strategy, and many of the recommendations are incorporated in the proposals for future action, or by way of commitment to continuation of current good practice.

Census statistics show that for the last 40 years approximately 40% of households in Leeds rent their homes either from the Council through its three Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs); through Registered Social Landlords or from private landlords. Over the last three years however, expansion of the private rented sector has been accompanied by a marked contraction of the social sector, mainly through sales of council homes to sitting tenants.

Private rented housing provides a home for students, nurses and young professionals, low income households, benefit claimants as well as for households relocating from other parts of the country, migrating from outside the UK or seeking asylum. New purpose built accommodation in the city centre and for the student market has been added to existing stock traditionally providing rented accommodation.

Since 2002, some 8,000 purpose-built student accommodation beds have been added to the rented sector and this has taken some of the pressure off the traditional 'off-street' market, particular in far Headingley and Weetwood. and there have been notable improvements in the condition and management practices of many properties, driven primarily by market expectations.

Until recently the apparent increasingly attractive return that housing provided as a form of investment has led to increasing levels of 'buy-to-let' purchasing either for commercial return or to provide pension income for those without long-term occupational provision. Lower than average house price inflation in certain parts of the city had also made housing in those areas attractive to investors. This investment 'boom' has ceased due to current economic circumstances but it is likely that once economic and financial conditions ease, and given the continuing high demand for private rented housing, then the attractiveness of investment in property and the rental market will continue.

As is usual in such circumstances bargain hunters will return to the market (and there is already evidence of increasing purchases of repossessed properties), and it is anticipated that this will, given time, start to reverse the current downturn.

The expansion of the private rented sector has led in some parts of the city, to private rented housing to be the dominant tenure; in Headingley ward the proportion is around 60% and in Beeston Hill, the proportion of housing privately rented is between 40% and 50%. The percentage of housing privately rented in Beeston Hill has increased threefold over the last five years. In both areas the increase has led to problems of instability and 'churning'. Given the changing nature of the private rented market and the acknowledged impact that concentrations of private rented housing can have on the surrounding community, the potential for local housing strategies needs to be explored, in certain circumstances to refine the overall Leeds Housing Strategy.

Until the onset of the recent slowdown in city centre development, on the other hand, buoyant prices and attractive returns led to approximately 40% of apartments developed being purchased by investors for letting and this is shown by the flourishing lettings market in the city centre. However, with the growing number of city centre developments becoming rented rather than owner occupied, management problems are emerging with block managers unused to managing mass rented housing and with a high turnover of residents' or deal with anti-social behaviour. This in turn is having an impact on the attractiveness of those developments which will need to be monitored in the future for consideration of any appropriate interventions.

- Markets

The private rented housing market has diversified and extended greatly over the last 20 years. In the past the majority of private rented housing has been concentrated in inner urban areas of older terraced housing and in 'Leeds 6' catering for students. Over the last 5 years however, private rented housing has become attractive to a wide range of people and has developed in a wider range of areas

Markets for private rented housing have developed over time amongst a range of groups; people relocating to work in Leeds, visiting academics and medical practitioners taking up time limited contracts at the Leeds Teaching Hospitals, young professionals working in the legal, financial, ICT and retail/leisure businesses in Leeds City Centre, those in work on low to average incomes, students, and benefit claimants.

Analysis of the rental market by Allsopp's and any browsing of RightMove.com shows that private rented markets exist in all Leeds postal areas and offers a range of property types including apartments, detached and semi detached houses as well as in older terraced housing.

While it remains the case that the largest concentrations of private rented housing are evident in areas such as Headingley, Hyde Park and other parts of Inner North West Leeds (driven by demand for shared housing from students and young workers) and some other inner urban areas such as Beeston Hill, Cross Green and Harehills, there has been a clear expansion of private rented housing, partly driven by demand and partly by buy-to-let investment. The city living market has developed through significant buy-to-let investment from local and national investors to provide a rental market aimed at a range of people working in the financial, legal and service businesses in the city centre, while large rental markets also exist in suburban areas such as Chapel Allerton, Bramley, Moortown, Beeston and the 'Street Lane' area of Roundhay.

Increasingly in Headingley, parts of Hyde Park, Chapel Allerton, Roundhay and in Leeds City Centre, there is a growing market in shared housing for young workers, who are unable to afford rents for self-contained rental properties.

The contraction of the social housing stock, and the significant reduction in the number of lettings each year, has had implications for the Council in being able to house those who are homeless or with other priority housing needs. The reduction in availability and access to social housing has also led to increased demand for private rented housing from those households with general housing needs unable to achieve access to social housing. As the Council operate an accreditation scheme (Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme – LLAS) the Council has built on this partnership to refer households for re-housing to LLAS members as an appropriate temporary to permanent solution to their housing need. The use of such tenancy referrals is also a benefit for landlords of membership of the LLAS and can be used to attract other landlords to join the LLAS and increase the pool of landlords working with the council. It is vital that the council offer further such unique incentives to members to enable the LLAS to continue to enlarge its membership base and coverage across the city.

There is also an intention to work with the LLAS members in relation to the proposed tendering of the contract for Leeds City Council for the Temporary Accommodation Service later this year. The use of LLAS members in relation to this contract would be a significant move with provision of about 100 units at any one time made available to the service. There is an expectation in the terms of the contract that the temporary accommodation could be made permanently available if tenants wish to remain in the property long term.

More recently the impact of the credit crunch and the restrictions on the availability of mortgage finance, has led to those who may have become first time buyers tending to rent housing as they save up the deposits needed for house purchase. With repossessions of owner/occupied property increasing, some of these are being bought by investors to meet growing rental demand, while those repossessed are providing additional demand for private rented accommodation. Another facet of this is that a proportion of recent repossessions have been small buy-to-let investors unable to meet mortgage payments, sometimes resulting in the eviction of tenants due to landlord default.

The increasing incidence of divorce and relationship breakdowns has resulted in a growing private rented market for people leaving relationships, many of which will require larger 'family' properties to accommodate child visitation or custody arrangements.

There has also been evidence of the development of aparthotels in and around the city centre which offer temporary short term accommodation or use as hotel rooms and are aimed either at mobile professionals or those visiting Leeds on business.

- Stakeholders and relationships

There are a range of stakeholders involved in the delivery of this strategy, including a range of Council Departments and services, landlords and their associations, estate agents, UNIPOL, the Universities, community associations representing areas containing private rented housing, tenants and residents associations, the Leeds Benefits Service, the Rent Officer service, and a range of advice agencies and their associations dealing in landlord and tenant issues. These also include funders and mortgage lenders (although at present however there are severe restrictions on availability of credit for investment in the private rented sector).

Formulating and implementing a strategy for private rented housing therefore requires a constructive relationship between those stakeholders. The Council has been working to develop a strategic and partnership based approach involving working closely with private landlords and other agencies and using a mix of enabling, regulatory and enforcement functions to ensure a healthy and good quality private rented sector. The diagram attached at Appendix A represents this.

The development of the Leeds Landlords Accreditation Scheme and the UNIPOL Code of Standards in conjunction with UNIPOL and Landlords has provided a good example of the mixed approach of enabling and enforcement being taken by the Council. The operation of a pilot Local Housing Allowance in Leeds which was one of the Pathfinder authorities (which has now replaced housing benefit) has also required a cooperative response from the range of stakeholders involved.

The Leeds HMO Lobby has been successful in highlighting some of the issues arising from the emergence of large areas of predominantly private rented housing, especially houses in multiple occupation, and play an important role in influencing local initiatives from the perspective of local communities. The Lobby is also playing a major role in the current consultation on HMOs.

The Leeds Residential Property Forum was established to coordinate and represent the interests of private landlords who are members of the Residential Landlord Association, Leeds Letting Agents and Leeds Property Association to provide a voice in discussions with Leeds City Council and others. Successful dialogue and consultation with this group has led to the effective introduction and subsequent operation of the Mandatory HMO Licensing Regime in Leeds. Despite the successes achieved in Leeds there continues to be a debate nationally as to whether the Mandatory HMO Licensing is in fact fit for purpose.

The challenges posed by the Housing Act 2004 and current or future potential changes in market conditions along with the results of changing policy on higher education will requires a cooperative working to enable the range of stakeholders to meet those challenges, not least the impact of the severe recession resulting from the credit crunch.

- *Interventions*

In order to ensure that a high quality private rented sector is in operation to provide a major component of housing provision in Leeds, then a range of interventions are necessary. The diagram attached at Appendix A shows this pictorially:

Encouragement: to increase supply of good quality private rented housing to complement social housing and home ownership and adding to the range of housing options open to households

Accreditation: to ensure standards are continually driven up. Currently the spread of Accredited Landlords has tended to be focused on the student and shared housing markets of inner North West Leeds and until recently there has been a much lower uptake across other postcodes with poorer quality rental markets. However over the last year there has been significant growth in accreditation in these postcode areas, although it is accepted that the balance will take a long time to redress there has been marked progress. Landlord representatives believe that accreditation can become an even more significant driver to improve professionalism in the private rented sector in the City.

Assistance: through helping landlords where appropriate to gain access to grant or loan funding to improve the quality and energy efficiency of their housing

Regulation and Enforcement: The Housing Act 2004 provides a range of statutory powers to address poor quality housing and management failures, including enforcement provisions to remove unacceptable hazards to health, the option to take control of properties under management order arrangements, where there are unacceptable failings, and the discretion to extend licensing arrangements where local circumstances justify such action.

Due to the size of the local PRS and the recent introduction of mandatory HMO licensing, which has had significant resources implications for Leeds, the recent focus of regulation and enforcement has been largely on licensing administration and reactive work in response to requests for assistance from disgruntled tenants, which may not necessary focus on the worst housing across the city.

In order to address the poorest housing conditions and worst management failures, often associated with property occupied by the most vulnerable residents, it will be essential to move towards targeted enforcement based on area, property type or poor management, and robustly enforce the law to tackle the worst abuses. This shift in approach will require to be adequately resourced.

3. STRATEGIC DRIVERS AND KEY ISSUES

There are a number of key issues that are driving the formation and implementation of this strategy and issues that need to be addressed by its formulation and implementation:

National Legislative and Policy Drivers

The Housing Act 2004 holds significant implications for private landlords not least the costs associated with its provisions. The Housing Health and Safety Rating system, HMO licensing and selective licensing will all have significant implications for landlords and for the Council. An important element of the successful implementation of the Act has been for all stakeholders involved with private rented housing to be working together to achieve compliance with the minimum of disruption for all concerned. The council has an agreed proportional enforcement policy as a result of this joint working. The Leeds Residential Property Forum drawn from the three landlords associations locally has been supportive of the Council in the introduction of HMO licensing although it has expressed its opposition to the introduction of selective licensing. The fact that Leeds has the highest levels of compliance with mandatory licensing in the country is due largely to the cooperation that ensured those levels of compliance.

Leeds was a pathfinder for the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which has replaced Housing Benefit to assist tenants living in private rented housing to meet their housing costs. The introduction of LHA commenced in February 2004 and has required co-operative working between the Council's Benefits and Enforcement services, Landlords and managing agents, the rent officer service and advice agencies. The Council believes that the LHA met its objectives to promote fairness, choice, transparency, personal responsibility, financial inclusion, improved administration and reduced barriers to work. The number of tenants receiving benefit in the private rented sector in Leeds has increased from around 6,000 to 8,000 during the pathfinder phase between 2004 and 2008 and this increase reflects the increase in people looking to the private sector to meet their housing needs. The current financial climate has seen a further increase and around 11,000 tenants in the Private Rented sector are now claiming Local Housing Allowance. (March 2009)

The scheme is fairer and more transparent than the previous scheme. LHA covers the housing costs for 65% of tenants who claim LHA compared to only 40% in 2004 and the majority of tenants (80%) are receiving their allowance and paying the rent to the landlord. Relationships and responsibilities of tenants and landlords are now clearer under LHA and this is contributing to the wider social agenda of increasing personal responsibility and tackling financial exclusion.

Landlord representatives have generally welcomed the new system but concerns remain; in particular issues regarding direct payment of benefit to tenants rather than landlords. It also remains the case that LHA is not influenced by housing condition and it is the responsibility of the landlord and tenant to agree the level of rent having regard to condition, location and any other relevant considerations.

It should be noted that Government are concerned at the cost of the LHA to the treasury. In the 2009 budget the Chancellor announced that from April 2010 Local Housing Allowance would be capped at the rent that is paid, which means that tenants will no longer receive excess LHA. This will not have any immediate impact on affordability as it is only those tenants who get more than the rent that they pay that will have their benefit cut. However, there will be little incentive for tenants to negotiate a rent that is lower than the LHA whilst they remain on benefit, which may mean that rents adjust to the LHA rates, even in areas where rents are traditionally lower.

The LHA rates are reviewed monthly taking into account rental market evidence collected by the valuation office over the preceding 12 month period, this system means that changes in the market do not impact immediately on the LHA rates. The broad market areas which directly affect LHA levels are also under constant review. There are some concerns that already households wishing to seek private rented housing where rents are higher than the LHA rates (especially in North West and North East Leeds) may not be able to and landlords in those areas may not let to benefit claimants, and that may worsen if the LHA levels reduced.

The outcome of an ongoing wider Housing Benefit review is likely to be announced in 2009 and there may be a further restriction introduced then, Any reduction in benefit levels will mean that there is less accommodation being affordable to HB tenants in the private rented sector in the future.

Local Strategic Drivers – Local Strategic Outcomes

Leeds Strategic Plan

The Leeds Strategic Plan sets out the key outcomes for linked programmes of action to enable the realisation of the Vision for Leeds. The plan sets out a number of strategic themes, three of which: Thriving Places, Health and Well Being and the Environment are relevant to this strategy.

Economic Growth and well being

Up until recently the economy of Leeds has grown fast. The need for a skilled, flexible and mobile workforce is a key part of ensuring that growth while attracting and retaining students and graduates to support the skills base to ensure economic growth returns. The private rented sector provides flexibility and assists labour mobility including providing a 'first port of call' for those relocating and unaware of local housing market conditions, opportunities and costs and for visiting academics, medical staff on time limited contracts with the Leeds Universities and teaching Hospitals.

High standards of housing for students has helped the high level of graduate retention in Leeds with new graduates who have come to value and expect higher property and management standards becoming both 'pathfinders' into the remaining professional rented housing market whilst owner occupation and the entry into social housing remains very restricted, and the future 'family builders' in those areas .

Private rented housing also provides for those in work on low paid to average earnings who cannot gain access to social housing and who cannot or who don't want to buy housing. Fewer individuals are able to access mortgage finance or afford owner/occupation. Economic analysis suggests that where there is job growth in the Leeds City Region over the coming years it will be as much in lower paid jobs and especially to short-term, limited hours and non-secure employment.

A range of rented housing will be needed to meet the housing needs of those taking up lower paid and non secure jobs now and in the future including intermediate, sub market rented housing especially for those who cannot afford/ are unable to purchase their own homes.

Assisting Regeneration and Renewal

The large concentrations of private rented housing, and especially poor quality and badly managed parts of the sector, in inner urban areas that are the subject of major regeneration programmes can, in their current condition, pose a barrier to that regeneration both in terms of the quality of the housing and the high turnover that is evident. The aims of the Council to secure the renaissance and renewal of those communities surrounding Leeds City Centre (the 'Leeds Rim') will be dependent on addressing those issues in the private rented sector within those areas and successful outcomes can only be achieved through co-ordination between the councils' Housing Regulation Team who undertake housing enforcement action and those colleagues undertaking the area renewal initiatives, particularly relevant around the proposed selective licensing area. The introduction of selective licensing will in turn need evaluation to measure its impact in assisting regeneration and improving standards.

Increasing Choice and Housing Options

Enabling the extension of choice for individuals and households over a range of parts of their lives has become the policy of all the main political parties although current economic conditions may put a break on this at least for the time being. The private rented housing sector provides choice and adds to choice in terms of location, type and size of housing. The private rented sector provides options for households to live in areas who are unable to access social rented housing or unable to buy on the open market. It also enables households to express lifestyle choice.

Market competition and choice can only work where the consumer has good quality market information which this strategy is trying to improve. Increasing use is being made of private rented housing to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households, vulnerable people and people seeking asylum and refugees. In working through the tender process it has been agreed that Landlords offering such accommodation will be required to be members of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme and all their properties will meet the standards of that scheme. The flexibility and instant access of private rented housing offers a flexible response that hostel type accommodation cannot offer. In addition, the Supporting People strategy is seeking to shift funding from buildings based provision towards support to independent living and in particular is seeking to offer support funding to those living in private rented housing or owner occupation. In this context it is essential for private rented housing to be of a good quality and be well managed. To that end the council's Housing Options team work with accredited landlords to refer clients presenting to that service for assured short-hold tenancies in the private rented sector.

Leeds Homes

Leeds City Council invites accredited private landlords to advertise their available properties through Leeds Homes Choice-Based Lettings scheme. This enables applicants to bid for private lets with landlords. Landlords are given a list of applicants for each vacancy from which they may make a letting. This provides both greater choice, and widens the housing options for applicants, especially those in high demand areas. The aim is to increase the use of the lettings scheme by landlords, offering a diverse range of private rented housing across the city.

Student Housing

Private rented housing has traditionally provided the majority of housing for students with most returning students seeking to live in shared housing in communities. The Government drive towards increasing student numbers led to huge expansions in shared privately rented housing in cities with large student populations such as Leeds which has been very difficult to manage posing challenges to the Council, landlords and community groups.

The latest UCAS media release suggests applications from new students in 2009 be 8.8% higher than 2008-2009's record level. The Government has set a cap on student numbers for the coming year but pressure is already building for this to be lifted in light of the recession. It is likely that, even with a cap, Leeds will see a rise of about 250 students from overseas in the summer of 2009.

The development of large purpose-built student accommodation in Leeds has had an impact on the demand for some private rented properties in inner North West Leeds. It is likely that this demand pressure will continue. Research undertaken in Nottingham (<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/survey-unit/Studenthousing.pdf> pages 48-50) which has a similar market and is a comparable University town to Leeds shows that almost 63% of first year students expected to be housed in a larger student development for their first year and 21% of all respondents had a "strong" or "slight" preference to continue living in a larger student development in returning years. In Leeds almost all first year students who require accommodation are accommodated by the Higher Education institutions, while around 80% of returning students in Leeds prefer to live in private rented housing. It has been suggested that it might be worth taking this into account when setting out a policy objective that purpose built residences and the institutions should aim, as part of this strategy, to house all first years who need *and* want purpose built accommodation, either directly or through the institution and for sufficient purpose built accommodation to be encouraged to house 20% of returning students. To follow this strategy the construction of around 5,811 bed spaces would need to be developed over the period of this strategy and the evidence is that these would be let, taking pressure off the off-street market. Where appropriate the local authority would encourage the building of purpose built housing. UNIPOL have noted that while there may be additional development of student purpose built accommodation, because of the credit crunch it is likely that there will be a pause in development for 2 to 3 years, and also that the off-street property market is currently "frozen" with few buying or selling. If intake starts increasing any further the surplus capacity in the market is soon diminished, and, indeed, there is a discussion to be had about what constitutes a student housing "shortage".

New build student accommodation is also associated with higher cost accommodation and rental inflation has, over the last four years, well exceeded inflation, so this accommodation is getting more expensive compared to other rented accommodation in the City. As a wider range of students will need to rent purpose built accommodation, affordability will become an important consideration of the appropriateness of such new stock.

The market currently fails to provide, as it does generally, for students with special needs: those with families, who have or are carers and those with disabilities and there is a need for a working partnership between the Local Authority and others, to support initiatives targeted to help these groups.

In terms of quality, it is important to stress the partnership between Unipol and LCC on accreditation that covers an estimated 70% of student housing stock and the changes being made to how that accreditation is being managed:

- greater training in skills (particularly Unipol's role in niche market training)
- greater engagement through a full review of the Unipol Code to come into operation in August 2009 but with feed-ins across the next three years with greater responsibilities and support for landlords in the areas of community cohesion, noise, anti-social behaviour and assisting with inter-tenant friction
- the introduction and implementation of a more thorough verification or compliance checking system resulting in higher sampling (with a target of 2,400 property inspections over the duration of this strategy), issuing of a formal report, setting (where necessary) action plans for improvement leading to greater and more positive engagement directly with landlords (only 9% of whom are members of any formal bodies).
- higher levels of support to new landlords, "unintentional" landlords and landlords who have had a history of poorer management who are willing to receive assistance.

Improving Quality and Condition

The quality and condition of private rented housing is variable. In some areas it is of a very high quality, offering standards of housing far better than elsewhere in the rented sector or through home ownership. In those areas accommodating students, the higher expectations of some students and their parents have driven up standards, but in other often inner urban and deprived areas, quality of private rented housing can be poor with ownership often by small scale landlords unconnected to the accreditation schemes, absentee or speculative landlords. Vulnerable households (older people, people with specific needs and those on very low incomes) can tend to be over represented in these lower quality parts of the private rented sector

Improving Energy Efficiency and Affordable Warmth

Improving the energy efficiency of housing, while reducing the 'carbon footprint' of that housing and helping provide affordable warmth and reducing the numbers of households in fuel poverty, has become one of the key priorities over recent years. Stock condition data has shown that levels of energy efficiency in some parts of the private rented sector, and especially in some older housing, are very poor and many households living in private rented housing are among those most likely to be in fuel poverty. Improving energy efficiency and eliminating excess cold hazards will be a primary objective of future activity.

Driving up Standards of Management

In the past, standards of housing and tenancy management have been variable, with some landlords providing good quality management and others doing very little housing or tenancy management. However, the success and expansion of the Accreditation Schemes have brought signs of improvement and far better management. Further work is required to develop accreditation to improve professionalism in the private rented sectors to build on the good work which is already being done. Landlord representatives believe that there needs to be a greater reliance on accreditation to self-regulate the sector. More responsible and better quality landlords should be subject to self regulation outside day to day local authority control. They would still be subject to the same laws and requirements.

This would allow limited Local Authority resources to be made available to concentrate on the worst cases. The necessity to have effective housing and tenancy management is crucial if areas with high stocks of private rented housing are to be managed well and turnover of housing is not to bring problems and a lack of cohesion.

It is estimated that 38% of student properties and a significant number of other private tenants, fall under managing agents and there have been a number of high profile problems in this area. Accrediting managing agents has been particularly difficult because of the range and type of accommodation they manage and because of the churn in managing agents' portfolios. Many of the problems relating to poorer management, however, are associated with inexperienced or overloaded managing agents and this is an important area for further work.

The Council is supporting Unipol in the rolling out of a "Code Supporter" status which seeks to assist and recognise managing agents who sign a protocol that commits them to the values and standards of accreditation and then operates a verification system in accrediting individual properties under Supporter status designation. This will enable student consumers to be directed towards better agents that clearly support and are making progress under accreditation. As this scheme develops it may form a useful basis for a similar approach to be rolled out to non student properties thus bringing managing agents fully into accreditation for the first time.

To enable landlords to engage with the council, a dedicated advice point for landlords should be considered. This would be advertised as a general conduit for all landlord enquiries to the council and a one stop shop to meet their needs so raising the standards in the private rented sector by continuing engagement. It would focus also on education of the responsibilities and property standards required of landlords. Such support could only lead to positive outcomes and an improved private rented sector within the city as it is also recognised that many landlords do not engage with any national or local professional landlord organisation either.

Addressing Public Health and narrowing health inequalities

Improving and maintaining good housing standards is a very effective way of reducing some of the causes of poor health. With private rented housing providing homes for a significant number of vulnerable people, this is of particular importance.

By ensuring properties in the private rented sector are compliant with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System some important public health issues such as asthma, excess winter mortality, coronary heart disease, strokes, and accidents in the home can be tackled. This need for investment to secure long term goals is a major challenge not least because of the cost at a time when we are in the middle of a serious recession. However through demonstrating these potential improvements in health, and engaging with the Primary Care Trust, there could be a diversion of some of the traditional health care funding into appropriate initiatives and interventions in the private sector such as the proposed programme to address infant mortality.

Having regard to the scale of the problem in Leeds, effective solutions are likely to require significant investment and the expertise and commitment of several partners. It may be possible to attract funding from sources not traditionally associated with housing interventions if evidence can be provided of the benefits that these interventions could bring to the respective budget holders from the impact of 'upstream' investment in housing on the 'downstream' health and wellbeing of residents.

Precise targeting, combined with innovative and efficient use of any additional funding, could go a long way to addressing issues highlighted by the Leeds house condition survey. Efficient use of these finite resources is essential to maximising impact.

To obtain buy-in from partners on the importance of tackling housing related ill health, the costs to society, both economically and socially of continuing to have large numbers of

hazardous and non-decent homes within the private sector stock, and the substantial benefits to be had from improved housing, need to be demonstrated.

With this in mind, research is being commissioned from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University to estimate the social and economic cost of housing-related ill health in Leeds and to make recommendations for future priorities on which to focus.

The chosen approach would be to use the Leeds stock condition survey to construct a baseline of harms to health combining the survey data with the Housing Health & Safety Rating System statistical base to identify the housing types, tenures and conditions that pose the greatest risk to health. The cost of ill health can be expressed using Quality Adjusted Life Years and estimates can then be made on the impact of different interventions based on how effective they are likely to be at reducing risk and harm associated with particular hazards e.g. excess cold.

Back to Back houses

A substantial proportion of private rented housing stock is in the form of back-to-back terraced housing. This type of housing, a legacy of Leeds industrial past, contains a number of hazards that make them difficult to improve to a decent standard. When in large concentrations back-to-backs have been unattractive to potential home owners, but were and are attractive to small and large, investors. A strategy for back-to-back housing in Leeds has been produced and its implementation is now being planned. The strategy proposes a number of interventions including energy efficiency improvements, work to remove hazards in back to backs, 'facelift' or group repair improvement and some limited clearance or conversion.

New Developments

With the current housing market conditions and the impact of the credit crunch, some new build developments, especially some in Leeds City Centre are unsold and developers and their agents are seeking to rent them. Some of these, particularly the very small 'smart pads' do not meet the standards of the Leeds Landlords Accreditation Scheme due to the lack of space & amenity and may not be used for permanent residence. Others can have variable management standards arising from sub-letting by multiple landlords and the involvement of some unprofessional landlords who purchased them as speculative buy to let investments.

Reducing Domestic Burglaries

Given the history of burglaries in private rented properties, and properties occupied by students in particular, there is a need for the Council, the Police, Landlords the University, Students Unions and community groups to work together to tackle this significant issue, and improve both standards and reduction in domestic burglary rates.

Improving Stability and Community Cohesion

The private rented sector tends to have significantly higher turnover than other tenures although this can be the nature of the demand patterns for rented housing. With tenancy conditions different, and with less onus on private landlords to maintain tenants in those tenancies, areas with high concentrations of private rented housing can have high rates of turnover where the population of those areas changes rapidly, bringing continual mobility of

population. This can hinder the achievement of community cohesion, the creation of community pride, and the active involvement of local households in their communities. In student areas, higher levels of property inspections, particular environmental inspections and assisting landlords to deal with noise, litter and anti social behaviour is an important part of maintaining and enhancing community cohesion. In addition it could be in the interests of communities in which there are very high concentrations of private rented housing to seek mechanisms to increase the proportion of owner occupied and other rented housing to create a better balance of tenure and households.

Local plans (such as the Shared Housing Action Plan in North West Leeds) to manage mobility and 'churn' and explore mechanisms to create more affordable housing for rent and low cost home ownership, could be a way of managing this issue, as well as through a local Housing Strategy. The Planning policies relating to the Area of Housing Mix will still offer an opportunity to manage the amount of private rented HMOs in inner North West Leeds.

Reducing Anti Social Behaviour

The private rented sector can provide a 'bolthole' for those households evicted from or prevented from living in certain areas. Action to tackle anti-social behaviour in one area can lead to influx of 'problem households' into those areas with a high proportion of private rented housing as it is that which is most immediately accessible.

This can lead to labelling of an area and the injection of permanent instability of population. Selective Licensing was included in the Housing Act 2004 to address these issues.

Another way of tackling this would be to introduce a tenants referencing scheme accessible to all landlords including those in the private rented sector across the city. This could be used to offer a reduced cost to LLAS members offering another incentive to accreditation. Such a scheme may be better operated regionally across West Yorkshire but funding would have to be forthcoming as this is not a cheap proposal. Preliminary discussions have been ongoing for some while but funding has been the sticking point to date.

Training

With full support from landlord representatives, Leeds City Council has been a pioneer in that it has required licence holders to undergo training as a condition of mandatory HMO licences and selective licensing. Only one other authority in the country so far has done this. The training goes wider in that it incorporates agents who are involved in managing licensable HMOs. Landlords/Agents owning/managing licensable HMOs of course own/manage other properties as well, so that there is a trickle-down beneficial effect.

The training aims to improve standards of management. The accreditation scheme, with its regular landlord forums, also helps ensure landlords are kept informed and up to date on this practice. The objective should be to encourage all landlords to undergo training and use statutory mechanisms when available to ensure that this happens. Unipol has also developed comprehensive training on greater training in skills (particularly niche market training).

4. Private Rented Housing Strategy: Key Priorities

The following have been identified and broadly agreed by partners (with some key reservations on some issues) as the key priorities for this strategy for private rented housing in Leeds

A. Promoting and supporting the private rented sector to meet needs and provide choice: *the Council using its enabling role to promote the private rented housing and ensure that the Council and all relevant departments support a healthy private rented sector; and landlords contributing to agreed strategic objectives such as meeting housing needs and contributing to regeneration programmes and sustainable and balanced housing provision*

- Ensuring maintenance of a good relationship between landlord, tenant and community representatives and the Council,
- Ensuring various Departments work closely together to co-ordinate actions/decisions in relation to the private rented sector.
- Highlighting the key place of private rented housing in the revised Leeds Housing Strategy and within major regeneration and renaissance programmes
- Developing and expanded partnerships with private landlords to provide further housing options for households who are homeless or with other priority needs or general needs applicants on the waiting list unable to access social housing
- Ensuring that routes into private rented housing are prominent within the Housing Solutions approach being developed by Leeds City Council in particular developing intermediate housing options either through private landlords or housing associations
- Engaging landlords in the implementation of interventions outlined in the Back to Back Housing Strategy and in group repair or other physical and environmental improvement programmes
- Identifying future investment options for council housing using “Redundant PRS” stock including use of Management Orders, PRS leasing scheme and use of long term empty properties in PRS for ALMO stock
- Supporting the development of private rented housing and help achieve a sustainable rental market through partnership working between developers, landlords and Planning Services via pre application discussions..
- Seeking development of local housing plans in areas where there are high concentrations of private rented housing with problems and issues to resolve, in order to seek to improve sustainability of those areas
- Consider and respond to the findings of the Government’s review of the Use Classes Order

B. *Ensuring good standards of housing and management: the Council using its regulatory role to encourage responsible landlords and its enforcement role to tackle bad conditions and standards of management and landlords using self regulation through support to accreditation schemes to provide good quality housing.*

- Leeds City Council to work with landlords representatives to explore the value and feasibility of self-accreditation by landlords
- Continuing to enhance and spread Landlord Accreditation to improve standards in the private rented sector through :
 1. Encourage non-accredited landlords into accreditation while tackling landlords appropriately who are operating 'wilfully' outside the law.
 2. Increasing resources to accreditation through promoting more resources to the LLAS to complement those input by Unipol;
 3. Establishing routine and enhanced inspection levels
 4. increasing the spread of Landlord Accreditation in areas outside of Inner North West Leeds.
 5. Seeking to build on developing initiatives to bring managing agents under the umbrella of accreditation and finding resources for such initiatives
- Increasing the coverage of HMO licensing outside Inner North West Leeds by identifying and licensing relevant properties in other areas of the city.
- Implementing and evaluating the introduction of Selective Licensing in the target area
- Keep under review all the regulatory tools the Housing Act 2004 makes available (including Additional Licensing) and deploy as appropriate.
- Increasing the supply of private homes that meet the decency standard through reviewing LLAS to include decency and the use of property improvement plans under LLAS; publicising what is required and support available, working with landlords co-operatively to enable them to use the EPC's they have to obtain for their rental portfolios to address excess cold
- Ensuring enforcement of HHSRS and using targeted and proactive enforcement (utilising LHCS info) and 'worst case first enforcement'.
- Seeking means of bringing empty private rented housing into use
- Tackling issues of poor repair in private rented back to backs while seeking to re-establish private rented back to backs as good quality 'starter housing'
- Seeking to improve the standard of accommodation offered to homeless households and asylum seekers through a pre-inspection regime to monitor contracts and standards and closer working with all Council departments.
- Raising the standard of security in PRS accommodation, given traditional significant levels of burglary in Leeds.

C. Effective advice, information and support: *Involving the Council providing or supporting provision of support and accurate and timely advice and information to landlords and private tenants and local communities. Such advice not being limited by the lack of appropriately trained staff.*

- Continuing and maintaining constructive partnership working between Leeds City Council and all professional landlord organisations that operate within Leeds.
- Providing advice and assistance to landlords currently experiencing financial difficulties especially small buy-to-let investors
- Ensuring landlords act in accordance with landlord & tenant legislation
- Encouraging landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their housing stock
- Helping landlords to contribute to improving and developing deprived neighbourhoods within LLAS service plan postcode targets;
- Supporting local tenant referencing and considering the potential to support a tenant referencing scheme across West Yorkshire and how to develop collective action on anti-social behaviour and joint working with a range of partners and agencies
- Providing incentives to landlords to achieve decency in PRS including grants/ loans and high profile landlord awards scheme e.g. Green Landlord Award
- Improving the long-term sustainability of private rented housing stock through supporting landlord and tenants via an enhanced Leeds City Council tenancy relation service
- Continuing to engage with Central Government on key concerns arising from the Local Housing Allowance including links to stock condition, direct payments to landlords, LHA rates and definitions of vulnerability.
- Providing advice/information that is accessible to tenants particularly those vulnerable or hard to reach about disrepair and other issues of health and well being;
- Developing a Central Landlord Service (One Stop Shop),
- Seek to actively develop and resource a Tenant Referencing Scheme with associated tenancy training for those who do not qualify due to past behaviour etc and would otherwise remain impossible to re-house.
- Introducing deposit guarantees for landlords working collaboratively with LCC on a range of initiatives
- Providing advice and assistance to landlords on energy saving measures, including financing measures, design issues and technical advice.
- Providing car parking permits for landlords/tradesmen linked to the LLAS membership in residential areas subject to Residential Parking Zones
- Supporting and maintaining helplines for residents in areas with a large private rented sector
- Developing outreach and support to BME households and vulnerable people living in private rented housing
- Exploring ways of engaging private tenants in local tenant and resident associations and mechanisms
- Continuing to support the Shared Housing Group in North West Leeds and the activity set out in the Shared Housing Action Plan

5. Roles and Responsibilities

It is essential for the successful implementation of this strategy to have the full support, commitment and ownership of the range of partners involved in its delivery. This section outlines the roles of those key partners.

Leeds Housing Partnership and Leeds City Council

- To ensure the continual review and improvement of the Leeds Private Rented Housing Strategy
- To respect and recognise the contribution of responsible landlords and promote the role of private rented housing in meeting needs, demand and choice
- To recognise the right of private landlords to operate a profitable business while having responsibility for the safety, health and well-being of their tenants and contributing to maintaining the neighbourhoods in which they operate.
- To understand changes and trends in supply, demand and cost in the private rented sector and where private rented housing is located.

Leeds City Council Environment and Neighbourhoods Directorate

- To utilise its regulatory role to improve standards of provision and management, and also by encouraging landlords to join or maintain membership of the Leeds Landlords or UNIPOL Accreditation Schemes
- To utilise its enabling role to provide support and training for private landlords and advice on quality and housing standards. This will assist them in meeting the terms of legislation and accreditation scheme codes of standards and consult regularly with representatives of landlords and management agents in the formulation of policy whilst taking account, wherever possible, of their views and concerns.
- To exert its statutory enforcement role to ensure compliance of private landlords with the key legislation providing for the safety, health and well-being of tenants
- To use its enforcement role to take action against any landlord found to be operating their business in a substandard manner in accordance with the council's agreed enforcement policy
- To determine the level and type of provision needed from private landlords to house homeless and vulnerable people
- To work with NASS to establish levels of provision needed to accommodate asylum seekers
- To establish and operate appropriate and efficient contracting arrangements for use of private rented housing from accredited landlords only.
- To ensure that satisfactory housing standards & management are met in any private rented housing subject to any contract let by Leeds City Council
- To seek to provide private landlords with a long-term commitment to arrangements for the provision of accommodation through contract and to recognise that landlords will only provide such accommodation if it is economic and profitable to do so

- To seek to maximise available funding to ensure provision of effective floating support provision to vulnerable people housed in private rented housing.
- To work with the Universities UNIPOL, Students Unions, Landlords, and community associations to implement and review the student housing strategy for Leeds
- To provide effective, accurate and timely advice and support to private tenants on health and safety, landlord/tenant, rent payment and housing benefit matters through Leeds Housing Options
- To support other advice agencies (CAB, Harehills Housing Aid etc) to provide effective, accurate and timely advice and support to private tenants on health and safety, landlord/tenant, rent payment and housing benefit matters
- To promote the inclusion of private tenants in community engagement structures
- To work with the Leeds Tenants Federation to explore how to include private tenants in tenants and residents groups
- To encourage registered tenants groups and community associations to promote membership to private tenants
- To promote improved security standards within the private rented sector in Leeds

Leeds City Council City Development

- To ensure that planning applications are fairly, transparently and properly determined without bias towards other interested groups.
- To consider how planning policies can be best used to manage the distribution of private rented housing

Leeds Benefits Service

- To ensure the efficient, accurate and timely processing of Local Housing Allowance applications and payments in accordance with national indicators.
- To ensure that payment is made to the landlords where the circumstances justify this action
- To ensure effective, accurate and timely advice on housing benefits matters
- To provide information to landlords as to progress in respect of claims where tenants direct Leeds Benefits Service to do so.

Rent Officer Service

- To provide accurate information on rent levels to the local housing allowance process
- To consult with the Local Authority and landlords and collect information on the rental market as part of defining the broad rental market areas and setting the local housing allowance rates

UNIPOL

- To work with the Council, the Universities, Students Unions and landlords/private sector providers to ensure that housing for students is of a good standard
- To provide good quality, well-managed and affordable housing for students
- To provide training, advice and support for landlords

Private Landlords

- To participate in dialogue with the Council with a view to agreeing strategies for the private rented sector, including the most appropriate levels of private rented housing across the city and within various neighbourhoods

- To provide well managed and good quality housing for a range of housing needs including homeless and vulnerable people, students and asylum seekers and refugees, professional people and those suffering relationship breakdowns
- To support the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme, the UNIPOL Accreditation Scheme or other endorsed schemes and maintain their membership
- To provide good quality, well-managed and affordable housing for students that fully complies with the UNIPOL Accreditation Scheme or the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- To support the strategic aim of the Leeds Housing Partnership and the Council to create and maintain mixed, sustainable communities
- To work constructively with the Leeds Benefits Service to ensure the efficiency of the benefits system
- To provide accurate information required by the Leeds Council in a timely manner.
- To advertise their available properties through Leeds Homes subject to membership of the Leeds Landlord Accreditation Scheme.
- To support and attend landlords forums and ensure they have good awareness of current legislation and good practice and undertake appropriate training in their roles as landlords
- To co-operate, as far as practicable and reasonable, with the Council to address anti-social behaviour by their tenants taking account of the costs, practicalities and outcomes of enforcement action.
- Members of LLAS to adopt and promote the Accredited Tenants Scheme in its existing or future format
- To support and uphold tenants welfare rights and other legal rights
- To support and work constructively with advice agencies and Leeds Housing Options
- To provide effective, accurate and timely advice and support on health and safety matters
- To work with Safer Leeds in raising security standards in PRS accommodation, thereby reducing burglary levels within Leeds.

Universities

- To work closely with Unipol, the Students Unions and landlords to ensure that students who want private rented housing can gain access and enjoy that housing in safety and responsibly

Community Groups

- To contribute to a dialogue with the Council and Landlords over levels of private rented housing within neighbourhoods and impacts on local residents

Tenants and Residents and Community Organisations

- To explore how to include private tenants in registered tenants and residents groups
- To promote membership to private tenants

6. OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

This strategy when implemented will ensure that all of those involved in private rented housing will work together to achieve or contribute to:

Outcome	Leeds Housing Strategy Theme	Leeds Strategic Plan Theme
The recognition of private rented housing as a valued component of balanced and sustainable housing provision and communities in Leeds	Housing Quality Affordable Housing	Thriving Places Harmonious Communities Health and Well Being
Recognition of the role of private rented housing in not only meeting demand and choice but also meeting needs of specific groups including students, homeless and vulnerable people and asylum seekers and refugees so long as it is economic to do so and helping to reduce the victimisation of certain vulnerable groups, by raising security standards in PRS accommodation	Affordable Housing Housing Quality Independent Living	Health and Well Being Harmonious Communities
More homeless households temporarily and permanently housed in private rented housing	Affordable Housing Independent Living	Health and Well Being
More privately rented properties to be made available to settle asylum seekers pending decision of their cases and migrant workers	Affordable Housing Independent Living	Health and Well Being
More privately rented homes of a good standard through encouragement of landlords to improve their service	Housing Quality	Thriving Places Health and Well Being
Fewer private rented homes of a poor standard of condition and amenity through effective enforcement action being taken against poor landlords	Housing Quality	Thriving Places Health and Well Being
Increased membership of the Leeds Landlords Accreditation Scheme, the UNIPOL Code of Standards and other accreditation schemes e.g. Accreditation Network UK	Housing Quality	Thriving Places
Increasing numbers of bedspaces in the private rented sector provided by accredited landlords	Housing Quality	Thriving Places

Outcome	Leeds Housing Strategy Theme	Leeds Strategic Plan Theme
Accurate and timely payment of Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance for the benefit of private tenants and landlords	Affordable Housing Independent Living	Health and Well Being Thriving Places
Meeting of national targets set for Local Housing Allowance processing for private rented housing.	Affordable Housing Independent Living	Health and Well Being Thriving Places
Efficient operation of planning policies and building control issues relating to private rented housing including consultation & advice relating to applicability of housing standards.	Housing Quality	Thriving Places
Provision of accurate and timely advice and information to private tenants	Independent Living	Harmonious Communities
Inclusion of private tenants in tenant and resident involvement and community engagement structures	Independent Living	Harmonious Communities
Developing systematic consultation mechanisms with private tenants	Independent Living	Harmonious Communities
Seeking to achieve balance between the private rented and other sectors in neighbourhoods.	Independent Living	Harmonious Communities

This will result in a private rented sector that provides good quality and well managed housing that offers an essential component of sustainable and balanced housing provision in Leeds.

Output Targets

The following targets have been set in the Leeds Housing Strategy for private rented housing in Leeds.

	2008/09 (Baseline)	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
No of bedspaces accredited under the Leeds Landlords Accreditation Scheme	tbc	20,000	tbc	tbc
No. of licensed HMO bedspaces (Minimum)	tbc	tbc	tbc	tbc
No. of homes subject to selective licensing				
No. of private lettings made through Leeds Housing Options	426	720	760	800
No. of homeless preventions relating to tenants being able to remain indefinitely in a private rented tenancy	40	100	125	150

