



NOTICE OF MEETING

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

MONDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 4.30 PM

COUNCIL CHAMBER - THE GUILDHALL

Telephone enquiries to Anna Martyn - Tel 023 9283 4870
Email: anna.martyn@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

If any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting has access requirements, please notify the contact named above.

Information with regard to public access due to Covid precautions

- Attendees will be requested to undertake an asymptomatic/ lateral flow test within 48 hours of the meeting.
- If symptomatic you must not attend and self-isolate following the stay at home guidance issued by Public Health England.
- All attendees are recommended to wear a face covering while moving around within the Guildhall.
- Attendees will be encouraged to take a temperature check on arrival.
- Although it will no longer be a requirement attendees may choose to keep a social distance and take opportunities to prevent the spread of infection
- Hand sanitiser is provided at the entrance and throughout the Guildhall. All attendees are encouraged to make use of hand sanitiser on entry to the Guildhall and are requested to follow the one way system in place.
- Attendees are encouraged book in to the venue (QR code). An NHS test and trace log will be retained and maintained for 21 days for those that cannot or have not downloaded the app.
- Those not participating in the meeting and wish to view proceedings are encouraged to do so remotely via the livestream link.

Membership

Councillor Darren Sanders (Cabinet Member)

Councillor Cal Corkery

Councillor Scott Payter-Harris

(NB This agenda should be retained for future reference with the minutes of this meeting).

Please note that the agenda, minutes and non-exempt reports are available to view online on the Portsmouth City Council website: www.portsmouth.gov.uk

Deputations by members of the public may be made on any item where a decision is going to be taken. The request should be made in writing to the contact officer (above) by 12 noon of the working day before the meeting, and must include the purpose of the deputation (for example, for or against the recommendations). Email requests are accepted.

A G E N D A

Meeting information: Risk assessment for the Council Chamber

- 1 Apologies for absence**
- 2 Declarations of interest**
- 3 Management of energy provision in local authority housing whilst void
(Pages 13 - 32)**

Purpose

The purpose of the report is to recommend an improved system of managing the issue of gas and electricity supplies in local authority social housing dwellings when the property is void. This report will highlight the benefits a new system would offer tenants and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet Member

- 1. Recognises the benefits for tenants from a standardised process for the management of gas and electricity bills when Local Authority Housing properties change tenants.**
 - 2. Notes the positive impact of the pilot with Utilita which includes, providing a clear and concise service to tenants, and that it saves money, staff resource time and generates a small income.**
 - 3. Agrees the pilot is extended to the full housing stock.**
 - 4. Delegates to the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services to undertake all necessary and procedural actions to formalise the process for void energy management with a single supplier in the long term, undertaking a suitable procurement process if and when required.**
-
- 4 Update on assistance for people to secure a private rented home, to reduce homelessness and housing need in Portsmouth (Pages 33 - 54)**

Purpose

To provide an update on assistance for people to secure a private rented home, to reduce homelessness and housing need in Portsmouth. This includes an update on previously agreed actions agreed in January 2020.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet Member

- 1. Approve that the 0% rent deposit loan scheme pilot is no longer suitable for delivery.**
 - 2. Subject to funding, proceed with the development of the bond scheme, piloted over the next 12 months, as one element in a range of options offered to landlords to increase access to the private rented sector.**
 - 3. Submit a request for use of up to £85,600 from reserves to fund the pilot of the bond scheme for one year.**
 - 4. Recognise the work of the pilot PRS Access team in helping over 70 families and 123 single people to access the private rental sector. Approve the completion of the pilot to understand if a longer-term service can be sustainably provided.**
- 5 Update on the actions from the Private Rental Sector Strategy 2021-2026 (Pages 55 - 66)**

Purpose

To provide an update on the progress of actions agreed in the Private Rental Sector Strategy 2021-2026.

Members of the public are permitted to use both audio visual recording devices and social media during this meeting, on the understanding that it neither disrupts the meeting nor records those stating explicitly that they do not wish to be recorded. Guidance on the use of devices at meetings open to the public is available on the Council's website and posters on the wall of the meeting's venue.

Whilst every effort will be made to webcast this meeting, should technical or other difficulties occur, the meeting will continue without being webcast via the Council's website.

This meeting is webcast (videoed), viewable via the Council's livestream account at <https://livestream.com/accounts/14063785>

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	Coronavirus Risk Assessment for the Council Chambers
Company	Portsmouth City Council
Department	Corporate Health and Safety, Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services Directorate
Activity	Covid-19 operating safely in the Guildhall Council Chambers This risk assessment is a live document and will be updated as new information is issued.
Date	19 July 2021 (v3)
Review date	Ongoing
Author	Lynda Martin, Health and Safety Manager

Hazard	Who could be harmed and how	All controls required	How controls will be checked	Confirmed all in place or further action required
<p>Risk of exposure to Covid-19 virus</p>	<p>Staff, contractors and attendees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The capacity for the Guildhall Council Chamber for all attendees (including members of the public) has been calculated to be maximum of 30 people to accommodate 2 m social distancing. • Improvements in ventilation permits up to an additional 30 attendees. Members of the public will be advised to follow Covid safety recommendations. If 2m social distancing cannot be maintained then face coverings should continue to be worn. • The actions taken to maximise ventilation in the Guildhall Council Chamber includes: • The removal of internal casement secondary glazing windows. • Large casement windows will be opened. • Pedestal fans - positioned in each of the wing areas and along the back wall behind the pillars, maximum speed and modulation setting. • High level doors and window - the double doors to the high level galleries and the gallery corridor window will be opened. • The Guildhall deems, with the rate of infection and transmission still high that the following mitigations remain in place and will be conditions of entry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The wearing of masks ○ Temperature checks ○ To ask for a Covid pass (double vaccination / negative lateral flow test) • Therefore: • All attendees are required to wear a face covering while moving around within the Guildhall. If 2m social distancing cannot be maintained then face coverings should continue to be worn. • On arrival all attendees must scan the Test and trace QR code, sanitise their hands and may have their temperature checked 	<p>All attendees will be invited.</p> <p>Signage displayed.</p> <p>All staff to monitor and politely challenge non-conformity directly.</p> <p>Posters displayed.</p>	<p>In place</p>

Hazard	Who could be harmed and how	All controls required	How controls will be checked	Confirmed all in place or further action required
Page 7		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All attendees are requested to undertake an Asymptomatic / lateral flow test within 48 hours of a meeting. Information on how to access this testing can be found on the Portsmouth City Council website: (https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/coronavirus-covid-19/getting-tested-for-coronavirus-in-portsmouth/community-testing-for-covid-19-in-portsmouth/ or https://intranet.portsmouth.gov.uk/hr/wellbeing/coronavirus/testing-for-coronavirus/) • If the result is positive you must not attend the meeting, you and your household must self-isolate and you must book a confirmatory PCR test • Further mitigations to reduce the risk of exposure and transmission: • Attendees should be reminded of the need to regularly wash hands for 20 seconds using soap and water or hand sanitiser. • Maintain good hygiene particularly when entering or leaving. Hand sanitiser will be located at the entrance of the building. • Practice social distancing, trying where possible to keep 2m apart. Where 2m cannot be maintained 1m+ applies, this involves additional measures i.e. Face coverings and not facing each other etc. • No hospitality to be provided. • Some members are in the clinically extremely vulnerable group or vulnerable group https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/ Therefore: • Members are advised not to use public transport to get to and from Council meetings wherever possible. • Council Meeting is scheduled so members can avoid peak travel times on public transport if they have not alternative option. • All members will be requested to sit 2 metres apart and must adhere to arrival and exit procedures as detailed above. • All members may be required to undertake a temperature check on arrival and will sanitise their hands. • All member will bring their own refreshments. • All members will bring and use their own pen/stationery. 	<p>Staff to monitor. Any non compliance will result in the attendee not be permitted entry to the building.</p> <p>Guidance sheet provided to all attendees in advance of the meeting.</p>	

Hazard	Who could be harmed and how	All controls required	How controls will be checked	Confirmed all in place or further action required
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The duration of the meeting should be reduced as much as possible to only consider essential business. Multiple exit doors will be opened at the end of the meeting to facilitate a straightforward exit from the building and minimise congestion. 		
<p>Social distancing and NHS Test and Trace - advice from Public Health Portsmouth (PHP)</p> <p>Maintaining 2m distance is primarily about reducing the risk of infection. However, it is important to recognise that for NHS Test and Trace, the definition of a close contact of a positive case outside of the household is either being face to face with someone for 1 minute or being within 2m of someone for 15 minutes. Therefore, people may still be asked to self-isolate for 10 days if they are not able to meet the 2m requirement (regardless of any of the 1m+ mitigations). Further details can be found here https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works</p>				
Hygiene and Prevention Page 8	Staff, contractors and attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleaning staff are working at the Guildhall so each hand rail, door plate and stairwell is regularly cleaned. Cleaning wipes are provided at the reception desk in the Octagon. Sanitiser provided at entry, exit and at all lift lobbies. Building ventilation adjusted to provide good extraction and fresh air turnover (where possible) Doorways marked, where possible, with entry and exit channels. Only one person should use the Lifts at a time. Staggered arrival and exit times to minimise the number arriving and leaving in one go. Follow entry/exit signage to the building Member's seats to be located 2m distance from each other. Tables to be used to ensure chairs are not moved. Each speaker to have their own microphone. No sharing of microphones. All attendees are to bring their own water bottles/drinks. Members are to remain in their own seats throughout the meeting. There will be no swapping of chairs when elected to another position. 	Sanitising equipment with COSHH safety sheets are provided on arrival and in each reception area. Posters displayed Signage regarding hand washing placed in all restroom areas All soap provided will be anti-bacterial soap Gloves will be worn by staff completing	In place

Hazard	Who could be harmed and how	All controls required	How controls will be checked	Confirmed all in place or further action required
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members will be sat with their group colleagues to minimise the risk of members needing to move to speak to colleagues. . Attendees should only leave their seat to use the rest rooms. 	<p>cleaning and/or sanitising. Gloves to be disposed of appropriately after cleaning is undertaken.</p> <p>Exiting will be undertaken in a distanced manner maintaining 2m social distancing at all times.</p>	
<p>Test and trace</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 9</p>	<p>Staff, contractors and attendees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact details of all staff are held by the meeting organiser. No members of the public can just turn up on the day. All attendees must scan the venue's test and trace QR code on arrival. NHS test and trace log to be retained and maintained for those that cannot or have not downloaded the app. Contact details will be held securely by the event manager for 21 days and will then be securely disposed of. 		<p>In place</p>
<p>Symptomatic attendees</p>	<p>Staff, contractors and attendees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All attendees briefed if symptomatic they must not attend the council meeting and must self-isolate following the stay at home guidance issued by Public Health England. If any person displays or reports symptoms of Covid-19 they must leave the building by the closest exit, return home directly and follow the stay at home guidance for households issued by Public Health England. If the person is unable to leave the building safely on their own, event staff will ask them to move to the first aid room and we will call 111 for advice. The area will be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised that has been occupied by the person using the correct PPE. 	<p>First aid staff always available during working hours. Additional PPE available to first responders in the event of the person showing symptoms.</p>	<p>In place</p>

Hazard	Who could be harmed and how	All controls required	How controls will be checked	Confirmed all in place or further action required
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close contacts will be notified. This is anyone who has come into face to face contact (under 1 metre) with the case for any length of time, or within 2 metres of the case for more than 15 minutes'. 		
Ventilation and air conditioning	Staff, contractors and attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing ventilation systems have been reviewed and improvements have made in the Guildhall to maximise fresh air into the building and ventilation where possible All windows to remain open in chamber during the meeting 	The Guildhall Trust and PCC Facilities Team to implement and monitor.	In place/ongoing
Toilet facilities	Staff, contractors and attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to toilet facilities will be limited to one person at a time. Cleaning products are provided for use by attendees to clean area after use, paying particular attention to contact points i.e. door handles, taps etc. Posters are displayed reminding attendees staff to clean down touch points etc. after use and 'single person use' posters displayed. 	<p>Facilities team to monitor</p> <p>Additional cleaning during the day and after the meeting.</p> <p>Staff to inform Line manager where there are concerns.</p> <p>Posters displayed</p>	In place/ongoing
PPE	Staff, contractors and attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All attendees must wear a face covering and are encouraged to bring their own. Face coverings to be available at the entrance to the Guildhall if required. Gloves, anti-bacterial wipes and bin bags to be provide to all events staff. Sanitiser available at the entrance and exit of the building and in reception areas. 	<p>Posters displayed</p> <p>Guidance provided in advance of</p>	In place/ongoing

Hazard	Who could be harmed and how	All controls required	How controls will be checked	Confirmed all in place or further action required
		<p>The following guidance on using face coverings should be followed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash/sanitise hands prior to fitting the face covering • when wearing a covering avoid touching your face or mask as you will contaminate the covering • change your face covering if it becomes damp or contaminated, • continue to wash your hands regularly • if the material is washable then follow the manufacturer's instructions if not dispose of in your usual waste 	meeting to all attendees.	
Manual handling	Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff to follow manual handling policy and guidance • 2 person or more lift should be avoided where possible if participants are closer than 2m. Consider use of mechanical aids etc. • Where a 2 person or more lift is unavoidable the risk assessment must be revisited to ensure Covid-safe mitigation measures are in place i.e. face coverings, disposable gloves, minimising exposure time etc. 	Meeting to be planned in advance with alternatives to 2 man lifts provided wherever possible.	In place/ongoing
Financial Risk	Staff, contractors and attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council meeting may need to be cancelled at short notice if the Covid-19 situation changes due to local outbreaks, local sustained community transmission, or a serious and imminent threat to public health. • Contact details of all attendees held by the event manager to enable easy efficient cancellation. • Technology in place to move to virtual council meeting if required and permitted by legislation. 	<p>Financial commitments minimised wherever possible.</p> <p>PCC Insurance department aware of council meeting.</p>	In Place

Hazard	Who could be harmed and how	All controls required	How controls will be checked	Confirmed all in place or further action required
Updates		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This risk assessment is a live document and will be updated and a result of consultation and as new information becomes available. 		
Further information		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further government information on support during the coronavirus pandemic can be found here HSE guidance, on working safely during the coronavirus pandemic can be found here The Government's guidance for the safe use of council buildings 		

Agenda Item 3



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness	
Date of meeting:	20 September 2021	
Subject:	Management of energy provision in local authority housing whilst void	
Report by:	James Hill - Director Housing, Neighbourhood and Buildings	
Author:	Lauren Taylor - Estate Manager (Leading Voids intervention roll in) Andrew Waggott - Energy Services Team Manager	
Wards affected:	All	
Key decision:		No
Full Council decision:		No

1. Purpose of report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to recommend an improved system of managing the issue of gas and electricity supplies in local authority social housing dwellings when the property is void. This report will highlight the benefits a new system would offer tenants and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

2. Recommendations

2.1. That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness recognises the benefits for tenants from a standardised process for the management of gas and electricity bills when Local Authority Housing properties change tenants.

2.2. That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness notes the positive impact of the pilot with Utilita which includes, providing a clear and concise service to tenants, and that it saves money, staff resource time and generates a small income.

2.3. That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness agrees the pilot is extended to the full housing stock.

2.4. That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness delegates to the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services to undertake all necessary and procedural actions to formalise the process for void energy management with a single supplier in the long term, undertaking a suitable procurement process if and when required.

3. Background

- 3.1. Portsmouth City Council (the City Council), through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), is a social landlord with approximately 15,000 properties in Portsmouth and the Havant area. Typically it has between 700-900 properties become empty (known as a 'void') each year. Whilst a property is empty, the council is responsible for the gas and electric supply to a void until a new tenancy begins.
- 3.2. When a tenant leaves a property, the supply may be with one of a large number of suppliers currently trading in the UK at the present time. Under the current system, the HRA takes on responsibility for the payment of bills to this incumbent supplier.
- 3.3. The outgoing tenant should ensure they contact the energy supplier to advise they are moving out and submit the latest meter reading. However it has been seen that in a significant number of cases this does not happen meaning that the incoming tenant often doesn't know the energy supplier for the new property, and therefore has difficulty in making contact with the energy supplier to take on responsibility of the supply. This creates unnecessary confusion and disruption and is time consuming for the new tenant.

4. Current system

- 4.1. As part of systems thinking work around how the voids process can be managed in a better way, it was identified that there are significant issues with the current system. These are split into four broad categories, all of which have an impact on the customer journey and cost to the HRA as demonstrated below:

- 4.1.1. Credit meters: bills continue to be sent to the property in the council's name after the new tenant has moved in. This creates an administrative burden of moving utility accounts into tenants' names. In addition human error is often encountered when transferring final meter readings onto various supplier portals. Customers often have to provide their tenancy agreement to the energy supplier to evidence they have moved in, sometimes taking numerous days and multiple phone calls to get the account liability changed.

Where the City Council receives a bill it is not liable for, it has to make contact with the customer to gain permission to share a copy of their tenancy agreement with the energy supplier. This process can take between 30 minutes and a number of hours, assuming that the customer gives permission.

If the customer does not give permission, the bills continue to be sent to the City Council. If the City Council cannot get a resolution it may be required to pay the ex-tenant's outstanding bill, which ultimately becomes a cost to the rest of the HRA.

The council spent £40,000 paying ex-tenant unpaid utility bills in the 2020/21 financial year. This figure does not include the unallocated time of the accounts team to process the payments.



- 4.1.2. Key and card meters: A large amount of time is spent by staff and contractor operatives when replacing key cards from the utility suppliers via a local retailer. Time is spent topping up meters to clear debt and to enable works to be undertaken during the void period. If the previous tenant has left a large debt on the meter, the incoming tenant often has a lengthy negotiation with the energy supplier to get this debt removed. The energy provider often has to make a visit to the property to remove the debt, and they will not do this until such time as a tenant has moved in.
- 4.1.3. Pre-payment smart meters: An administrative burden is created as suppliers are contacted to switch the liability into the City Council's name when the ex-tenant has moved out. This is needed to ensure the property has a gas and electric supply to undertake works in the property during the void period. Each call takes approximately an hour. When the new tenant moves in, they have to follow the same procedure, spending a further hour trying to get through to the correct supplier.
- 4.1.4. Standing charges: the majority of suppliers charge 'standing charges', with the average for electricity being 32.5p/day; and gas 45p/day. The average void period is 30 days.
- 4.2. In the financial year 2020/21, the City Council spent approximately £40,000 paying for gas and electric in void properties for credit meters; largely in standing charges.
- 4.3. In 2020, repairs and maintenance contractors spent £15,100 topping up gas and electric meters. This equates to an average of £61 per a property in gas and electric charges.
- 4.4. Dealing with each property takes on average of two hours of officer time to collect meter readings, contacting the energy supplier, physically going to a shop and topping up the meter and dealing with the clerical side of paying a bill. This equates to a total of 1,800 hours spent dealing with this issue.
- 4.5. Therefore the total budgetary impact on the service is approximated to be £85,100 per annum.
- 4.6. The incoming tenant is further impacted by having to contact the energy supplier when they move into their new home so the liability can be changed over. This takes at least an hour once they know who their energy supplier is.

5. Pilot of a new scheme

- 5.1. In February 2021 a pilot project began to provide a different way of handling gas and electricity supplies during a void. This was working with a company called Utilita Energy Limited to offer a solution for these issues, and no commitment requiring a formal procurement process has been undertaken at this time.



- 5.2. Starting in the Paulsgrove area, new voids, long term voids and those undergoing improvement projects have their energy supply switched using the online Utilita portal. When the property is void, the meter resets to 50p credit with £15 emergency credit usage for the void period. The account is switched into City Council's name.
- 5.3. If the property doesn't have a compatible smart meter at the start of the void, Utilita schedule an appointment whilst the property is void to change the meter.
- 5.4. When the new tenant accepts the property and a new tenancy start date is agreed, the name and tenancy start date is input into the Utilita portal and the account is switched into their name. £5 is credited to both gas and electric for when the customer moves in.
- 5.5. Importantly, the new tenant is under no obligation to stay with Utilita and are free to switch to alternate energy suppliers at any time. The Switched On Portsmouth service includes an energy switching website, which can assist tenants to find the best possible tariff for their circumstances. Additionally, the Switched On Portsmouth team can provide support to residents when undertaking an energy supplier switch.
- 5.6. As of the 6th September 2021, a total of 519 properties have been switched to Utilita during the pilot. Of these, properties;
 - 5.6.1. 84 were project voids (saving the City Council money in standing charges)
 - 5.6.2. 57 new tenants have moved in and switched to a new energy supplier (away from Utilita)
 - 5.6.3. 345 additional smart meters have been installed in local authority properties.
- 5.7. Customer feedback has been positive as they have one less bill to deal with when moving into their new, and can address their energy supply at a time suitable for them.
- 5.8. From the pilot it has been learned that there is the required amount of time between the ex-tenant ending and the property becoming void to enable Utilita to get the switch facilitated in a timely manner. This also gives Utilita more time to schedule an appointment for switching the meter if required.
- 5.9. The amount of time spent on the phone to gas and electricity suppliers in the voids process has significantly reduced.
- 5.10. As, in the non-pilot system there is a time lag between the tenant moving out and the energy supplier sending the City Council the bill, it is difficult to measure the financial impact.
- 5.11. In the pilot area of Paulsgrove, the amount the contractors are spending topping up meters has reduced. Since the beginning of the pilot one of the repairs and maintenance contractors has spent £305 topping up meters in Paulsgrove compared to comparable non-pilot area where £970 has been spent topping up meters.

5.12. In order to continue to learn the effectiveness of the pilot for tenants and the City Council, it is recommended that all HRA dwelling stock should be added to the pilot, for a minimum period of one year. This will enable the project team to learn:

- 5.12.1. the impact on the bills coming through to finance,
- 5.12.2. the ability for Utilita to service the level of demand, and
- 5.12.3. the ongoing needs of our customers.

5.13. This pilot will continue to benefit the incoming tenant by:

- 5.13.1. The customer moves into their new property knowing their energy supplier
- 5.13.2. The gas and electric has £5 credited on each meter
- 5.13.3. Vulnerable customers are immediately supported by being placed on the Priority Services Register with Utilita to ensure they are dealt with as a priority should there be a disruption to the service.
- 5.13.4. Installation of SMART meters with in-home display to help households better understand their energy consumption.
- 5.13.5. Residents being able to remotely top up their meters 24/7.
- 5.13.6. Residents will be eligible for the Warm Homes Discount.

5.14. This pilot will continue to benefit the City Council, and therefore onto the HRA, by:

- 5.14.1. Utilita providing a single business partner for all query management.
- 5.14.2. Providing access to a single customer portal to make switches simply and easily.
- 5.14.3. Timescales for switches being having a fixed maximum period of time of 21 days for gas and 14 days for electric.
- 5.14.4. Providing the HRA with a referral fee per fuel switched, which will go toward the offset of costs.
- 5.14.5. There being no standing charges for the City Council or the tenants.
- 5.14.6. There being no requirement on the City Council to undertake debt clearance.
- 5.14.7. A reduction in the volume of bills being handled by the City Council's purchase to pay team.

5.15. The council understands that many of the tenants coming into the new properties following the void period will be sensitive to high energy bills. A cost analysis of Utilita's prepayment tariff was therefore undertaken to ensure that a customer choosing to stay with Utilita would not be adversely affected by high bills. Details are correct as of the 9th September 2021 and represent a property with annual fuel consumption of 2,900 kWh of electricity and 12,000 kWh of gas:

- 5.15.1. Utilita's prepayment tariff would result in an annual bill of £1,136.
- 5.15.2. The UK's largest energy supplier's prepayment tariff would result in bills of £1,309.
- 5.15.3. The Prepayment Meter Cap, set by the energy regulator, Ofgem, will be £1,309 from the 1st October.

5.15.4. Ogem's Default Tariff Cap (standard variable tariffs), which applies to credit meters, is £1,277

6. Reasons for recommendations

- 6.1. Under the current non-pilot system, the customer moving into a Local Authority Housing managed property has the burden of finding who their new energy provider is, making contact, and then switching the account into their name, sometimes taking multiple phone calls and hours of time.
- 6.2. It additional, without a formalised process for managing voids' energy requirements, there is a financial impact upon the City Council, and the HRA.
- 6.3. Utilita's void process agreement ensures that neither the Council nor the tenant are tied into a contract; and can move away with no penalty.
- 6.4. The pilot has been a success in terms of turning a time-consuming and costly process into a much more streamlined protocol, which is actually cost positive to the service. The early results are positive for the tenant and the City Council.
- 6.5. As a result of the positive pilot, officers now wish to enact a wider rollout to all areas of the Housing portfolio in a graduate, area by area approach. This expansion of the trial would remain a pilot, but would begin immediately following the approval.
- 6.6. Once the Pilot is complete, consideration will be given the results, and if further decisions are required they will be sought.

7. Integrated impact assessment

7.1 An integrated impact assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix 1.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. Depending on the nature and the value of the arrangement proposed in the main body of this report, this arrangement may be subject to public procurement and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. In addition, this arrangement may also be subject to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules which govern procurement matters.
- 8.2. It is understood that once the property becomes "void" and the account is put into the Council's name, Utilita also becomes the Council's gas and electricity provider and, as a result, this arrangement becomes a contract potentially subject to procurement. Legal and procurement advice shall be sought to ensure compliance with any internal and external rules and the relevant legislation.

8.3. Regarding the passing of the tenants' details to Utilita, the instructing officer shall seek advice from Legal Services and the Data Protection Team to ensure that the Council complies with the relevant legal obligations under the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 (and all other relevant legislation and guidance as may be applicable from time to time in relation to data processing). It should be noted that relying on a consent given in a tenancy agreement may not be sufficient due to unequal bargaining powers between the parties hence it is important to ensure appropriate advice is sought at a timely manner and in any event before this arrangement with Utilita materialises and any personal data is shared with the company.

9. Director of Finance's comments

9.1 The SMART meter system allows the Council to more accurately measure a meter reading on a particular day, this will ensure that when one tenancy ends and another begins the Council can accurately assess the cost of electricity or gas used and therefore the cost associated with utilities should reduce.

9.2 This also means that there is no requirement for the contractor to try and load a meter with credit which uses up the time of an operative and causes additional administration which should help the Repairs and Maintenance budget realise efficiency savings.

9.3 In addition, if the revised process is extended across the whole housing portfolio efficiency savings in the form of staff resources of £30,000 per annum may be achieved.

9.4 For each fuel which is switched in a void, the Council are paid £20, there are around 900 voids a year so that could total £36,000 in additional income a year. However this will only materialise if a customer is not with Utilita prior to the property becoming void.

.....
Signed by: James Hill - Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Integrated impact assessment

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/
rejected by on

.....
Signed by:



Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

Integrated impact assessment (IIA) form December 2019

www.portsmouth.gov.uk

The integrated impact assessment is a quick and easy screening process. It should:

- identify those policies, projects, services, functions or strategies that could impact positively or negatively on the following areas:
 - Communities and safety
 - Regeneration and culture
 - Environment and public space
 - Equality & - Diversity This can be found in Section A5

Directorate:

Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

Service, function:

Voids Energy Management

Title of policy, service, function, project or strategy (new or old) :

An improved system of managing the issue of gas and electricity supplies in HRA dwellings when the property is void

Type of policy, service, function, project or strategy:

- Existing
- New / proposed
- Changed

What is the aim of your policy, service, function, project or strategy?

An improved system of managing the gas and electric fuel usage of a void of a property. The proposal improves the customer journey and reduces the time and cost to the Council.

Has any consultation been undertaken for this proposal? What were the outcomes of the consultations? Has anything changed because of the consultation? Did this inform your proposal?

None

A - Communities and safety

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A1-Crime - Will it make our city safer?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce crime, disorder, ASB and the fear of crime?
- How will it prevent the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances?
- How will it protect and support young people at risk of harm?
- How will it discourage re-offending?

If you want more information contact Lisa.Wills@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-spp-plan-2018-20.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How will you measure/check the impact of your proposal?

A - Communities and safety

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A2-Housing - Will it provide good quality homes?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it increase good quality affordable housing, including social housing?
- How will it reduce the number of poor quality homes and accommodation?
- How will it produce well-insulated and sustainable buildings?
- How will it provide a mix of housing for different groups and needs?

If you want more information contact Daniel.Young@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/psh-providing-affordable-housing-in-portsmouth-april-19.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

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How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

A - Communities and safety

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A3-Health - Will this help promote healthy, safe and independent living?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it improve physical and mental health?
- How will it improve quality of life?
- How will it encourage healthy lifestyle choices?
- How will it create healthy places? (Including workplaces)

If you want more information contact Dominique.Letouze@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cons-114.86-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-proof-2.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

A - Communities and safety

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A4-Income deprivation and poverty-Will it consider income deprivation and reduce poverty?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it support those vulnerable to falling into poverty; e.g., single working age adults and lone parent households?
- How will it consider low-income communities, households and individuals?
- How will it support those unable to work?
- How will it support those with no educational qualifications?

If you want more information contact Mark.Sage@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-homelessness-strategy-2018-to-2023.pdf>
<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/health-and-care/health/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

Utilita are a Warm Home Discount eligible company meaning customers on a low income will be able to apply for the support under the scheme.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
We are able to ask Utilita for a list of customers who have applied for the grant where we have switched the supply. When a customer moves into a property, we can also complete the application process with them when the scheme is open to applications.

A - Communities and safety

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A5-Equality & diversity - Will it have any positive/negative impacts on the protected characteristics?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it impact on the protected characteristics-Positive or negative impact (Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, Age, disability, race/ethnicity, Sexual orientation, gender reassignment, sex, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership,socio-economic)
- What mitigation has been put in place to lessen any impacts or barriers removed?
- How will it help promote equality for a specific protected characteristic?

If you want more information contact gina.perryman@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cmu-equality-strategy-2019-22-final.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B1-Carbon emissions - Will it reduce carbon emissions?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
- How will it provide renewable sources of energy?
- How will it reduce the need for motorised vehicle travel?
- How will it encourage and support residents to reduce carbon emissions?

If you want more information contact Tristan.thorn@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cmu-sustainability-strategy.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B2-Energy use - Will it reduce energy use?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce water consumption?
- How will it reduce electricity consumption?
- How will it reduce gas consumption?
- How will it reduce the production of waste?

If you want more information contact Triston.thorn@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/pln-portsmouth-plan-post-adoption.pdf>

<https://democracy.portsmouth.gov.uk/documents/s24685/Home%20Energy%20Appendix%201%20-%20Energy%20and%20water%20at%20home%20-%20Strategy%202019-25.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

The installation of smart meters eliminates manual monthly meter readings, monitors the electric and gas system in real time, encourages more efficient use of energy, provides responsive data for balancing electric loads while reducing blackouts, enables dynamic pricing, allows the customer to see their energy usage and cost of fuel.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

We can monitor the number of smart meters being installed in void properties.

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B3 - Climate change mitigation and flooding-Will it proactively mitigate against a changing climate and flooding?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it minimise flood risk from both coastal and surface flooding in the future?
- How will it protect properties and buildings from flooding?
- How will it make local people aware of the risk from flooding?
- How will it mitigate for future changes in temperature and extreme weather events?

If you want more information contact Tristan.thorn@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/env-surface-water-management-plan-2019.pdf>

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-flood-risk-management-plan.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

Electricity and gas have a carbon value associated with them. Giving the tenants means, through provision of smart meters will reduce this consumption, and the associated carbon emissions.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
Through the numbers of smart meters provided

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B4-Natural environment-Will it ensure public spaces are greener, more sustainable and well-maintained?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it encourage biodiversity and protect habitats?
- How will it preserve natural sites?
- How will it conserve and enhance natural species?

If you want more information contact Daniel.Young@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/pln-solent-recreation-mitigation-strategy-dec-17.pdf>

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/pln-portsmouth-plan-post-adoption.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B5-Air quality - Will it improve air quality?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce motor vehicle traffic congestion?
- How will it reduce emissions of key pollutants?
- How will it discourage the idling of motor vehicles?
- How will it reduce reliance on private car use?

If you want more information contact Hayley.Trower@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/env-aq-air-quality-plan-outline-business-case.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

Gas consumption in domestic properties contributes to local air quality issues. Giving the tenants means, through provision of smart meters ,will reduce this consumption, and the associated NOx and other air pollutants.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
Through the numbers of smart meters provided.

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B6-Transport - Will it improve road safety and transport for the whole community?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users over users of private vehicles?
- How will it allocate street space to ensure children and older people can walk and cycle safely in the area?
- How will it increase the proportion of journeys made using sustainable and active transport?
- How will it reduce the risk of traffic collisions, and near misses, with pedestrians and cyclists?

If you want more information contact Pam.Turton@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/travel/local-transport-plan-3>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B7-Waste management - Will it increase recycling and reduce the production of waste?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce household waste and consumption?
- How will it increase recycling?
- How will it reduce industrial and construction waste?

If you want more information contact Steven.Russell@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://documents.hants.gov.uk/mineralsandwaste/HampshireMineralsWastePlanADOPTED.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

C - Regeneration of our city

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

C1-Culture and heritage - Will it promote, protect and enhance our culture and heritage?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it protect areas of cultural value?
- How will it protect listed buildings?
- How will it encourage events and attractions?
- How will it make Portsmouth a city people want to live in?

If you want more information contact Claire.Looney@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/pln-portsmouth-plan-post-adoption.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

C - Regeneration of our city

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

C2-Employment and opportunities - Will it promote the development of a skilled workforce?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it improve qualifications and skills for local people?
- How will it reduce unemployment?
- How will it create high quality jobs?
- How will it improve earnings?

If you want more information contact Mark.Pembleton@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-regeneration-strategy.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

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Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

C3 - Economy - Will it encourage businesses to invest in the city, support sustainable growth and regeneration?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it encourage the development of key industries?
- How will it improve the local economy?
- How will it create valuable employment opportunities for local people?
- How will it promote employment and growth in the city?

If you want more information contact Mark.Pembleton@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-regeneration-strategy.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

A void property will be switched supplier to Utilita when the customer gives notice. The actual switching of supply takes at least 19 days and will be scheduled for on or after the void date.

During the void period a smart meter will be installed by Utilita. The meter will be credited with 50p and will have £15 emergency credit for the council to use.

When the customer moves into the property, the council will update the Housing Utilita Portal with the customer's name and tenancy start date putting the liability into the customer's name. The customer and council are not entered into a contract and therefore have the freedom to switch supply without penalty.

The customer will know who their supplier is when they move into their new home and won't have the issue of contacting energy suppliers to get the liability switched into their name.

The customer will benefit by knowing their energy supplier, being able to remotely top up their meters 24/7, having a SMART meter in the property with in-home display, won't have a previous customers / councils debt on their meters, being able to apply for the warm home discount if eligible.

The council will benefit by having access to a customer portal to make switches simple and easy, no standing charges, reduce the volumes of bills sent to finance, the volume of time spent physically topping up the meters, volume of time on the phone to numerous energy suppliers as well as the amount of money clearing debts on meters caused by standing charges.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

We will continue to monitor the number of properties which are switched to Utilita with the customer moving away from the supply vs the number staying on supply. The council is provided with a weekly update as to how many properties have been fitted with a smart meter and how many more are scheduled.

The council will be kept informed of the schedules and for installation of the smart meters.

Q8 - Who was involved in the Integrated impact assessment?

Lauren Taylor - Housing Voids and Allocations Intervention.

This IIA has been approved by:

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Contact number:

Date:

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Agenda Item 4



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness
Date of meeting:	20 September 2021
Subject:	Update on assistance for people to secure a private rented home, to reduce homelessness and housing need in Portsmouth
Report by:	James Hill - Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services
Report Author:	Paul Fielding - Assistant Director - Housing Nicola Clannachan - Interim Head of Housing Needs, Advice & Support
Wards affected:	All
Key decision:	No
Full Council decision:	No

1. Purpose of report

1.1. To provide an update on assistance for people to secure a private rented home, to reduce homelessness and housing need in Portsmouth. This includes an update on previously agreed actions agreed in January 2020.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Approve that the 0% rent deposit loan scheme pilot is no longer suitable for delivery.
- 2.2. Subject to funding, proceed with the development of the bond scheme, piloted over the next 12 months, as one element in a range of options offered to landlords to increase access to the private rented sector.
- 2.3. Submit a request for use of up to £85,600 from reserves to fund the pilot of the bond scheme for one year.
- 2.4. Recognise the work of the pilot PRS Access team in helping over 70 families and 123 single people to access the private rental sector. Approve the completion of the pilot to understand if a longer-term service can be sustainably provided.

3. Background

- 3.1. A report was brought for decision on 27 January 2020, outlining options regarding new forms of assistance for people in Portsmouth unable to secure a home in the private rented sector.
- 3.2. The decision was to proceed with further investigation and pilots of two schemes; a 0% interest loan scheme for deposit and rent in advance, and a bond scheme to offer guarantees to landlords as an alternative to paying a deposit or providing a guarantor.
- 3.3. Alongside these new forms of assistance, the City Council's Housing Needs, Advice and Support (HNAS) service continued to develop its engagement with the private rented sector, using £194,000.00 funding from Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) Private Rental Sector Access Fund and other funding to support those who were homeless into the private rented sector.
- 3.4. Before the deposit loan scheme and bond pilots could be taken forward, the pandemic changed the housing market, with moves being restricted in the first lockdown, a ban on evictions and significant resources being diverted to assist single homeless people and those at risk of sleeping rough.
- 3.5. Due to the impact of the pandemic, work to develop these two schemes was paused, and as the city moves into recovery, the needs of residents, and focus of City Council resources previously identified may have changed. Therefore the outcomes of the original report have been reassessed and new recommendations are made within this report.
- 3.6. The two pilot schemes were designed to help address the following barriers to accessing the private rented sector:
 - 3.6.1. High upfront costs of deposits and rent in advance to secure a tenancy;
 - 3.6.2. Landlords requiring a rent guarantor in order to give them extra security that the rent will be paid.
- 3.7. The decision taken was that funding for the schemes, and any financial liability incurred by the pilot, would come from the Leader's portfolio reserve. For the reasons shown above no requests for funding for these schemes has been made. If the recommendation in the report is approved a request to fund from cabinet reserves will be submitted.
- 3.8. The expected costs of a 12 month pilot were £85,600 for the expanded bond scheme (with a maximum additional liability if every tenancy fails of £128,000) and £70,000 for the deposit loan scheme (with a maximum additional liability of £90,000 if every loan were not repaid).

3.9. A holistic approach to all housing issues in the city is important and these schemes are aimed at complimenting the other work that is taking place to help people to join and stay safely within the private rental sector, and to help avoid rough sleeping.

4. Impact of pandemic on household finances

4.1. The pandemic has had a significant impact on household finances, with Citizens Advice estimating that across the UK, 6 million adults have fallen behind on at least one household bill during the pandemic¹.

4.2. This increase in debt has in part been mitigated by millions of payment holidays of up to 6 months provided by lenders. However these ended on 31 July 2021.

4.3. At present, demand for debt advice has not increased in line with increases in household debt, but it is anticipated that there will be an increase in households in debt seeking support.

4.4. The Private Sector Housing and Housing Needs, Advice and Support Services will continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic and the potential increase in demands. Households struggling with household finance can find sources of support on the City Council's website.

5. Provision of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

5.1. Financial assistance with upfront costs to secure a tenancy is provided through the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), administered by the City Council's Revenues and Benefits Service.

5.2. DHP is available to anyone currently in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit with a housing costs element, where there is a need to move due to affordability, risk of homelessness, or other significant need. However it is not available to anyone who does not currently hold a tenancy, including sofa surfers and those living with family members. Nor are they available to tenants who do not currently qualify for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit because their income is too high, even if they are struggling financially.

5.3. In 2020/21, the City Council provided £370,570 in DHPs for deposits and/or rent in advance. This assistance to secure a tenancy was 44% of the total DHP of £833,153. This total was comprised of £793,153 funding from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and an additional £40,000 of pandemic emergency assistance funding.

5.4. This was a significant increase in the total amount provided and a small increase in the proportion of DHP that went to help secure a tenancy compared to 2019/20, when the amount was £227,637, 40% of the total expenditure of £565,787.

¹ <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>



5.5. The Revenues and Benefits Services report that they are currently awaiting confirmation from DHP in relation to the final funding for 2021/22, although the government has announced allocations based on the first £100m of a £140m 2021/22 budget for English and Welsh authorities. DWP are now due to provide local authorities with the mid-year contribution, although there may be a delay in providing information. There has been an initial payment of £438,842, and an estimated maximum of around £615,000 which would be 74% of the total spend in 2020/21.

5.6. At this point demand does not appear to be suggesting a budget pressure. Of the £438,842 received by DWP so far this year, Revenues and Benefits have paid or committed to pay just over £201,000 and will continue to monitor the expenditure for DHP.

6. Grant and general funding from Housing Needs, Advice & support

6.1. Financial assistance to secure a tenancy is also provided via HNAS, using grant funding (Flexible Homeless Support Grant for the years up to and including 2020/21 and Homeless Prevention Grant for 2021/22) and general funding. This provision is only available to people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

6.2. In 2019/20, HNAS paid out £116,070 from its Flexible Homelessness Support Grant to secure homes on behalf of 131 households, an average payment of £886. Of the total amount, £93,569 was paid out in the form of non-repayable grant, while £22,501 (19% of total financial assistance) was paid out as interest-free loans to 27 households (21% of households assisted), to be repaid to the council over an agreed period.

6.3. In 2020/21, the City Council paid out £137,016 from its Flexible Homelessness Support Grant to secure homes on behalf of 145 households, an average payment of £945. Every payment was made in the form of non-repayable grant, with no loans being made during this financial year.

6.4. Therefore during the first year of the pandemic, the requirement for a loans scheme as a form of assistance reduced from almost a fifth of the total assistance provided, to zero.

7. Sourcing a partner for the pilot of the 0% loan scheme

7.1. Prior to the decision in January 2020, initial discussions had taken place with a local credit union who would be able to act as the suitable lender that the City Council could direct any Portsmouth resident to in order to apply for a 0% loan for access the private rental sector.

7.2. Negotiations continued following approval, but were then interrupted by the impact of the pandemic. Discussions began again during the summer of 2020 but in September 2020, the chief executive of the local credit union notified the City Council

that their Board had decided not to proceed any further with a rent deposit loan scheme pilot.

7.3. Investigations were made to find alternative providers of the pilot that would meet the needs of the scheme and the City Council's financial rules. There currently are no other suitable credit unions or not-for-profit personal finance lenders operating in Portsmouth who provide unsecured personal finance. One private sector lender that is a member of the Responsible Finance network was identified as a possible provider, but initial negotiations identified that this would incur much higher interest rate charges, making the scheme unaffordable.

7.4. Therefore the current position is that no suitable provider has been identified for the council to work in partnership to offer a pilot scheme, and therefore it is not proposed to continue with a pilot.

8. Bond scheme

8.1. The report in January 2020 highlighted the demand for rent guarantors among private landlords in Portsmouth, and outlined why it is not feasible for the City Council to act as guarantor for private tenancies.

8.2. The approved decision was to develop and extend the City Council's private rented sector bond scheme. The purpose of this was to provide landlords with greater assurance on rent payment, while limiting the council's maximum liability.

8.3. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the HNAS service did not have the capacity to develop and implement the bond scheme pilot during 2020. However the PRS Access team will now take the lead for implementing the bond scheme pilot, alongside other incentives, guidance and support for landlords.

8.4. Implementation of the bond scheme required the development of the bond agreement with support from City Council's Legal team, and this is now complete.

8.5. Resources to manage the bond scheme were identified within the original decision report, and the £85,600 funding will now be required to undertake the pilot bond scheme for 12 months. There is currently no identified source of funding for this work within the existing cash limits so, in line with the original decision, it is proposed that, if the decision is made to continue with the bond pilot, a formal request for the use of Cabinet reserves is submitted

9. Private Rental Sector Access team

9.1. As a result of PRS Access funding obtained from MHCLG in 2019, the HNAS service was able to pilot the creation of the Private Rental Sector Access team. The initial aim was to reduce the need for temporary accommodation by supporting people to find a suitable private sector tenancy. Funding was provided for staff resources and for deposits and top ups for rents for those who are eligible for the service.



- 9.2. The team started in March 2020, just as the pandemic began. The team continued to work throughout the period to find accommodation and secure tenancies for families in temporary accommodation, and for people moving through the rough sleeping pathway. The team has grown to match the demand and currently consists of a manager, two support officers, a landlord support officer and a money advisor, all on temporary contracts. All staff resources are funded from Homelessness and Rough sleeping grants.
- 9.3. The team is responsible for being the main link between the HNAS Service and landlords regarding finding private tenancies for those who have been in some form of temporary or emergency accommodation. The team carry out the negotiation on properties and rents, and also to inspect the property to ensure appropriate property standards are maintained
- 9.4. The team has successfully built relationships with landlords and letting agents, ensuring that suitable deposits and rent in advance is agreed and paid promptly. Currently the team are working with 48 landlords and letting agents, and the plan is to increase this number over the next 12 months. Since April 2021 the team has assisted around 40 people ex-rough sleepers shared accommodation, providing support to ensure the tenancy is sustained, preventing further homelessness.
- 9.5. In the year from March 2020 the team have assisted in accommodating 43 families into self-contained homes and 86 single people into houses of multiple occupation. So far this year the team have supported 32 families and 40 single people.
- 9.6. Using grant funding allocated for homelessness and rough sleeping the team will continue to function until at least the end of FY 2021/22. The bond scheme will be an addition form of funding to ensure more landlords to work with those who need a private tenancy through this scheme. In September an advertising campaign of the scheme available to landlords is planned using a range of media routes including Flagship, Facebook, twitter and other online platforms.
- 9.7. Funding for incentives such as rent deposits and top ups comes from a range of sources depending upon the circumstances of the customer. It can include DHP or specified MHCLG grant funding, either the Homelessness Prevention Grant (from which up to £100,000 has been allocate for those who are in priority homeless need) or the Rough Sleeping Initiative Grant (from which £75,000 has been allocated for those who have been, or are at risk of, rough sleeping). These incentives include rent top-ups to bridge the gap between the Local Housing Allowance for those on benefits and the monthly rental charge and other payments to landlords to enable a tenancy to be offered.



10. Reasons for Recommendations

- 10.1. There is no suitable provider for the council to work in partnership to offer a pilot 0% loan scheme to the general public. It is therefore proposed that the rent deposit loan scheme pilot is not progressed.
- 10.2. Private landlords are increasingly looking for security of a rent guarantee, however. Pre-pandemic the ability of people to secure rent guarantors was an identified issue. Job losses and additional financial burdens associated with the pandemic exacerbate the problem and increasingly landlords are seeking a guarantor whilst customers are unable to secure one. It is therefore proposed that the development of the bond scheme, piloted over the next 12 months proceeds, as one element in a range of options offered to landlords to increase access to the private rented sector.
- 10.3. The Private Rental Sector Access team has helped a large number of families and single people to find an affordable and suitable tenancy in the private rental sector, and has been vital in making the early stages of the rough sleeping pathway successful. It has also helped many people to minimise their time in temporary accommodation, or avoid it all together, by helping to access a private tenancy. The long-term value of the work, and future provision, is still being fully evaluated.

11. Integrated Impact Assessment

- 11.1. An integrated impact assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix 1.

12. Legal Implications

- 12.1. Local authorities' duties towards homeless people are contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended). Local authorities have a duty to secure permanent accommodation for unintentionally homeless people in priority need. Changes introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed additional duties on local authorities which apply to all eligible applicants irrespective of whether they fall into a priority need category.
- 12.2. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 encourages local authorities to improve the provision of support to anyone who is eligible and homeless or threatened with homelessness and introduced new duties on local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for eligible applicants at risk of homelessness and to take reasonable steps to help applicants to secure suitable accommodation.

- 12.3. The duty to 'help to secure' accommodation for those eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness or homeless does not necessarily mean a duty to directly find and secure the accommodation but involves working with applicants to agree reasonable steps to identify and secure accommodation. The type of reasonable steps a housing authority might take to prevent or relieve homelessness can include providing support to applicants, whether financial or otherwise, to access private rented accommodation.
- 12.4. The Housing Act 1996 and key housing legislation also requires housing authorities to undertake reviews of homelessness within their areas and to have strategies in place to tackle identified issues. The recommendations set out in this report will assist with this.

13. Director of Finance's comments

- 13.1. The Director of Finance comments are made within the main body of the report.
- 13.2. The estimated cost of the Bond Scheme pilot is £85,600, this will be met from the Cabinet Reserve, this will be funded from the previously unspent appropriations from the Leader portfolio reserve approved in January 2020.
- 13.3. There are no other costs associated with the recommendations of this report.

.....
Signed by James Hill - Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Integrated Impact Assessment

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Helping people secure a private rented home to reduce homelessness and housing need in Portsmouth (Cabinet member for Housing - 27 January 2020)	Agenda for Cabinet Member for Housing on Monday, 27th January, 2020, 4.30 pm Portsmouth City Council
Portsmouth City Council Private Rental Sector Strategy 2021-2026	Private Rental Sector Strategy for Portsmouth 2021- 2026



The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/
rejected by on

.....
Signed by:

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Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

Integrated impact assessment (IIA) form December 2019

www.portsmouth.gov.uk

The integrated impact assessment is a quick and easy screening process. It should:

- identify those policies, projects, services, functions or strategies that could impact positively or negatively on the following areas:
 - Communities and safety
 - Regeneration and culture
 - Environment and public space
 - Equality & - Diversity This can be found in Section A5

Directorate:

HNB

Service, function:

HNAS

Title of policy, service, function, project or strategy (new or old) :

Private Rented Sector Access Scheme

Type of policy, service, function, project or strategy:

- Existing
- New / proposed
- Changed

What is the aim of your policy, service, function, project or strategy?

Pilot Scheme to secure a private rented home, to reduce homelessness and housing need in Portsmouth. 12 month trial of Bond Scheme with rent guarantee for up to 4 months.

Has any consultation been undertaken for this proposal? What were the outcomes of the consultations? Has anything changed because of the consultation? Did this inform your proposal?

Research has been undertaken to understand the PRS market in Portsmouth, the needs of people seeking assistance from the council who do not currently qualify for help, and the requirements of landlords and letting agencies in the city. Just over a fifth of households in the city are housed in the PRS, so it is an important part of the housing market. Non-student households make up 80% of the PRS market, and of these, 37% receive some financial support to pay their rent. Currently, on average 29 households per month receive financial assistance from PCC to secure a PRS home, either because they are at risk of homelessness, or because they are living in an unsuitable or unaffordable PRS home, they are in receipt of financial assistance to pay their rent, and they need to move. Learning from this research has informed the proposals outlined in the report.

A - Communities and safety

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A1-Crime - Will it make our city safer?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce crime, disorder, ASB and the fear of crime?
- How will it prevent the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances?
- How will it protect and support young people at risk of harm?
- How will it discourage re-offending?

If you want more information contact Lisa.Wills@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-spp-plan-2018-20.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

Prevent rough sleeping and associated behaviours/increase opportunities for young people and service user groups such as customers leaving prison to secure a home, where they otherwise may of struggled.

How will you measure/check the impact of your proposal?
count the number of properties used in the scheme, and the number of customers helped.

A - Communities and safety

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A2-Housing - Will it provide good quality homes?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it increase good quality affordable housing, including social housing?
- How will it reduce the number of poor quality homes and accommodation?
- How will it produce well-insulated and sustainable buildings?
- How will it provide a mix of housing for different groups and needs?

If you want more information contact Daniel.Young@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/psh-providing-affordable-housing-in-portsmouth-april-19.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

Part of the PRS access managers role is to assess the properties and use the guidance from Government policy to ensure standards are met. Communicate the schemes available to improve housing standards and environmental standards and improvements. We are seeking to negotiate affordable rents and long term tenancies with PRS landlords to secure housing for customers of all backgrounds and needs. The proposals do not increase the supply of PRS or affordable homes, but help beneficiaries to access the homes that are available in the city.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
We will measure take up of the scheme and the amount of properties acquired.
If the council adopts a scheme that requires a visit to the property, we will record any advice on improving standards, and any tenancies that do not go ahead due to sub-standard conditions, and further action taken.

A - Communities and safety	Yes	No
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Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A3-Health - Will this help promote healthy, safe and independent living?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it improve physical and mental health?
- How will it improve quality of life?
- How will it encourage healthy lifestyle choices?
- How will it create healthy places? (Including workplaces)

If you want more information contact Dominique.Letouze@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cons-114.86-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-proof-2.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

securing housing for individuals and families.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
we will measure the take up of the scheme and properties acquired.

A - Communities and safety	Yes	No
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Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A4-Income deprivation and poverty-Will it consider income deprivation and reduce poverty?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it support those vulnerable to falling into poverty; e.g., single working age adults and lone parent households?
- How will it consider low-income communities, households and individuals?
- How will it support those unable to work?
- How will it support those with no educational qualifications?

If you want more information contact Mark.Sage@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-homelessness-strategy-2018-to-2023.pdf>

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/health-and-care/health/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

Improving access to PRS housing options, negotiating rent to within LHA levels, and financially supporting customers. Unsuitable and insecure housing are among the wider determinants for poor health outcomes. The aim of the schemes is to improve quality of life for those currently struggling to access a suitable PRS home.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
measure the number of customers assisted by the scheme.

Monitor reasons why those assisted were previously unable to access a suitable PRS home, and their housing and financial circumstances. It is not possible to identify which other households are interested in a home and fail to secure it, and therefore there is no identified means for the council to measure the potential negative impact.

A - Communities and safety

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

A5-Equality & diversity - Will it have any positive/negative impacts on the protected characteristics?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it impact on the protected characteristics-Positive or negative impact (Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, Age, disability, race/ethnicity, Sexual orientation, gender reassignment, sex, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership,socio-economic)
- What mitigation has been put in place to lessen any impacts or barriers removed?
- How will it help promote equality for a specific protected characteristic?

If you want more information contact gina.perryman@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cmu-equality-strategy-2019-22-final.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

Data is not available on the protected characteristics of all those in the city who may be seeking a more suitable private rented sector home.

However, we can consider the equalities data we hold for those registered on the council's housing waiting list with a housing need. There are 1,638 households registered on the general needs waiting list with a low or medium level of housing need due to overcrowding or health issues.

Of these, the biggest group are in the age band 26-34, which indicates that the proposed policy would have the biggest impact on households with an adult in this age band. However, the scheme does not exclude anyone based on age, and there is no negative impact identified on this protected characteristic.

The waiting list data does not enable us to identify what proportion of these households include someone with a disability.

72% of applicants to the waiting list are recorded as White or White British ethnicity. 23% of applicants are from Asian, Black, Mixed, other White or other ethnic origin groups, while 5% of applicants do not have their ethnicity recorded. This indicates that housing need is higher amongst Black and minority ethnic groups in Portsmouth, and therefore a scheme to assist those in housing need could help to reduce disadvantages experienced by these groups.

Sexuality is not recorded for 81% of applicants. Of those whose sexuality was recorded, 2% identified as gay or lesbian, but the amount of missing data means this data cannot be assumed to be representative. Similarly, gender was not recorded for equalities monitoring purposes in 59% of applications, but of those recorded, 68% were female, which suggests housing need may be more prevalent among households headed by a female.

10% of applicants were recorded as being pregnant at the time of their application, which indicates that pregnancy is strongly associated with housing need, and therefore this scheme can help to reduce some of the inequality experienced by women who are pregnant or in maternity.

No equalities data is available regarding the religion or belief, or marriage / civil partnership status of this group on the housing waiting list.

This policy is not specifically targeted towards any of the protected characteristic groups. However, some of those groups are more likely to be financially disadvantaged, including people with disabilities, and some black and minority ethnic groups.

By tackling one of the impacts of financial exclusion (inability to secure suitable housing), this scheme will help to promote equality for beneficiaries.

There is some evidence that people with physical disabilities are disadvantaged in the private rented sector, where landlords and letting agencies rarely provide information on the accessibility of homes for rent, and where some landlords are unwilling to allow their properties to be adapted to meet tenants' needs (eg fitting ramps, grab rails, accessible bathrooms etc). This scheme does not address these issues.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

measure the number of properties secure for this client group

Gather and monitor equalities data for applicants and beneficiaries of the scheme, to understand whether people with protected characteristics are requesting and receiving support.

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B1-Carbon emissions - Will it reduce carbon emissions?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
- How will it provide renewable sources of energy?
- How will it reduce the need for motorised vehicle travel?
- How will it encourage and support residents to reduce carbon emissions?

If you want more information contact Tristan.thorn@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cmu-sustainability-strategy.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

Promote green energy to landlords and customers

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

number of referral to green home scheme

If the council is involved at the start of the tenancy, record the EPC rating.

Record any referrals to schemes to improve the energy and water efficiency of the home.

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B2-Energy use - Will it reduce energy use?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce water consumption?
- How will it reduce electricity consumption?
- How will it reduce gas consumption?
- How will it reduce the production of waste?

If you want more information contact Triston.thorn@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/pln-portsmouth-plan-post-adoption.pdf>

<https://democracy.portsmouth.gov.uk/documents/s24685/Home%20Energy%20Appendix%201%20-%20Energy%20and%20water%20at%20home%20-%20Strategy%202019-25.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

As above, the council can identify whether applicants qualify for assistance from LEAP to improve the energy and water efficiency of their home.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

Record any referrals to schemes to improve the energy and water efficiency of the home.

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B3 - Climate change mitigation and flooding-Will it proactively mitigate against a changing climate and flooding?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it minimise flood risk from both coastal and surface flooding in the future?
- How will it protect properties and buildings from flooding?
- How will it make local people aware of the risk from flooding?
- How will it mitigate for future changes in temperature and extreme weather events?

If you want more information contact Tristan.thorn@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/env-surface-water-management-plan-2019.pdf>

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-flood-risk-management-plan.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

N/A

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

N/A

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B4-Natural environment-Will it ensure public spaces are greener, more sustainable and well-maintained?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it encourage biodiversity and protect habitats?
- How will it preserve natural sites?
- How will it conserve and enhance natural species?

If you want more information contact Daniel.Young@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/pln-solent-recreation-mitigation-strategy-dec-17.pdf>

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/pln-portsmouth-plan-post-adoption.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

There are no identified negative impacts on public spaces.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

N/A

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B5-Air quality - Will it improve air quality?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce motor vehicle traffic congestion?
- How will it reduce emissions of key pollutants?
- How will it discourage the idling of motor vehicles?
- How will it reduce reliance on private car use?

If you want more information contact Hayley.Trower@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/env-aq-air-quality-plan-outline-business-case.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

There are no negative impacts on air quality

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

N/A

B - Environment and climate change

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B6-Transport - Will it improve road safety and transport for the whole community?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users over users of private vehicles?
- How will it allocate street space to ensure children and older people can walk and cycle safely in the area?
- How will it increase the proportion of journeys made using sustainable and active transport?
- How will it reduce the risk of traffic collisions, and near misses, with pedestrians and cyclists?

If you want more information contact Pam.Turton@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/travel/local-transport-plan-3>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

There are no negative impacts on transport

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

N/A

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

B7-Waste management - Will it increase recycling and reduce the production of waste?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it reduce household waste and consumption?
- How will it increase recycling?
- How will it reduce industrial and construction waste?

If you want more information contact Steven.Russell@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://documents.hants.gov.uk/mineralsandwaste/HampshireMineralsWastePlanADOPTED.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

The scheme involves the council providing assistance to residents to secure a new PRS home. The council can therefore use this opportunity to provide information on household waste and recycling. However, there will be no information on the households previous waste and recycling and therefore it is not possible to evidence any increase in recycling or reduction in waste.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?

N/A

C - Regeneration of our city

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

C1-Culture and heritage - Will it promote, protect and enhance our culture and heritage?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it protect areas of cultural value?
- How will it protect listed buildings?
- How will it encourage events and attractions?
- How will it make Portsmouth a city people want to live in?

If you want more information contact Claire.Looney@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/pln-portsmouth-plan-post-adoption.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

There are no identified negative impacts on culture and heritage.

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
N/A

C - Regeneration of our city

Yes

No

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

C2-Employment and opportunities - Will it promote the development of a skilled workforce?



In thinking about this question:

- How will it improve qualifications and skills for local people?
- How will it reduce unemployment?
- How will it create high quality jobs?
- How will it improve earnings?

If you want more information contact Mark.Pembleton@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-regeneration-strategy.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

There may be the opportunity to link customers to employment support

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
number of referrals and outcomes

Is your policy/proposal relevant to the following questions?

C3 - Economy - Will it encourage businesses to invest in the city, support sustainable growth and regeneration?

In thinking about this question:

- How will it encourage the development of key industries?
- How will it improve the local economy?
- How will it create valuable employment opportunities for local people?
- How will it promote employment and growth in the city?

If you want more information contact Mark.Pembleton@portsmouthcc.gov.uk or go to:

<https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/documents-external/cou-regeneration-strategy.pdf>

Please expand on the impact your policy/proposal will have, and how you propose to mitigate any negative impacts?

N/A

How are you going to measure/check the impact of your proposal?
N/A

Q8 - Who was involved in the Integrated impact assessment?
Nicola Clannachan
Janice Davis

This IIA has been approved by: Paul Fielding

Contact number:

Date:

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Agenda Item 5



THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Housing and Preventing Homelessness
Subject:	Update on the actions from the Private Rental Sector Strategy 2021-2026
Date of meeting:	20 September 2021
Report by:	James Hill - Director for Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services
Author:	Clare Hardwick - Head of Private Sector Housing Samuel Rickeard - Acting Housing Regulation Manager
Wards affected:	ALL

1. Requested by

1.1. This report has been requested by the Housing and Preventing Homelessness, Portfolio Holder Councillor Darren Sanders.

2. Purpose

2.1. To provide an update on the progress of actions agreed in the Private Rental Sector Strategy 2021-2026.

3. Information Requested

3.1. Following on from a draft document and consultation process, the Private Sector Housing (PSH) service presented the final Private Rental Sector Strategy 2021-2026, which was agreed on 25th January 2021.

3.2. The strategy outlines the following aims:

3.2.1. To achieve an active and well-functioning Private Rental Sector (PRS) which works fairly for all.

3.2.2. For the PRS to be seen as a desirable type of tenure which meets the needs of those who use it, with support being focussed on those who need it most.

3.3. The strategy also sets out nine strategic objectives.

THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

- Objective 1. Good landlords will be welcomed, supported and promoted through the use of accreditation.
- Objective 2. Information and guidance for landlords and tenants will be clear and easy to access to enable them to make fully informed choices when entering and moving around the PRS.
- Objective 3. More tenants can afford a sustainable rent level. More tenants will also receive support in overcoming financial access barriers such as deposits and bonds.
- Objective 4. The maintenance of tenancies will be supported, as far as possible, using a range of routes to try to resolve problems without the need for eviction.
- Objective 5. Users of the PRS will be a stronger part of, and more integrated with, their local community. This will increase inclusion and cohesion with other tenures.
- Objective 6. A wide range of stakeholders and user groups will work together to provide a focal point for the delivery of outcomes.
- Objective 7. Tenants and landlords will be considered when significant decision-making within the city occurs, and that the benefits of economic regeneration will be felt equitably by those within the PRS.
- Objective 8. Fair, transparent and professional regulatory functions will provide reassurance and support to all that request it and not adversely affect those that need help by adding disproportionate burden.
- Objective 9. Strong regulators will use all of their powers, working with partner agencies and stakeholders, to tackle and remove criminal and antisocial behaviour.

In order to achieve these objectives, 13 actions were identified and agreed, eight of which required no additional permissions or resources to implement, and five actions would need more detailed investigation, resources or permission in order to implement. This report is focused on providing an update to these eight actions.

4. Progress of the actions which did not require additional resources

4.1. HMOs: Continue to deal proactively when an unlicensed HMO is reported.

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- 4.1.1. The City Council, through its PSH service, will continue to pursue landlords of unlicensed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) in the city, where evidence can be found to take necessary enforcement action.
- 4.1.2. PSH recently commissioned the Building Research Establishment group (BRE) to do an assessment of the private rented housing stock using data modelling. This was funded through a grant from the MHCLG, and it was achieved by the BRE taking data from a number of different sources to evaluate housing in Portsmouth. The data collected is anonymised and does not contain personal or sensitive data, but is able to predict trends and give information in one single platform.
- 4.1.3. This data is able to highlight addresses which, via the government approved deposit protection schemes and other sources, may require a mandatory HMO license.
- 4.1.4. Whilst in its infancy, PSH have already begun to survey this data with a view to evidencing which addresses are being used as unlicensed HMOs and to take appropriate enforcement action. It is expected that a high proportion of those identified will not be licensable, but it is likely that a number of licensable properties will be found through this exercise. Ongoing investigations will naturally be kept confidential, but where unlicensed HMOs are confirmed they will be publicised, via the website and news sources, to inform the public of successful action taken against bad landlords.
- 4.1.5. The City Council will also continue to welcome members of the public informing it if they believe that a property is being used as an unlicensed HMO. PSH, working closely with the Planning service, will always investigate these cases and members of public can raise concerns, with feedback provided where appropriate. Residents can contact the City Council via its website, email (Housing-PrivateSector.Housing-PrivateSector@portsmouthcc.gov.uk) or telephone (02392 841 659).

4.2. Training: Ensure that officers responsible for regulating the PRS are trained to a professional standard and capable of meeting the needs of this strategy.

- 4.2.1. A review of the staff structure and management of the Housing Standards and HMO Licensing teams took place in early 2021. This resulted in the merger of the separate teams into a new Housing Regulations team. This has provided a more resilient team and made it easier to manage resources and respond to demand as the officers have shared skills and attributes.
- 4.2.2. This review included a requirement for all Housing Regulations Officers to be educated up to (or working towards) at least level 3 qualification in a relevant Housing, construction or environmental health qualification and have

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demonstrable experience (minimum of 2 years) in working with stakeholders within the private rental sector to achieve the right outcomes with regard to the enforcement of housing regulations.

4.2.3. The Housing Regulations Officers' job profiles now also states that they will be encouraged to have or work towards a level 6 qualification in housing, environmental health, environmental science, housing engineering or construction, and gain associate level CIEH membership, member level of the CIH or membership of another relevant body. This will include evidence of continual professional development (CPD).

4.2.4. Following the review and implementation of the new Housing Regulations team, Officers are being given training and support to assist them in carrying out the duties of their role, and in achieving the desired qualifications and professional membership levels.

4.2.5. Training needs assessments are now taking place throughout the team and where needed qualifications will be sought to meet the requirements of the role. This is an ongoing task that will become business as usual as part of Officers' development.

4.3. Communication/information: Provide more information for tenants, such as average market rents across property sizes. Expand on the current website information on what makes a good tenant (including different situations). Investigate with third party stakeholders the feasibility for closer partnership working on a single communications and web strategy.

4.3.1. The Rent it Right website is currently being revised with a view to maximising its helpful content for renters in the city. Part of this work, led by Housing Needs Advice and Support (HNAS), will be to publish information on rent levels in the city. This platform aims to support renters in Portsmouth by offering property comparisons and helpful information to support perspective renters find suitable homes.

4.3.2. Similarly, for those who do not use Rent it Right, the City Council website will be updated to include information on market rents, space standards and what to look for when renting a property in Portsmouth. A "renting in Portsmouth" page is currently being developed to include helpful information and the Landlords page will also be developed to contain useful information regarding standards and licensing.

4.3.3. A new Tenant and Landlord Support Officer role has been introduced to the Housing Regulations team. This role will focus on ensuring that updated appropriate information is made available to both tenants and landlords on how to be a good tenant or landlord. This information will be made available via the

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City Council's website and key aims of the role include providing information and advice; completing workshops with tenant and landlords groups; conducting consultations to address issues experienced in the private rented sector and developing links with third party stakeholders.

4.3.4. PSH is continually reviewing its web content to support tenants and landlords and already added information on:

- Energy link onto the landlord page (Landlord page)
- Public transport information (Tenant page)
- Community safety (Tenant page)
- Parking (Tenant page)
- Housing Benefit (Tenant page)

4.3.5. Our Landlord and Tenant Support Officer will be leading on a "renting in Portsmouth" page.

4.3.6. The City Council works closely with Advice Portsmouth, regarding tenancy advice, and want to promote this link through its web content so that customers know which service can offer them the best advice.

4.3.7. In addition to this it has produced an updated "contact us" form and online "report a repair" form to support customers to reach the right person and receive the best advice. These are now active and in use, and working well.

4.3.8. PSH are continually seeking good online content that can support the private rented sector and where these are found PSH will seek to link these from the City Council's website.

4.4. Governance: Develop the current HMO governance board into a multi-agency partnership group which oversee this strategy. Review the stakeholders to ensure that all voices are covered. Investigate with third party stakeholders the feasibility for closer partnership working on a single communications and web strategy.

4.4.1. PSH Officers have been speaking with already existing resident groups across Portsmouth to increase the number of attendees on the PRS Governance Board. Initial feedback has been that residents would prefer this to take place in person, which has been a challenge during the pandemic.

4.4.2. However, as lockdown restrictions ease an advert will be published, via the City Council's website for renters in Portsmouth to submit their interest to contribute towards these meetings regarding issues impacting on them as tenants.

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4.4.3. The ambition will be to reach as many different types of renters (HMO, bedsit, student and single occupancy) to offer the best range of representation.

4.4.4. With the next Governance Board meeting due to take place September 2021, this advert became live on our website since August 2021 and will be reviewed at the board meeting.

4.4.5. Links to third party stakeholders, such as the University of Portsmouth, have already taken place, with an example being found at the following webpage [Student information - Portsmouth City Council](#)

4.5. Financial support: Undertake a pilot of the rent deposit and bond scheme.

4.5.1. This work is within of a decision report to the Housing and Preventing Homelessness decision meeting on 20 September 2021 titled *Update on assistance for people to secure a private rented home.*

4.6. Shared services: Work more closely with stakeholders to increase the understanding of the services that could be provided across Portsmouth to support the PRS.

4.6.1. Where PSH works closely with stakeholders this information will be made available online so customers understand the range of services available to them. The support available to the PRS is broader than that solely provided by the City Council. For example tenants can receive advice from Advice Portsmouth and landlords have a number of industry groups and bodies, including the Portsmouth and District Private Landlords Association (PDPLA). In addition to this, PSH have a close working relationship with the University of Portsmouth, especially regarding student accommodation in the city.

4.6.2. This relationship is led by the Landlord and Tenancy Support Officer who will begin conducting student workshops from September 2021 as students return to the city.

4.7. Council internal processes: Implement the revised supplementary planning document for HMOs. Review all relevant enforcement policies to make them more transparent. Work with other local authorities to find new ideas to support the PRS. Ensure that data sharing, both within the council and with external partners is maximised, within legislation.

4.7.1. The draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has now been issued by the City Council's Planning Service for consultations and amendments. The final Local Plan document will be published once formal consultation is complete.

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4.7.2. The Planning Service's role regarding HMOs is to agree or decline proposals for additional, or changes to, existing HMOs in the city. PSH are responsible for issuing licenses for all licensable HMOs in the city and regulating their standards and conditions.

4.7.3. PSH's current enforcement policy, which is available to view on the City Council's website, was updated in response to the pandemic. This update gave information on how PSH would respond to inspections, investigations, assessment of risk and our response to non-urgent demand.

4.7.4. As lockdown restrictions ease, PSH aim to complete a review of its enforcement policy as per the PRS Strategy, with a particular view on making information regarding Civil Penalty Notices clearer. To assist in this review it will consider how other local authorities present such information.

4.8. Pilots: Working with stakeholders, approach the MHCLG to look for support in the development and implementation of this strategy, with a particular request to pilot some of the changes identified in actions.

4.8.1. A pilot is currently underway with Portsmouth Mediation Service (PMS) and PSH. The aims of this pilot are to refer landlords and tenants to PMS where the relationship between tenant and landlord has broken down. PMS aim to act as an impartial party to facilitate positive conversation between tenant and landlord in these cases.

4.8.2. The ambition is for this service to reduce homelessness cases from evictions and build better relationships between tenants and landlords.

4.8.3. The pilot scheme will be reviewed at the end of September 2021 and a further update on its progress will be provided if appropriate. This may help in understanding the demand for an alternative dispute resolution model.

5. Progress on actions which required further decisions and/or resources

5.1. Workshops: (A) Work with landlord groups to provide workshops on how to be a good landlord. E.g. how to choose appropriate tenants and carrying out their own HHSRS assessment on their property. (B) Work with tenancy groups to provide workshops on how to be a good tenant, aimed at helping a tenant to maintain a tenancy. Focussing on money management, behaviour and how to work with the landlord.

5.1.1. Following the relaxation of lockdown restrictions PSH are seeking to resume existing tenancy groups already established within the city and the Landlord and Tenant Support Officer will also be improving the web content to support customers get the right information.

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- 5.1.2. Initial face to face workshops have now begun, the first of which was a workshop for tenants on damp and mould, with more planned.
- 5.1.3. These are being trialled to understand the demand and success of such workshops. If this proves to be successful, and Officers believe that it should be rolled out on a longer term basis, a further report will be brought for decision.
- 5.1.4. Housing Needs Advice and Support (HNAS) have a newly appointed Money Advisor to support those in the private rented sector accessing their services. HNAS continue to work with more landlords to assist with housing those on the housing waiting list by providing a temporary top up to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. The Money Advice service is specifically targeted at supporting these tenants to sustain their tenancies longer term beyond the initial rent top up.
- 5.1.5. Members of the public can also access the Citizens Advice Bureau or Advice Portsmouth for money management advice, and are signposted to these from the City Council.
- 5.1.6. As required under the Housing Act 2004, which introduced Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) guidance, Landlords should undertake sufficient checks to their properties to ensure they are kept at the correct standard, this includes an understanding of the HHSRS, and the need to correct defects found through this process. Plans to create a Landlord Workshop are already taking place, along with improvements to the "*Landlords*" web page which aims to give landlords all the need to know information, including choosing tenants and understanding the HHSRS.
- 5.1.7. PSH are working towards providing better support for landlords to understand their responsibilities and maintain properties to a good standard. The quarterly landlord newsletter, provided by PSH, gives updated guidance and useful information for landlords to use. This information is generally available via the City Council's website.
- 5.1.8. The PRS governance board will be used as a platform to involve stakeholders in feeding back the effectiveness of this information.

5.2. Mediation: Create a mediation service between landlords and tenants to help improve security of tenure. This may include a 'private sector housing court'.

- 5.2.1. In July 2021 a pilot scheme began with the PMS. This has started as a small scale pilot scheme in which 16 landlords have been given restorative practice training and restorative toolkit, which will help them to identify when referrals should be made to the mediation service.

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5.2.2. A review of the pilot scheme will take place at the end of September and an update on this will be provided in a separate information report.

5.3. Financial support for the PRS: Provide loans for good, accredited landlords to improve the quality of their property. Provide low interest loans for those who are eligible to be able to access the PRS (the loan will cover the rent deposit and any additional fees required to be paid to enter the PRS). Provide bonds to help those who are eligible to gain access to the PRS.

5.3.1. HNAS are now providing grants to top up Local Housing Allowance (LHA) nearer to full market rent levels to support tenants to access the PRS.

5.3.2. A bond scheme is intended to undergo a pilot and is outlined in a report to the Housing and Preventing Homelessness Cabinet on 20 September 2021 titled *Update on assistance for people to secure a private rented home*.

5.3.3. The accreditation scheme, as described below, will be redesigned and incentives such as loans to accredited landlords may be included, but a specific decision will be required to seek additional resources for this.

5.4. Accreditation: Expand the Rent it Right model to help more tenants across the PRS. Working with multi agency partners, develop the council's accreditation scheme to offer benefits to good landlords.

5.4.1. The current Rent It Right accreditation scheme is under review to consider how it can be redesigned to provide better tailored support for both landlords and tenants. PSH will be working with key stakeholders, through the PRS governance board, to understand what a successful accreditation scheme should include for the benefit of both tenants and landlords. These discussions have only started during summer 2021.

5.5. Additional licencing: Consult on reintroducing additional licencing for HMOs to help in the better management of them and understand how they interact with the local community.

5.5.1. The decision taken in January 2021 was "*A decision will be required on the appropriateness of a consultation on reintroducing additional licencing for HMOs. This decision is anticipated to be made in the summer or early autumn of 2021 as the PRS becomes more stable and we move away from the pandemic.*"

5.5.2. Provisions for additional licensing are made available to the City Council under the Housing Act 2004. Additional licensing can be used to license all HMOs, in

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the same way mandatory licensable HMOs are at present, in a specific area or locality.

- 5.5.3. Under the terms of the Act, this provision can only be put in place if significant evidence is available showing that a large proportion of HMOs in the city are poorly managed and are having a significant adverse impact on members of the public.
- 5.5.4. In line with 5.5.1 to 5.5.3 of this report officers are currently reviewing the evidence available to inform an approach on additional licencing. A further decision report will be brought to councillors on this issue in due course. This will outline the evidence and make an officer recommendation on whether evidence is sufficient to proceed with additional licencing. Councillors will have the opportunity to accept or reject that recommendation.
- 5.5.5. As per sections 56 - 60 Housing Act 2004 the City Council must consider whether a significant proportion of the HMOs are being managed ineffectively, based on evidence it receives. Section 57 of the Act asks that local authorities consider whether there are any other courses of action available to them that might provide an effective method of dealing with the problem or problems in question. To do this the City Council must produce evidence on the extent of problems attributed to non-licensable HMOs and give detail on why existing measures are ineffective at managing these.
- 5.5.6. If a decision is taken to pursue additional licencing, the next step would be for a consultation to take place with those affected by additional licencing provisions.
- 5.5.7. Following consultation, a further report would be brought for decision with the options on the location and reasoning of any addition licencing scheme. This will include consideration of sections 56-60 of the Housing Act 2004. This includes the requirement that additional licencing can only be introduced if confirmation is given by the national authority (i.e. MHCLG).
- 5.5.8. Any additional licencing scheme will be required to be reviewed on a regular basis and can be revoked at any time by the City Council. A designation of additional licencing must cease to have effect no later than five years after the date it came into force.

6. Summary

- 6.1. Most of the actions from the strategy have either been implemented or are underway. There are some actions that will require further resources or permissions before implementing, and additional decision reports will be presented in due course.

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Signed by **James Hill, Director for Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services**

Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Private Rental Sector Housing Strategy	PRS Strategy report Appendix 1 - Strategy.pdf (portsmouth.gov.uk)
Enforcement Policy	Housing Enforcement Policy - coronavirus information - Portsmouth City Council
Housing Act 2004 Sections 56 - 60	Housing Act 2004 (legislation.gov.uk)

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