



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE ADDENDUM

4.00PM, WEDNESDAY, 17 JUNE 2015

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, SHIP STREET, BRIGHTON

ADDENDUM

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WRITTEN QUESTIONS

(i) Living Rent- Giuseppina Salamone

'At the March meeting of the Housing Committee, Councillor Randall said that the council would be carrying out Living Rent calculations on the new council housing being developed, and the Head of Housing Strategy and Development promised to report on this work at the June meeting. Councillors wished to find ways to offer new council housing at a Living Rent, rather than an unaffordable 80% of market rent. Do these models include the option to extend the repayment period on the building costs of new homes, so that rents can be lowered without increasing the subsidy required?'

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of depositions from members of the public. Each deposition may be heard for a maximum of five minutes.

Depositions received:

(i) Deposition: Private sector housing

'We are pleased to see that the committee is discussing private sector housing at today's meeting. In our campaign we have talked to many people who feel that there is a real crisis in private sector housing in the city, and there is an urgent need to take action to tackle this crisis.

However, we were disappointed that the scrutiny panel's recommendations do not match the urgency of the problem, and in some cases do not even follow from the evidence presented in the report. For example, the report discusses the need for truly affordable rented housing to be supplied, so that low paid workers can afford to live and work in the city. But recommendation 6 deals only with owner-occupied housing.

Having heard evidence of poor quality in rented housing, particularly that rented by students, the panel recommended a series of voluntary initiatives, led by the universities or by some unspecified agency (Recommendations 12, 13 and 14). While we do not object to these ideas, we think the council could and should take much stronger action.

Recommendations 15 and 16 are similarly weak, in the face of widespread unethical, discriminatory and exploitative practice by both landlords and letting agents.

The fact is that the private rented sector is not a level playing field in which tenants are "customers within a market" who simply need more information to enable them to "make rational evidence-based decisions" (page 21 of scrutiny report). There is a big imbalance of power between tenants and landlords. This is the main factor which determines the choices tenants are able to make.

To give just two examples of how this works, we heard of a case at our regular street stall recently where a tenant asked her landlord to replace an insecure front door at her home. The landlord agreed to do this, and, encouraged by this, she asked for a series of additional repairs, as is her right. The landlord responded by increasing the rent, which was already higher than the tenant's entitlement to Local Housing Allowance. The repairs have not been done but the tenant has no effective recourse in law because she is not entitled to legal aid.

Another tenant faces homelessness after being evicted from her studio flat when her landlord decided to sell. She is able and willing to pay rent in the private sector, but because she is on disability and housing benefits, no letting agency is prepared to let a property to her. This kind of discrimination is extremely common.

In these circumstances, the council needs to do more than act as an independent arbiter of ethical behaviour. The council must enforce decent minimum standards for all housing in the city, by introducing a comprehensive register of private sector landlords. Landlords should be required to maintain their properties at a set standard of repair, safety and energy efficiency before they can be included on the register and permitted to let out property in Brighton & Hove.

We note that both the Labour and Green Party manifestos included a commitment to a landlord register, and urge the committee to take action to implement this as soon as possible'.

Dani Ahrens
Pip Tindall
Leila Erin-Jenkins
Dave Bangs
Giuseppina Salamone