

TASK AND FINISH GROUP REVIEW HOUSING STANDARDS. – Notes.

APPENDIX C

Meeting: 1000 hours 28 July 2022

REPRESENTATION BY:

A representative of the Lithuanian Community
Written submission by a representative of the Polish Community

Representation by a representative of Boston Lithuanian Community:

The group were advised that there were significant issues within the community of poor housing with ongoing damp and mould impacting on the health of residents with issues of asthma in children and other issues in elder residents. Residents complained to each other about the standard of their homes, with their clothes smelling of damp due to damp rooms and also that their bedding became damp too. Many residents did not know how to report the issues officially and many did not want to cause problems with the landlords by moaning as they were scared they would lose the homes.

There were also serious concerns in respect of the standard of shared houses. Some people were trying to live cleanly and quietly, alongside others who were disruptive and took drugs and drink and smoked in the house, making it feel very frightening for them. There are ongoing issues of loud music and some people don't sleep – children don't get their homework done and those who are clean dare not confront those who are on drugs or drunk. Some landlords charge up to £1000 per month for a room in a poor state. When the residents were asked why they didn't move, they replied that they were on zero hours contracts and the decent landlords would not accept them as tenants due to them not having a stable income. As such, this caused even more worry about losing the accommodation they had, even though it was poor.

Furthermore, the residents note that there is no privacy with some families living in one room with a teenage boy and teenage girl and two parents but it is recognised that many are used to living in very overcrowded homes.

The following is feedback of comments to the representative who spoke with members of the community:

- There were issues of landlords turning off the heating and water as soon as the residents left the home to go to work and residents do not know who to turn to for help when it happens.
- Significant abuse of tenants by landlords in various ways:
 - Putting pressure on for more money and lots of pressure if the rent is a little late with threats to evict.
 - A feeling that nobody can help them and that if they try and report something they will be evicted or worse and end up on the streets. Many are very scared of saying anything with landlords evicting immediately on occasion.
 - Issues of literacy in not speaking English. Could information be provided in different languages with simple guidance on renting, on the tenants' rights and on trustworthy contacts to ring who they know will help them.

- Issues of pets in homes – some landlords do not allow and those who do sometimes have their furniture and things damaged by the pets and the owners do not replace them when they leave, making it the responsibility of the new tenant as the landlord does not replace. There should be something in the contracts requiring owners of pets to replace any damage they make
- Concerns on decorating and replacing carpets etc. No clarity of whose responsibility and if a tenant does try to improve a home they don't get the money it back.
- Concerns for the elderly who have worked in pack houses for years paying high rents and who have no savings. They are unable to continue renting and having nowhere to go to live with long waits for getting on the council housing register
- Concerns for children living in shared accommodation with no privacy or quiet area to undertake home-work, issues of sleep deprivation impacting on their attention at school and in certain communities the elder children remaining at home to look after the younger children whilst both parents went out to work.

Suggestions:

A 'See How' Guide' to be made available in multi-languages offering simple straightforward advice on the procedures for renters. To include contacts for repairs, issues in respect of rent and importantly contacts for help with health and safety. To also clearly specify the procedure for the disposal of all waste with pictorial data if necessary. The guide to be handed to all tenants when they collect their keys and landlords and agents to agree the guide.

A secondary guide to explain the 'Responsibilities of the Landlord' to include straightforward data on electricity / gas / water / and all other areas within the responsibility of the landlord. Contact details also to be provided on who to contact if the landlord is not contactable. The guide to clearly define the landlords' responsibilities.

Below written submission of key concerns by a representative of the Polish Community:

- Limited amount of properties available through the Housing Register(HR), more properties available through HR could help
- An overpriced rent in private sector due to the demand, more properties available thorough HR could help
- An overpriced rent in comparison to earnings, the landlords can ask for money because of a demand
- Multiple occupancy - people renting the rooms as they can't rent affordable homes. Often a whole family living in one room.
- Multiple occupancy - health and safety issues. I am not sure how the people living in multiple occupancy properties could follow lock downs rules. Many did not and people knew this but nothing is done.

- People are really struggling, paying far more as there are not enough affordable homes. This leads to neglecting people's needs as they have to spend the majority of income on rent. They ignore illnesses and as they live in poor conditions often use alcohol and drugs and don't eat.
- Many properties in private sector are often in very bad conditions and some not fit to be lived in. The landlords leave them. It is hard for many to understand the process of reporting and a lack of English is a big problem. More information in different languages should be provided to help the communities and they should know they can report the problems.
- Many residents live in property owned by the landlord who employs them and are scared to speak up and afraid they will be lose the job and home. This is a big problem and they are very vulnerable and live in dangerous houses with nowhere to turn. Some houses have no heating and no carpets and often one toilet and shower with many people using them. The facilities are less than basic and lead to increased health issues and a complete lack of privacy within shared housing.
- The Council should be able to visit all houses where they think there are problems and then have the power to insist the landlords make the houses to a standard that the tenants can live in. The lack of this supports the rogue landlords as they are untouchable and the tenants are very scared of them. Much more needs to be done to make the rogue landlords take responsibility.

It is noted that certain information relayed during this session which was not specific to housing standards but of concern to the group, would be referred to a further review to be convened by the Council in respect of Migrant Communities.