

A CONSULTATION WORKING DRAFT CHARTER FOR PRIVATE RENTED HOUSING



The Council has prepared a Consultation Working Draft 'Charter for Private Rented Housing' in Plymouth. The Charter sets out key values, aims and actions which, by working together in partnership, will bring about sustainable improvements in Plymouth's private rented housing.

The Council wants to make this a true 'Plymouth Charter' with the full backing and support of the key agencies, organisations and individuals involved in the sector. Working together, we want to improve conditions by supporting good landlords, by helping to bring more landlords up to the standards of the best and by taking robust action against those that do not meet what is required of them. Tenants have rights and responsibilities and we want to work with tenants and tenant representatives to make both clear. We also want to increase the supply of good quality accommodation.

We want to hear your views and to gain your input, support and positive contributions to make this 'The Plymouth Charter for Private Rented Housing'. Your involvement will be vital to the Charter's success and to improving the quality of private rented housing in our city.

Please let us have your comments by **Friday 28th November 2014**.

A questionnaire has been prepared for your use which should be returned by email to private.rent@plymouth.gov.uk, or may be sent to:

Plymouth City Council, Homes & Communities, Private Sector
Housing, Civic Centre, Plymouth PL12AA.

Let us know if you agree with and can sign up to the values, aims and actions that have been identified so far.

Let us know what else you think is required and what contributions you can make in improving the quality of private rented housing for Plymouth's residents of today and tomorrow.

Context for the Charter

The private rented sector represents around 20% of all housing in Plymouth. It is a growing sector and is increasingly the tenure of choice for many whilst also being housing of last resort for others, many of whom are vulnerable residents. Whilst there are many high quality private rented homes, the sector also has the poorest standards which can impact adversely on living conditions and quality of life for many of Plymouth's citizens.

The Fairness Commission has recommended that the Council develop a comprehensive and resourced response to raising standards in the private rented housing sector *. In turn, the Council has pledged to develop a programme to improve the quality of private rented housing and take action against rogue landlords**. The Charter responds to the Fairness Commission recommendations and Council pledge.

The Council has responsibilities and duties that it must undertake but it cannot improve private rented housing alone. The Charter is referred to as a 'Working Consultation Draft' as we will be working with partners to develop and advance the actions in the Charter, moving towards the launch of the final 'Plymouth Charter for Private Rented Housing' by March 2015. To achieve measurable success, we need the full support of and a close working partnership with landlords, letting agents, tenants, investors, the University and Colleges, Student Unions and housing support agencies.

* Creating the Conditions for Fairness – The Plymouth Fairness Commission Final Report March 2014

** Our Pledges for a Better Plymouth (April 2014)

Our proposed 'Shared Values and Aims':

- To value fairness for everyone in all housing and to champion the belief that everyone is entitled to a good quality home where they can live safely, settle and thrive.
- To acknowledge the vital role of the private rented sector in helping to meet the housing needs of many of Plymouth's residents.
- To seek a fair balance between the interests of landlords and tenants.
- To work in partnership to actively raise the profile of the best private landlords who improve Plymouth's reputation and help to attract more high quality landlords to the city.
- To increase the number of good quality landlords and private rented homes.
- To increase understanding of what a good quality home is and encourage landlords and agents to provide this.
- To reduce fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency in private rented housing.
- To expect landlords to do what is reasonable and proportional to resolve any problems with their properties.
- To take appropriate enforcement action to protect tenants and to act swiftly against 'rogue' landlords.
- To provide advice so that tenants are aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights.
- To help tenants make informed decisions about their housing options in ways that suit them best.
- To avoid creating a crisis in tenants' lives by taking action that might lead to their eviction.
- To improve choice in rented housing for Plymouth's citizens by increasing the supply of well run, good quality private rented

housing.

Our proposed 'Shared Actions' -:

<u>Promoting the Sector</u>	<u>Key Delivery Partners</u>
1. Working in partnership, promote a Plymouth Charter for the Private Rented Sector.	PCC, landlord associations, letting agents, tenants, housing agencies, University, Colleges, Student Unions
2. Collaborate in the delivery of further accreditation and training , seeking to improve the skills and knowledge of all landlords, letting and managing agents in Plymouth and to improve the management of property in the sector.	SWLA, PCC, landlords, agents
3. Grow the role and influence of the Plymouth Private Rented Forum through encouraging active involvement and widening membership.	PCC, PRF members
4. Promote best practice in the letting and management of private rented housing to include greater stability and certainty of tenancies through the Model Tenancy Agreement and Code of Practice.	PCC, landlord associations, letting agents, tenants, agencies
5. Explore the viability of a 'Virtual Tenants' Forum linked to advice on the rights and responsibilities of landlords and of tenants.	PCC, CA, Shelter

<u>Setting the bar high</u>	
6. Develop a ' Plymouth Healthy Homes Guide ' which clearly sets out what the minimum standard for a safe and healthy home is, ensuring that there is widespread awareness of the standard amongst landlords and tenants.	PCC, landlord associations, letting agents, tenants, agencies
7. Develop and promote a ' Rent With Confidence ' brand which will be used to signpost tenants to accredited and trained landlords and agents as well as to advise on their rights and responsibilities.	PCC, landlord associations, letting agents, agencies
8. Explore the potential for further voluntary or selective / additional licencing of houses in multiple occupation alongside the mandatory scheme, including targeted actions by place and property.	PCC, landlord associations,
9. Promote the availability of ECO/Green Deal and other grants and loans to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty in the private rented sector.	PCC, PEC, British Gas
<u>Targeted Council action on rogue landlords</u>	
10. Respond quickly to complaints from tenants and reports of sub-standard houses in multiple occupation with targeted steps to identify the worst managed and lowest standard properties and quickly bring them up to the standards of the 'Healthy Homes	PCC

<p>Guide' in line with the Council's Enforcement Policy.</p>	
<p>11. Develop a robust response to allegations of harassment and illegal eviction up to and including prosecutions of landlords or their agents in line with the Council's Enforcement Policy.</p>	<p>PCC</p>
<p>12. Develop a revolving 'enabling fund' to carry out urgent improvements (in default) to the poorest quality rented property, securing repayment from landlords.</p>	<p>PCC</p>
<p><u>Growing the Sector</u></p>	
<p>13. Invest in the development of the HouseLet and EasyLet Schemes in order to improve access to properties in the private rented sector, increase choice of properties, and increase the diversity of the client group.</p>	<p>PCC, PATH, PH4L, RP</p>
<p>14. Bring empty homes back into use to increase access and improve the quality of stock in the private rented sector.</p>	<p>PCC, landlords</p>
<p>15. Develop opportunities for institutional investment to create new private rented accommodation, helping to increase competition, widen choice, improve standards and increase opportunities for longer tenancies.</p>	<p>PCC, RP's, Developers</p>

<p>16. Continue to lobby government for a national registration scheme to identify and support good landlords and take swifter enforcement action against rogue landlords with longer term security for tenants.</p>	<p>PCC, landlord associations, letting agents, tenants, housing agencies and bodies</p>
---	---

- CA Citizens Advice
- PATH Plymouth Access to Housing
- PCC Plymouth City Council
- PEC Plymouth Energy Cooperative
- PH4L Plymouth Homes for Let
- PRF Private Rented Forum
- RP Registered Providers
- SWLA South West Landlords Association