

INFORMATION ITEM

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee		
DATE:	10 th November 2021		
TITLE:	Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Ellie Emberson	PORTFOLIO:	Housing
SERVICE:	Regulatory Services	WARDS:	Borough Wide
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme and the new website - www.rrwc.org.uk
- 1.2 The purpose of the scheme is to accredit properties and their landlords and encourages landlords to work with the Council to provide good quality accommodation to tenants in the private rented sector along with good management services.
- 1.3 This report is due to go to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee as an information item at its meeting on 10th November 2021, it will then go to the March Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee with a further update as the website should be launched by then

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the contents of this report are noted
- 2.2 That an updated report will be presented at the March Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee following the launch of the new Reading Rent with Confidence website

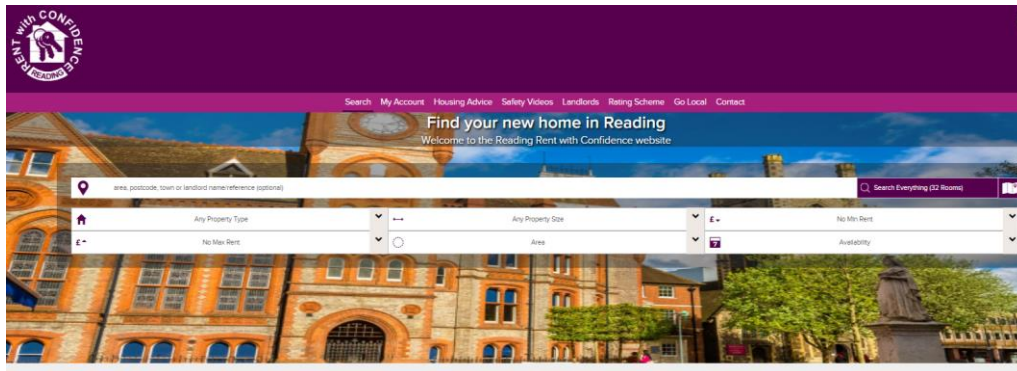
3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Private rented accommodation provides a flexible and accessible housing solution for many residents. The Council recognises the valuable contribution the sector makes to providing decent and safe homes for many tenants. There are however, a minority of landlords and agents who provide poorly managed, substandard and unsafe homes, often to the most vulnerable in society. In some areas with high densities of private rented accommodation, there can be a direct impact on neighbourhood cohesion.
- 3.2 The Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme formed part of the Housing Charter that was launched in 2016. The purpose of the scheme was to give tenants in the private rented sector greater confidence in the properties they rent, to raise standards and to enable landlords to market good accommodation to those tenants
- 3.3 The original Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme was developed as a landlord accreditation scheme and soft launched in October 2017. Whilst landlords, agents and teams within the Council were consulted in developing the scheme, it was felt appropriate to move forward with a soft launch to test the market. There was little take up and feedback was that the criteria needed more definition, charges were high for what was being offered and the consistent message was there needed to be a mechanism in place to advertise the properties.
- 3.4 Following this feedback the scheme was revised to a property-based accreditation scheme with a criterion that resulted in a gold, silver and bronze award and properties being advertised on the Council website but with very limited information about the properties and not particularly interactive from a landlord and tenant perspective. This scheme was again soft launched to test the market in 2019 and had a better uptake with 34 properties on the scheme and 17 pending applications
- 3.5 Subsequently the Council was successful in its bid to the MHCLG to create a standalone website for the scheme and cover the subscription cost for 2 years.
- 3.6 In addition to the funding for the website the MHCLG funding also funded the cost of the Safety Shaun videos, which is a selection of 12 Animated videos relating to hazards in the home and potential issues during a tenancy period. These short videos have been carefully put together by the provider and the Council as a simple but effective way of informing Tenants about what safety standards to expect in a Rented Property and equally ensure Landlords are meeting their legal obligations. These videos sit as part of the website but will equally be used independent of this as training and information tools for landlords and tenants.

4. THE PROPOSAL

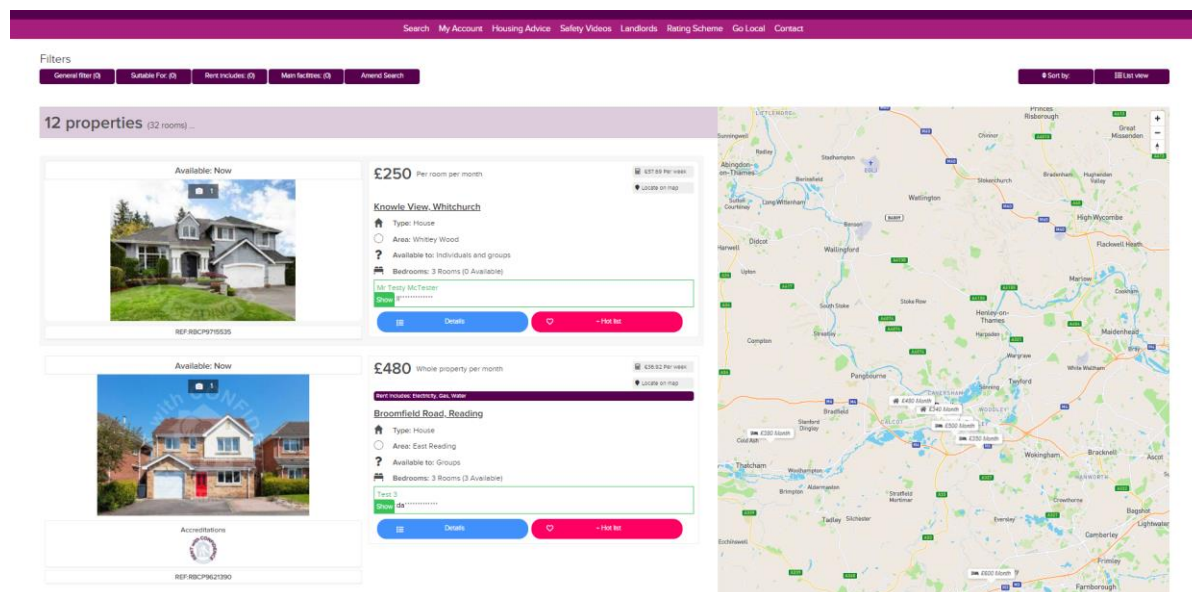
- 4.1 Current Position:
- 4.2 Officers from the Private Sector Housing Team have been working with a specialist provider in designing the website and have updated the scheme in order to simplify the process. The scheme will now be a one tier criteria which is the equivalent of the current gold standard

- 4.3 The scheme is application and inspection based and this process is completed prior to accreditation being awarded. The website is more interactive and allows landlords to update details of their properties and links to the ‘click before you evict’ website launched by Housing Advice.
- 4.4 There are some screen shots below which demonstrate what the website will look like:



Rent with Confidence in Reading

Welcome to the Reading Rent with Confidence private accommodation search engine. Reading Rent with Confidence lets you search for houses, flats, bungalows and rooms available to rent in Reading.





£250 Per room per month

Hot list View on map

Return to Results Print this page Share with a friend

REF: RBCP975535



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Knowle View, Whitchurch

- Contact: Mr Testy McTester
- Advert ref: 2105182
- Property type: House
- Area: Whitley Wood
- Town: Whitchurch
- Bedrooms: 3
- Bedrooms to let: 0
- Available to: Property let to individuals and groups
- Security deposit: No Information Provided
- Tenancy type: Information
- Heating type: Gas Central
- Available: Now

Description: this is a test

Number of facilities / rooms:

Shared facilities:

Suitable for:

Safety & security features:

Certifications:

Energy ratings:

Landlord details:

Contact: Mr Testy McTester

Email:



RRWC presents Safety Shaun



Shared Accommodation

Sharing accommodation can allow tenants to save money and make friends, however disagreements between tenants can cause problems. This video covers tips on preventing disagreements and issues to work out soon after moving in such as bill payments, household chores and guests staying over.

Find Safety Shaun on Facebook Follow Safety Shaun on Twitter

The screenshot shows the 'Help and Advice' section of the Reading Borough Council website. The page is structured with a purple header, a navigation bar, and a main content area with six article cards. Each card includes an icon and a brief description of the article's content. The footer contains various utility links, social media icons, and the council's branding.

4.5 The criteria for the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme is as follows:

- Properties in very good decorative repair and modernised
- Member of a Landlord Accreditation / Association Scheme
- Charge maximum deposit up to a maximum of five weeks in accordance with the Tenant Fees Act 2019
- Regular recorded property inspections
- Target response times for emergencies and other requests
- Written and recorded inventory for check-in and check-out
- Must attain C & D criterion of the Decent Homes Standard
- Gas/ Electrical certificates provided to tenants (and Local Authority on request)
- EPC minimum standard 'E' in specified property but a commitment to work with the Council to ensure improvements are made to maximise energy efficiency to an EPC rating of C where possible
- Written Assured Shorthold Tenancy's for all tenants
- All deposits must be protected
- Must carry out Right to Rent checks
- Provide How to Rent guide
- No rental increases within fixed term tenancies (12 months or less)
- Fire/Heat/Carbon monoxide detectors to be fitted and checked annually
- Meet a fit and proper person test
- All HMO Management Regulations to be complied with
- All applicable Consumer Protection Regulations to be complied with
- All tenant's applications considered prior to the financial affordability procedure
- Required landlord insurance to be in place
- Provide adequate storage for refuse and recycling & share relevant waste and recycling information with all tenants.
- To provide, if possible, long term tenancies (e.g. 2-year tenancies)

- 4.6 The benefits of this scheme include:
- Property Approved and Rated by Reading Borough Council
 - Promotion of Landlords and their properties (through logo & self-promotion, RBC website, Social Media, etc)
 - Dedicated Officer for help & advice
 - Certificate
 - Market advantage when letting their property

4.7 Options Proposed

- 4.8 That the website is finalised, and the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme is launched early in the new year.

4.9 Other Options Considered

- 4.10 This is a discretionary scheme and as such we have no duty to provide it, however, it has been well received and compliments the Council's enabling role. There will be an application fee to enable the scheme to fund the cost of the website which is currently being worked on with Finance colleagues

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The Reading Rent with Confidence website and scheme supports the Council vision to *help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.*
- 5.2 *In relation to the Council's Corporate Plan the following themes are appropriate*
- 5.3 *"Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe"* - working with landlords and agents to address poor property conditions that attracts crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 5.4 *"Ensuring access to decent housing to meet local needs"* by ensuring homes in the private rented sector are of a good quality and meet health and safety standards

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Regulations set a minimum energy efficiency level for domestic private rented properties.
- 6.2 The Regulations apply to all domestic private rented properties that are:
- let on specific types of tenancy agreement
 - legally required to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)
- 6.3 Since 1 April 2020, landlords can no longer let or continue to let properties covered by the MEES Regulations if they have an EPC rating below E, unless they have a valid exemption in place in which case it needs to be registered

- 6.4 In terms of the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme any application for accreditation needs to meet the minimum EPC rating of E and an additional criterion has been included in the scheme “a commitment to work with the Council to ensure improvements are made to maximise energy efficiency to an EPC rating of C where possible”. Any improvements should be carried out in line with the Approved Document L1B Building Regulations 2010 thus private sector accommodation becomes more energy efficient, warmer and cheaper to keep warm.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 It is proposed to launch the scheme early in the new year with a marketing and social media campaign. There is already growing interest in the proposed new scheme and we have been working closely with Reading University who are keen on the scheme and the benefits it brings to students

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 *Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—*

- *eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- *advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*
- *foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.*

- 8.2 *The Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme gives tenants greater confidence in the private rented sector, it raises standards and enables landlords to market good accommodation to those tenants.*

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 *The Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme is a discretionary scheme and Legal Services are currently finalising the contract with the provider.*

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The cost of developing the website and subscription for two years has been funded from the successful bid to the MHCLG. The cost is £12,900
- 10.2 The Safety Shaun videos have also been funded from the MHCLG funding for two years along with commissioning of a video tailored towards landlords. The cost is £6,840
- 10.3 It is proposed that the website will be self-funding and to this end Officers are working with Finance to establish the fees to be charged. The fee structure will be included in the update report to be presented to HNL at its meeting in March
- 10.4 The proposal offers value for money in that it will be self-funding through fees charged for the scheme application and inclusion on the website

10.5 Risk Assessment - the key risk is if there is little or no take up of the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme and therefore becomes non-viable. However, given the keen interest from landlords, agents and Reading University along with publicity of the scheme these risks can be mitigated

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None