

Report to:	AUDIT COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services
Date of Meeting:	17 June 2021

CENTRAL SELECTIVE LICENSING SCHEME UPDATE

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To consider the progress of the Central Selective Licensing Scheme and associated Housing Enforcement actions to improve and regulate the private rented sector.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To note the updated report on the Central Selective Licensing Scheme.

2.2 In addition, to note the enforcement work currently being taken in the Central Licensing area.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To improve the private rented sector, improve property conditions, reduce anti-social behaviour and ensure landlords manage their properties effectively and to current standards.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is:

- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

6.0 Background information

6.1 Selective Licensing is a discretionary licensing scheme that covers privately rented properties which are not covered by mandatory or additional licensing that are for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Selective Licensing is intended to address the impact of poor quality privately rented properties, lack of management by landlords and reduce levels of anti-social behaviour.

- 6.2 As Blackpool had existing licensing schemes operating in 2018, the Council required permission from the Secretary of State to introduce a new Selective Licensing Scheme in the Central area. This was approved on 11 December 2018, came into force on 26 March 2019 and will cease to have effect on 25 March 2024. The Scheme applies to the area which forms part of Talbot, Brunswick and Bloomfield wards. The Central Additional Licensing Scheme will cease to have effect in July 2021, 339 Houses in Multiple Occupation are currently licensed under this Scheme.
- 6.3 Central Selective Licensing Scheme:
- 1712 properties have licensed (2124 units)
 - Fees £947,890 - cost of a licence is £775 (£542 with 30 per cent discount) for a single occupancy property. Multiple units up to two £1,090 (£775 with 30 per cent discount) and £68 for every unit over two.
 - 1422 applied for the Blackpool Standards that allows for a 30 per cent deduction of the cost of a licence.
 - There have been eight prosecution cases for failure to license and three Civil Penalties for failure to license in the Central Selective Licensing area with a fine each of £2500. A Civil penalty is an alternative to a prosecution case and results in a fine that is paid to the Council.
 - Other prosecutions and civil penalty cases have continued across Blackpool regarding breaches of enforcement notices and HMO management regulations. A recent prosecution case in the magistrate court resulted in a fine of £24,121.
- 6.4 Blackpool has received funding from central government as one of five areas in the country to contribute to a national pilot which is looking at how far enforcement can be taken in respect of regulating the supported housing sector and whether improvements can be made. This new scheme brings in officers from other areas such as Social Services, Housing Benefits, Corporate Fraud, Housing Enforcement, Fire Service and Planning Enforcement. This provides a means for a multi-agency approach to look at how accommodation can be improved, for example the requirement for properties to have better fire detection systems and appropriate planning permission in place. The pilot will run from November 2020 to December 2021 and will be aiming to review all the supported accommodation provision in Blackpool during this period.
- 6.5 The project board meets on a weekly basis and 145 properties that provide supported housing have been identified to inspect. To date 26 properties have been inspected, no category one (serious) defects have been noted but 43 category two defects have been found. The main issues are around fire risk assessments that are inadequate for the level of support offered in this type of supported accommodation for vulnerable tenants.
- 6.6 The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions have published a new national statement of expectations that sets out the standards and value for money the government is expecting from supported housing accommodation.
- 6.7 Since the commencement of the Central Selective Licensing Scheme in March 2019, the Housing Enforcement Team continues to undertake full Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) assessments because of poor housing conditions. 80 per cent of these assessments involve a deficiency in heating provisions and the Housing Enforcement Team is assisting vulnerable tenants to deal with fuel poverty by engaging with energy companies, working directly with landlords and involving support agencies. The number of chargeable enforcement notices has increased over the last five years. An enforcement notice is charged at £430 and the numbers have increased to the

highest level during the pandemic 2020/2021, with 48 notices issued compared to 27 in 2016/2017.

6.8 The Housing Enforcement Team plan to inspect the properties that have applied for a licence and declare on the application form that they meet the Blackpool Standard and received a 30 per cent discount of the total licence fees. To meet the Blackpool Standard, landlords must ensure that there are no category one hazards in their properties and that they have all relevant safety documents, gas and electrical installation certificates and a current Energy Performance Certificate. In addition there are selective licence conditions that include an anti-social behaviour plan. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Blackpool Standard inspection programme was temporarily postponed and a policy is currently being developed to enforce against landlords that fail to meet the Blackpool Standard.

6.9 The Selective Licensing Scheme was introduced in the Central area to deal with high levels of anti-social behaviour. The scheme funds anti-social behaviour (ASB) officers who deal proactively with reducing anti-social behaviour and engaging with landlords, communities and tenants. High levels of multi-agency work with Public Protection Officers, the Police and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Services has continued throughout the pandemic in the Central area to ensure anti-social behaviour and COVID regulations are effectively enforced. This involves properties that have been used for cannabis cultivations, drug dealing, prostitution, violent crime and illegal operations and taking action against landlords and tenants for breaches.

6.10 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 None

8.0 Financial considerations:

8.1 In a Selective Licensing Scheme there is a fee charged for the cost of the licence as indicated above in 6.3.

There are incentives for early payment of £100 reduction and 30 per cent reduction for meeting the Blackpool Standard.

The income received from the Scheme could increase if landlords who were found not meeting the Blackpool Standard and receiving the 30 per cent reduction were subsequently charged the full fee and enforcement action taken against them.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 None

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 The potential risks are around tackling problems in the private rented sector around the management and condition of properties and resources available to undertake proactive inspection programmes. Currently there is a recruitment drive to fill vacant posts and a multi-skilled team should assist this matter.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

11.1 None

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 Work is ongoing to reduce fuel poverty and ensure landlords use renewable and efficient energy sources.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 None

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None