

A Protocol for SE London Boroughs about use of the Private Rented Sector for meeting housing needs.

Introduction

This protocol is derived from an 'Options Appraisal on Use of Private Rented Sector in SE London' produced by the South East London Housing Partnership (SELHP) Homelessness Co-ordinator, in consultation with the partnership's homelessness group.

The ALG protocol (2004) for use of private rented sector for Private Sector Leasing (PSL) is viewed as being potentially out of date and there are doubts about whether it is being adhered to. This protocol sets in place an agreement between the boroughs of SE London on how they will use the private rented sector. In the spirit of sub-regional working it involves sharing best practice and joint working around publicity and information sharing. It also sets in place an agreement on cross borough placements using the private rented for either PSL or rent deposit/guarantee schemes.

The Government's promotion of the private rented sector as a 'housing option', particularly as a means for preventing homelessness, results in a sub-regional or inter-borough approach to use of private rented sector becomes necessary as there is scope for competition between boroughs. There is a risk of driving up costs for boroughs and tenants and reducing standards if agreements are not in place.

The protocol will be reviewed on a six monthly basis to allow for the boroughs to propose amendments or further development of the protocol.

1. Joint working and publicity

- Boroughs will work together to explain options to landlords in the form of joint publicity and a website page.
- The SELHP homelessness co-ordinator will have responsibility for design and information on the web page.
- Boroughs will ensure there is a named officer for private sector schemes available to be contacted.
- There is a commitment to use opportunities to drive up standards.

2. Private Sector Leasing (PSL)

- Boroughs can develop PSL in other boroughs on the basis of bi-lateral agreement.
- The host borough will be offered first refusal on leasing any properties that come up.
- The level of need and supply may have changed but the ALG protocol would suggest that it was Southwark and Bromley that needed to access supply in other boroughs

3. Cross borough finders fee/rent deposit/incentive schemes

- Any applicant who finds their own private rented housing option can do so wherever it is located, including when the original borough provides an incentive to either applicant or landlord. This is the case for finder's fee, rent deposit, rent guarantee or bond deposit schemes
- Private sector teams will not actively procure properties for rent deposit/incentive schemes in another borough.
- Host borough will be offered first refusal on a property within their boundaries that is offered by a landlord to another borough. Boroughs will provide a named contact officer and timescale for host borough to respond to the procuring borough is 3 working days. After this time the procuring borough can proceed with arrangements if there is no response from host borough.

- Where the landlord has an existing connection with the procuring borough and is not prepared to offer the property to the host borough, the property may be used by the procuring borough.
- On accepting the property the procuring borough must inform the host borough named contact officer. This will be monitored at bi-monthly SELHP homelessness group meetings.
- For cross-borough moves of households with support needs where floating support is required, host borough will be informed of arrangements to provide that support. There will be a named contact in each borough for this.

4. Overcrowded and under occupying Council or housing association tenants

- Boroughs will allow out of borough private renting options (e.g. via rent deposit schemes and packages of support for households) for households who currently overcrowd or under occupy social housing.
- Options will be considered for a more joint approach to use of the private rented sector for overcrowded or under occupying households e.g. through the sub regional under occupation scheme hosted by Gallions Housing Association.
- Cross borough moves will be monitored and information brought to bi-monthly homelessness group meetings.

5. Pathmeads

- Boroughs will continue to work with Pathmeads (Settled Homes Agency) on a pilot scheme for securing and managing private sector properties to provide housing options
- Adjustment of any agreement between boroughs about host borough usage will be allowed as pilot develops.
- Boroughs will use the pilot on a consistent basis.

6. Settled Homes Initiative

- Boroughs are currently able to link to the existing Bromley Settled Homes Initiative scheme and will prepare for a sub regional approach to further bidding for 2009-2010.
- Neither sub regional nor borough only schemes will involve placements across borough boundaries although this can be reviewed in due course, possibly to allow for reciprocal arrangements.

7. Broadway

- Boroughs will facilitate Broadway's private renting scheme for provision of move on from hostel accommodation, by promoting joint approach with Pathmeads.
- Private rented homes will be used by host boroughs but movement between SE London boroughs is not ruled out.
- Ensure homes secured in SE London are not used for similar schemes elsewhere in London.

8. Temporary Social Housing Grant

- Host boroughs will continue their use of housing generated by Temporary Social Housing Grant
- This will be reviewed if any one borough takes up more than 40% of the sub regional allocation of TSHG.
- Boroughs are encouraged to follow the Greenwich model for using TSHG funded properties for 'homelessness prevention' as well as temporary accommodation.

9. Use of SE London private rented sector by other boroughs

- The SELHP homelessness co-ordinator will investigate the extent to which other boroughs are making temporary accommodation placements in SE London.