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Housing Strategy and Performance: Dorset Private Landlords

Home in on Housing programme

May 2025

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Subject of Report	Dorset Private Landlord
Purpose of Report	**Information / Recommendations / Decision Making**

Background Papers	Housing Strategy January 2024 to January 2029 - Dorset Council dorset-council-plan-for-web

Contents

Summary

This report provides a detailed analysis of Dorset Councils' offer and incentives to private landlords. It considers current ways of working and makes recommendations for new and/or alternative ways of working with Private landlords.

The project is cross departmental with scope beyond that of services offered by Housing Services.

This project forms part of phase 1 of the 'Home In on Housing' programme to deliver the Housing Strategy.

Project Purpose and strategic context

The Dorset Council Housing Strategy 2024-2029 identifies objectives for Housing Services and recognises Dorset Private Landlords as important in meeting the 4 key objectives: housing need, housing supply, housing standards and homelessness prevention.

Over the last decade the private rented sector has expanded considerably. Between 2008-09 and 2023-24 the number of households across England in the sector rose by 52% from 3.1 million to 4.7 million households. The private rented sector is now the second largest tenure in England and is home to 19% of all households[1].

This is reflected in Dorset, with home ownership being the largest tenure and the second largest proportion being households who are renting privately at 16.3%. During 2022/23 the number of households losing their private rented accommodation increased by 50% in Dorset. This accounted for 17.8% of all homeless approaches. Data for 2024 shows this upward trend is continuing with increased number compared to 2022 and 2023.

The private rented sector offers variety, serving different types of households across all incomes, including an increasing number of families. In 2023-24, 34% of households in the sector had dependent children, amounting to 1.6 million households. The sector experiences high turnover rates, with significantly more house moves compared to the owner-occupied and social rented sectors, both within the sector itself and between it to other sectors[2].

Since 2010, various policy changes have impacted private landlords, including tax adjustments, changes to Stamp Duty Land Tax, stricter lending criteria for Buy-to-Let mortgages, and the rise of the Build to Rent sector. Most recently, the Government's announcement to introduce the Renters' Rights Bill is set to provide a major overhaul of the sector. The Bill is now some way through the parliamentary process with most recent timelines indicating, the House of Lords report stage and third reading for final debate are set for 1-15th July 2025[3]. If the timeline proceeds on this bases, there will be seven days before recess for Royal Assent to be granted with a potential implantation date in October 2025. The Renters' Rights Bill intends to:

- abolish assured shorthold tenancies, replacing them with periodic assured tenancies.
- abolish section 21 'no fault' evictions
- reform and expand the grounds for possession
- limit rent increases to no more than once per year and place requirements on the service of notice

[1] English Private Landlord Survey 2024: main report - GOV.UK
[2] English Private Landlord Survey 2024: main report - GOV.UK
[3] Renters (Reform) Bill - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament

- prohibit the practice of 'rental bidding'
- give tenants the right to request a pet
- make it illegal for landlords to discriminate against tenants who receive benefits or who have children when letting their property
- introduce a new ombudsman service for the private rented sector
- create a new private rented sector database containing key information for landlords, tenants and local authorities
- introduce a decent homes standard to the private rented sector and apply Awaab's Law to the sector
- expand rent repayment orders and strengthen local authorities' enforcement powers.

In the most recent survey of Dorset landlords, 25% of respondents said that they were planning to leave the market or reduce their number of rental properties, within the next 5 years.

Their biggest concerns were:

- the impact of the capped local housing allowance on tenants' ability to meet their rent
- the increased costs needed to meet any new property, energy efficiency or Decent Homes standards
- their ability to meet these standards based on the age and construction of their properties
- the confusion over standards might lead to landlords being asked to complete unnecessary and costly works

The housing strategy also identified that households who privately rent their home can face barriers to having adaptations installed and this can result in a need to move. Due to the demand for housing, finding suitable accommodation can be a lengthy and challenging process. Supporting tenants to remain where they are often provides a better solution.

As of March 2025, the Dorset Landlord Forum had just over 355 registered landlords. Whilst this is a sizeable number, membership is mostly landlords with properties in the west of Dorset, who have been established as a group since before Dorset Council became a Unitary Authority in 2019.

A wide range of directorates and services need to access properties in the private rented sector on behalf of the people they are working with. the If the council can act as one organisation and mitigate cross-departmental competition for the same properties this would help services, landlords and customers.

Project aims and objectives

- carry out a cross departmental review of Dorset Council's packages of support for private landlords.

- conduct a bench marking review of Dorset Council private landlord incentives against other neighbouring local authorities.

- research new or alternative ways to incentivise private landlords.

- follow up on the previous landlord survey and engage private landlords around new or revised incentivised ways of working.

- make recommendations and where necessary business case for, changes (including barriers to accessible adaptations), new or alternative ways of working with private landlords.

What we looked at and what we did

Throughout the course of this project, we have considered and included information from the following sources:

- researched other local authorities within the southwest and nationally to identify incentive packages
- conducted stakeholder engagement with Dorset private landlord's forum
- reviewed council service information in relation to incentive packages.
- considered the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published English Private Landlord Survey (EPLS)
- considered Renters (Reform) Bill

The national picture

In December 2024 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the English Private Landlord Survey (EPLS). The EPLS is a national survey of landlords and letting agents acting on behalf of landlords who own and/or manage private rented properties in England. It offers unique insight into the sector with large scale surveys carried out in 2001, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2018, 2021 and 2024.

The report makes 8 key findings[4]

- just under half of all landlords own one rental property, 17% of landlords with five or more properties represent 49% of all tenancies.
- around three in five landlords have some form of borrowing on at least one of their properties
- around a quarter of landlords reported that they had identified damp and mould in at least one of their properties in the last year.
- more than half of landlords requested either a guarantor or rent in advance for their most recent letting. 7% asked for both.
- landlords were more likely to increase rent on new lettings than when renewing or extending a tenancy. 58% of landlords increased the rent the last time they let to a new tenant with a median increase of 11%. Around a third (35%) of these landlords increased the rent for new tenants by 15% or more. 52% of landlords increased rent the last time they renewed or extended a tenancy with a median increase of 8%. This is twice as high in 2024 as it was in 2021 and 2018. 20% of these landlords (one in five) increased rent by 15% or more.
- tenants were more likely to initiate ending a tenancy than landlords. 44% of landlords reported their last tenancy ended because the tenant gave notice at the end of their periodic tenancy. Around a quarter said the tenant came to the end of their tenancy period and decided not to renew and 13% reported having the tenant leave before the end of the tenancy. 8% (fewer than 1 in 10) of landlords said they asked the tenant to leave. 6% evicted the tenant and 4% chose not to renew the tenancy.

[4] English Private Landlord Survey 2024: main report - GOV.UK

- landlords generally reported complying with required legal and health and safety actions for their most recent tenancy. 91% provided the new tenant with a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). 47% of landlords had at least one property with an EPC rating of D or below. Of these, 35% said they were planning to improve the energy efficiency or some or all of their properties.
- more landlords in 2024 reported planning to decrease the size of their portfolio than in 2018 and 2021. In 2024, 31% of landlords reported planning to decrease the size of their portfolio in the next two years, with 16% planning to sell all their properties.

The report goes on to highlight two prevalent reasons as to why landlords first decide to enter the market with 42% seeing it as pension contribution and 42% preferring to invest in property versus other investments. Around 4% originally joined wanting to let properties on a full-time bases. Over half of surveyed landlords viewed their role as a landlord as 'a long-term investment to contribute to their pension', this is higher than 'pension contribution' as their initial reason for becoming a landlord.

The report considers the employment and economic circumstances of tenant which showed the most common employment for tenants who landlords currently let to is;

- white collar, clerical or professional (59%)
- blue collar or manual workers (36%)
- people in receipt of Housing Benefit or Local Housing Allowance (18%)
- people in receipt of Universal Credit (16%)
- retired people (16%)
- student (10%)
- non-UK workers (10%)
- with 16% of landlord indicating that they do not let to any of these types of tenants.

The report goes on to consider 'willingness to let', which demonstrated that 90% of landlord were unwilling to let to tenants with a history of rent arrears and those with county court judgements (CCJs) against them (78%). It also highlighted 38% of landlords had unwillingness to let to people in receipt of housing related support including universal credit, citing a perceived greater risk of delays in payment or unpaid rent. Almost half at 47% were unwilling to let to people who would require adaptations.

Less than one in five landlords said a current or new tenant has requested an adjustment to the property. Almost all landlords (97%) who received a request for reasonable adjustments said that they had carried out the request. When asked how these adjustments were funded, the majority of landlords (87%) said they had paid for these in full. With 2% indicating social services and 1% citing Disabled Facilities Grant to have covered the costs.

80% of landlords reported having no tenants in rent arrears over the past two years. Landlords who let to tenants on housing benefit were more likely to report having two or more tenants in arrears than those that did not. Only 3% of landlords said that they had gone on to pursue a guarantor for unpaid rent in the last two years.

50% of landlords used a letting agent to find the tenant for their most recent letting, with next most common route being through letting websites like 'Gumtree' or 'OpenRent' at 28%.

The most common factors to influence rent setting for landlord's who increased the rent on their most recent new letting was to 'keep in line with market rents', with 40% indicating their 'agent advised' them to. It was more common in 2024 at 29% for landlords who increased rents to cite 'mortgage costs' as a reason.

The most common way for a landlord to evict a tenant was via a Section 21 notice at 70% with 36% issuing a Section 8 notice[5] and 24% indicating that they asked the tenant to leave informally. The most common reasons for the landlord initiating the end of a tenancy was 'property not cared for' (43%) and 'tenant in arrears' (42%). Almost one in ten (9%) landlords in 2024 said they ended the last tenancy because they 'wanted to let the property at a higher rate' compared to 2021 when 2% of landlords gave this as a reason.

Landlords were asked in the most recent 2024 survey about their awareness and understanding of recent or planned legislative changes. Which concluded awareness around changes to the way a tenant can be evicted and the right to request a pet where high at 75% and 61% respectively however other changes like the introduction of the Decent Homes Standard and Private Rented Sector Ombudsman where less known.

When asked about future plans 59% of landlords said next time one of their rental properties become vacant that they would relet it. Landlords were more likely to say they were planning to decrease the number of properties they let opposed to increasing their portfolio, with 'recent tax and legislative changes' being the most common reason given for this decision.

Reviewing Dorset Councils' Private Rented Sector Offer

The purpose of providing a comprehensive private rented sector (PRS) offer for a local authority is multifaceted:

- tackling Homelessness – a PRS offer can be used to fulfil the local authorities' statutory duties[6] helping to prevent and relieve homelessness by providing suitable accommodation for those in need. This includes reducing pressures on temporary accommodation and improves the health and wellbeing of those placed in this type of accommodation.

- expands housing options – by incorporating a PRS offer, the authority can offer a wider range of housing solutions, this is particularly important for areas like Dorset with limited access to social housing.

- reduces pressure on social housing – a PRS offer helps to alleviate the demand on social housing.

- ensures quality and standards – local authorities can work with private landlords to ensure that rental properties meet safety and quality standards, improving living conditions.

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[5] A Section 8 notice is a formal legal document that a landlord in the UK can serve to a tenant to begin the process of eviction due to a breach of the tenancy agreement. It is typically issued when a tenant has failed to uphold their responsibilities, such as falling behind on rent payments or damaging the property.
The landlord must serve a tenant with a valid Section 8 notice, stating the grounds for eviction these grounds can be mandatory or discretionary

[6] Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

    - flexibility and responsiveness – it can help the authority to respond more flexibly to housing needs providing a quicker and more adaptable solutions.

Dorset Council offers five separate packages of support to the private rented sector. These are across five different service areas in three different directorates, each used to serve a different purpose.

Housing Services

Housing services offer three packages of support which are used for working with the private rented sector:

The housing advice and homelessness service offers the 'Key4Me' scheme. This scheme is intended to help households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to secure accommodation in the private rented sector. Features of the scheme include:

- Financial assistance in the form of rent in advance, deposit bonds and rent deposits.
- Pet bond up to £400 to cover additional costs incurred due to tenant owning a pet.
- Landlord cash incentives based on the size of property, up to £4,250.00.
- Free tenancy agreements and inventories.
- Support services for both tenants and landlords.
- Compliance checks to ensure landlords meet all legal requirements.

The temporary accommodation and supply service offers a 'residential property direct leasing scheme'. This scheme looks to secure long term leases to be utilised as temporary accommodation. These leased properties are managed within the Council, with the landlord benefiting from:

- Guaranteed rent regardless of whether the property is let.
- No management fee
- Regular property visits
- A professional property management service
- Peace of mind
- Full repair service on any damage caused by the tenant

The scheme allows for a cash incentive up to £4,250.00 this paid usually in one lump sum although arrangements can be made to stagger payments.

The housing standards team offers a wide range of loans which are available to homeowners, tenants and landlords to carry out works of repair, improvements or adaptations. The loans are funded by Dorset Council and administered by the Councils partner, 'Lendology' a Community Interest Company (CIC):

- **Home Improvement Loan**: homeowners and landlords can access this loan when a property needs essential repairs or improvements to make the property safe and decent. Eligible works are wide ranging with loans available up to £25,000
- **Empty Property Loan**: this can be used where a property has been classified as 'empty' for more than 6 months and needs essential repairs or improvements. Loans are available up to £25,000.
- **Energy Efficiency Loan**: homeowners and landlords can access this loan to cover costs associated with large scale energy efficiency improvements. Eligible works are

wide ranging and could include installation of solar panels, solar thermal systems, air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, biomass heating systems or solid wall insulation. Loans are available up to £15,000.

Typically, one loan is given per property although in some circumstances more than one can be considered. For example, where there is three flats in one property there is potential to offer a loan per flat.

Children's Services

The 'Leaving Care' team within children's services has an offer for landlords who provide accommodation for care experienced young people. The incentives include:

- Dorset Council as a rent guarantor for up to 12 months
- 1 month rent in advance
- payment of 12 months' rent up front to be held in a separate account[7]
- a top-up towards the rent if the Universal Credit element is lower than the private rental cost.
- personal advisor as a contact point with regular updates and meetings with the young person
- personal advisor visits to the home every 8 weeks
- a 'setting up home' grant up to £3,000[8]

The team also build in regular reviews to show support, oversight and accountability. Children's services do not offer any type of bond or cash incentive to secure properties.

Adult Services

Adult Services do not have a specific package of support although funds can be made available to pay rent in advance and deposits which is offered on a case-by-case basis. Adult services do not offer any cash incentives or bonds.

Below Table A. shows a summary of the packages of support offered across all the Dorset Council services

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[7] The young person pays rent – this is intended to be as a security should the rent not be paid.
[8] This is supervised funds that is award to the care leaver and spent with authorisation of the personal advisor

Table A.

Directorate & Team	Incentive amount	Bond	Rent in advance	Deposit	Extras	Grant (non-repayable)	Policy
Housing – Homelessness Prevention and Housing Advice	• 1 bed - £4000 • 2 bed - £2250 • 3 bed - £3250 • 4 bed – £4250 No rent increases for 18 months. Paid in instalments	Up to 12 weeks rent	Up to 5 weeks rent	Up to 5 weeks rent	• Pet bond up to £400 • Landlord support • Tenancy support • Tenancy agreement • Inventory • Landlord compliancy test	No	Yes
Housing - Housing Supply (Temporary Accommodation)	Maximum £4250 (value determined case by case) Paid in 2 instalments	No	No	No	• Tenant support • Landlord support • Property compliancy checks • Lease agreement • Repairs and maintenance	No	Yes
Housing - Housing Standards	No	No	No	No	• Homes Improvement Loans from Lendology CIC – up to £25000 • Empty property loan from Lendology – up to £25000 • Energy efficiency loan from Lendology – up to £15000	No	Yes
Adults Services	No	No	Yes	Yes	Rent can be paid on a case-by-case basis. No set terms required.	No	No

Children's Services	No	No	Up to 5 weeks rent Can offer 12 months rent	Up to 5 weeks rent	• Rent guarantor up to 12 months • Can offer 'top-up' rent (if rent is above UC element received) • Support via Personal Advisor	Setting up home grant (up to £3000)	Yes

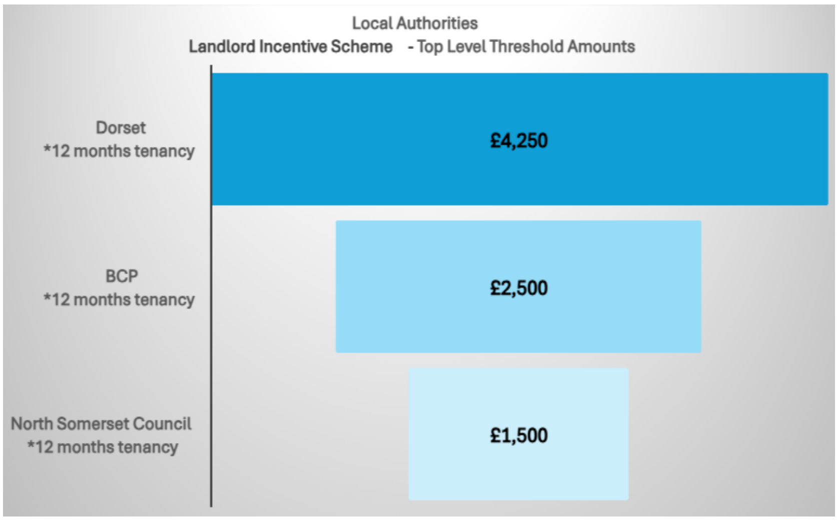
Dorset Council incentive compared to neighbouring authorities

Local authorities frequently offer an incentive package to private landlords. We have compared the incentives package offered by Dorset and all the neighbouring authorities below. The data for these comparisons have been gathered from information available in the public domain. It is possible some authorities do offer incentives but the information on these is not made available or advertised.

Dorset Council's Key4Me incentive to secure 12-month tenancies in the private rented sector has the highest financial amounts compared to all other Southwest local authorities.

Below Table & Graph B. Shows the top-level threshold amounts for neighbouring authorities

Table & Graph B.



East Devon Council	No Incentive
NFDC	No Incentive
Plymouth Council	No Incentive
Somerset Council	No Incentive
South Hams & West Devon Councils Joint Initiative	* Rent guarantee if property is empty (2 months max). * A competitive management fee: 6% +VAT per month 4% +VAT for two or more properties
Teignbridge District	No Incentive
Wiltshire Council	No Incentive

Dorset's Key4Me incentives are 100% higher in the payable amount compared to Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) and 150% higher compared with North Somerset Council.

This is shown in Table C below.

Table C.

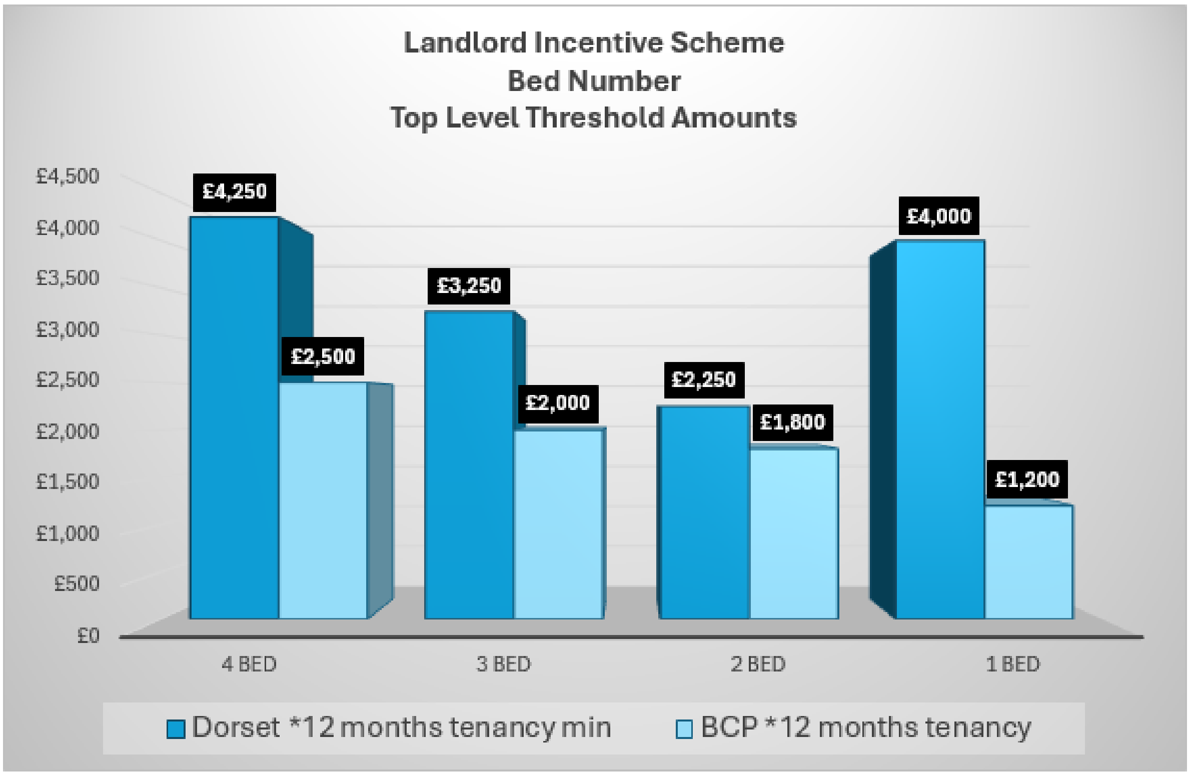
Authority Comparison Price Threshold Difference				
Landlord Incentive Scheme **Top Level Threshold Amounts**				
Dorset Council *12 months tenancy min	**BCP Council** *12 months tenancy	**North Somerset Council** *12 months tenancy min	**£ Difference**	**% Difference**
£4,500	£2,500		£2,000	100%
£4,500		£1,500	£3,000	150%

The incentives operating in Dorset and BCP work on a tariff, with more payable depending on the size of the property. For 1- and 4-bedroom properties, Dorset Council's incentive is 100% higher than BCP's.

Table and Graph D. below shows the full comparison of incentive amounts paid per bedroom.

Table and Graph D.

Landlord Incentive Scheme Bedroom Number Top Level Threshold Amounts				
	Dorset Council	**BCP Council**	**£ Difference**	**% Difference**
1 Bed	£4,000	£1,200	£2,800	100%
2 Bed	£2,250	£1,800	£700	64%
3 Bed	£3,250	£2,000	£1,250	100%
4 Bed	£4,250	£2,500	£1,750	100%



Whilst the landlord incentive for Dorset is payable at the highest rate in the Southwest region it can still prove to be a cost-effective solution, especially when used to move applicants out of bed and breakfast accommodation.

From the 1st November 2024 to 30 June 2025 the council has paid 56 private landlord incentives through the Key4Me scheme. Of the applicants to receive the incentive 19 had a placement in council temporary accommodation. With 13 of those during their application being placed in Bed and Breakfast, with an average stay of 41 days. Some received the incentives whilst still placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation while others had been moved on to other types of council temporary accommodation. The range of incentive paid for the 19 applicants was from £675 to £4250 with an average payment of £3114.47.

For example: for an applicant who is placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for 41 days at a cost of £95.00 per night amounts to a weekly charge of £665.00. The applicant will always need to pay a weekly service charge (£26.41) and any charges that are ineligible for housing benefit. Assuming the applicant is eligible for full Housing Benefit, they will be awarded Housing Benefit at £638.59 per week. The Department for Work and Pensions will pay the council £114.23 per week toward this, and the balance of the housing benefit award (£524.26 per week) is paid by the council. In this example, for a stay of 41 days, £3070.90 is paid by the council.

These same financial savings do not apply to council owned or leased temporary accommodation. There are however secondary savings when the incentive is used to moved applicants out of council owned or leased temporary accommodation in that a vacancy is created allowing for other applicants to be moved out or avoid bed and breakfast accommodation.

Table E. below shows the full details of the Dorset Council ‘Key4Me’ scheme in comparison to other neighbouring authorities

Table E. Full incentive details for neighbouring authorities[9]

	Dorset Council	BCP Council	North Somerset Council	East Devon Council	NFDC	Wiltshire Council	Plymouth Council	Somerset Council
Landlord incentive scheme	Key4Me Scheme: Cash incentive up to £4250. (12 months tenancy min). 1 bed - up to £4000. 2 bed - Up to £2250. 3 bed - up to £3250, 4 bed - up to £4250.	Help to Let Scheme: cash incentive up to £2500 (12 months tenancy) Studio/1 bed - £1200. 2 bed - £1800. 3 bed £2000. 4 bed - £2500	Cash incentive: up to £1500 (12 months tenancy min)	No incentive scheme	No incentive scheme	Wiltslet: tenant finding service only.	Own ethical letting agent. No cash incentive.	Keyring Lettings: Tenant finding service only
Bond	Up to 12 weeks	Arrears bond only, valid for 12 months.	Up to 5 weeks	Amount negotiable	Yes	Up to 6 weeks		Unknown
Rent in advance	Up to 5 weeks	Up to 5 weeks	Up to 5 weeks	Up to 5 weeks	Up to 3 months	Up to 5 weeks		Unknown
Deposit	Up to 5 weeks	Up to 5 weeks	Up to 5 weeks	Up to 5 weeks	Up to 3 months	Up to 5 weeks		Unknown
Extras	Tenant support services, landlord support, tenancy & inventories, pet bond £400	HMO license fee reimbursement (nomination rights for 12 months), tenancy support & landlord liaison service.	Tenant finding service, property inspections, tenancy agreements, financial assistance to join or renew.	Tenancy sustainment support	Tenant support service	Tenant support services		No

[9] See appendix A for South Hams, West Devon and Teignbridge

Other Statutory and Non statutory organisations

Other statutory and non-statutory organisations such as the Probation service and local charities also do work to secure accommodation for their service users in the private rented sector. These tend to be less competitive and focus more on access to funds/grants for the individual to secure a property rather than an incentive amount in exchange for a property. The offer is to the service user rather than the landlord.

Table F. is a summary of some local and national organisations with an offer to help access the private rented sector.

Table F.

	Organisation						
Item	**Probation**	**St Martin in the Fields**	**St Mungos**	**SSAFA**	**The Lantern**	**Veterans Hub Weymouth**	**PATH (Plymouth Access to Housing Ltd)**
Scheme	Accommodation offer only	Vicar's Relief Fund	Support based schemes & help finding accommodation only	Housing support & Advice for military personal and their family	No cash incentive	Community project - lottery funded. Support for veterans.	PATH - relieve poverty by providing assistance to those in housing need. PRAS - Private rented access service.
Bond	No	No	No	Yes - no cap as long as property is affordable	Yes, case by case	No	Yes, most commonly offered. No upper limit but must be affordable property.
Rent in advance	No	Up to £500	No	Yes	Up to £500	No	They apply to charities for RIA, they do not offer themselves. Except: they have YP pot of money where they can offer RIA or offenders - separate

							offenders pot where they offer RIA
Deposit		N/A	No	Yes	No	No	No - except for offenders (this funding comes from LG)
Extras	Community Accommodation Service. Provides housing for up to 12 weeks for offenders at risk of homelessness on release. Often referred to LA alongside this.	Grants of up to £350 to cover rent arrears	Support with addictions, signposting, finding accommodation	No cash incentive. Rent and deposit is means tested - less than £500 surplus income. Affordability checks conducted; property must be affordable. Turn-over is 3-4 weeks. SSAFA reach out to various military charities and then approach RBL as a last resort. Can also help with household items - fridge, washing machine, cooker and carpets - quotes needed. The items are bought on claimants' behalf.	Tenant support	Community café, events, mental health support - psychotherapy	Plymouth Council can refer people in. Housing advice, support for rough sleepers, resettlement support. Refers people to Plymouth Homes4Let. Refugee integration support.

Private Sector leasing and housing standards

Dorset Council is one of only three Southwest authorities offering a private sector leasing scheme and the only authority to offer an incentive with this.

South Somerset are offering a similar level of loan support for home improvements as Dorset. South Somerset offer this in conjunction with grants. Both Dorset and South Somerset offer the highest amount through loan.

Table G is a summary of the private sector leasing schemes and loans offered by neighbouring local authorities

Table G:

Local Authorities	Private Sector Leasing Offered	Private Sector Leasing Incentive	Housing Standards - Grants/Loans/Incentives
Dorset Council	Yes	Yes Up to £4250	Yes (Housing Standards) Homes Improvement Loans from Lendology CIC – up to £25000 Empty property loan from Lendology – up to £25000 Energy efficiency loan from Lendology – up to £15000
BCP Council	No	No	Yes – Property Improvement Grant Studio - £1500 1 bed - £2000 2 bed - £2500 3 bed - £3000 HMO - £3000 Rent must be no higher than LHA + 10% Nomination rights
NFDC	Yes	No	No (only advertise external schemes)
Wiltshire	No	No	No
East Devon	No	No	Lendology – smaller repair works up to £1000
Devon & Cornwall	Yes	No	Responsible Landlord Scheme
	No	No	Safe, Warm and Secure Grant – up to £15000 Empty Home Grants – up to £15000

South Somerset			HMO grant (to upgrade and make new units) Loan assistance with Lendology, up to £25000 Landlord loans – up to £25000 - 4% interest
North Somerset Council	No	No	Grants for property improvements up to £1200 Interest free loans up to £5000 12 month nomination rights

Landlord Engagement

As part of the project the 'Dorset Private Landlord Roundtable' event was held as a way of engagement and to gain a better understanding of how we can better work with the sector. The event consisted of 15 local landlords and agents, with small, medium and larger (estate) residential landlords in attendance.

There were five main themes that came out of the event, these themes generally align with the national picture (discussed above) and the large-scale survey carried out by MHCLG.

Financial

There was a general feeling amongst smaller landlords (those with one or two properties) that recent changes in taxation and borrowing made the return on investment no longer viable and they were considering exiting the market. This was less of a concern for larger landlords.

Resources

Most landlords told us that they were unaware of all the packages of support available through Dorset Council. The leasing scheme, loans for property improvements and Disability Facilities Grants were largely unknown. Many do not find the Dorset Council website to be user friendly and have not been able to find any information related to being a landlord in Dorset. They felt the website was particularly lacking in information about events or news.

Many of the landlords source their information from National Residential Landlord Association (NRLA), British Landlords Association (BLA), or a local landlord association. With agents using SMS and WhatsApp to communicate with their landlords. Landlords told us that they enjoy landlord forums and find this a useful source of information, support and networking.

Support

Generally, there is a lack of awareness around what support is available through the Council. Landlords told us that they want to have answers to issues and enquiries promptly. It was especially important for them, that they are updated frequently regarding any tenant issues. They told us they do not always feel acknowledged and delays in support and bad communication can often put them off working with the Council.

For those that had received support from the Council, many reported positive interactions and found this helpful, particularly from the Benefit and Revenues department and the housing's landlord liaison service. There was suggestion that the new incentive packages are generous financially, which is a nice to have, however, they would exchange this extra financial support for early intervention/support, for tenants they are experiencing difficulties with. One agent gave an example of the Afghan resettlement team providing wrap around support and this being very helpful at the start of a tenancy. Landlords deemed tenant support and early check-ins for new tenants as very important.

For many landlords the process of applying to court for possession is a complicated and a lengthy process that they would rather avoid where possible.

The landlords were unanimous in saying the most important thing for them is being able to choose their own tenant. They explained they generally have a good choice of prospect tenants and tend to go with how the person presents and if they have a good rapport. There was a consensus amongst landlords that rent top-ups are not so much of an issue as had initially been anticipated. A tenant being in receipt of benefits, having a pet or poor credit rating is not necessarily a barrier. Landlords told us that they do not have any objections to working with the Council, they simply do not have a need to. They told us that they do not need to work with the Council to get a tenant, they prefer to pick a tenant themselves and have plenty of choice, with some operating a waiting list.

Standards

The impending changes likely to be brought in by the Renters Reform Bill and changes that will be required in terms of property standards is of huge concern to Dorset landlords. Many explained that if the changes are brought in as proposed which would require the property to be EPC rating C or above, it would force them to leave the market. They told us that it is relatively easy for them to bring a property up to a D or E rating but achieving a C is difficult. This is especially difficult for those landlords with older or listed properties. The schemes and loans available through the Council are largely unknown, these were however of interest. Many landlords talk of being weary of schemes to improve energy efficiency, some describing receiving a poor service in relation to cavity wall insulation, with poor tradesman and conflicting information about which products are best to use. Most landlords have heard of 'Ridgewater Energy' and find this a helpful resource.

Some of the landlords who attended had experience of tenants receiving a 'Disability Facilities Grant' (DFG). They told us that this was an easy process, no extra costs to them and generally a good experience. The negative comments related to sometimes poor workmanship and the products not being removed or recycled when no longer required. Ideally, they would like the option to have these works removed, the property made good, and items removed when a tenant moves out.

For existing tenant's landlord all agreed that they have and would agree to adaptation within a limit, they are more cautious about major adaptations such as 'motorised kitchens' whereas stair lifts and wet rooms where the property allows were mostly accepted and had been allowed when requested.

Legislative requirements & changes

The main concern of proposed changes from the Renter's Reform Bill relate to tenancies and no longer being able to use a fixed term assured shorthold tenancy. Landlords told us that they feel unhappy that the EPC requirements do not apply to holiday lets and because it will be difficult to achieve the proposed C rating that the option of moving over to a holiday let is more appealing. They would like to see local government lobbying central government about this issue. Particularly as Dorset has lots of older properties and is a desirable tourist area.

The Roundtable landlords told us that they would welcome a landlord accreditation scheme. Sometimes they feel they get tarnished by a general view that all landlords are 'bad'.

New, additional and or alternative ways of working

The Local Government Association's 'Improving the Private Rented Sector – A guide for councils'[10] discusses various offers and initiatives to optimise work with the private rented sector. In summary the guide makes the following suggestions:

- Landlord Accreditation Scheme – These schemes encourage landlords to maintain high standards by offering recognition and support for good practices.
- Property Management Services – Providing services such as social lettings agencies to help manage properties and ensure they meet required standards
- Financial Support – This includes bonds, rent deposit schemes and guarantee schemes to help tenant secure housing and support landlord in managing financial risks.
- Tenant Support – Tenancy advice and support for tenants' groups aim to empower tenants and ensure they are aware of their rights and responsibilities
- Partnership working – Collaboration with various stakeholders, including fire and rescue services, HMRC, tenant groups to address issues effectively

Looking at other local authority schemes across the country it seems most offer similar services which include financial incentives, rent in advance, deposit, bonds, tenancy support and tenant finding services. Some offer rent guarantee for the first 12 months, reimbursement of landlord insurance and a few offer energy efficiency grant funding.

The 'Options for the new Private Rented Sector Offer'[11] report by Andy Gale[12] 2024 discusses approaches to maximise access to the private rented market. The guide aims to help Councils access the private rented sector in greater numbers and provide sustainable housing solutions to tackle homelessness

The report indicates to effectively access the 00. rented sector and tackle homelessness; realistic landlord incentives are necessary. Suggesting a cost-benefit analysis should be considered, comparing the cost of temporary accommodation and potential incentive payments for landlords.

Key Points of the report include:

- **Flexible Packages**: Officers should have the flexibility to create packages that meet landlords' varying needs, such as guaranteed rent, market rent, additional incentive payments, rent security, or support services.
- **Geographical Sourcing**: Councils should source private rented properties across a broader geographical area to increase the number of available properties.

This suggests offering an incentive scheme which is tailored and specific to the landlord rather than an upper fixed amount. With any scheme there clearly must be an upper limit however there are benefits to not advertising this and allowing negotiations for an equitable payment.

The report goes on to give steps to take when implementing an offer to private landlords:

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[10] 5.85 Local Authority private rented sector main report_02FINAL.pdf
[11] See Appendix B
[12] Andy Gale is a highly respected housing and homelessness expert in the UK, with a career spanning over three decades. Awarded an **OBE in 2008** for his work on homelessness prevention and housing options

1. **Basics to Put in Place**:
    - Assign a responsible team for property acquisition.
    - Recruit officers with lettings experience.
    - Promote the scheme to private landlords and maintain relationships.
    - Prepare marketing packs for landlords and agents.
    - Inspect properties to ensure they meet standards.
    - Establish a single point for Housing Benefit claims.
    - Ensure support is provided where needed through contracts with floating support providers.
    - Respond to tenants' and landlords' enquiries.
    - Encourage tenants to participate in savings schemes.
2. **Review and Revise Marketing Material**:
    - Create and finalise marketing packs for landlords and letting agents.
    - Develop flyers for distribution.
3. **Develop a Marketing Strategy**:
    - Use word of mouth, flyers in public access points, landlord forums, and Housing Benefit mailings to promote the scheme.
    - Seek access to landlord mailing lists, ensuring data protection compliance.

Adaptations

As discussed above the Housing Strategy indicated that households who privately rent face barriers to having adaptations installed often meaning the individuals must move. Between 1st April 2024 to 31 March 2025 there were 352 applications made to the Housing Register, where the applicant cited needing to move because adaptations are required. Of these applications, 64 were made from those living in the private rented sector. 34 of the 64 applications are live with 30 not completing the whole application process required to be accepted on to the Housing Register. The MHCLG survey identified nationally that 97% of private landlords who received a request for reasonable adjustments had carried out the request with most landlords at 87% funding these entirely themselves. This data matched the local information given to us at the Dorset Private Landlords Roundtable. Where all the landlords in attendance agreed they have or would agree to adaptions (some caution around major adaptations such as motorised kitchens).

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are financial aids provided by local councils to help disabled individuals make necessary adaptations to their homes. These grants are designed to support people in living more independently and safely in their own homes. In 2024/2025 there were a total of 433 DFG (works over £1000) awarded in Dorset for major adaptations. Of these, 21 were awarded to individuals living in the private rented sector, accounting for just under 5% of all major adaptations funded by Dorset Council via DFG.

As part of the research for this project we looked at the Council processes used when an individual living in private rented accommodation applies to the Housing Register indicating that they need to move because they require adaptations. It was identified that within the assessment process there is no engagement with private landlords. Investigations are carried out to check the applicants medical need for adaptations. However, there is no process to investigate if the landlord has received a request for adaptations or whether this would be considered.

Conclusion

Dorset Council offers five separate packages of support to the private rented sector. These go across three directorates, five services, with each used to serve a different purpose. Dorset Council packages of support provide the most generous landlord incentive packages in the Southwest, particularly through the Key4Me scheme. However, awareness amongst landlords is low, and many are unaware of the full range of support available, including improvement loans and leasing schemes.

Exiting the market is still a consideration for landlords for reasons relating to taxation, legislative changes, and property standard requirements (e.g. EPC rating C). Dorset landlords value having choice when selecting a tenant, early support, and communication over financial incentives alone.

There is a gap in the process for engaging landlords when tenants in private rentals request adaptations. Although most landlords are open to adaptations, only 5% of major adaptations funded by DFGs were in the private rented sector.

The upcoming Renters' Reform Bill is a major concern, particularly the removal of fixed-term tenancies and stricter EPC requirements. Landlords feel disadvantaged compared to holiday lets, which are not subject to the same EPC standards.

Landlords appreciate forums and direct engagement but find the Council's website and communication channels lacking. There is a desire for a centralised information hub, one point of contact and regular landlord forums.

Recommendations

These recommendations are linked to the project aims and findings:

1. Improve awareness and accessibility of existing support:
    - Create a centralised online landlord portal or platform. The online space should include accessible information on all Dorset Council schemes, incentives and support services. Alternatively, the Dorset Council website be redesigned to include a single landing spot and supporting pages of information specifically for landlords. Opposed to service specific information sitting within individual service pages.
    - Establish a cross-departmental private rented sector working group to align strategies, share data and avoid duplication.

2. Strengthen landlord engagement and communication:
    - Reinstate and maintain a schedule of regular forums to engage with private landlords. These forums provide a platform for updates, feedback, and relationship-building. The last forum was held on 8th May 2025 with the previous forum being held in May 2023.Create a single point of contact for all queries, support and feedback. This will work to streamline and coordinate contact with landlords. Develop a cross-departmental marketing strategy to promote all the schemes, offers and incentives available across the Council.
    - Create a shared landlord database accessible to all relevant services that tracks engagement and support.

3. Enhance support for adaptations:
    - To encourage better take up of DFG’s, offer a “make good” service post-tenancy to remove adaptations and restore the property.
    - Develop a clear process which includes investigations with private landlords when a tenant applies to the Housing Register because they require adaptations. This would ensure opportunities to adapt existing homes are not missed and better outcomes for tenants who can remain in their homes longer.

4. Monitor, evaluate and expand data driven insights:
    - Introduce KPIs to track landlord retention.
    - Conduct an annual landlord survey to assess satisfaction and gather feedback.
    - Publish an annual private rented sector impact report detailing; number of landlords engaged, properties secured and adaptations completed.

Appendix

Appendix A

	Dorset Council	South Hams & West Devon Councils Joint Initiative	Teignbridge District Council
Landlord incentive scheme	Key4Me Scheme: Cash incentive up to £4250. (12 months tenancy min). 1 bed - up to £4000. 2 bed - Up to £2250. 3 bed - up to £3250, 4 bed - up to £4250.	Joint scheme between South Hams & West Devon. Works with landlords and developers. Rent guarantee if property is empty (2 months max). A competitive management fee of 6% +VAT per month (4% +VAT for two or more properties).	SPRINT: tenant finding service only
Bond	Up to 12 weeks	Unknown	No
Rent in advance	Up to 5 weeks	6 weeks	Up to 5 weeks by DHP
Deposit	Up to 5 weeks	Damage deposit	Up to 5 weeks by DHP
Extras	Tenant support services, landlord support, tenancy & inventories, pet bond £400	Property management for low fee 6% - in exchange for a lower monthly rental price. Tenant selection, credit checks and referencing. Tenancy agreements & associated legal documents. Conducting quarterly management inspections including all outdoor spaces. 6 week rent and damage deposit guarantee . A 100% guarantee of the rent when the property is empty (maximum two months). Arranging and paying for your EPC. Access to affordable finance packages for property improvements. Rent account management.	Tenant finding service, property inspections, tenancy checks, landlord training.

		A comprehensive inventory. In-house support from the Council.	

Appendix B

Landlord Deal for PRS 2024 Andy Gale .docx