

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY

1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Cabinet recommend to Council that the Private Sector Housing Strategy be adopted.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report proposes a Private Sector Housing Strategy which identifies 5 key priorities to deliver safe homes, adapted living, tackle empty homes, increase partnerships and promote energy efficiency.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The proposed Private Sector Housing Strategy was produced in conjunction with the Private Sector Housing Task and Finish Group and has regard to the Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024, which sets out the Council's commitment to a thriving private rented sector.
- 3.2 A District wide Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey was also carried out and completed in March 2020. This has been used to provide an evidence base for the Task and Finish Group to determine and finalise the key priorities of the Strategy.

4. THE NEW PROPOSED PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY

- 4.1 The proposed new Private Sector Housing Strategy is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The main aim of the Strategy is to improve access to safe and healthy homes within the private sector housing stock of the New Forest District.
- 4.3 The Private Sector Housing Strategy identifies five key priorities:
 - 4.3.1 Achieving high standards in the private rented sector
 - 4.3.2 Enabling safe independent living
 - 4.3.3 Tackling privately owned empty homes
 - 4.3.4 Energy efficiency
 - 4.3.5 Creating a fully integrated Private Sector Housing Service
- 4.4 The Private Sector Housing Strategy sets out the various housing challenges faced within the New Forest District, in relation to the private sector; the importance of improving access to safe and healthy homes and enabling safe and independent living.
- 4.5 In early 2019 the Council set out that it would be reviewing its Private Sector Housing functions through the adoption of a new Strategy, which would set out a new vision for the District. A Task and Finish Group of Members and senior officers, led by the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, reviewed provision and performance to establish the set of key priorities listed within the proposed Strategy.

- 4.6 High priority is given to achieving high standards in the private rented sector by strengthening the Council's relationship with private landlords and Letting Agents in the New Forest and working with them to deliver what is required to reduce the number of hazards identified within private rented homes.
- 4.7 The Council has a role in protecting the rights of tenants so it must also ensure that awareness of tenant rights, responsibilities and the support available is clear. The Strategy ensures the Council places an emphasis on delivering a service which meets the needs of private residents, working with other Council departments and external partners to deliver the aims. This will include promoting the Council's services and ensuring that residents understand they can contact the Council to tackle poor quality private rented housing and landlords who breach their legal responsibilities.
- 4.8 In order to achieve this, the Strategy requires a robust enforcement policy to be developed where co-operation and a supportive approach with landlords has failed.
- 4.9 The District Wide Stock Condition Survey highlighted that 12% of households in the New Forest have at least one family member who is affected by a long-term illness or disability. The majority of these households also experience problems moving around their homes. The most common mobility problems relate to climbing steps and stairs, using bathroom amenities and access to gardens. The Strategy highlights the importance of the Council's work to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). The Council is committed to deliver these both in the private sector and its own Social housing stock, and to increase the awareness of Disabled Facilities Grants and ensure that those who need adaptations receive the appropriate advice, support and assistance, in an efficient and timely manner.
- 4.10 Although the Stock Condition Survey evidences that the New Forest District does not have a significant issue with empty properties, the proposed Strategy includes objectives to tackle the empty properties that do exist. The Strategy has regard to the Corporate Plan, to ensure long term empty properties are identified and provide support and advice to the homeowners to bring the empty property back into use.
- 4.11 The Strategy also highlights the importance of energy efficiency within the private sector, by ensuring that the Council provides advice and assistance on energy efficiency measures to both private rented tenants and homeowners.
- 4.12 The final priority of the Strategy is to create a fully integrated Private Sector Housing Service to work with other departments within the Housing Service, Council and external partners to ensure the Private Sector Housing Team plays their part in meeting the priorities within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the Housing Strategy.
- 4.13 Progress against the key priorities of the Private Sector Housing Strategy will be monitored through annual reports to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 To deliver the Strategy, there will be a requirement for extra resources in the form of a full-time post, particularly to respond to Priority 2. This will take the form of a new additional Housing Adaptations Surveyor.

- 5.2 This additional resource will enable the objectives of the Strategy to be achieved, recognising that an improved and more timely offering to vulnerable people will be the result.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The cost of the additional post referred to in paragraph 5.1 amounts to £44,000, and will form a bid during the budgetary setting process. It is proposed that the cost will be split equally between the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund.

7. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are none.

9. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Private Sector Housing Strategy is for the benefit of all the District's residents and will have a positive impact by improving housing standards of private sector accommodation, increasing the awareness and delivery of disabled adaptations, bringing empty homes back in to use, promoting energy efficiency and improving the performance and outcomes of the Private Sector Housing Service.
- 9.2 Consideration has been given to the needs of those who identify with the protected characteristic groups of age, disability, pregnancy and maternity, who may find it difficult to access safe and healthy homes in the private sector.
- 9.3 This Strategy should be read alongside the Council's other key housing initiatives, including the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, the Tenancy Policy and the new Allocations Policy which collectively all provide a means to meet the housing needs of those within these protected characteristic groups. It is recognised that the way in which the Strategy is implemented and the impact on those with a protected characteristic will need to be regularly monitored to ensure that those residents are able to take advantage of the Strategy's key objectives.

10. HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL'S COMMENTS

- 10.1 The Panel were fully supportive of the proposed Strategy and requested to be updated on the progress of the Strategy at future meetings.

11. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 11.1 Following on from the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey, the new draft Private Sector Housing Strategy provides a concise picture of the many housing challenges private residents face within the New Forest. It provides a number of key actions and priority objectives which aim to improve Housing standards across the sector and place renewed importance on raising awareness of the many services available to vulnerable people, such as Disabled Facilities Grants, which benefit more than 400 households each year.
- 11.2 I fully support the Strategy and look forward to seeing positive outcomes being delivered to residents, working alongside our own officers and partners in the private and public sectors.

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Background Papers:

Public documents