

Executive

Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010 - 2014

1 March 2010

Report of Head of Housing Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek adoption of the council's Private Sector Housing Strategy and endorsement of the associated action plan.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To adopt the Private Sector Housing Strategy, and
- (2) Endorse the Strategy's action plan

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 The Private Sector Housing Strategy is intended to deliver improvements in four priority areas. These are described in section 2.8 of this report.
- 1.2 Its production has been overseen by a Steering Group, following extensive consultation, and with the involvement of a Task and Finish Group established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 At the direction of the Steering Group the draft strategy and action plan have been subject to appropriate revision to take account of consultation responses.
- 1.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has considered and endorsed the draft strategy and the action plan (subject to clarification of certain targets) and has asked that delivery progress should be reported back to that Committee in a year's time.
- 1.5 The strategy does not require additional financial resources but will make use of external grant funding which has already been secured by the council for housing purposes. It will also be necessary to appoint a part-time officer on a temporary contract to deliver improvements in domestic energy-efficiency and address fuel-poverty issues but it is intended to achieve this within the 2010-11 budget.

Proposals

- 1.6 That the strategy should be formally adopted by Executive.
- 1.7 That the associated action plan for the strategy is endorsed.

Conclusion

- 1.8 This strategy is an essential part of the council's response to the need to provide suitable accommodation for the residents of Cherwell. The council has a key role to play in ensuring that the local stock is in satisfactory condition; that fuel poverty and carbon emissions are reduced; the housing needs of vulnerable residents are met and that those seeking homes have suitable options available to them, particularly in the private rented sector.
- 1.9 The Private Sector Housing Strategy will also assist with the delivery of a number of actions and targets previously identified in the Cherwell Homelessness Strategy 2007-11 and the Cherwell Housing Strategy 2005-11.

Background Information

- 2.1 The need to develop the Council's first Private Sector Housing Strategy was identified in early 2009. A new stock condition surveys was underway and a fuel poverty survey had recently been completed. The Government had also reported on a review of the private rented sector. A strategy was needed to address the issues being raised.
- 2.2 It was also judged important to highlight the importance of good quality private sector housing to residents in the district, and to specifically reflect the contribution the private sector housing team can make towards meeting the Council's corporate priorities.
- 2.3 The project was overseen by a Steering Group chaired by Councillor Michael Gibbard and including representatives from Adult Social Care, Age Concern, Oxfordshire PCT and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.4 In April 2009 in response to a request from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group to contribute to the production of the Private Sector Housing Strategy.
- 2.5 Development of the strategy commenced with four consultation events. The draft was been subject to a six week formal consultation period which included a 'coffee morning' event, a press release, a direct postal mail shot to 114 stakeholders and interested parties, and the inclusion of a consultation questionnaire on the Council's website consultation portal.
- 2.6 All of the consultation responses were considered by the Steering Group and a number of revisions made to the draft as a result.
- 2.7 Given the strategic importance of this topic, the Task and Finish Group judged that it would be appropriate for the draft strategy to be considered by full Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to it's consideration at Executive. At its meeting on 25 January the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

endorsed and approved the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and the action plan (subject to clarification of certain targets) and has asked that delivery progress should be reported back to the Committee in a year's time.

2.8 Four priorities have been identified for action over the next four years and these are at the core of the strategy. They are:

- a. Ensure existing privately rented homes are accessible and affordable;
- b. Ensure existing stock is in good condition;
- c. Support vulnerable people to remain living in their own homes and improve their health outcomes;
- d. Improve energy efficiency to reduce carbon emissions and fuel poverty.

The action plan develops these four priorities into a number of objectives and targets.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 3.1 This strategy is an essential part of the District's response to the needs of our residents for suitable accommodation. It will play an important role in delivering the council's corporate objectives.
- 3.2 The strategy has been produced at a time of financial stringency and in full recognition of the need for efficiencies and for resources to be committed to priorities. It therefore seeks to deliver improvements within existing resources, through more efficient working and by refocusing activities. However, delivery of a number of important actions (identified in the action plan as the Private Sector Development Project) will require the use of grant funding which has already been secured by the council for housing purposes. The allocation of that grant funding to help deliver the action plan has been approved by CMT.
- 3.3 Housing and related services are at the heart of enabling older people to live independent and active lives and helps prevent older people falling into crisis and the need for high cost care.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward:

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|---------------------|---|
| Option One | To adopt the Private Sector Housing Strategy and endorse the action plan |
| Option Two | To adopt the strategy and endorse the action plan with amendments. |
| Option Three | Not to adopt the strategy or endorse the delivery plan, in which case an alternative strategy will need to be considered. |

Consultations

Public and stakeholders

The strategy was subject to extensive consultation both during its development and following production of the draft (see section 2.5). A summary of the consultation responses received in response to the draft strategy is included as Appendix 2.

Implications

Financial:

The Strategy has no additional financial implications and will be resourced within existing resources, and using new Recession Impact funding, Homelessness Grant and other funding streams as identified within the strategy.

Comments checked by Eric Meadows, Service Accountant PH&E, 01295 221552

Legal:

There are no legal implications resulting from the adoption of this strategy. The Private Sector Housing team works within a tight legal framework relating to enforcement of property condition and provision of grants. The strategy does not detract from that framework.

Comments checked by Nigel Bell, Solicitor, 01295 221687

Risk Management:

The Council's annual survey of residents' views indicates that housing issues are of increasing importance to the public. Having in place an effective Private Sector Strategy is a key means of demonstrating the Council's recognition of, and resolve to address, pressing housing issues. The content and delivery of the Strategy's action plan are likely to be subject to audit and a significant factor in any future assessments made of the Council's performance.

Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Management and Insurance Officer 01295 221566

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

- Theme 2 - improve health - including health prevention and access to services for older people. It makes the link between housing and health issues for older people.
- Theme 5 - Secure more affordable housing. This will include increased provision of new specialist extra care housing for older people.
- Theme 8 - Access to rural affordable housing and relevant services for all groups and specifically younger and older people.
- Theme 10 - Focus on Cherwell's people including increasing involvement, improving advice and support and promoting independent living with older people.

Executive Portfolio

Councillor Michael Gibbard
Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Appendix 1	Cherwell's Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010-2014
Appendix 2	Summary of consultation responses
Background Papers	
Ministerial foreword to the Rugg Report (23 October 2008) on a review of the private rented sector.	
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