

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Private Sector Housing Strategy progress update

19 July 2011

Report of Head of Housing Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an update on progress made with achievement of targets set by the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010-14.

This report is public

Recommendations

The meeting is recommended to:

- (1) Note the progress made with achievement of targets set by the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010 -14.

Details

Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's first formal Private Sector Housing Strategy (PSHS) was adopted, and its action plan endorsed by Executive, on 1 March 2010.
- 1.2 The Housing Service has therefore been working to deliver the strategic objectives for just over 15 months and it is appropriate to review and report progress at this stage.
- 1.3 The Strategy identified 4 priorities for attention:
 - Problems faced by households trying to find and afford private rented accommodation
 - The need to support vulnerable and disabled people
 - Stock condition problems
 - The need to reduce Fuel-poverty and improve the energy efficiency of homes.
- 1.4 Councillor Michael Gibbard, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Housing, Chaired the Working Group which oversaw production of the Private Sector Housing Strategy (PSHS). At the request of the Portfolio Holder the Scrutiny Committee established a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group in

May 2009 and 2 members from that Group, Councillors Trevor Stevens and Rose Stratford were included in the Working Group. Production of the draft PSHS was reported to the Scrutiny Committees on 5 January 2010. This report fulfils the specific request of Scrutiny Committee that progress should be reported back to them.

Achievements

2.1 Key achievements include:

- Establishment of the Private Sector Development Project (PSDP). Although some early changes in focus were needed as a result of the Government's deficit budget proposals (and benefit changes in particular), this has allowed us to respond, and continue adapting, to the significant risk that many households that rely on benefits to pay their rent will be unable to secure private rented accommodation and could find themselves homeless.
- Review and revision of the Private Accommodation Letting Scheme (PALS) and the Landlords Home Improvement Grant (which is used to secure nomination rights) so as to ensure continued access to the private rented sector for households in housing need.
- Delivery of 4 Landlords Forum meetings including a joint meeting with the National Landlords Association, a special one-off dealing specifically with benefit changes and a further special arranged at landlords' request with Tony Baldry (MP for Banbury), at which he explained the government's approach.
- Production and implementation of a Disabled Facilities Grant Policy to ensure that we get best value from the Council's substantial commitment of resources and are prepared in the event that demand exceeds available resources. (Elements of that work, including joint work with OCC and Sanctuary, are on-going.)
- Adaptation of 140 homes for disabled residents using the whole of the available budget of £950k to within 0.1%
- 663 other vulnerable households assisted through discretionary grants or by the Small Repairs Service.
- Record results for the improvement of stock condition, with 125 homes made safe by resolution of serious hazards, a further 51 made free from less serious hazards and 99 homes achieving the Decent Homes Standard.
- 78 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) inspected in 2010-11, most on a planned basis.
- 535 homes insulated using the Cocoon scheme through partnership working in 2010-11 (attracting £114k external funding)
- Improvements to domestic energy-efficiency totalling £543k delivered by Eaga through Warm Front grants in Cherwell (CDC actively helps promote) (achieved with £543k external funding).

- 2.2 A full copy of the PSHS Action Plan, with Year-1 Action Notes, is included as Appendix 1.
- 2.3 A copy of the PSDP work-plan is included as Appendix 2.
- 2.4. A summary of wider results achieved by the Private Sector Housing Team in 2010-11 is included as Appendix 3 and this also shows results for the previous year by way of comparison.

Areas of slippage

- 3.1 The new Empty Homes Policy we originally intended to go to Executive in May is still in production.
- 3.2 Although considerable work has been put into the delivery of energy-efficiency improvements intended to help reduce fuel-poverty as well as improve the condition of the stock (see 2.1 & appendix 3), a decision was made to incorporate the intended Fuel Poverty Strategy and action-plan into the new Housing Strategy which is also now in production. The aim being to avoid a proliferation of documents and streamline consultation.

Conclusion

- 4.1 Good progress has been made in delivering the targets and objectives set by the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010-14. The majority of the Year-1 targets have been met although some refocusing has proved necessary in light of the legislative, benefit and funding changes arising from the Government's deficit reduction programme.
- 4.2 It remains our intention to review the Strategy at the end of 2011-12 (its midway point) and revise the action plan, if that is judged necessary, to ensure that targets remain realistic and resources continue to be used to best effect.

Implications

Resources

The Private Sector Housing Strategy is being delivered within the currently agreed revenue budget and the capital budget approved for 2011-12. Effective delivery beyond the end of 2011-12 will depend upon the resources made available.

Comments checked by Joanne Kaye, Service Accountant 01295 221454

Legal:

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. The legal aspects of the individual elements of the action plan are fully addressed as

part of the implementation process.

Comments checked by Ross Chambers, Solicitor
01295 221690

Risk Management: Delivery of the Strategy's targets will improve the homes and circumstances of residents. Conversely, failure to deliver those objectives is likely to result in adverse living conditions and increased harm to health and welfare. Failure to resolve Category-1 hazards or provide Disabled Facilities Grants would place the Council in breach of its statutory duties.

Comments checked by Gillian Greaves, Head of Housing Services
01295 221654

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

A District of Opportunity

Executive Portfolio

Councillor Debbie Pickford
Lead member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Appendix 1	PSHS Action Plan
Appendix 2	PSDP work-plan
Appendix 3	Private Sector Housing Team summary of results 2010-11
Background Papers	
Cherwell's Private Sector Housing Strategy 2010-14	
Overview & Scrutiny Committee report 5 January 2010	
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