

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2010 - 2015

Report of the Head of Strategy and Partnerships

1. Summary of Proposals

The committee is asked to recommend the adoption of the Private Sector Housing Strategy and Action Plan. The Council is required to produce a Private Sector Housing Strategy taking into account the current issues affecting the sector. This strategy replaces the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2004.

The Council has undertaken stock condition research through the Building Research Establishment and surveyed residents to identify the issues and the action plan has been produced to raise the standards in housing conditions in the private sector and give support and advice to private sector tenants and vulnerable households.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that

the Private Sector Housing Strategy, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.

3. Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Sustainability Implications

Financial

3.1 The Council receives an allocation from the Regional Housing Capital Pot to support regeneration in the Private Sector. The Council's proposed allocation for 2010/11 is £77,000.

3.2 This allocation will be used to support the delivery of the strategy's action plan.

Legal

3.3 Under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council has the power to do anything which it considers is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the social, economic or environmental well-being of its area.

- 3.4 The Housing Act 2004 requires the Council to keep the housing stock under review to identify any action that may need to be taken by them.
- 3.5 The Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 requires the Council to publish how it intends to improve the housing in its area.

Policy

- 3.5 This strategy is an update from the 2005 Private Sector Housing Strategy

Risk

- 3.6 Without a clear strategy for the private sector housing function, staff and other resources in the form of schemes, grants and support could be misdirected and wasted. The Audit Commission report *Why the strategic housing role matters* (September 2009) highlights a need for Council's to prioritise targets relating to existing stock.

Sustainability / Environmental / Climate Change

- 3.7 Reducing empty homes creates more sustainable communities. Utilising existing resources for housing need creates less of an environmental impact than new build.
- 3.8 Making homes decent and more energy efficient results in reduced energy consumption and reduces fuel poverty.

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4. Background

- 4.1 Central Government continues to promote the use of private rented sector homes for people in housing need.
- 4.2 The Housing Act 2004 introduced a number of measures that have impacted on the way local authorities operate a private sector housing service. This is the most significant piece of primary legislation relating to private sector housing. It reinforces the link between housing and health and introduced a measure for assessing health and safety hazards. The Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) replaced the 'fitness' standard for housing. The Act also strengthens and increases the rights for private tenants.

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- 4.3 The Audit Commission report *Why the strategic housing role matters* (September 2009) writes that well targeted spending on existing housing can yield financial benefits:
- a) £1 spent on housing support for a vulnerable person saves nearly £2 in health services, tenancy failure, crime and residential care;
 - b) Spending as little as £2,000 on adaptations to help an elderly person to stay in their own home can save £6,000 a year on care;
 - c) If only 5 per cent of empty homes could be brought back into use, councils' could cut the annual homelessness costs by £1/2 billion.

5. **Key Issues**

- 5.1 Building Research Establishment (BRE) completed a stock modelling survey of Redditch private housing (all non-social) in April 2009. This stock modelling survey is a proven desk top method of surveying homes using national data sets.
- 5.2 Central ward, with high density housing and high numbers of pre 1919 dwellings has the highest percentage of dwellings in the following categories: non-decent dwellings, dwellings with inadequate thermal comfort, dwellings with category 1 hazards, dwellings in disrepair, non-modern dwellings, dwellings in fuel poverty, vulnerable households, vulnerable households living in non-decent accommodation.
- 5.3 Based on the evidence of the BRE stock modelling data this strategy recognises there are significant issues in older areas of the Borough and hot spots in part of the former new town areas. Resources and policies should be focussed towards the areas of most need, these being the older dwellings that are situated in Central and adjacent wards (Lodge Park and Abbey).
- 5.4 A snapshot survey took place during summer 2009 using face to face contact with customers, Redditch Borough Council's website and a postal/email survey of private tenants, landlords and owner occupiers to see which private sector housing services are seen as priority.
- 5.5 This survey shows that residents' top priorities are:

- a) Assistance to low-income households on property maintenance and helping arrange subsidised loans;
- b) Returning empty properties back to use;
- c) Helping older people and people with disabilities to live independently in their own homes by providing stairlifts, wider doorways, etc;
- d) Advice on reducing energy use and combating fuel poverty.

- 5.6 To reflect the issues from the stock condition research and residents priorities this strategy has to two main strategic aims:
- a) Improve housing conditions in the private sector;
 - b) Give support and advice to private sector tenants and vulnerable households.

6. **Other Implications**

- Asset Management - None identified.
- Community Safety - Making homes decent and safe is a commitment of this private sector housing strategy.
- Human Resources - None Identified.
- Social Exclusion - This strategy aims to support and advise private tenants and vulnerable households. There are objectives in this strategy aimed at socially excluded groups.

Private landlord training and development increases awareness of issues affecting vulnerable groups.

7. **Lessons Learnt**

Without an evidenced Private Sector Housing Strategy, the Council may direct its private sector resources to issues that are not a high priority for the sector and receive a poor inspection rating.

8. **Background Papers**

None.

9. **Consultation**

Relevant Borough Council Officers.

10. Author of Report

The author of the report is Alexandra Gittins (Housing Policy Officer) who can be contacted on extension 3225 (e-mail alexandra.gittins@redditchbc.gov.uk) for more information.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Action Plan of previous strategy with updates
Appendix 2 – BRE Indicator definitions
Appendix 3 – BRE Methodology