

CABINET

16 September 2009

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY

REPORT OF HEAD OF STRATEGIC HOUSING

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB1741 - Homelessness Strategy - 18 November 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Private Sector Housing Strategy is part of a suite of strategies that underpin the main Housing Strategy. This Strategy is aimed to compliment the Homelessness Strategy which was endorsed by Cabinet on 18 November 2008 (Report CAB1741 refers). This Strategy is aimed at serving the years 2009 – 2013 which aligns changes in legislation and incorporates a detailed action plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Private Sector Housing Strategy be adopted, subject to any revisions that may need to be agreed by the Portfolio Holder for Housing, under the portfolio holder decision making scheme, following any recommendations flowing from the validation of Equality Impact Assessment, the rural proofing and the sustainability assessment.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to seek adoption of the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2009 -2013.
- 1.2 The Strategy has been developed following a comprehensive review of the services, consultation with members and stakeholders and review of the Previous Strategy.

2 **Scale of the review**

- 2.1 Consultation and participation was facilitated through a specific Review and Workshop day and a Workshop session during the annual Winchester Housing Board Forum. In addition, a series of participating focus groups with accompanying questionnaires were held with partner organisations

3 **Priorities for the Private Sector Strategy**

- 3.1 The priorities are;
 - To promote high standards in private housing and affordable housing, including taking action on climate change
 - To promote independent living and provide support for vulnerable and disadvantaged households
 - To ensure that communities are sustainable and inclusive
 - Prevent homelessness wherever possible
 - To communicate the benefits of new housing and promote a positive image of affordable housing
 - More energy efficient homes
 - Equality in the delivery of the service

4 **The Private Sector Strategy**

4.1 The Strategy discusses the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey which has helped us identify the breakdown and condition of private sector accommodation in the district, and identify those areas which are in need of attention. It also highlights the areas on which further initiatives need to be implemented, such as;

- Where there are properties that are not energy efficient
- Indicating areas where there may be fuel poverty and / or economic vulnerability
- where there is overcrowding
- Where there are properties in disrepair / and are not up to the decent homes standard
- Where there is transient movement in the private rented sector

This Strategy updates the previous Action Plan and highlights the major relevant changes since the Introduction of the Housing Act 2004, which includes a new system for assessing housing conditions and enforcing housing standards by way of applying a hazard standard (replacing the old system based on the test of fitness for human habitation), the compulsory licensing of defined Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) and the introduction of new discretionary powers available to a local housing authority to tackle empty properties. The strategy also indicates our key partners whom we are currently working with to ensure that the private sector produces and maintains good quality accommodation.

4.2 The Strategy indicates the vision of Winchester for the next 4 years with the priorities lying in closer working links with the Homelessness team and forging links with Homelessness Strategy.

4.3 An area which is also covered is fuel poverty, which various initiatives are being implemented as to reduce fuel poverty and cut overall carbon emissions. A number of initiatives lie within this.

4.4 Push4Safer Homes initiative is a sub regional scheme which focuses on providing loans to people on low incomes to insulate their property.

4.5 Heatseekers scheme is an initiative where vehicles will survey homes within the district during the winter months taking thermal photographs to indicate properties which are not energy efficient, and then looking to assist occupants to insulate their properties.

4.6 The report also mentions the recent Rugg Report, which outlines the potential vision for the next legislative change for the private rented sector as a whole; in summary these are;

- licensing of private landlords
- mandatory regulation of letting agents
- independent complaints and redress procedure
- tax changes (including changes to stamp duty)
- steps to better understand the sector
- accreditation schemes for the private rented sector as a whole

We are proposing to align ourselves to this direction by seeking to research into the benefits of an accreditation scheme for the private rented sector as a whole.

4.7 This Strategy is to be equality impact assessed, alongside the assessments for rural proofing and the sustainability assessment.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN (RELEVANCE TO):

- 5.1 Safe & Strong Communities: Promoting an Inclusive Society, Health and Wellbeing by taking steps to understand the needs of all sections of the communities
- 5.2 An Efficient & Effective Council, working with partner organisations to deliver improvements in the quality of life across the District.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 The intention is to achieve the measures set out within the Action Plan by prioritising the use of existing staff time and resources as part of the Business Planning process.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 7.1 None.

8 TACT COMMENT

- 8.1 TACT realise that Private Sector Housing plays a vital part in the Homeless Strategy. This urgent need for them could be said to have been caused by years of neglect, by various governments, to provide affordable housing, of which council homes plays a major role.

1. 1.5 Priorities for Private Sector Strategy. TACT has no problems with.

2. 1.11 Outlining the potential vision for the next legislative change for the private rented sector as a whole. TACT has no problems with.
- 5.2 TACT agrees with the 2007 Government issued consultation paper 'Homes for the Future: more affordable, more sustainable!
It is only the term affordable when applied the private sector that causes concern. According to some reports they are far from being affordable. However that is something TACT feel is for the Government to deal with.
- 5.3 TACT will monitor the Private Sector Housing through the press and articles in the Housing publications available to us. It however though an important part of housing, will not be our major concern.
TACT would like to thank the officers and all concerned for consulting TACT on this matter.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 - Private Sector Housing Strategy

Appendix attached for Cabinet Members, Group Leaders, Chairman of Principal Scrutiny Committee and Chairman of Social Issues Scrutiny Panel only. Copies have also been placed in the Members' Library and can be viewed on the Council's Website via the following link:

<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/CommitteeCalendar.asp?year=2009&month=9&day=16>