

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Environmental Health Portfolio Holder 25 January 2007  
**AUTHOR/S:** Executive Director / EHO Public Health Specialist

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### PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL STRATEGY

#### Purpose

1. This report presents the final version of the South Cambridgeshire Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and seeks approval for the proposed priorities for action outlined in the table at the back of the strategy, hence this report should be read in conjunction with the strategy. Following Portfolio Holder approval, the Strategy will be presented to Cabinet for approval.

#### Executive Summary

2. This report outlines the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy for South Cambridgeshire and seeks approval from the Portfolio, for subsequent Cabinet approval, as to the priorities for action in the strategy.
  - (a) Section three of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy contains both the areas for action and possible solutions to those actions.
    - (i) The areas for action are:
      - Housing defects (Serious Hazards, Decent Homes)
      - Adaptations for independent living (Disabled Facilities Grants)
      - Empty Properties
      - Fuel Poverty
      - Feelings of safety and well-being (Crime and Disorder)
      - Homelessness
      - Affordable Housing
      - Overcrowding
    - (ii) The possible solutions to these action areas are detailed in the table attached to this report.
3. The table attached is divided into short, medium and long-term solutions for implementing the strategy. The portfolio holder is asked to consider the table and decide if the actions have been assigned the correct priority and if so should the council aim to tackle each section i.e. short, medium and long. Or should the council focus on the short-term actions only.

#### Background

4. The services the Council provides in relation to private sector housing are many and varied. The main function currently relates to the standard of repair and is the responsibility of the Environmental Health Division of the Council. Private sector housing is not limited to one department and this strategy aims to pull together all the council's functions that are relevant to the private sector housing agenda.
  - (a) Private sector housing needs to be distinguished from the housing provided by the Council and other Registered Social Landlords (RSL's). The private

sector encompasses houses that are in private ownership, namely Owner Occupied Properties and Private Rented properties.

- (b) In South Cambridgeshire there are 47,300 dwellings in the private sector, with the remaining stock comprising of approximately 5000 being Council owned stock owned and less than 1000 in other tenures.
- (c) The strategy went through a period of consultation during February and March in accordance with the decision of the portfolio holder (24 January 2006), unfortunately none of the consultees responded.

### **Considerations**

- 5. The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy is needed if the Council is to deliver its corporate agenda on housing as well as the key housing objectives of the Community Strategy. It is recognised that the Council in isolation cannot deliver the strategy and that it will need to be delivered in partnership with other agencies, bodies, groups and in particular Housing Associations and other RSL's.
  - (a) The Government requires each Local Authority to produce a Housing Renewal Strategy under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 (RRO), which came into effect in July 2002.
  - (b) The RRO gives wider powers to authorities to use funding in whatever way they consider most appropriate to their area, the only exception being that the £25,000 Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) remains mandatory.
- 6. In order for the strategy to be implemented the Council will need to consider the financial implications of the strategy and balance that with the needs of the private sector housing stock in South Cambridgeshire. This is further discussed under the financial implications section of this report.

### **Options**

- 7. The aim of this report is to obtain a strategic direction from the council with a view to implementing the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy, with regards to the services the Council should/could be providing in order to bring private sector dwellings up to the relevant standard. The Housing Act 2004 places requirements on the local authority to remedy serious hazards found in private sector dwellings. The remedies vary from giving grants to enforcement.
- 8. In order to bring private sector housing stock up to an acceptable standard the Council could rely on an enforcement approach forcing owners and landlords to carryout works at their own expense. This approach is likely to cause distress to some owner occupiers who may not be able to pay for the improvements to be made and hence could leave the council no option but to take legal action.
- 9. The Council could rely on a grant giving approach where grants are given to all properties in need of repair to enable them to reach the appropriate standard. This would be expensive to the authority and currently outside the Council's current financial commitments.
- 10. A favoured option would be to use a mixture of both approaches whereby grants are given for properties that have category 1 hazards, and disabled adaptations only. Landlords would not be eligible for grants and would have to finance the repairs themselves.

## Implications

### *Financial implications*

11. The implementation of the strategy will have financial implications for this authority. The table below show the amount of money we would have to spend in grants to remove serious hazards, and complete all adaptations for disabled facilities

<b>Remedy</b>	<b>Amount (£)</b>
To repair all properties with a serious hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System	£23.00M
To bring all properties up to the decent homes standard	£48.00M
To fit all adaptations required under DFG	£8.1M
Total	£71.00M

12. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) are the only mandatory grants we are obliged to offer. At the current rate of spend it would take the council 11-13 years to make all the adaptations which are needed.

### *Staffing Implications*

13. Within existing resources at present, recognising that further staff resources would be needed in the medium to long term if the Council is to fully deliver the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.

### *Risk management implications*

14. There is a Government requirement to produce a Housing Renewal Strategy contained in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 (RRO). If the renewal strategy is not produced the Council will attract criticism from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

15.

Financial	As above
Legal	None
Staffing	As above
Risk Management	As above
Equal Opportunities	It is important for the Council to be aware that its grant giving and enforcement regime must be applied fairly across all sectors of society. Therefore the implementation of this strategy will follow the Departmental enforcement policy.

## Consultations

16. In accordance with the decision of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health (24 January 2006) the strategy was sent to:
- Housing associations and Registered Social Landlords
  - Voluntary Sector involved with housing and homelessness issues
  - Private landlords that the Council is aware of
  - Tenants of private landlords
  - South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust

No replies to the consultation were received.

## Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

17.	Affordable Homes	Private sector housing is a theme that is common to all the corporate objectives and annual priorities. The renewal strategy will have effects on home ownership, affordable housing, independent living, partnerships, and village life to name but a few.
	Customer Service	
	Northstowe and other growth areas	
	Quality, Accessible Services	
	Village Life	
	Sustainability	
	Partnership	

## Recommendations

18. The Portfolio Holder is asked to: -
- (a) Bearing in mind the Council's current financial situation prioritise the areas for action contained in the attached table and prioritise the possible solutions for each area,
  - (b) Identify any areas of current work on private sector housing which the Council can/should stop delivering,
  - (c) Identify any areas in the strategy that are missing or over emphasised.
  - (d) Agree to the strategy, revised in accordance with a – c above, being presented to cabinet for approval.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2006

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