

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 9 July 2007
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Corporate Manager Health & Environmental Services

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL STRATEGY

Purpose

1. This report presents the final version of the South Cambridgeshire Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and action plan following the priorities agreed by the Portfolio Holder (25 January 2007). It requests Cabinet to agree the strategy prior to implementation. The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy forms a key part of the Councils overall Housing Strategy and therefore the two documents should be read together.

Executive Summary

2. This report outlines the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy for South Cambridgeshire and seeks approval from Cabinet to approve the Strategy. The priorities for action to implement the strategy are based on the private sector housing need in South Cambridgeshire and take into account the ability to deliver these priorities both in terms of staff capacity and financial resources. The Council is committed to improving the condition of the private sector housing stock in the district and to reducing the effects of climate change and will increase the provision of private sector grants available if and when suitable funding becomes available. Until such funding becomes available the Council will raise private sector housing standards through a mix of enforcement, education and the continued signposting of residents to grants available from the Council or elsewhere.

Background

3. 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 service 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 approximately 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 (25 January 2006).

Considerations

4. The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy will help the Council deliver its corporate agenda on housing as well as contributing to the key housing objectives of the Community Strategy and the Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement. It is

recognised that the Council cannot deliver the strategy in isolation and that it needs to be delivered in partnership with other agencies, bodies, groups and in particular Registered Social Landlord's.

5. 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. 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. Although the Council is committed to improving the standards of private sector housing, if the strategy is to be fully implemented the Council needs to consider the financial implications of the actions contained within. A balance has to be struck between affordability to the Authority and 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 seek approval to implement the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. In order to bring private sector housing stock up to an acceptable standard the Council relies on a balance of enforcement and education whereby grants are given for properties that have Category 1 hazards (dependant on additional finances being secured), disabled adaptations, (Landlords are not be eligible for grants and would have to finance the repairs themselves) and is looking to widen this (depending on available finances) to including grants for energy efficiency (replacement boilers and renewable technology) and grants to convert large properties into flats.

Implications

Financial implications

8. The implementation of the strategy will have financial implications for this authority if new grants are to be offered or the Council changes the criteria of awarding grants. The table below show the amount of money the Council would have to spend in grants to remove serious hazards, and complete all adaptations for disabled facilities.

Remedy	Amount (£)
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

9. 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.
10. At the Portfolio holder meeting (25 January 2007) the Portfolio Holder agreed that a sum of £100,000 be made available to tackle some of the priorities contained in the Action Plan (Appendix Two of the Strategy) if and when suitable funding becomes available. Until such time the Council will implement the actions that do not require additional funding to raise private sector housing standards through a mix of enforcement, education and the continued signposting of residents to grants available from the Council or elsewhere.

11. Financial	As above
Legal	As contained in the body of the report and strategy.
Staffing	Within existing resources at present, recognising that further staff resources may be needed during the setting up of the new proposed grants if the Council is to deliver on its priorities. This resource could be provided on a temporary basis or by use of external assistance.
Risk Management	There is a Government requirement to produce a The 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).
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 and the Corporate Disability Equality Scheme

Consultations

12. In accordance with the decision of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health (25 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.

Comment has also been received and incorporated from the Housing Strategy Manager

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

13. 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	

Recommendation

14. Cabinet is asked to approve the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy, acknowledging that implementation may be in two phases. Phase two being implemented if and when suitable funding is secured

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2006 (V7)

Contact Officer: Iain Green – Environmental Health Officer (Public Health Specialist)
 Telephone: (01954) 713209
 Dale Robinson – Corporate Manager Health & Environmental Services
 Telephone: (01954) 713229