

Wiltshire Council

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM NO. 17

CABINET

DATE: 22nd September 2009

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL Interim STRATEGY AND POLICY

Executive Summary

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Interim Strategy and Policy establishes the strategic direction that the council will follow to improve poor housing conditions within the owner occupied and private rented sectors.

To support this aim the council adopted the following objectives:

- To fully utilise private sector housing resources to help meet the housing needs of the district. Including grants, loans and equity release vehicles.
- To target public funds to assist vulnerable groups
- To improve the energy efficiency of the stock and to reduce fuel poverty.
- To improve partnership working and communications with the local housing commercial sector.
- To enable people to live independently for as long as possible in their own homes through the use of aids and adaptations and help in maintaining their home.
- To fulfil the council's statutory obligations with regards to enforcement of poor housing standards and Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation.

This document sets out the work being done to address conditions within the owner occupied and private rented sectors and considers the review options available to the council. This will be used to help inform the council in its review of the Housing Renewal Strategy.

The Government indicated that priority for spending this money should be used to address the problem of non-decent homes occupied by vulnerable residents, the use of loans and equity release products and energy efficiency in homes. The financial resources that are at our disposal following Government allocation increases the options available to the council for housing assistance. The council may raise the profile of the scheme and broaden the scope of the assistance that is offered.

The policy is available on the website with a hard copy available on request.

Proposal

That the Cabinet recommends that Full Council approve the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy

Reason for Proposal

Harmonisation of essential policies to enable the council to discharge it's discretionary powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 to provide financial assistance to residents in the county and mandatory powers under the Housing Act 2004 with regards to Housing Enforcement and Houses of Multiple Occupation.

Graham Hogg, Service Director of Housing

CABINET

DATE: 22nd September 2009

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL INTERIM STRATEGY AND POLICY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To outline to the Cabinet and to seek endorsement of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Interim Strategy and Policy to harmonise essential Housing Services across Wiltshire and allow the Council to effectively discharge it's duties towards Private Sector Housing.

2. BACKGROUND

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Interim Strategy and Policy primarily deals with providing support and assistance to householders and in particular vulnerable householders and to ensure that the private sector stock is kept in good condition and meets the needs of occupants. It is a requirement that the Strategy is in place before any discretionary grant aid can be paid. The Strategy also set the direction for our private sector work and in particular sets out how the council will approach housing enforcement work and licensing of Houses of Multiple Occupation.

Each of the four districts had an array of activities and policies to help deliver the above aims. The goal is to harmonise those policies that are regarded as essential or business critical. This will ensure:

- A united 'one council' message
- Fairness and Equality across Wiltshire County.

3. MAIN CONSIDERATIONS FOR CABINET

This is an interim Strategy and Policy document designed to allow the new council to continue to fulfil one of its key housing roles. A new Wiltshire strategy and policy will be developed that fully meets local and national priorities. Key actions from this strategy will be reflected in the overarching Housing Strategy for Wiltshire Council due to be published in 2010.

The aim is to have uniform approach to:

- Private sector grants and loans
- Enforcement work
- Advice
- Licensing and Houses of Multiple Occupation Fees

4. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

Not considered applicable.

5. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPACT OF THE PROPOSAL

The policies detailed herein aim to deliver quality services without prejudice and discrimination to meet the needs of all the community, regardless of age, cultural or ethnic background, disability, gender, marital status, religious or political persuasion or sexual orientation and will adhere to the Equality and Diversity policy developed by Wiltshire Council.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

Risks are considered low in relation to each policy detailed herein.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Revenue - None of the proposals herein are expected to increase costs in the revenue budgets of the private sector housing team. By harmonising these policies; best practices from across the former districts can be replicated countywide, and this should enable slight efficiencies to be generated in future years budgets. Work will be done to ensure that any such efficiencies are recognised, captured, and taken account of when preparing the 2010-11 and beyond budgets.

Capital - Wiltshire Council were awarded £1,804m for Private Sector Renewal work in Wiltshire. This money will allow much needed work to be done, and was above the level which was estimated in the capital budget which IE approved in February (£1.500m). Suggested headline splits of how this money will be used can be found in the policy document.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The council can only provide discretionary assistance in accordance with the Regulatory Reform [Housing Assistance] Order 2002 following the adoption and publication of a private sector housing renewal strategy. The legal implications of each policy have been considered, specific detail relating to each policy is shown where applicable within each appendix.

9. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Doing nothing is not considered as an option in the case of each policy as this would lead to us not being able to improve private sector housing in the Wiltshire Council and leaving some people in potentially dangerous housing conditions. In addition, doing nothing would also have a significant detrimental impact on service levels and the reputation of the council and leave the council open to legal challenge.

10. CONCLUSION

It is requested that Cabinet recommend that Full Council approve the Strategy

Name and title of Director: Graham Hogg

Report Author: James Hudson

Name, title and contact detail: Head of Private Sector Housing

Date of report: 22nd September 2009

Background Papers

None

Appendices

The policy document is available on the website.