

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of People and Places	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	8 April 2013

UPDATE ON PRIVATED RENTED SECTOR HOUSING STANDARDS INSPECTION PROGRAMME

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update Members on the progress made to increase the level of programmed housing standards inspections in relation to the private rented sector housing stock in Chorley.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. Members are asked to note the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. In April 2012 an O&S Task Group produced a report 'Private Sector Housing Inspection' where it was recommended that additional resource be directed to establishing a programmed private sector housing standards inspection service to augment the existing reactive housing standards work undertaken within the People and Places Directorate.
4. The Task Group findings and recommendations were reported to Executive Cabinet on 21 June 2012 where the following decision was made:

That the findings and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on its inquiry into Private Rented Housing Inspection be received and accepted for consideration, with a view to the Executive Cabinet's recommended response to the recommendations being reported to a future meeting.

5. Members will recall that the Task Group report made recommendations in the following terms:

The Task Group asks the Executive to introduce a more proactive inspection regime for private rented sector housing within the borough beyond the existing service which is only able to respond to complaints received. This would be on the basis of one half time or fulltime post based in the neighbourhood team and providing expertise and capacity to undertake housing inspections on a more programmed basis, targeting hot spots and those areas known to have low standards of private rented property, based on current knowledge and other sources of information identified in the report. The cost of this provision is estimated at between £22,000 and £40,000 per annum.

To support the above recommendation, the Task Group further recommends the development of a private rented housing standards policy, against which compliance can be measured.

Having considered a range of landlord accreditation schemes and the views put forward by the Landlords Forum, the Task Group does not recommend that the Council introduces a Landlord Accreditation Scheme at the current time but that this be revisited in the longer term as Members feel there are benefits in landlords gaining accreditation in improving private rented housing standards.

6. A report will be produced for a forthcoming Executive Cabinet which will articulate a response to the O&S report recommendations.
7. In the meantime work has commenced within the Environment and Neighbourhoods Team to establish a programmed inspection regime for the private rented housing sector in Chorley utilising the existing resources of officers trained to inspect housing to the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS).
8. This has coincided with the introduction of the new IDOX database system and since October 2012 officers have undertaken a total of 47 programmed inspection and work has commenced to build up a database of private rented sector accommodation using local intelligence, housing benefits information and council tax details.
9. As part of the Service Improvement Plan for 2013/14 and in line with the Corporate Strategy there is a specific project in place within the Health Environment and Neighbourhoods Team to 'Develop and deliver a scheme to increase housing standards'. This project will be delivered during 2013/14 and will redirect existing resources to fully establish a programmed inspection regime for the private rented housing sector and develop a private rented housing standards policy subject to Council approval against which housing standards compliance can be measured.
10. For information Appendix 1 provides two case studies to describe the impact that a housing standards inspection can have to improve living conditions for tenants and has formed part of the early work in establishing a proactive housing standards inspection regime.

Confidential report Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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CORPORATE PRIORITIES

11. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all		A strong local economy	
Clean, safe and healthy communities	√	An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

12. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal		Integrated Impact Assessment required?	
No significant implications in this area	√	Policy and Communications	

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

13. The resources required to undertake the additional work as described above have been found from within existing resources.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

14. No comments

JAMIE CARSON
DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND PLACES

Background Papers			
Document	Date	File	Place of Inspection
Private Rented Housing Inspection - Report of Overview & Scrutiny Task Group	April 2012	Exec Cabinet Report 21 June 2012	Electronic Committee Records – 12.EC.112

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Simon Clark	5732	25 March 2013	O&S Housing Standards

Appendix 1

Housing Standards Case Studies

Case Study 1 – A terraced property in Adlington was identified by the team as tenanted with a single occupant just prior to Christmas 2012. Arrangements were made to carry out a preliminary inspection of the property with the tenant. The inspection revealed a number of deficiencies including an inadequate heating system and issues with the electrical wiring and associated installations. The landlord was written to in order to advise of the issues identified and to arrange a full Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS) inspection.

The landlord attended this formal inspection and he agreed to carry out the necessary works to eliminate the hazards and improve the accommodation. Works included the repair of the heating system, a gas safety inspection and the repair of the electrical faults identified using an approved electrician.

The guidance on undertaking housing standards work recommends the use of an informal approach in the first instance as the process to serve formal notices with the prospect of undertaking works in default for non-compliance can prolong the carrying out of remedial works into several months.

The time taken to resolve this from preliminary inspection to compliance was 4 weeks.

Case Study 2 – A multi-occupied tenanted property in Chorley which falls below the licencing threshold was brought to officers attention via the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service. The property is divided into 5 bedsits with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. Arrangements were made with the landlord to undertake an HHSRS inspection together with the fire safety officer and in the presence of the landlord. (This required giving notice to all the tenants that an inspection was being arranged to ensure access to accommodation could be made)

The inspection revealed issues in relation to one of the bedsit rooms not meeting the space standard and therefore insufficient for an adult occupant. In addition the shared bathroom and toilet facilities were found to be insufficient for the number of occupants.

Officers discussed remedial action with the landlord but could not reach agreement on how to increase the room space and the provision of shared bathroom and toilet facilities. Consequently officers served a Prohibition Order on the landlord which restricts the number of occupants within the property and prohibits the use of the small room as living accommodation.

When the landlord has determined how he wishes to increase the shared facility provision or the room size then subject to the works being carried out satisfactorily the Prohibition Order can be lifted.