

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of People and Places (Introduced by the Executive Member for Places)	Executive Cabinet	20 June 2013

## **RESPONSE TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING STANDARDS**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide a response from Executive Cabinet to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommendations on private rented sector housing standards and developing a private rented sector housing programme.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that Executive Cabinet accept the basic recommendation of providing a proactive inspection programme for private rented sector housing standards.
3. It is recommended that the resourcing of the inspection programme is made through the utilisation of existing resources by shifting workloads and using capacity created from the reduction in workload arising from the transfer of private sewers to United Utilities as public sewers.
4. It is recommended that a Landlord Accreditation Scheme is not introduced in Chorley at this time.
5. It is recommended that a private rented sector housing standards policy be developed.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT**

6. 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.
7. 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.*

8. 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.*

9. The recommendations proposed above (para's 2 to 5) are the Executive Cabinets response to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommendations.
10. In the intervening period between the O&S report and Executive Cabinet response, 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) standard.
11. This coincided with the introduction of the new IDOX database system and since October 2012, officers have undertaken over 50 programmed inspections and work has commenced to build up a database of private rented sector accommodation using local intelligence, housing benefits information and council tax details.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. Work will commence on the development of a private rented sector housing standards policy to ensure there is a consistent approach to undertaking programmed inspection work and a draft policy will be brought back to Executive Cabinet at a future date.
15. It is proposed that the Council does not pursue the introduction of a Landlord Accreditation scheme at this time in line with the O&S Task Group recommendations.

<b>Confidential report</b> Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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<b>Key Decision?</b> Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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<b>Reason</b> Please bold as appropriate	1, a change in service provision that impacts upon the service revenue budget by £100,000 or more	2, a contract worth £100,000 or more
	3, a new or unprogrammed capital scheme of £100,000 or more	<b>4, Significant impact in environmental, social or physical terms in two or more wards</b>

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**(If the recommendations are accepted)**

16. To respond to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees recommendations in regard to the introduction of a proactive housing inspection programme in the private rented housing sector.

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

17. None

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

18. 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**

19. 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**

20. Currently inspections are being carried out within current resources by reengineering what we do and by prioritising this particular type of work. Consequently there are no additional budgetary implications of adopting the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

21. There are no comments.

JAMIE CARSON  
DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND PLACES

<b>Background Papers</b>			
<b>Document</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>File</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>
Private Rented Housing Inspection – Report of O&S Task Group	21 June 2012	Exec Cabinet Papers - 21 June 2012	<a href="http://democracy.chorley.gov.uk/ielssueDetails.aspx?Id=26797&amp;Opt=3">http://democracy.chorley.gov.uk/ielssueDetails.aspx?Id=26797&amp;Opt=3</a>

<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Ext</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Doc ID</b>
Simon Clark	5732	28 May 2013	HousingO&Sresponse

## **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. The shared bathroom and toilet facilities were found to be insufficient, given 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.