

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Public Protection, Streetscene and Community	Overview and Scrutiny	16 April 2015

## **SECOND MONITORING REPORT TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING STANDARDS INSPECTIONS**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide the second monitoring report for Overview and Scrutiny Committee with regard to the Councils private rented sector housing standards programme.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee accept the contents of the report in relation to proactive housing standards inspections and the continuing development of the inspection programme.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT**

3. The Regulatory Services Team is responsible for carrying out housing standards inspections across the borough. A case study is attached in Appendix 1, which is provided to give members some additional insight into the type of issues that are identified during housing standards inspections and the actions being taken.
4. The levels of complaints directly from tenants is historically low (41 in 2014/15 and 49 in 2013/14) and as a result the Council have identified that in order to improve housing standards in the private rented sector that a different approach is required to engage with both tenants and landlords.
5. The Housing Inspection Policy identified that an important avenue for identifying private rented accommodation and raising awareness to tenants was through data sharing with housing benefits. There have been a number of issues in confirming the legality of sharing the necessary data. After lengthy discussion and contact with the Information Commissioner and the Head of Governance it has been recently agreed that the Housing Benefit data relevant to identifying the tenants and private rented properties addresses can now be shared with the Regulatory Services Team.
6. A protocol for data sharing has been drawn up with the housing benefits team and the procedures are being finalised. This will greatly improve the existing property database and enhance the team's ability to target this particular housing sector.
7. Due to the delay in receiving the necessary data required to identify privately rented properties the inspection programme is behind schedule and therefore officers have not had the information necessary to meet the target for completing 80 proactive housing inspections in 2014/15. However, it is anticipated that the new arrangements with Housing Benefits will ensure that in future those targets are achieved.

8. The proactive housing inspection scheme has also recently been re-branded as the council's 'Healthy Homes Scheme' and we are launching a media campaign this spring where we target the link between health and housing standards. A copy of the poster is attached in Appendix 2 and it is anticipated that the posters and flyers will be placed in GP surgeries, Health centres and pharmacies across the borough. Social media and traditional press releases will also support the campaign to raise awareness for tenants and landlords.
9. The Regulatory Services Manager attends the Landlord Forum and provides updates and information about our enforcement activity as well as information about the Healthy Homes Scheme. The scheme has been received favourably by those landlords in attendance and a number of landlords have offered for their properties to be inspected prior to letting and have been provided with the contact details of the Regulatory Services Team to facilitate this.

<b>Confidential report</b> Please bold as appropriate	Yes	<b>No</b>
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## BACKGROUND

10. Chorley has in the region of 4,000 private rented properties with an estimated 10% below standard. This information was provided by the 2010 Housing Stock Condition Survey.
11. A private rented sector property database is being developed alongside a robust inspection and enforcement process.
12. 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.
13. The O&S 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.*

14. 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.*

15. In June 2013 The Executive Cabinet agreed the following recommendations:
- *It is recommended that Executive Cabinet accept the basic recommendation of providing a proactive inspection programme for private rented sector housing standards.*
  - *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.*
  - *It is recommended that a Landlord Accreditation Scheme is not introduced in Chorley at this time.*
  - *It is recommended that a private rented sector housing standards policy be developed.*
16. On 14th April 2014 a verbal update was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, where it was confirmed that staffing resources had been allocated to housing standards inspections.
17. All six Environmental Health Officers within the Regulatory Services Team now have a generic role which includes the skills and knowledge to undertake the inspection and enforcement processes to the Housing Health and Safety Regulation Scheme (HHSRS) standard and a Housing Standards Enforcement Policy has been agreed at Executive Cabinet.
18. In 2014/15 the team were able to complete a total of 43 housing standards inspections in the private rented sector which resulted in the full compliance for those properties.
19. With the agreement for data sharing between Housing Benefit records and the Regulatory Services Team as well as the proactive 'Healthy Homes' initiative it is envisaged that a far greater number of private rented sector properties will be identified for inspection with the subsequent improvement in the standard of accommodation provided.
20. A private rented sector housing standards policy has been produced which ensures there is a consistent enforcement approach to undertaking programmed housing standards inspection work. This policy was adopted by the Council in November 2013.

#### **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

21. None

#### **CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

22. 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

23. 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

24. Inspection activity is contained within existing budget provision.

## COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

25. The Council has enforcement powers in relation to poor quality housing contained in the Housing Act 2004, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Building Act 1984.
26. The information sharing protocol referred to in paragraph 6 of this report must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998

JAMIE CARSON  
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROTECTION, STREETSCENE AND COMMUNITY

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Lesley Miller	5299	2 April 2015	OS housing standards

## **Appendix 1**

### **Housing Standards Case Study**

Case Study - A multi-occupied tenanted property in Chorley which falls below the licencing threshold was brought to officers attention via a complaint relating to blocked drains resulting in sewage overflowing into the yard area.

Following informal visits by officers in early February 2014 a number of housing defects were also identifying including dampness, electrical safety issues and inadequate heating. There were also issues associated with overcrowding and fire safety which were dealt with on partnership with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service. The property is divided into 3 flats, however, one flat is not self-contained and has bathroom, living, bedroom and kitchen facilities in various rooms and floors of the property.

Notices were served to resolve the drainage issues immediately.

The landlord was unwilling to resolve the matters informally.

Arrangements were also made to undertake a formal HHSRS inspection together with the fire safety officer and the landlord was invited to attend as per the requirements of the legislation. (This requires giving notice to all the tenants that an inspection was being arranged to ensure access to accommodation could be made).

Both Chorley Council and the Fire Service served improvement notices on the landlord as a result of the formal inspection.

As is common to many housing standards cases, this was complex in nature and required considerable negotiation with both tenants and landlord. Enforcement action was required in this case, which is time consuming and also results in numerous contacts and site visits to monitor progress and compliance.

The case was closed, following compliance with the improvement notices on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

# Always at the doctors?

Could it be  
**your house**  
that's making you ill?



If you live in a privately rented property we can give your home a **FREE** health check



To find out how call  
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[www.chorley.gov.uk](http://www.chorley.gov.uk)

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