

## **Report to Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel**

**Date of meeting: 22 October 2013**

**Portfolio: Housing – Cllr David Stallan**

**Subject: Progress Report on the Private Sector  
Housing Strategy 2012-2015**

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**Alan Hall – Director of Housing (01992 564004)**

**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 564607)**



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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the 12 month Progress Report on the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012-2015 Action Plan attached at Appendix 1 and the revised Action Plan attached at Appendix 2, be considered, with any comments passed to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing accordingly.**

### **Report:**

1. At its meeting on 23 April 2012, the Council's Cabinet adopted the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012-2015. The Strategy outlined the Council's approach to address the conditions in the District's private housing stock as demonstrated by the findings of the private sector house condition survey carried out in the summer of 2011.
2. The Strategy also included an Action Plan, which set out the proposed actions that would be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the private sector housing objectives over the first year of the Private Sector Housing Strategy.
3. When adopting the Housing Strategy, the Cabinet also agreed that the Housing Scrutiny Panel be requested to consider progress with the Strategy's Action Plan, in accordance with its Terms of Reference, on an annual basis. The 12 Month Progress Report for the Action Plan adopted in April 2012 is attached at Appendix 1, together with an updated Action Plan for 2013-2015 at Appendix 2. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider these and to provide any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing accordingly.

## Appendix 1

Private Sector Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2012-15 - Progress					
No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Original Timescale	Progress/Comments
1	C.A.R.E./Housing Assistance	To introduce an extended assessment and advice procedure and to train staff in delivery of the procedure	LS/PD	Sept 2012	<b>Ongoing. Brought forward into 2013/14 Action Plan.</b> It has not been possible to develop and implement these practices within the term of the Strategy as a result of staff vacancies and recruitment within the C.A.R.E. Team.
2	C.A.R.E.	To investigate the options and procedures necessary to introduce a charging scheme for residents in receipt of benefit using the Handyperson Scheme	LS/PD	Sept 2012	<b>Achieved.</b> Charges introduced from 1 October 2013 and Scheme extended to older people not on means-tested benefits. Members approval given to CSB bid for additional funding
3	C.A.R.E.	Upgrade C.A.R.E. page on Council website	PD	Sept 2012	<b>Achieved</b> and web-site is regularly reviewed to ensure that information is up to date.
4	Disabled Adaptations	Explore alternative means of service provision for Occupational Therapist's referrals	LS	Jan 2013	<b>Ongoing. Brought forward into 2013/14 Action Plan:</b> 1) Discussions are ongoing with ECC which have resulted in an increase in the numbers of O.T. referrals. 2) New arrangements are being implemented to increase customer choice in accessing referrals.
5	Private Rented Sector	Develop Landlord Resources page on Council website including provision for interaction and response to queries. Include additional information on PLACE and HALD	SD	Dec 2012	<b>Achieved</b> and web-site is regularly reviewed to ensure that information is up to date.

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Original Timescale	Progress/Comments
6	Private Rented Sector	Upgrade empty homes page on Council website giving consideration to inclusion of improved alert provisions for members of public to report empty homes	SD	June 2012	<b>Achieved.</b> The website is regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. An effective system has been set up to report an empty property directly to the private sector team
7	Private Rented Sector	Carry out feasibility study on the potential for fast track procedures for accredited properties	SD/Housing Benefits Manager	Jan 2013	<b>Delayed</b> owing to the pressures on staff as a result of the implementation of new benefits arrangements. <b>Brought forward into 2013/14 Action Plan</b>
8	Private Rented Sector	Conclude discussions with Essex University in respect of accreditation	SD	Sept 2012	<b>Achieved.</b> A Student Accommodation Accreditation Scheme is up and running with 30 properties accredited
9	Enforcement	Introduce programmes of proactive investigation/planned inspections for long term empty homes and park home sites	SD	Sept 2012	<b>Achieved</b>
10	Enforcement	Bring 40 long term empty homes back into use during 2012/2013	SD	March 2013	<b>Achieved</b> and exceeded. A total of 115 with active LA intervention and 390 with LA involvement
11	Financial Assistance	Change financial assistance procedures and documentation to implement the revised framework of financial assistance	LS/PD	June 2012	<b>Achieved:</b> All policy documentation and procedures have been fully implemented in accordance with the new Housing Assistance Policy 2012- 2012 which commenced 1 July 2012.
12	Financial Assistance	To present a report to the C.A.R.E. Advisory Panel on the fees to be attached to the new types of Housing Assistance.	LS	Sept 2012	<b>Achieved:</b> Advisory Panels have met and been consulted on the Private Sector Housing Strategy and C.A.R.E. Business Plan 2012-2014.

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Original Timescale	Progress/Comments
13	Financial Assistance	Update Council website to publicise details of new framework for Financial Assistance	PD	June 2012	<b>Achieved</b> : Council website has been refreshed and includes publicity on financial assistance to private home owners and policy. New information leaflets have been printed and are available to the public in various outlets and upon request.
14	Financial Assistance	Consider options for updating Council website to provide facilities for service users to make applications for assistance on-line	PD	June 2012	<b>Achieved</b> : On line applications for Housing Assistance can now be made and the web site is 'live'.
15	Financial Assistance	Keep developments with Green Deal under continuous review with a view to maximising Council involvement	LS	Possible implementation by September 2012	<b>Ongoing.</b> Officers are maintaining a watching brief as it is not possible at present to fully assess the benefits/risks to the Council of advocating the Scheme
16	Financial Assistance	Undertake options appraisal on the implementation of equity release/loan arrangements for housing assistance.	LS	March 2013	<b>Achieved.</b> C.A.R.E. Caseworkers have been making service users aware of the option of private sector equity release schemes but there has been no interest, partly as a result of the introduction of the new repayable types of housing assistance. The availability of suitable equity release products will be kept under review
17	Financial Assistance	Make recommendations to the Housing Scrutiny Panel with regard to the implementation of equity release/loan arrangements	LS	July 2013	<b>Not achieved.</b> Insufficient information available at present to assess whether available equity release schemes would be suitable for client group.

## Appendix 2

### Private Sector Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2012-15

#### 2013/14 Update

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Resources
1	<b>C.A.R.E./Housing Assistance</b>	To introduce an extended assessment and advice procedure and to train staff in delivery of the procedure	PD	Apr 2014	Within existing resources
2	<b>Disabled Adaptations</b>	Implement new arrangements to increase customer choice in accessing referrals from vetted O.T.s from C.A.R.E.'s Preferred Contractor List	PD	By Dec 2013	Within existing resources
3	<b>Private Rented Sector</b>	Carry out feasibility study on the potential for fast track procedures for accredited properties	SD/Housing Benefits Manager	April 2014	Within existing resources
4	<b>Enforcement</b>	Bring 40 long term empty homes back into use during 2013/2014	SD	March 2014	Within existing resources
5	<b>Financial Assistance</b>	Keep developments with Green Deal under continuous review with a view to maximising benefits for service users	LS	Ongoing. Next review in March 2014	Dependent on agreed action
6	<b>Private Rented Sector</b>	Introduce Essex Landlord Accreditation Scheme in partnership with other participating Essex Authorities	SD	Dec 2013	Within existing resources
7	<b>Empty Properties</b>	Extend PLACE Scheme to include PLACE Loan to Let	SD	Dec 2013	Within existing resources

No	Category	Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Resources
8	Park Homes	Revise and Introduce new Site Licences with new Site Licence Conditions for authorised Gypsy and Traveller sites	SD	Feb 2014	Within existing resources
9	Park Homes	Revise and Introduce new Site Licences with new Site Licence Conditions for holiday homes sites	SD	Dec 2014	Within existing resources
10	Park Homes	Make recommendations to Members on charging for licensing and enforcement activities in the light of the provisions of the Mobile Homes Act 2013	SD/LS	March 2014 (dependent on government clarification on legislation)	Within existing resources
11	C.A.R.E.	Implement new arrangements for technical support to C.A.R.E.	PD	Jan 2014	Within existing resources
12	C.A.R.E.	Discuss with partners the viability of continuing the Safe and Well Scheme post April 2014	PD/LS	Jan 2014	Within existing resources
14	C.A.R.E.	Make application for Electrical Safety Council Grant for 2014/15	PD/LS	May 2014	Within existing resources