

Chiltern District Council

South Bucks District Council

D R A F T Joint Private Sector Housing Strategy 2016 - 2021

Background

Poor housing conditions can have a major impact on health and wellbeing. For example:

- Disrepair and deficiencies such as inadequate fire safety measures, uneven floor surfaces, dangerous electrical wiring can lead to accident or injury.
- Cold and damp housing can have a major impact on illnesses such as heart disease, stroke and respiratory conditions and can also increase the risk of falls.
- People are up to 2.8 times more likely to fall if they are living in unsuitable housing which needs adaptation, for example, where ramps, a stairlift or level access bathing facilities are needed (Source: Housing Health and Safety Rating System Operating Guidance).

Local authorities have a statutory duty to:

- Assess and keep housing conditions under review
- Take enforcement action to address the most serious health and safety hazards
- Licence large Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)
- Administer and approve Disabled Facilities Grants
- Prepare plans to improve home energy efficiency

They also have powers to:

- provide financial and other assistance to tackle poor house conditions
- deal with empty homes and
- deal with poor management in HMOs.

Preventative and responsive housing interventions which reduce accidents and poor health provide financial savings to the NHS and Clinical Commissioning Groups as well as wider benefits to society such as fewer lost working days/school days, reduced family breakdown etc.

1.0 Introduction

Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council are two sovereign authorities with separate budgets and separate decision making processes. The two authorities have operated a shared housing service since April 2014. Both districts share broadly the same issues and challenges in improving housing standards. In order to improve efficiency of the service and ensure a consistent approach across the two areas, a joint Private Sector Housing Strategy has been prepared.

The purpose of this document is to set out Chiltern District Council's and South Bucks District Council's broad strategy to improve housing conditions in the private sector and more specifically to outline its policies in respect of giving Housing Assistance under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002, undertaking enforcement activity and licensing of HMOs under the Housing Act 2004.

This document is one of a number of detailed local strategies which delivers the wider strategic housing role of the Councils as set out in the annual Housing Strategy Framework.

This Strategy, as a component of the framework, reflects and helps to deliver the broader strategic aims set down in the Joint Sustainable Community Strategy for Chiltern and South Bucks and the Councils' key objectives, principally by seeking to improve health and wellbeing of residents.

2.0 Local Context

House Conditions

The [English Housing Survey](#) (insert link) has identified that nationally, house conditions and energy efficiency in privately owned homes is improving year on year. However, in 2013,

- 12% dwellings had 'Category 1' hazards (the most serious defects)
- Private rented sector was noted as being more likely to have poor energy efficiency
- 4% dwellings (8% in private rented sector) have a problem with damp
- Overcrowding is more prevalent in the rented sectors than the owner-occupier sector

Previous local House Condition Surveys have shown that house conditions in the Chiltern and South Bucks Districts are generally better than average nationally, although the general trends are mirrored. For example, excess cold and falls are the most common hazards and the private rented sector tends to exhibit the poorest conditions.

Anecdotal evidence of local house conditions from recent housing inspections for grants, loans and housing complaints indicate the most common concerns locally relate to:

- old and defective central heating boilers
- damp and mould from condensation
- dated electrical installations
- lack of fire precautions in houses in multiple occupation

Demographic/Socio-Economic

The [Joint Sustainable Community Strategy for Chiltern and South Bucks 2013 - 2026](#) (insert link) provides a summary of the local demographic and socio-economic make up of the districts.

Headline figures include:

- Over 19% of the population are aged over 65 and this is projected to increase to more than 27% by 2026.
- Average earnings are higher than the national average and there are no Lower Super Output Areas in either district which fall within the bottom 30% most deprived areas in the UK.
- Average house prices and rents are high, and in the case of South Bucks rents are the highest outside of greater London.
- Around 10% of the population is likely to be living in fuel poverty.
- The residents of Chiltern and South Bucks are generally in good health, though there are significant inequalities in terms of life expectancy between the least and most deprived areas.

National wealth indicators confirm that the Chiltern and South Bucks District are affluent areas, and the nature of the local housing market means that poorer quality housing is likely to be repaired over time, as those who buy property as an investment will inevitably carry out repairs. However, there are pockets of deprivation and more vulnerable groups, especially older people, families on low incomes or people with disabilities, may require greater levels of assistance in undertaking repairs and adaptations.

Furthermore, high house prices mean that access to affordable housing is a concern for local people, particularly key workers, young people and first time buyers. The private rented sector is the main option to those who cannot afford to buy in the area but do not qualify for social housing.

Tenure

The English Housing Survey has noted a significant growth in the private rented sector from around 10% of housing stock as a whole in 2002 to almost 20% in 2014-15. While owner-occupation has tended to be higher in Chiltern and South Bucks than nationally, the trend for an increase in the private rented sector has also been noted locally.

In particular, there is local evidence to indicate that the number of HMOs in the district is growing. In the 2015-16 financial year, twenty-five new HMOs were identified across Chiltern and South Bucks, the majority of these (20) being in the South Bucks district.

Houses in Multiple Occupation offer the lowest cost housing option and are often used to provide accommodation for staff as part of an employee package for low paid jobs such as carers or catering staff, or an affordable option for people under the age of 35 who are not eligible to receive housing benefit for self contained accommodation.

Both Councils are keen to ensure that this accommodation is retained to meet housing needs, however, the provision of fire precautions to ensure the house is safe for the number of occupants can be expensive and landlords will often choose to revert to single occupancy rather than do the necessary works, following inspection by the Council.

3.0 Priorities for Action

The Joint Sustainable Community Strategy for Chiltern and South Bucks identifies the following housing related outcomes to support the five its five broad themes:

- Support the delivery of more affordable housing of a type that meets the needs of local people entering the housing market, families with specialist needs and an ageing population
- Reduce energy use and carbon emissions across the Districts, including promoting the use of alternative fuels and forms of transport, improving the energy efficiency of buildings and reducing consumption.
- Improve health outcomes for people in the lowest 20% of household incomes, by promoting ill-health prevention and self-care
- Reduce fuel poverty, particularly for the elderly
- Help older people stay in their homes for longer

With these outcomes in mind, Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council have identified four key objectives for the shared Private Sector Housing Strategy:

1. **To ensure the housing stock is free from significant hazards in order to reduce accidents and ill health.**
2. **To ensure the housing stock is suitable to meet the needs of disabled and older residents.**
3. **To promote and encourage the provision of good quality private rented accommodation and to maximise the use of existing accommodation, including empty properties.**
4. **To improve energy efficiency of dwellings in the district, and ensure affordable warmth is available to all residents.**

To achieve the objectives, the Councils will seek to undertake the actions set out in the Action Plan in Appendix 1.

4.0 Monitoring and Review

The strategy will be reviewed annually to consider the extent to which planned actions have been achieved, whether any amendments are required for the coming year.

Progress in meeting the stated objectives will be assessed with reference to the Action Plan in Appendix 1 and the following Performance Indicators and targets:

Indicator	Annual Target CDC	Annual Target SBDC
Completed adaptations for disabled people	70	50
Grant customers rating the grant service as good/excellent	95%	95%
Category 1 hazards addressed	10	10
Financial savings to NHS (assessed using BRE Housing Health Cost calculator)	Baseline to be set 16/17	Baseline to be set 16/17
Residents and landlords receiving energy efficiency advice or financial assistance for measures	75	75
Empty properties brought back into use	40	10

The Home Energy Conservation Act Report and the Bucks Affordable Warmth Strategy also set out detailed targets in relation to work to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty.

Grant applications and housing service requests are subject to performance monitoring criteria and citizen's charter targets which are monitored and reviewed annually.

Any significant revisions to the strategy and associated policies shall be agreed by the Council and published in advance of any such revisions coming into force. The Council shall utilise feedback from service users to identify needs and expectations for future services.

Future stock condition and housing needs surveys, in addition to ongoing research into the circumstances of local housing markets, demographic trends and socio-economic factors, may be necessary to effectively monitor the outcomes of the policy.

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