

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

SUBJECT:	<i>Joint Private Sector Housing Strategy and Financial Assistance Policy</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Healthy Communities Portfolio – Cllr Paul Kelly</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Martin Holt, Head of Healthy Communities</i>
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WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>All</i>

1. Purpose of Report

To notify the Chairman and members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee about a forthcoming consultation on a draft joint Private Sector Housing Strategy and associated policies covering financial assistance, Houses in Multiple Occupation and housing enforcement across South Bucks District Council and Chiltern District Council and seek the Committee's comments on the draft strategy

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- draft joint strategy and policy documents for consideration by Cabinet
- That members note the intention to undertake a 6 week consultation on the joint strategy and associated policies as required by the Policy and Budget Framework procedure rules following the Cabinet meeting on 4 July

2. Reasons for Recommendations

The Private Sector Housing Strategy forms part of the Council's Policy and Budget Framework. Council Procedure Rules provide for the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be notified of proposed revisions to policy framework documents to enable the Committee to make any comments as part of the consultation process.

3. Content of Report

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to regularly review housing conditions in its area and to take action to tackle serious health hazards in housing. The Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2007-2012, which sets out the Council's approach to improving local housing conditions, is now out of date.
- 3.2 Since it was prepared there has been a change of government with resulting changes in national housing policy as well as the introduction of new legislative requirements and increased financial constraints. These changes include the introduction of the Better Care Fund, a new Energy Company Obligation scheme for energy efficiency improvements (replacing the Carbon Emission Reduction Target and Warm Front schemes), the removal of any target in relation to Decent Homes Standard in the private sector, a new requirement to provide further reports under the Home Energy Conservation Act and welfare benefit reforms impacting on private tenants.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 3.3 There have also been local developments since the strategy was first prepared, not least the introduction of shared working with Chiltern District Council. In a housing context, there has also been the introduction of the Flexible Home Improvement Loan scheme; the development of the Bucks Affordable Warmth Network; the closure of the Home Improvement Agency and Handy person schemes, and an evidenced increase in the number of Houses in Multiple Occupation being rented in the district.
- 3.4 The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy therefore requires updating to reflect these changes.
- 3.5 The housing service became a shared service with Chiltern District Council in April 2014 and the shared housing standards service has been operating now for two years under separate private sector housing strategies for each district. However, the objectives of the service are common across both authorities and both districts share broadly the same issues and challenges in improving housing standards. The opportunity is therefore now sought to prepare a joint strategy and associated policies to ensure a common approach across the two areas and consistency in the products and services on offer to residents in both districts.
- 3.9 The joint Private Sector Housing Strategy and associated policies are based on the evidence available from analysis of national and local data carried out as part of the English House Condition Survey, the Home Energy Conservation Act report, officer inspections of properties within the district and reference to historic local house condition surveys.
- 3.11A draft joint strategy has therefore been prepared based on current information about national and local conditions. It has also reflected comments and ideas discussed at the member workshop held on 3 February 2016. The draft joint strategy is contained in **Appendix.1** and the Action Plan to the strategy **Appendix 1a**
- 3.12Amendments are also recommended to the financial assistance policy to provide more flexibility to assist occupants of mobile homes, disabled people requiring adaptations, and help to improve conditions in HMOs. The draft joint financial assistance policy is set out in **Appendix 2**. The main changes are highlighted in **Appendix 3**
- 3.13 Detailed draft joint policies on Houses in Multiple Occupation and Enforcement have also been prepared to provide greater clarity around areas of practice where there is an element of discretion, for example how the Council deals with non-licensable HMOs and Category 2 hazards.
- 3.14The draft Houses in Multiple Occupation and Enforcement policies are contained in **Appendix 4**

4. Consultation

- 4.1 On 3 December 2015, the Healthy Communities Policy Advisory Group received a presentation on the current Financial Assistance policy for comment and discussion. Two of the key local housing standards issues (Disabled Facilities Grants and Houses in Multiple Occupation) were also discussed at the joint Member workshop held in

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

February 2016. Comments and ideas from both of these consultation events have been reflected in the strategy.

- 4.2 The Healthy Communities Policy Advisory Group reviewed these documents 13 June 2016 and support the approach being taken.
- 4.3 Following approval by Cabinet on 4 July the strategy and supporting documents will be subject to a 6 week consultation via the council's website. Partner agencies, representatives of the Councils Landlord Forum, recipients of housing assistance and the voluntary sector will be consulted. The comments will be reported to Cabinet together with any suggested amendments to policy, together with comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A final draft of the strategy and associated documents will be presented to Council for approval.

5 Options

The Council could continue to operate its own separate strategy and policies. However, operationally, the approach to tackling housing standards is the same across both authorities and there are efficiencies in being able to offer the same products and services as part of one shared service.

6. Corporate Implications

- 6.1 Finance: The proposed consultation would be within current budgetary estimates and involve use of emails, the website and other electronic media.
- 6.2 Legal: The Council has a statutory duty to regularly review housing conditions in its area and to take action to tackle serious health hazards in housing. The proposed strategy and associated documents address this obligation. The Council's Policy and Budget Framework Procedure rules requires Cabinet to publicise a timetable for making proposals to the Council for the adoption of any plan, strategy or budget that forms part of the budget and policy framework, together with arrangements for consultation after publication of those initial proposals. The consultation period shall in each instance be not less than 6 weeks.

7 Links to Council Policy Objectives

This links to the 'Working towards safe and healthier local communities' aim of the Joint Business Plan 2014-19.

8. Next Steps

Following consultation officers will collate the responses and suggest any amendments to the draft policy and associated documents before submission to Cabinet for further consideration and then onto Council for adoption.

Background Papers:	None except as referred to in this report
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