

Bolsover District Council

Meeting of the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee on 22nd January 2024

Private Sector Housing Strategy

Report of the Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement

Classification	This report is Public.
Contact Officer	Victoria Dawson Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement Joanne Wilson Housing Strategy and Development Officer

PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To consider and provide comment on the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2024-2027.

REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

- 1.1 Housing is one of the key determinants of health. The quality of people's homes is strongly related to economic prosperity and minimising the adverse effects of poor housing remains a major challenge for the Council. Living in a home which is in good condition, that the household can afford to heat, and is in an area in which they feel safe and well supported by the local community underpins the wellbeing of individuals and families. The impact of poor housing in childhood can affect an individual for a lifetime and can affect physical, social, and psychological development. Damp, mould, cold, and overcrowded conditions can lead directly to physical illness and there is also increasing evidence that poor housing conditions can seriously affect people's mental health and sense of wellbeing
- 1.2 During 2019, Derby City Council developed a desktop survey approach to assess the condition of private sector housing across Derbyshire. It established that Bolsover District Council had complex housing issues within the private rented sector. Issues of quality, price and management continually cause difficulty both in terms of creating homelessness and trying to house people in suitable accommodation.
- 1.3 Owner occupied and privately rented properties make up over 83.3% of homes in Bolsover (Census 2021). Many homes in the private sector in Bolsover are in poor condition. 45.8% do not meet EPC C, and 16.3% of owner-occupied homes and 18.6% of private rented homes fail the Decent Homes Standard for having a

Category 1 hazard, which poses a serious and immediate risk to a person's health.

As a result of the stock condition survey, officers wanted to develop robust and ambitious private sector housing strategies to help engage with the private sector, to improve the quality of accommodation, develop good management practices, and reduce homelessness.

1.4 In November 2022, jointly with North East Derbyshire District Council, the Council was successful in securing £20,000 from the LGA Housing Advisors Programme to develop a Private Sector Housing Strategy for each district. We appointed Arc4 Housing consultants and work began in earnest from April 2023.

1.5 The aim of the project was to:

- access and report on information relating to the make-up of the private rented sector including the stock condition surveys and most recent Census data
- engage and consult with private landlords, tenants and other stakeholders, to get their views on the issues affecting them
- assess the various options available to NEDDC/BDC to intervene in the private rented sector
- develop and recommend proposals for Members to consider
- enable both councils to protect the viability of the private rented market in both Districts especially in relation to affordability.

The key outcomes identified for achievement included a focus on corporate commitment to engage with and support the private rented sector. Previously our collective understanding and interaction with the sector has focused on traditional local authority functions such as housing benefit payments, housing standards enforcement, empty property work and homelessness prevention.

We wanted and needed to change this approach so that we can better work with and utilise the sector to the benefit of our residents. Moving forward, we want to develop and explore innovative new approaches to funding and policies to drive improvements in quality and management standards. We also want to protect the stock that we have, and increase the availability of accommodation to our residents who would otherwise be excluded from the sector.

Interviews with key stakeholders have taken place and we now have an evidence base which is extremely comprehensive and timely, given the uncertain economic times. Landlord and tenant surveys have been completed on-line and ran for an extended period from 29th May 2023 to 1st September 2023.

The proposed Private Sector Strategy sets out the Councils plans for achieving good quality housing across the existing private sector stock.

2. Details of Proposal or Information

2.1 The Council's Housing Strategy 2021-2024 commits to developing a Private Sector Strategy and Action Plan to deliver the recommendations identified in the Stock Condition Survey, which were:

- Continue to work with partners (Derbyshire County Council, Derby City Council, NHS, and other districts) to examine how housing and health data can be collated to maintain a database that can be updated on a regular basis and used more systematically.
- Working with partners to use the data to inform both health and housing policy with a view to increasing housing interventions in support of addressing health inequalities and improving health and wellbeing of residents.
- Use the data to develop an action plan to address specific housing issues identified within the report to improve health outcomes.

The Strategy's focus is the both the private rented sector and owner occupiers. It has been developed to help the Council better understand the key challenges, the activity and performance of the market, how and where to focus resources, and the scale of the challenge that is being faced.

2.2 Policy Context

The home is a driver of health inequalities. Inadequate housing causes or contributes to many preventable diseases and injuries, including respiratory, nervous system and cardiovascular diseases, and cancer (source: World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe Report (2012)). Direct effects of an inadequate home on a person's health can include heart attacks, stroke, respiratory disease, flu, falls and injuries, hypothermia, and poor mental health. This in turn can lead to greater demand for health and emergency services. Poor housing is estimated to cost the NHS at least £600 million per year in first year treatment costs alone (source: Building Research Establishment and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health 2010). Good housing leads to good health.

2.3 Stock Condition

There is a gradient of risk with age of the property, the risk being greatest in dwellings built before 1850, and lowest in the more energy efficient dwellings built after 1980. Data gathered as part of the stock condition survey shows the percentage of property built pre-1944 across Derbyshire and Chart 3.8, the age of stock in Bolsover. Bolsover has the 5th highest proportion of properties built before 1944 across Derbyshire.

The 2021 Census confirms that there are 29,383 households living in the private sector in Bolsover. This represents 83.3% of all stock.

The 2021 Census also confirms that there are 6,119 households living in the Private Rented Sector in Bolsover. This is 17.4% of all households. Bolsover has the second largest Private Rented Sector across Derbyshire and grew by 2.8 percentage points since 2011. In 2001, it was 9.8%. The owner-occupied sector has reduced since 2001 from 69.0% to 65.9% in 2021.

2.4 Stakeholder Feedback

A range of discussions took place with officers, partners and agents as part of completing the stock condition survey, which have fed into the development of the strategy and the objectives. In addition specific targeted consultation with was undertaken with landlords and tenants in the Rented Sector. 21 landlords

and 84 tenants completed the online survey as part of developing the evidence base.

2.5 Landlord and Tenant Feedback

21 landlords and 84 tenants completed the online survey as part of developing the evidence base.

71% of landlords who responded to the survey are a member of the Landlord Accreditation scheme (DASH). The survey confirmed that 71% of landlords in Bolsover are planning to sell their properties, with a further 10% considering this as an option. When asked to indicate the reason for selling their properties, 71% of landlords responded that there is too much regulation, 38% agreed it was no longer profitable, 19% had too many problems with tenants, and 5% of landlords were selling to benefit from the value of the property. Other reasons given by landlords for selling their property included EPC requirements, the end of no fault evictions, lack of interest relief, and council charges when the property is vacant, with one landlord going as far as calling them 'anti landlord policies'. 24% of landlords specified interest in receiving information about the council's landlord events.

Implications for the Private Sector Housing Strategy

- Further promotion of DASH
- Support to ensure properties remain in the Private Rented Sector
- Introduction of Loans
- Further promotion of the landlord's forum with training, support and a safe place to voice concerns
- Specific advice and guidance on landlord legal requirements
- Support for more vulnerable tenants and advice for landlords about how to provide support

The majority of tenants in Bolsover who responded to the survey live in a house (85%). 8% of respondents live in a flat and 7% live in a bungalow. 31% of tenants are satisfied with the value for money with regards to their rent, 33% are satisfied with the current condition of their property, and 26% are satisfied with the maintenance and general upkeep of the property. Energy efficiency was one area of this section of the survey where responses were weighted more negatively, with 27% of tenants dissatisfied and 14% very dissatisfied with the energy efficiency of their property, and a further 30% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

99% of tenants had a way to contact their landlord/letting agent when they needed to but only 64% felt able to complain to their landlord about their home if there was a problem. Only 20% of tenants reported concerns with the behaviour of their landlord/letting agent and 80% had no concerns. 5% of tenants responded to indicate their landlord is a member of the Landlord Accreditation scheme (DASH), 5% of tenants did not think their landlord was a member, and 90% did not know.

With regards to places where tenants would like to see/get information to encourage people to report concerns, via the council website was the most popular method (63%), followed by post (57%), by phone (52%), face-to-face advice (46%), Facebook (27%), leaflets (18%), posters (16%), Twitter (5%), snapchat (5%), and emails (4%).

Implications for the Private Sector Housing Strategy

- Increased supply of affordable homes in the Private Rented Sector
- Ensuring promotion of 'cost of living' initiatives to tenants, potentially via landlords
- Promotion of the positive role the council can play in supporting poor landlord practices

2.6 Proposed Objectives and Outcomes

This Strategy will meet the Council's Ambition Statement 2024-2028 vision and aims through the delivery of 4 Objectives:

- Objective 1: Improve Property and Management Standards
- Objective 2: Maintain and Improve the Supply of Good Quality, Well-Managed Homes in the Private Rented Sector
- Objective 3: Ensuring that Housing Standards and Living Conditions in Bolsover Contribute Towards Better Health Outcomes for All
- Objective: 4: Ensuring All Areas, Neighbourhoods, and Streets in Bolsover, irrespective of Housing Tenure or Type, Are Places Where People Want to Live and Are Proud to Live

The strategy is accompanied by an action plan which sets out what the Council hopes to achieve and by when. The action plan will be agreed with partners and stakeholders and will be used to monitor progress over the period of the strategy.

The outcomes that will be achieved through this strategy are:

- Improved property condition across the private sector.
- Improved management standards across the private rented sector.
- Improved energy efficiency of homes in the private sector.
- Reduced number of properties with a Category 1 hazard.
- Reduced levels of Anti-Social Behaviour across our neighbourhood.
- Reduced number of people presenting as homeless from the Private Rented Sector.
- Increased access to the private rented sector to offer accommodation to homeless households.
- Increased supply of high-quality affordable housing for the private rented market.
- Residents living independently for longer.
- Improved targeting of resources to maximise our impact in the private sector.
- Reduced numbers of empty homes across the District.

A safe, warm, and secure home underpins people's ability to build a better quality of life and enables people to maintain independence. Living where you can afford and having security in knowing you won't be 'kicked out' at a moment's notice helps people to put down roots and have a stable base, a sense of community, and belonging. We want to make sure that homes in the private sector—whether owned or privately rented—are safe, well-managed, and well maintained and this Private Sector Housing Strategy sets out how we, along with our partners, will achieve this over the next 3 years (2024-27).

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Council needs to take pro-active action following completion of the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey. By adopting the Strategy and delivering the identified actions, this should generate marked improvement in the quality of private sector housing and improved management of the private rented sector.
- 3.2 The Government is currently reviewing the Decent Homes Standard and it is expected that the new version will apply to the Private Rented Sector, which will give further impetus to the improvements the Council is trying to achieve.

4. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 Members could choose not to support the adoption and delivery of the proposed Strategy but this would go against the recommendations of the private sector stock condition survey and cease delivery of a key action of the Housing Strategy 2021-24.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That Members review the proposed Strategy and Delivery Plan and provide comment to officers as part of the consultation period.
2. That Members confirm they are satisfied the proposals, with amendments if necessary, will meet the desired outcomes and recommend the Strategy for submission to Executive.

Approved by Councillor Sandra Peake, Portfolio Holder for Housing

IMPLICATIONS

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details:

There are no direct implications from the report and the suggested objectives within the Strategy and Action Plan can be delivered within existing budgets.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details

Local Authorities have a legal duty under the Housing Act 2004 to keep the conditions of homes in their areas under review with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Environment: Yes No

Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal/report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment. (Please speak to the Climate Change Lead Officer for advice)

A core element of the Strategy is to improve the quality of housing in the private sector, this will include energy efficiency improvements in both the private rented and owner occupier sectors.

Staffing: Yes No

Details:

There are no staffing implications arising from the report or policy.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

<p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards, or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies.</i></p>	<p>No, but the final decision by Executive will be a Key Decision</p>
<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</p>	<p>No, but the final decision by Executive will be subject to Call-In.</p>

District Wards Significantly Affected	Yes, all Wards
Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Executive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SLT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	During consultation process – all Councillors, all tenants, Customer Services Scrutiny and Tenant Participation Review and Development Group

Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, and Environment.
<p>Economy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabling Housing Growth: increasing the supply, quality and range of housing to meet the needs of the growing population and support economic growth <p>Customers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting equality, diversity and supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people Providing good quality council housing where people choose to live <p>Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing our carbon footprint whilst supporting and encouraging residents and businesses to do the same

DOCUMENT INFORMATION	
Appendix No	Title
1	Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2024-2027
2	Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy Delivery Plan

Background Papers
<i>(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive, you must provide copies of the background papers)</i>
Private Sector Stock Condition Survey