

**Bolsover District Council**

**Meeting of the Executive on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

**Private Sector Housing Strategy**

**Report of the Assistant Director Housing Management and Enforcement**

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

**PURPOSE/SUMMARY OF REPORT**

- To consider and approve the proposed 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 29<sup>th</sup> May 2023 to 1<sup>st</sup> 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:

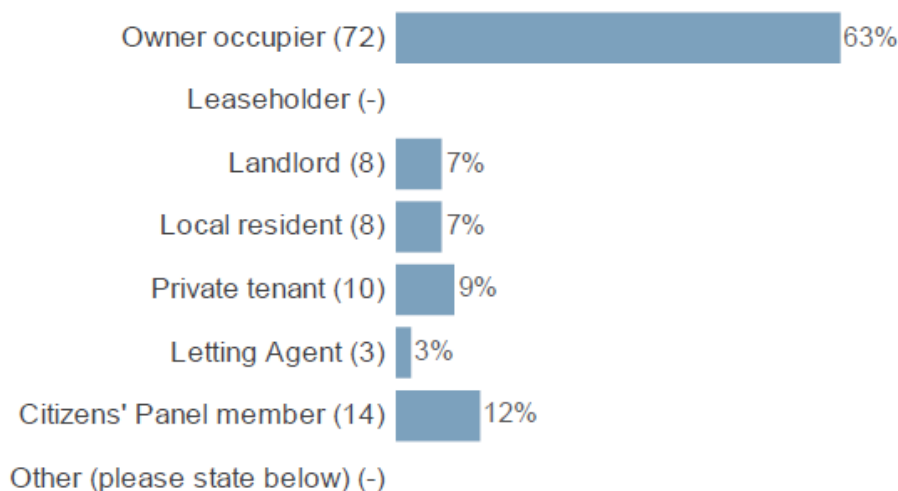
- Improved property condition across the private sector.
- Improved management standards across the private rented sector.
- Improved energy efficiency of homes in the private sector.
- Reduced number of properties with a Category 1 hazard.
- Reduced levels of Anti-Social Behaviour across our neighbourhood.
- 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).

## 2.7 Outcome of consultation on final draft

The draft Strategy was presented to Customer Services Scrutiny Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. Members welcomed the proposals and commented on property in their area that would clearly benefit from additional repairs and energy grants to enable improvements. Members acknowledged a key issue was the number of private landlords looking to sell up leave the sector due to change legislation and decreased profit margins. Officers informed Members that following consideration by Executive, there would be a launch event for the strategy, alongside the development of both a landlord newsletter and guidance for private tenants.

In total there were 115 respondents to the consultation with the type of respondent split as below:



In analysing agreement with the proposed objectives and outcomes, those responding, ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ have been combined.

All four suggested objectives were well received with the following response rates agreeing with the proposals:

Objective	Response
Objective 1: Improve Property and Management Standards	87% (100)
Objective 2: Maintain and Improve the Supply of Good Quality, Well-Managed Homes in the Private Rented Sector	85% (98)
Objective 3: Ensuring that Housing Standards and Living Conditions in Bolsover Contribute Towards Better Health Outcomes for All	93% (107)

Objective	Response
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	93% (107)

When assessing agreement with the 11 proposed outcomes of the strategy the results are as follows:

Outcome	Response
Improved property condition across the private sector.	87% (100)
Improved management standards across the private rented sector.	81% (94)
Improved energy efficiency of homes in the private sector.	83% (96)
Reduced number of properties with a Category 1 hazard.	80% (92)
Reduced levels of Anti-Social Behaviour across our neighbourhood.	92% (106)
Reduced number of people presenting as homeless from the Private Rented Sector.	81% (94)
Increased access to the private rented sector to offer accommodation to homeless households.	71% (81)
Increased supply of high-quality affordable housing for the private rented market.	74% (84)
Residents living independently for longer.	91% (104)
Improved targeting of resources to maximise our impact in the private sector.	75% (86)
Reduced numbers of empty homes across the District.	94% (108)

Respondents were also asked to give a priority order to the areas identified for action under each objective. The results have been used to guide the setting of target delivery dates in the Delivery Plan for the Strategy. The results across each objective were as follows:

#### Objective 1: Improve property and management standards

Priority	Rank 1-6
Enforcement	2 (joint)
Damp and mould	1
Promoting rights and responsibilities in the private rented sector (both landlord and tenant)	4
Promoting good practice and raising awareness	5
Promoting DASH (Decent and Safe Homes) Services	6
Energy Efficiency	2 (joint)

Objective 2: Maintain and improve the supply of good quality, well-managed homes in the private rented sector:

Priority	Rank 1-2
Increasing access to the private rented sector	2
Building more homes	1

When the results for this objective are rounded they both equate to 50% each so there is limited prioritisation of one over another.

Objective 3: Ensuring that housing standards and living conditions in Bolsover District contribute towards better health outcomes for all:

Priority	Rank 1-3
Health and safety at home for longer	2
Providing practical support for homeowners	3
Affordable warmth and fuel poverty	1

Objective 4: Ensuring all areas, neighbourhoods, and streets in Bolsover District, irrespective of housing tenure or type, are places where people want to live and are proud to live:

Priority	Rank 1-2
Sharing intelligence to target resources	2
Bringing empty homes back into use	1

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide open comments to the proposals. These will be taken account of as part of the officers implementation of the Delivery Plan. It should be noted that some of the issues raised would require action by Central Government in terms of revised legislation and enforcement powers. The following points summarise the main issues raised most frequently:

- Look to secure additional rental properties by bringing empties back into use. Provide the necessary support to owners to become landlords
- Improved energy efficiency information/grant information for landlords and tenants. This should include detail on any discounted or free improvements.
- Public funding should be spent on enforcement and advice/guidance, not on grants to cover costs of improvement works. It is not for ratepayers to cover costs of inaction by landlords/tenants in relation to property maintenance and improvement.
- Enforcement measures against tenants causing problems to the property and non-payment of rent need to be clearer and used.
- Agents should not be able to show/let properties clearly in disrepair. This needs addressing.
- Consider developing a system where it is possible to cap rents on stock below a certain standard and reward landlords operating correctly.
- To tackle the issue of high rents consider a general rent cap for private rents to ensure costs remain affordable.

Overall, there is clear agreement with the Council's proposals and a desire for improvement in the sector.



### **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.

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## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

That Members review the proposed Strategy and Delivery Plan, in light of the consultation results, and approve the Strategy for implementation.

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**

<b>Is the decision a Key Decision?</b> 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:  <b>Revenue - £75,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Capital - £150,000</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies.</i>	Yes
<b>Is the decision subject to Call-In?</b> <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i>	Yes

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

<b>Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment and Housing.</b>
Customers: Providing excellent and accessible services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, and supporting and involving vulnerable and disadvantaged people</li></ul> Economy: Driving growth, promoting the district and being business and visitor friendly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unlocking regeneration and development potential of long-term vacant land and buildings, and stalled sites and deliver income-generating capital projects.</li></ul>

**Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy, Environment and Housing.**

Environment: Protecting the quality of life for residents and businesses, meeting environmental challenges, and enhancing biodiversity.

- Reducing our carbon footprint whilst supporting and encouraging residents and businesses to do the same.
- Ensuring all areas, neighbourhoods, and streets in the district, irrespective of housing tenure or type, are places where people want to live, feel safe, and are proud to live.

Housing: Delivering social and private sector housing growth.

- Enabling Housing Growth by increasing the supply, quality, and range of housing to meet the needs of the growing population.
- Maintaining and improving property and housing management standards and ensuring that standards and living conditions in the district contribute towards better health outcomes for all.
- Maximising our influence and opportunities within the East Midlands Combined County Authority to create affordable, good quality housing options and to retrofit existing homes to be more environmentally sustainable.

**DOCUMENT INFORMATION**

<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
1	Private Sector Housing Strategy 2024-2027
2	Private Sector Housing Strategy Delivery Plan

**Background Papers**

*(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)*

Private Sector Stock Condition Survey