

To: City Executive Board

Date: 11 February 2016

Report of: Executive Director of Regeneration & Housing

Title of Report: Private Sector Housing Policy 2016 - 2019

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To approve a draft Private Sector Housing Policy for discussion and amendment prior to public consultation.

Key decision Yes

Executive lead member: Councillor Bob Price – Leader of the Council

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan Objective applicable to the following Corporate Priorities - Meeting housing needs/ Strong and active communities/An effective and efficient council

Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board resolves to:

1. Approve the draft Private Sector Housing Policy 2016 – 2019 for public consultation.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Private Sector Housing Policy

Appendix 2 – Risk Register

Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact Assessment, (EIA)

Introduction

1. Oxford City Council has a strong record of successful interventions in the private rented sector. In recent years the focus has primarily been on regulating the HMO market in the City due to the need to improve the management and property conditions in that sector being such a high

priority. However, the demand for housing and the substantial growth in the private rented market as a whole in Oxford has introduced new challenges and a fresh policy is required to set a direction of travel for the next three years.

2. More people now rent rather than own their home in Oxford. The private rented sector (PRS) has increased in size by 50% in ten years and is now substantially larger than the social housing sector.
3. There appears to be no slow down in sight for the growth of the PRS, despite government policies to increase housebuilding and tax changes designed to make buy to let less attractive and profitable. It is worthy of note that in an era of deregulation several pieces of new legislation have been introduced by the government aimed at the worst excesses of the PRS. It is clear that government endorses the view that the sector requires a greater level of regulation than has been the case historically.
4. This Draft Private Sector Housing Policy sets out the principles and practices that the City Council will apply to ensure that the PRS is adequately regulated and improved. The main priority areas that we have identified are:

HMO Licensing

- The Council's Award winning Additional HMO Licensing Scheme is a major plank in the Council's approach to regulating and improving some of the worst housing stock in Oxford. The Licensing Scheme will be maintained and further refined and improved, with a greater focus on unlicensed HMOs

Regulation and Improvement of Dwellings Occupied by Families or Single Occupants

- Continuing and extending the proactive work being carried out in the non-HMO rented sector, targeting rogue landlords and using EPC data to identify properties in poor condition
- Identifying and introducing a Selective Licensing Scheme to deal with poor management and property conditions and address anti-social behaviour associated with non-HMO privately rented properties

Unlawful developments

- Dealing with unlawful developments being used as substandard accommodation and ensuring that "beds in sheds" do not become an accepted feature of the PRS in Oxford

Providing housing assistance

- Continuing to support some of the most vulnerable people in Oxford by providing facilities which enable them to live in their own homes with dignity, and provide support allowing them to get home from hospital
 - Enabling funding for home improvements for owner-occupied properties in poor condition.
5. The policy also clarifies the enforcement approach that will be taken to ensure that minimum statutory standards are met.

Development of the Policy

6. The policy has been developed by the Environmental Health team in Planning and Regulatory Services, with input from colleagues in Housing and Property, Planning Policy, Building Control and Environmental Sustainability.

Consultation Process

7. Throughout the eight week consultation period the draft strategy will be available on the Council website and will be available for comment through the on-line consultation page. A press release and posts on social media will coincide with the start of the consultation.
8. Direct invitations to comment will be sent to the following stakeholders:
- Residents Groups
 - Landlords and letting agents (newsletter)
 - Oxfordshire County Council (Fire Service, Social Care, Public Health)
 - Student representatives
 - Shelter
 - Public Health England

Legal Issues

9. There is a statutory requirement to maintain compliance with the provisions of Parts 1 & 2 of the Housing Act 2004. The proposed policy seeks to ensure that this provision will continue to be met.
10. Prior to the introduction of a Selective Licensing Scheme, legal advice will be required to assess the evidence.

Financial Issues

11. No new money is being requested or committed by the Policy.
12. The policy seeks to clarify the procedure regarding works in default where the Council has served legal notices which have not been complied with and has to carry out works to make a property safe.

Environmental Impact

13. The policy details the use of powers and financial incentives over the short and longer term to more effectively improve energy efficiency in the PRS and to assist vulnerable home owners. Our aim is to reduce fuel poverty, while increasing investment in the sector. These measures will also have a positive environmental impact as they will be effective in reducing Oxford's carbon footprint as well as improving the city's environment.

Level of Risk

14. A risk register is attached as Appendix 2.

Equalities Impact

15. A completed EIA is attached as Appendix 3.

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List of background papers: None