

To: City Executive Board
Date: 14 July 2016
Report of: Head of Planning and Regulatory Services
Title of Report: Private Sector Housing Policy 2016 – 2019

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	The report provides the results from the consultation exercise carried out for the draft Private Sector Housing Policy 2016-2019 and seeks approval from members to approve the policy. The policy sets out the present baseline conditions of Oxford’s private rented sector housing and how Council services have been working to improve those conditions. It then sets out how the Council will address the complex issues that affect the sector from 2016-2019.
Key decision:	Yes
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Planning and Regulatory Services
Corporate Priority:	Meeting housing needs, Strong and active communities, An effective and efficient council.
Policy Framework:	
Recommendations: That the City Executive Board resolves to:	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider the report of the consultation on the Private Sector Housing Policy 2016-2019 and note the findings attached at Appendix 2; 2. Approve the Private Sector Housing Policy 2016 – 2019 attached at Appendix 1.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Private Sector Housing Policy 2016-2019
Appendix 2	Report on the Consultation on the Private Sector Housing Policy
Appendix 2a	E-mail signature

Appendix 2b	Flyer and Poster
Appendix 2c	Social Media
Appendix 2d	Local Newspaper adverts
Appendix 3	Risk register
Appendix 4	Equalities Impact Assessment

Background

1. On the 11 February 2016 the draft Private Sector Housing Policy 2016-2019 was approved by the City Executive Board for a city wide consultation.
2. On 15 February 2016 the Council commenced the consultation for a period of 8 weeks, concluding on the 18 April 2016.
3. The results for the Private Sector Housing Policy consultation exercise are summarised in this report and set out in full at Appendix 2.

Consultation on the Private Sector Housing Policy

4. Throughout the eight week consultation period the policy was available on the Council website and was also available for comment through the on-line consultation page. A press release and posts on social media were made at the start and throughout the consultation.
5. Direct invitations to comment were 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
6. In addition to the online questionnaire a series of 'road show events' were carried out by officers throughout the City. Details are provided in the Table below.

Location	Date
East Oxford – Community Centre	16 March 2016
Blackbird Leys Outside Library	17 March 2016
Headington Library	18 March 2016
Summertown Library	22 March 2016

7. A landlord information exchange was held on the 22 February 2016 at the Town Hall and around 80 landlords and agents attended.

8. Poster and flyers were distributed to all letting agents across the City during February and March and these were also made available in university student welfare and union offices. Posters were also distributed to other key external agencies such as Shelter, Crisis, Police and Oxfordshire County Council. All emails sent out by relevant Environmental Health teams had signature banners promoting the consultation. Social media was also used to advertise the online consultation.
9. A series of adverts were also placed in the free local newspapers providing details of where to find the policy online and where to obtain a copy if a person had no access to the internet.
10. A total of 58 responses were received, although not all respondents answered every question. The breakdown of respondents is as follows: 23% home owners living in Oxford, 17% landlords, 6% letting or managing agents, 38% tenants who were renting in the private sector in Oxford, 2% social tenant and 15% other.

Key findings of the consultation

11. The key findings are as follows:

- 78% of respondents agreed that the Council should proactively regulate the private rented sector and use all of its powers such as licensing and targeting criminal landlords.
- 69% agreed or strongly agreed that the Council's highest priority in the policy should continue to be to improve Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- 67% agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should introduce licensing to improve conditions in all of the private rented sector.
- 79% agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should continue to focus on improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions in homes and addressing fuel poverty as a priority.
- 79% agreed or strongly agreed that the Council should actively seek out "beds in sheds" and take any necessary enforcement action.
- 62% agreed that the proposed enforcement approach detailed in the policy is "about right".

Legal Issues

12. 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.

13. Prior to the introduction of any selective licensing scheme, legal advice will be required to ensure that the evidence to support the scheme is sufficiently robust and to ensure that the scheme is lawful and consistent with statutory guidance. Further reports to CEB and a statutory consultation exercise will also be required before the introduction of a Selective Licensing Scheme.

Financial Issues

14. No new money is being requested or committed by the policy.
15. 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

16. 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. This will result in reduced fuel poverty, while increasing investment in the sector. These measures will further have a positive environmental impact as they will be effective both in reducing Oxford's carbon footprint and on improving the city's environment.

Level of risk

17. A risk register is attached as Appendix 3.

Equality Impact Assessment

18. An EIA has been completed and attached as Appendix 4.

Conclusions

19. The consultation results strongly support all the key aims of the policy.
20. There was clear support for the Council's proactive approach to regulating private sector housing and the Council's approach to prioritising the licensing of HMOs. There was also support for the proposal to consider extending licensing by introducing a Selective Licensing Scheme that would be paid for by licence fees. This approach is also consistent with the priorities set within the Council's Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy.
21. The Council's innovative work on improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions in homes and addressing fuel poverty was also supported, as was the proposal to continue treating unlawful developments, or "beds in sheds", as a priority for enforcement action.

22. The Council's strong record of enforcement in the private rented sector was also backed, with 62% of respondents believing the proposed enforcement approach was about right.
23. Given the results of the extensive consultation exercise there is a clear mandate for approving the draft policy and no need to make any further changes.

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Background Papers: None

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