

REPORT FOR: **CABINET**

Date of Meeting:	11 October 2012
Subject:	Response to Scrutiny Review of “Private Rented Sector Housing in Harrow”
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Paul Najsarek, Corporate Director of Community, Health and Wellbeing
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Bob Currie, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Enclosures:	Appendix 1: Comments on recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of ‘Private Rented Sector Housing in Harrow’

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report responds to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of “Private rented sector housing in Harrow” presented to Cabinet on the 13th September 2012 and in particular to the recommendations contained within it. These are commented on individually in Appendix 1.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to:

Note the report and delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Community, Health and Wellbeing in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to ensure the responses outlined in Appendix 1 are included within

the draft Housing Strategy and draft Private Sector Housing Strategy to be reported to Cabinet in December 2012.

Reason: (For recommendation)

To enable the response to the recommendations to be formalised in the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and accompanying action plan.

Section 2 – Report

1. The final report from the “Private rented sector housing in Harrow” Scrutiny Review was reported to Cabinet on the 13 September 2012. It is an important and welcome report acknowledging the importance of the private rented sector in increasingly meeting the housing needs of households in the borough. It is an important aspiration to encourage the provision of additional good quality private rented accommodation as well as improve standards and tackle poor quality where it exists.
2. The Council is in the process of reviewing a number of its key housing policies and strategies to take account of the flexibilities offered through the Localism Act as well as the challenges it will face as a result of the various welfare reform proposals, many of which will disproportionately affect people living in the private rented sector on benefits.
3. Given the many changes proposed Cabinet has agreed that it would be appropriate to review all Harrow’s current housing strategies and policies to ensure that the Council has consistent and workable policies which operate together to increase the housing options available to the residents of Harrow, ensure that the most vulnerable continue to have priority and access to locally affordable housing and that they support the continued sustainability of local communities in Harrow. This includes a **Private Sector Housing Strategy** to strengthen our plans for ensuring there is a good quality private rented housing sector locally.
4. Officers have welcomed the opportunity to work with the Scrutiny Committee during the development of the Private Sector Housing Strategy. As a result all of the recommendations have been incorporated in the draft strategy. The draft strategy and accompanying action plan will be put out for formal consultation shortly. Appendix 1 sets out how the specific recommendations from the Scrutiny review have been addressed.
5. In view of the Council’s limited resources the Private Sector Housing Strategy will focus on what the Council can do to encourage and facilitate the continued provision of a good quality private rented housing sector working in partnership with other boroughs, landlords, developers and private tenants whilst using available enforcement resources to tackle the worst conditions.

Legal comments

6. The Council, as a local housing authority, uses the powers afforded to it by the Housing Act 2004 to enforce property standards within the private rented sector. Under this Act the Council has a legal duty to take appropriate enforcement action where a category 1 hazard exists (as per the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)) on any residential premises, and this could result in the issuing of a formal improvement notice. The Act gives the Council the power to take certain types of enforcement action where it is considered that a category 2 hazards exists, which again could include serving of an improvement notice.
7. The Councils Housing Strategy and supporting documents are required to be in conformity with the London Housing Strategy. The final version of the London Strategy is awaited but our draft Private Sector Housing Strategy does address several of the Mayor of London priority initiatives such as bringing empty homes back into use, the London Landlord Accreditation scheme.

8. Equality duties

Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 created the public sector equality duty. Section 149 states:-

- (1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
9. When making policy decisions, the Council must take account of the equality duty and in particular any potential impact on protected groups. An Equality Impact Assessment (“EqIA”) has been completed in relation to the Private Sector Housing Strategy and has helped inform its development. The majority of the actions set out within the strategy will have either a positive or neutral impact on protected groups.

Financial Implications

10. Many of the actions detailed in response to the recommendations will have revenue costs, primarily through existing staff resources and budgets. Bids for new proposals where there is no existing budget will be made through the appropriate commissioning channels on the basis of invest to save.

11. Bids for capital to continue with existing initiatives such as Empty homes grants or start new projects will be made through the Capital Forum.
12. It is acknowledged that the availability of new resources is very limited and therefore utilising external funding opportunities and partnership working with the private sector will be key to delivering the objectives of the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy.

Performance Issues

13. There are a number of Performance Indicators within the Housing Scorecard relating to housing demand and supply and the role of the private rented sector within this. Some of the outcomes to the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy will positively impact on performance in key areas, for example by minimising increase in the numbers of homeless families in Bed and Breakfast.
14. Current performance set out below reflects the pressures from rising homelessness and the difficulties in finding suitable private rented housing. These difficulties are projected to continue and will impact on future performance.
15. Whilst current supply of affordable housing shows good performance, future supply can only be maintained by continuing to explore a range of new supply models. Targets for future years will be significantly lower based on the Housing Capacity targets agreed for Harrow (350 new per homes per annum with a 40% policy affordable housing target = 140 new affordable homes per annum).
16. After the new strategies and policies are completed, including the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy, we will develop a new set of performance indicators to ensure we are able to monitor the ongoing impact of welfare reform and of the agreed policy changes in mitigating them.

Performance Indicator	Q4 2011/12 Performance	Q1 2012/13 Performance	2012/13 Target	Red Amber Green
Total number accepted as homeless and in priority need	110	25	150	Green
Average number of households in B&B	60	New PI	N/A	N/A
No of households with dependent children and/or pregnant woman in B&B for 6 weeks or more at end of quarter - snapshot (P1E)	N/A	18	N/A	N/A

No of households living in Temporary Accommodation	400	402	400	Amber
Number of households we assist with housing in the private rented sector	256	40	400	Red
Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)	408	86	139	Green
Empty private dwellings returned to use	271	58	200	Green

Environmental Impact

17. The outcomes from completion of the Private Sector Housing Strategy contribute to the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Delivering Warmer Homes strategy through:

- Improving energy efficiency and reducing CO2 in all housing tenures.
- New affordable homes in London being required to achieve a minimum of level 4 of the Sustainable Building Code.
- Other environmental improvements often included in new affordable housing developments or retrofitting of existing social housing include: provision of green roofs, solar thermal hot water systems to meet the target for use of renewable resources and resulting reduction in CO2 emissions, improved biodiversity as a result of increased tree planting and landscaped communal open spaces, provision of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, and green travel plans to encourage use of public transport and walking.

Risk Management Implications

Risk included on Directorate risk register? No

Separate risk register in place? No

18. Risk assessment will be undertaken for specific projects as recommended by Scrutiny Committee and risk registers maintained for major projects.

Equalities implications

19. An overarching equalities impact assessment was published for the Housing Changes Review and an individual assessment has been completed for the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy. None of the actions proposed discriminate either directly or indirectly under the public bodies duty of the Equality Act 2010. The majority of the actions set out within the strategy will have either a positive or neutral impact on protected groups.

Corporate Priorities

20. This report incorporates the following corporate priorities by involving residents in determining future housing policies and strategies that support people in priority housing need:

- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.
- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Roger Hampson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 27 September 2012		
Name: Paresh Mehta	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 28 September 2012		

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Martin Randall	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Divisional Director Partnership, Development and Performance
Date: 27 September 2012		

Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: Andrew Baker	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	On behalf of the Divisional Director (Environmental Services)
Date: 27 September 2012		

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Alison Pegg, Housing Partnerships and Strategy Manager, Tel 020 8424 1933 or email:

Alison.pegg@harrow.gov

Background Papers: Private Rented sector housing in Harrow, Scrutiny review report presented to Cabinet 13 September 2012
<http://modern.gov:8080/documents/g61071/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Thursday%2013-Sep-2012%2019.30,%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

**Call-In Waived by the
Chairman of Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee**

NOT APPLICABLE

[Call-in applies]