

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

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| <b>Meeting:</b>                          | Cabinet  |
| <b>Date:</b>                             | 15 <sup>th</sup> July 2003   |
| <b>Subject:</b>                          | Approval of Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy                                    |
| <b>Key decision:</b>                     | Yes  |
| <b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>        | Head of Housing and Environmental Health Services                                      |
| <b>Relevant Portfolio Holder Status:</b> | Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value<br>Part 1                                |
| <b>Ward:</b>                             | All  |
| <b>Enclosures:</b>                       | The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy ( circulated in Supporting Documents Pack) |

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 removed many of the detailed provisions that govern the way authorities carry out housing renewal. It gives authorities new, wider powers to provide assistance to repair and improve private sector housing and greater flexibility and discretion in delivering housing renewal to address local needs and achieve wider regeneration.
- 1.2 The Strategy for Private Sector Housing Renewal establishes how we will address the identified housing needs of the authority, raise standards in the poorest accommodation and increase the number of decent homes within the borough.
- 1.3 In doing so the strategy meets the requirement to clearly state the role of the Authority in achieving renewal, including enforcement, reflecting local priorities, need and strategic objectives e.g. regeneration, and ability of the Local Authority to offer financial assistance through grants, loans and equity release.
- 1.4 Local Authorities cannot use these new powers until they have adopted and published the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy.

## **2. Recommendations (for decision by Cabinet)**

### **2.1 Cabinet approves the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy**

**Reason:** The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 removed the detailed provisions that govern the way authorities carry out housing renewal giving authorities discretion in delivering housing renewal to address local needs. This new power is not exercisable until the authority has adopted and published a Strategy which details how this discretion will be exercised. This must be adopted by the 18th July 2003.

## **3. Consultation with Ward Councillors**

3.1 None specific other than attendance at consultation events including the Landlords Forum, Private Sector Housing Challenge event and the Housing Conference which were used as consultation events in drawing up the Strategy.

## **4. Policy Context (including relevant previous decisions)**

4.1 The Housing Strategy remains the predominant strategic document for housing. No specific Private Sector Housing Strategy has existed previously.

## **5. Relevance to Corporate Priorities**

5.1 The Strategy addresses 3 of Harrow's Corporate objectives in that it will:

5.2 Enhance the environment in Harrow by promoting higher environmental standards and the provision of and sustaining of a healthy, safe environment for those living in, working or visiting Harrow.

5.3 Improve the quality of health and Social Care through the provision of housing and the encouragement of a viable local economy.

5.4 Encourage the development of a prosperous and sustainable economy by providing support for the Council's Environment Statement of continuously improving the quality of life for the people of Harrow.

## **6. Background Information**

6.1 Harrow's vision is to become the driving force behind Private Sector Housing Renewal in the Borough, enabling and influencing policy, delivering services that make a positive difference to individuals, communities, and develop an inclusive and sustainable environment to live and work in.

6.2 The aims and objectives have been set in relation to National, Regional and Local Housing priorities and using current information from Local Demographics, Stock Condition, The Local Housing Market, Poverty/Wealth Streams, Housing Need and Demand, Current Service demands, key health and social care priorities delivered through partnership

6.3 In order to provide a supply of good quality, sustainable, secure and affordable private sector housing, the primary objectives identified in the Strategy are to:

- Develop integrated approaches with the Council and other agencies to tackle poor housing, poor health and social exclusion.
- Target investment to promote regeneration and strengthen local communities.
- Continue to deliver and support measures that secure higher standards and better management in the private rented sector.
- Bring empty properties back into residential use under the Empty Homes Strategy.

6.4 In relation to these objectives the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy sets out how the council will:

- Enforce the standards laid down in housing legislation, Government guidance, circulars and codes of practice to ensure that private rented sector accommodation is maintained to a minimum standard.
- Enforce standards laid down in our registration scheme to ensure Houses in Multiple occupation have adequate fire precautions, basic amenities (baths, wash hand basins, toilets) and are properly managed.
- Administer Disabled Facilities Grants to enable adaptation of properties to address the needs of disabled people.
- Administer a transparent policy and criteria for awarding Discretionary Grants targeted at those living in the worst conditions who are least able to afford the necessary works of repair and improvement. This will be based on the condition of properties as well as the financial means of the applicant to deliver strategic priorities.
- Provision of housing guidance, support and advice to both landlord and tenant and owner occupiers.
- Consult on the use of resources with service users and partners
- Bring empty properties back into use to assist with wider area regeneration and provide people in need with greater availability of properties to rent or buy
- Seek to secure continuous improvements in energy efficiency performance and the alleviation of fuel poverty through working with partners to identify opportunities to seek additional resources, make strategic links and target the poorest households and properties.

## **7. Approach to Addressing Housing Needs**

7.1 The Strategy proposes that we will address the private sector housing needs by using the renewal policies and initiatives outlined in the strategy and support corporate priorities through:

- Promoting independence through the Renewal Grants and Home Improvement Agency working in partnership to allow residents to remain in their own homes.

- Development of the Home Improvement Agency to assist the most vulnerable residents, both young and old within Harrow including the provision of advice and assistance in repairing, improving, maintaining or adapting their homes.
- The provision of disabled facilities adaptations through joint working with the occupational therapists and Improvement Grants enabling access to good quality housing and the independence of the disabled.
- The provision of discretionary grants to encourage property owners to improve private rented and owner occupied properties, targeted at those most in need, and to bring empty homes back into use.
- Working with owners, partner RSL's and the private sector to provide a comprehensive range of options to ensure that empty homes are brought back into use under the Empty Homes Strategy.
- Developing an Affordable Warmth Strategy targeted at addressing fuel poverty, renewable energy, Home Energy Efficiency Schemes and meeting the requirements of the Home Energy Conservation Act.
- Maintaining and raising standards in the private sector through enforcement activity and operation of the Councils Registration Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation to promote minimum standards of repair, safety and management in the rented sector.
- Operating the Handyperson scheme to provide works in relation to the crime prevention panel referrals and elderly home owners and people in receipt of benefits by providing quick direct preventive repair work.
- The provision of guidance, support and advice to owner occupiers, landlords and tenants and the promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy to the private sector through the provision of advice, financial incentives and grant aide and the promotional activities.

## **8. Development and Review**

- 8.1 The Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy will require regular review and development to ensure that it is aligned with the Community Plan, New Harrow Project and Regeneration Strategy and development of housing/regeneration needs base data to inform service provision.
- 8.2 The Strategy will be reviewed following the launch of the Community Plan, implementation of the New Harrow Project and new legislation to ensure that the range of assistance available and service provision are effectively targeted at the emerging priorities.

## **9. Consultation**

- 9.1 Consultation on the draft Strategy has been undertaken within the activities related to the Private Sector Housing element of the Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review.
- 9.2 Extensive internal and external consultation has taken place during the preparation of the policy including the Landlords Forum, Private Sector Housing Challenge event and the Housing Conference which were used as consultation events in drawing up the policy. Further consultation will be conducted during development and review.

## **10. Finance Observations**

- 10.1 There are no significant direct financial implications identified within this report at present as expenditure will be contained within the Capital provision for Private Sector Renewal and the budgetary provision for each service area.
- 10.2 Successful implementation of the Strategy will be dependant on maintaining Capital provision to support direct assistance preferably through the establishment of a long-range (3-5 year) capital finance planning process to allow for better forward planning of services. This will be coupled with the investigation of alternative funding opportunities and delivery systems to underpin capital funding provision.

## **11. Legal Observations**

- 11.1 Incorporated within the body of the report.

## **12. Conclusion**

- 12.1 Before Harrow Council can use the new powers contained in the regulatory reform Order the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and associated Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy must be adopted and published

## **13. Background Papers**

Housing Strategy 2002 – 2007  
West London Housing Strategy 2003  
The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and associated guidance documents  
Private Sector House Conditions Survey 2000  
Draft Harrow Economic Regeneration Strategy  
Empty Properties Strategy 2003  
Housing Policy Statement, 'The way Forward for Housing'  
London Housing Statement 2002, 'Working Towards Solutions  
Government Office for London's 'Regional Housing Priorities in London.'  
English House Conditions Survey 2002  
Harrow Housing Needs Survey 2000  
Harrow Supporting People Strategy 2002  
The Decent Homes Target Implementation Plan 2003

## **14. Author**

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