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**PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) – Councillor Bill Dixon**

**Responsible Director(s) – Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To seek Members approval for the implementation of the new Private Sector Housing Strategy.

**Background**

2. On 23 March 2006 approval was gained from Council to implement a targeted loans based Financial Assistance Policy, Mandatory licensing policy for houses of multiple occupation and a charging policy for the licensing of houses of multiple occupation. On 5 December 2006, Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Committee confirmed their support for the implementation of the Private Sector Housing Strategy.
3. The Private Sector Housing Strategy provides the strategic approach to tackle non-decent private sector homes in accordance with statutory targets towards achieving decent homes across all sectors by 2010. The Private Sector Housing Strategy is based upon the evidence of private sector stock condition identified through a survey completed in 2000.
4. One of the key “change drivers” in private sector housing is the Housing Act 2004, which recommends a different approach to private sector renewal. Improvements will, to a large degree, be achieved through the adoption of the new Financial Assistance Policy. The new Financial Assistance Policy will provide financial assistance in the form of loans rather than grants.
5. In addition, the Council are exploring a number of ways to lever in additional public and private finance to support larger scale clearance and renewal in central areas of Darlington which exhibit high density, low quality terraced accommodation which no longer meet the aspirations of local people. The wards of North Road, Northgate, Central and Bank Top are particularly targeted as areas requiring some form of intervention and improvement to sustain those communities.
6. The Private Sector Housing Strategy (**Appendix 1**) outlines Darlington’s approach to achieving these aims.

7. The key themes of the Private Sector Housing Strategy are to rejuvenate private sector housing which is failing to meet Decent Homes standards through targeted packages of financial assistance, increasing membership of private landlords in the accreditation scheme, and, ensuring standards in houses of multiple occupation area maintained through licensing.
8. The Housing Renewal Team will continue to engage with private landlords through the Private Landlords Forum, and, seek to offer further incentives with its stakeholder partners, aimed at accredited Private Landlords, to encourage improved standards within the private sector housing market. New policies and strategic approaches will be developed in partnership with Private Sector Landlords through the Forum to ensure the work of the Renewal Team remains relevant and meets broader strategic objectives.
9. Sub-regionally, Darlington works collectively with its Tees Valley local authority partners towards a co-ordinated joint response to the pressures observed within the private sector housing market. This includes joint funding bids addressing common issues across the sub-region recognising that housing markets extend beyond local authority boundaries and collaborative working can achieve economies of scale and better value for money.
10. Regionally, Darlington's Private Sector Housing Strategy will be promoted and influence the future direction of the Regional Housing Strategy at Government Office North East (GONE) recognising the role and influence of the private sector housing market on the broader multi-tenure local housing market conditions.
11. Increased data gathering, analysis and evaluation of private sector housing stock condition will facilitate appropriate targeting of resources to achieve private sector stock condition improvements. The implementation of the Financial Assistance Policy will be a catalyst for more collaborative engagement with the private sector to drive standards upwards.
12. Analysis of private sector stock condition information alongside other local data such as crime statistics and incidences of anti-social behaviour will inform interventionist activity, to ensure neighbourhoods remain sustainable or radical remodelling is considered to meet changing housing need and demand with time.
13. Links between the private sector housing market and the influence it has with the broader local housing market will be monitored to ensure cohesive local communities are maintained.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

14. This report contains legislation which is predominantly mandatory. However, the Financial Assistance Policy and the broader approach to private sector renewal and enforcement has been discussed at the Private Landlords Forum.

### **Legal Implications**

15. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures.

16. There is a requirement to publicise the Financial Assistance Policy through a Public Notice prior to the launch of the policy. There are no issues other than this which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

17. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

### **Council Policy Framework**

18. The issues contained within this report are required to be considered by Council.

### **Conclusion**

19. The Private Sector Housing Strategy offers the most appropriate mechanism to monitor, control, improve and regenerate private sector housing to achieve and maintain minimum Decent Homes standards.

### **Recommendation**

20. Council are requested to approve the Private Sector Housing Strategy.

### **Reasons**

21. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
- (a) The Private Sector Housing Strategy follows the recommended principles and legislative requirements of the Housing Act 2004.
  - (b) The Private Sector Housing Strategy complies with the Regulatory Reform Order 2002.

**Cliff Brown**  
**Director of Community Services**

### **Background Papers**

- (i) Council report 8 March 2005 – Private Sector Housing and the Housing Act 2004
- (ii) Council report 23 March 2006 – Delegated Powers
- (iii) Council report 23 March 2006 – Private Sector Housing Renewal
- (iv) Social Affairs and Health Scrutiny Committee 5 December 2006 – Private Sector Housing Strategy

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