



**Report to: Communities Committee, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020**

**Report of: Corporate Director, Homes and Communities**

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**Subject: UPDATE REPORT - PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY (2015 – 2020) YEAR 5 ACTIONS**

**1. Recommendation**

**1.1 That the contents of this report are noted, and in particular the detailed Year 5 Progress Report at Appendix 1; and**

**1.2 To extend the existing Private Sector Housing Strategy (2015 – 2020) at Appendix 2, up until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.**

**2. Background**

2.1 On the 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015 Cabinet approved the Worcester City Private Housing Strategy (2015 – 2020). This Strategy set out what would be undertaken to ensure that Worcester's private sector housing stock remains amongst the very best available. The Strategy covers private rented properties as well as owner occupied properties. Within Worcester City 65% (28,425) of the total housing stock are owner occupied and 19% (8,308) are private rented<sup>1</sup>. The 5 aims of the strategy are:

1. Encourage and enable owner occupiers to repair and maintain their homes to a good standard.
2. Encourage and enable private landlord and agents to provide good quality, well managed properties.
3. Enable people whose independence may be at risk to safely remain in or return to their home.
4. Maximise use of the existing private sector housing stock.
5. Enable more energy efficient and sustainable homes, and reduce fuel poverty.

2.2 The work which the Private Sector Housing Team carries out as part of this Strategy has strong links into other areas of the wider services work including meeting housing need and preventing homelessness as well as supporting other agencies including Health. The evidence base linking poor housing and poor health has increased dramatically. Housing is important for many aspects of healthy living and well-being. The home is important for psychosocial reasons as well as its protection against the elements, but it can also be the source of a wide range of hazards

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<sup>1</sup> Worcester City Private Sector House Condition Assessment 2015.

(physical, chemical, biological). It is the environment in which most people spend the majority of their time.

- 2.3 By increasing the amount of good quality private rented property available, the amount of homelessness can be reduced due to a greater availability of housing stock, as well as, reducing the number of people becoming homeless due to disrepair issues.
- 2.4 Supporting the provision of well managed private rented properties reduces the risk of illegal evictions and retaliatory evictions due to disrepair. In addition, it has been estimated that improving property to a good standard by reducing significant hazards to an acceptable level across England (36.9% of homes) would save the NHS £2 billion per annum. <sup>2</sup>
- 2.5 Provision of adaptations through the Better Care Fund has prevented occupiers from unplanned admissions to hospital, falls and to remain in their own homes, saving the NHS and Social Services both money and capacity. The 2018 Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Other Adaptations – External Review identified that 'Falls are a major issue for health and social care, as a third of people 65 and over fall each year, rising to half of those aged 80 and over, with about 5% of falls leading to fractures and stays in hospital. Fragility fractures in older people cost the NHS and social care about £4.4 billion a year, with about 25% of those costs attributable to social care. Falls are not just costly to public services, but also have major negative impact on the independence and quality of life of the person affected. Adaptations could potentially have a big impact as 75% of the deaths relating to falls happen in the home, and falls represent 10-25% of ambulance calls to older adults. Older people represent the greatest pressure on hospitals, as they use most bed days than other people once admitted in an emergency (65% of bed days). Falls also often precipitate a move into residential care'<sup>3</sup>.
- 2.6 A draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy was agreed for consultation by the Environment Committee in January 2020. It is intended that this strategy will be finalised and adopted in October 2020. The strategy is the Council's response to the climate emergency and other environmental pressures and sets out a number of ways in which the Council will strive to achieve carbon neutrality across the city. This strategy recognises that nearly 40% of carbon emissions in Worcester City come from domestic residences and therefore, that measures to support residents to reduce energy demand from residential homes will be required. This will be through improvements to the condition of homes as well as behaviour change measures. This work will therefore be closely linked with the new Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan.

### **3. Progress Headlines**

- 3.1 For a fuller progress report for all objectives please see **Appendix 1**.
- 3.2 During 19/20:
  - 4 households received small heating repairs utilising Foundations Independent Living Trust funding;

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/pdf/87741-Cost-of-Poor-Housing-Briefing-Paper-v3.pdf> -

<sup>3</sup> <https://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com/media/5665/dfg-review-2018-main-report-final-nov-2018a.pdf> - 2018

- 3 household received Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding and 3 household received ECO Flex funding for energy efficiency measures;
- The HIA secured funding from the Better Care Fund of £687,629 for 19/20. Ensuring that those needing adaptations and other services can remain in their own homes;
- 268 enquiries to the HIA were received with 66 adaptations being completed during 19/20;
- 12 people were prevented from unplanned admission to hospital;
- 30 people were prevented/ were at a reduced risk from falls;
- 30 people were able to remain in their own home;
- 89 Dementia Dwelling Grants have been completed. This work received the National Foundations Award for Innovation;
- 99 HMO licences were granted. 59 new licences and 40 renewals;
- 109 property standards complaints were made to the Private Sector Housing Team. Inspections identified 8 Category 1 Hazards.;
- 10 multi-agency visits carried out with the Private Sector Housing Team, Police, Fire Service and Immigration to tackle specific identified concerns;
- 189 empty properties have been visited, assessed and prioritised into bands. There are non properties in Band A (highest), one in Band B, four in Band C. The remainder are in Bands D-F, and
- 33 properties are registered as part of the City Life Lettings scheme providing private rented accommodation for families who were homeless or threatened with homelessness. This scheme has now been rebranded to Worcester City Lettings as of the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and offers a new service of let only or managed lets to landlords.

#### **4. Preferred Option**

- 4.1 The strategy has now completed its fifth and final year. An internal desk top analysis of private sector housing stock conditions will be undertaken in the coming months to be completed by the end of September 2020. This information will be used to extend the existing strategy action plan for a further year 2020/21. This will focus on recovery and addressing the short-term impacts of Covid 19.
- 4.2 It is planned to commission a full stock condition survey during 2021/22 when the ability to access and assess property conditions should be possible due to the easing of Covid 19 restrictions. Funding of up to £40,000 will be required for this survey and will be identified as a budget pressure for 21/22. This information will then inform the development of a new Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan to identify areas of stock in the City to focus key improvement measures on.

## **5. Alternative Options Considered**

- 5.1 The two alternative options are firstly not to extend the current strategy and have no action plan for the focus of key improvements over 20/21 or secondly not to extend the current strategy and to create a new strategy based on out of date data. Basing a new strategy on data which is over 5 years old would not be suitable as there may be new areas for improvement identified with more up to date data. The full stock condition survey is planned for 21/22 will assist to provide robust and evidence data and this will be used to identify new or existing key areas to focus on improving.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications**

There are no financial or budget implications of extending the strategy. The internal desk top analysis of private sector housing stock conditions will be undertaken with existing strategic housing officer resources.

### **6.2 Legal and Governance Implications**

Local Authorities are required to produce a Private Sector Renewal Strategy and Housing Assistance Policy if they wish to make use of the provisions of the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 enabling them to provide additional support and grant assistance.

The strategy extension doesn't alter these conclusions drawn previously.

### **6.3 Risk Implications**

This strategy was identified at its start (2015) not to have an impact on the current Corporate Risk Register and will have a key role to play in mitigating the risks associated with Private Sector Housing in the city, coupled with changes in demand and regulation of the sector. The financial resources required to address poor property conditions in the city have reduced over a number of years. The strategy contains a range of actions to minimise against the risk of the reduction whilst ensuring continued improvement to the stock. This will be monitored as a Corporate Plan performance outcome.

The strategy extension doesn't alter these conclusions drawn previously.

### **6.4 Corporate/Policy Implications**

This work also contributes to Theme 1 in the City Plan (2016-2021) – Stronger and Connected Communities, with the reduction in underused property, including re-using empty homes and more flats over shops as well as reducing the number of substandard rental properties.

There is also a link between this strategy and the Environmental Sustainability Strategy which is currently being drafted by the Environmental Sustainability Officer.

## 6.5 Equality Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed at the start of the Private Sector Housing Strategy in 2015. The private sector strategy seeks to improve housing stock across all private tenures and so will affect groups equally. Older and disabled households have more obstacles to securing safe and suitable accommodation due to their additional needs. The Stock Condition Survey from 2014 did highlight that certain BME groups have much lower levels of owner occupancy providing an opportunity to advance equality amongst these groups.

The strategy extension doesn't alter these conclusions drawn previously.

## 6.6 Human Resources Implications

This extension of the report will be carried out with existing resources from the Private Sector Housing Team.

## 6.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no health and safety implications.

## 6.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

In Worcester City the private rented sector plays an important role in meeting the diverse housing needs that exist within the city. It is therefore important that the accommodation is targeted to tackle disrepair and conditions with a range of initiatives and to use all tools available to undertake this.

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**Background Papers:** Worcester City Council Private Sector Housing Strategy (2015 – 2020)

## **Appendix 1 – Progress Against Year 5 Actions**

The actions which have been identified for completion during year five (19/20) are detailed below.

<b>REF</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>TARGET COMPLETION DATE</b>	<b>PROGRESS</b>
1	To monitor the availability of new funding sources to make bids for home improvements for private housing stock.	End 2020	<p>During 2019/20 the HIA accessed Foundations Independent Living Trust (FILT) funding and assisted 4 Worcester City households with small heating repairs utilising £10K of FILT funding.</p> <p>MHCLG funding for training – Wyre Forest District Council prepared a countywide bid that was successful. This is to deliver specialist enforcement training.</p> <p>Health &amp; Social Care Funding BRR – to address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capturing people who are able to self fund and whose needs are not met by mandatory services</li> <li>• Resourcing capacity focusing on systemic service improvements rather than individual contract or project management and achieve a more integrated service across health, social care, housing and the provider market. This resource will also co-ordinate and support the 7 principles and delivery of ambitions within the Health and Housing Memorandum of Understanding which has been signed up to by a range of strategic groups and organisations including the Health and Wellbeing Board.</li> </ul>
2	To Ensure the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) is used to access available funding	End 2020	<p>The HIA has secured funding from the Better Care Fund for 19/20 of £687,629 from the last year to ensure those needing adaptations or other services remain in or return to their home.</p> <p>We are working in an integrated way with Health and Social Care to support the delivery of the Better Care Fund Objectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional funding was provided for minor adaptations to address the continued financial pressures being experienced by Social Care.</li> </ul>

			<p>Better Care Fund Outcomes 2019/20:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate timely discharge from hospital – 1</li> <li>• Prevent an unplanned admission to hospital – 12</li> <li>• Reduce pressure on informal carers – 30</li> <li>• Reduce or delay the increase for a care package – 20</li> <li>• Reduce/Prevent falls – 30</li> <li>• Remain/promote independence – 30</li> <li>• Enable to remain in their own home - 38</li> </ul>
4	To continue to hold a landlord and letting agent forum and consider resourcing in a joined up way with Worcester University, NLA and other appropriate organisations	One or two a year	<p>The last landlord and letting agent forum was held in December 2018. The event for 19/20 was scheduled for March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020 however due to the Covid-19 outbreak this was postponed. The next forum will be in 20/21. Speakers which were going to be included in the event were the RLA, City Life Lettings, Trading Standards, University of Worcester and Act on Energy.</p> <p>The Private Sector Housing Team also attended the annual Worcester University Housing Fair in January 2020.</p>
5	To continue to produce a landlord newsletter	Two a year	<p>The latest landlord newsletter was produced in June 2020. However in between this and previous newsletters we have emailed landlords directly on any legislative changes as well as any developments with Additional Licensing.</p>
11.	To develop joint working relationships to address rogue landlords	Date not known as subject to legislation	<p>Worcestershire has successfully secured funding from the Government in 2018 for a two year project for tackling the hidden issues faced by migrants across Worcestershire. The Community Cohesion Officer as well as working to map services and need across the County, has been key in developing the 'Talk to Me Worcester' campaign with colleagues in Community Safety. This is to help bring communities together and could raise housing issues for further investigation.</p> <p>During this year the Private Sector Housing Team has been involved with 10 joint visits with the Police and Fire Service to investigate concerns regarding rogue landlords. We have also carried out some enforcement investigations, one of</p>

			<p>which resulted in a successful prosecution in 2019 for running an unlicensed HMO and having breached the HMO Management Regulations.</p> <p>The Team has also met with Trading Standards to look at how investigative methods can be used to identify Rogue landlords who are operating between different Agencies. Work is continuing to progress this joint working.</p>
12.	To monitor the HIA contract and meet quarterly	To 2020	<p>Operational and Board meetings are held quarterly. Quarterly reports are received and monitored.</p> <p>Performance Figures for 2019/20:  Enquiries received - 268  Number of Disable Facilities Grants - 66  Number of Dementia Dwelling Grant jobs completed – 89  Number of Home Repairs Assistance – 0</p> <p>During this year the re-commissioning of the service resulted in Millbrook Health care winning the Promoting Independent Living contract. This new service provider started on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020</p>
17.	To work with the Registered Providers, third party and voluntary agencies, to bring back empty homes back into use including vacant spaces above shops.	To 2020	<p>In 19/20 Officers have visited 189 empty properties over 2 years to assess and prioritise them for resource focus. Currently there are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1x property which is Band A (highest assessed priority band).</li> <li>- 2 x properties in a Band B</li> <li>- 11x properties in Band C.</li> <li>- The remaining properties are banded D- F (lowest assessed priority band).</li> </ul> <p>This has enabled Officers to build up a picture of the condition of these properties, the reasons for them being empty as well as focusing enforcement resources on them. The Band A and Band B properties are part of a multi-departmental focus to bringing back into use.</p> <p>Officers also attend Problem Properties Group which is a multi-departmental meeting, including Worcestershire Regulatory Services to discuss and action specific cases. As well as responding to customer enquires via telephone, email and using the online report it forms.</p>

			<p>Worcester Municipal Charities received RP status using advice and support provided by Strategic Housing a couple of years ago. This has given them access to Homes England Funding and they have converted 5 commercial HMO properties to residential use providing 21 units of accommodation. The CAB have also brought 2 properties back into use providing 9 units of HMO accommodation.</p>
20.	To promote City Life Lettings to increase access to the affordable private rented sector accommodation	On going	<p>Currently there are 33 properties registered as part of City Life Lettings. The service has been reviewed during this year and has been rebranded as Worcester City Lettings to be more contemporary and assisting with media searches. The services provided has also been improved to offer a let only and managed lets service. This will be promoted further in 20/21.</p> <p>The Early Intervention Project is coming to the end of its first year and this will be reviewed again at the end of year 2. The loss of private rented sector accommodation is one of the top three reasons for homelessness and the development of an early intervention service to address this issue was identified as one of the tools to prevent homelessness. During 19/20 there were 23 private sector housing preventions.</p>

