



COUNCIL CABINET
10 March 2021

ITEM 10

Report sponsor: Rachel North, Strategic
Director Communities and Place
Report author: Stuart Smith, Housing Strategy
Development Officer

Private Housing Renewal Policy 2021 - 2030

Purpose

- 1.1 To seek cabinet approval for the adoption of the new Private Housing Renewal Policy.

Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To agree to the adoption of the new Private Housing Renewal Policy.

Reason(s)

- 3.1 The policy provides the framework to identifying city-wide actions to improve the condition of privately owned and privately rented residential properties in the city.
- 3.2 The policy gives a summary of services and support available to residents and owners of private sector housing in Derby, including loans and grants, particularly for those who are the most vulnerable.
- 3.3 The current policy was agreed in 2015 and was due for review and to be updated. It will expire in May 2021.

Supporting information

- 4.1 The Housing Act 2004 requires all local authorities to keep the housing conditions in their area under review. The findings of the 2019 stock condition survey, the first comprehensive analysis of private housing in Derby in more than 10 years, are reflected in the new policy.
- 4.2 Critically, the policy includes for delegated powers to approve action and funding for:
 - Healthy Housing assistance (grants and loans)
 - Disabled Facilities Grants
 - Empty Homes renovation loans

- 4.3 In a time of increasing housing need, it is crucial that we work to achieve best possible use of our existing housing stock; that conditions are improved and empty homes returned to productive use.
- 4.4 It is a main premise of the policy that enabling vulnerable, older, or disabled people to remain safely in their own homes for longer is an integral part of promoting public health, well-being and sustainable communities.
- 4.5 Ensuring effective delivery of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) strategically, in a joined-up and practical manner helps meet the growing demand for disability adaptations in the home.
- 4.6 DASH and Call Before You Serve (CB4YS) have developed excellent relationships with landlords, tenants, homelessness and housing options services. These will be essential to mitigate the impact of the anticipated surge of possession proceedings in the private rented sector as the current embargo of evictions is lifted as the country moves out of the pandemic.
- 4.7 We engage with local private sector landlords through our Landlord Forum and with landlord associations locally and nationally. Our DASH (Decent And Safe Homes) Service operates an accredited private landlord scheme for landlords of rented housing including student properties.
- 4.8 We are also committed to a strong and proportionate approach to statutory enforcement where circumstances require it. Our Housing Standards team is achieving more successful prosecutions than ever before and serving civil penalties due to unmet safety standards. Our Compulsory Purchase programme ensures return to use of long term empty homes when all voluntary alternatives have failed.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 Council colleagues have been consulted with external consultation carried out September to November 2020. It was open to everyone but we particularly targeted:
 - a) Members of the public
 - b) Councillors
 - c) Landlords with rented properties in Derby and their agents
 - d) Derby residents living in private rented accommodation
 - e) Agencies who provide services or advice for residents of Derby.
 - f) The Council's Diversity Forums, particularly the 60+ forum (formerly 50+)
 - g) Council colleagues, particularly the Housing Standards Team.

5.2 Major elements of the consultation included:

- a) Consultation pages of the council web site ('Your City, Your Say');
- b) Online questionnaire (with option to complete and submit a hard copy);
- c) Direct invitation to Derby landlords through Housing Standards' contacts;
- d) Use of other e-media including "In Touch" and iDerby;
- e) Social media including DCC Twitter and Facebook ;
- f) Diversity forums.
- g) An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA).

5.3 Outcomes and resultant changes to the policy

Feedback from the consultation included a broad range of comments and suggestions: The most significant are:

- a) *The need for Improvements to private sector properties that help people remain independent in their own home, and that make them adaptable for the changing needs of our ageing population.*
This is incorporated as a core objective of the Private Housing Renewal Policy.
- b) *Most respondents agreed that poor housing conditions have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of occupants, particularly tenants in the private rented sector; and that the Council should continue to take enforcement action against rogue landlords, where appropriate, and publicise successful outcomes.*
Partnership working with landlords, wherever possible, and appropriate enforcement action against rogue landlords remain as key interventions identified within the Private Housing Renewal Policy.
- c) *Some tenants, especially the most vulnerable, can be too scared to complain about unsafe living conditions for fear of a rent increase or eviction, and suitable systems must be in place to protect them.*
Our Housing Options Service, Housing Standards Team and Call Before You Serve colleagues at DASH (Decent and Safe Homes) continue to work together to provide support services for both tenants and landlords to best help prevent incidence or threat of harassment and eviction. Those services are at the heart of this Private Housing Renewal Policy and our Homelessness Strategy.
- d) *More should be done to promote awareness of the services available through Disabled Facilities Services, Healthy Housing Hub and Handy Person Service.*
Amended text has been incorporated within the Policy to ensure this point is addressed.
- e) *The policy must be flexible in helping best meet vulnerable persons' individual needs. Works carried out by the Healthy Housing Hub help to keep vulnerable people in their own homes for longer. Serious hazards are also remedied preventing accidents and contributors to ill health, helping reduce admissions to care settings and reducing both demand and costs for our Health and Care partners.*
Amended text has been incorporated within the Policy to ensure this point is addressed.

Further comments were received directly from individual landlords and East Midlands Property Owners (EMPO):

- f) *The council should give advice and information to landlords on effective ways to insulate older properties. Grants or interest free loans should be available to landlords to improve their properties in modern green energy efficient ways.*
Housing Standards Team and Healthy Housing Hub colleagues are working with partner charity, Warmer Derby and Derbyshire, to encourage and support take up of Government Grant offers regarding energy efficiency improvement.
- g) *DCC can do more to cooperate and work with landlords and should seek to get more landlords to become accredited.*
The Council intends to review its approach to private rented sector engagement and intervention following completion of its Private Rented Sector Condition Survey due to report in 2021-22 (subject to pandemic implications).
- h) *The council should do more to inform and advise all tenants of protections offered by the Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018.*
Tenants making complaints to the Council about their private rented housing conditions are given information on the Homes Act with links to further information; but Housing Standards Team colleagues will explore more options, including the use of Web and social media sites and work with partner organisations.

The policy has been amended to reflect many of these suggestions and concerns. We have also drafted new actions arising from the Equality Impact Assessment around access to services and helping to best ensure that private housing in Derby is suitable, healthy and safe.

Other options

- 6.1 Although a policy for private housing in the city is not a statutory requirement a decision not to adopt this policy would mean Derby will lack a coordinated framework for improving private sector housing, in particular for carrying out works and adaptations to improve the living conditions of some of our most vulnerable citizens.
- 6.2 The policy includes delegated powers and processes for the authorisation of loans, grants, including management of disability grants, and funding for works carried out by the Healthy Housing Hub, as well as how appeals from service users are to be dealt with. These would have to sit elsewhere if the policy is not adopted.

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 There are no new additional financial commitments arising directly from the new policy, although it continues to include procedures and appropriate authorisations for grants and other expenditure managed within approved budgets and Capital Programme.

Legal implications

- 8.1 The proposed policy contributes to fulfilling the Council's statutory obligations in respect of provision of housing advice and assistance and the assessment of housing need under the Housing Act 1985.

Climate implications

- 9.1 Many of the measures outlined in this Private Housing Renewal Policy will continue to have a significant impact on Derby's carbon footprint. For example, bringing unused empty homes back into use contributes to increasing effective housing supply and reduces the need for new house construction. Furthermore, the renovation of derelict properties includes improvements to energy efficiency, at least to a statutory minimum standard and frequently beyond.
- 9.2 Actions to increase the thermal insulation of private properties in Derby and install energy efficient ventilation, heating and hot water systems can have a significant impact on reducing CO2 emissions that impacts climate change.
- 9.3 Government commitments to tackle climate change look likely to open some housing-related funding opportunities e.g. to further assist owners with retro-fit works to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. With our existing City Energy Saving Programme, CESP, (this sought to continue elements of the national Community Energy Saving Programme when it was ended by the government) and recent experience of delivering such schemes, we are well placed to make best use of such opportunities as they arise.
- 9.4 The Council submitted a successful bid for £900k Phase 1b Local Authority Delivery (LAD) grant, which is part of the Government's "Green Homes" fund. DCC will also receive an additional direct grant award of £1.4million from Phase 2 funding. A project is being established with Derby Homes and a contractor/installer to be appointed to retro-fit 250 council, leasehold, and privately owned and rented homes in Derby by December 2021.

Other significant implications

- 10.1 **The Council Plan 2019-23: A City of Health and Happiness.** The provision of good quality affordable housing is essential to good health and well-being.

This Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy acts to promote, encourage and, where necessary, enforce the improvement and better use of existing private sector housing in Derby.

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Olu Idowu	04.02.2021
Finance	Amanda Fletcher	04.02.2021
Service Director(s)	David Fletcher	15.02.2021
Report sponsor	Rachel North	17.02.2021
Other(s)	Ian Fullagar	03.02.2021

Background papers:	
List of appendices: Appendix 1	Draft: Private Housing Renewal policy 2021-2030