

Report of Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

Report to Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Board

Date: 30th October 2012

Subject: Update on Locality Approach to Private Sector Housing Regulation and Empty Homes

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| Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): | No |
| Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration? | Yes |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-In? | No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number: | No |

Summary of main issues

1. Safer, Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board's April 2012 report into the private rented sector recommended a targeted locality approach to regulation in the private rented sector to compliment the existing city wide arrangements.
2. The Executive Board has allocated £1m per annum over the next three years, subject to continued receipt of the New Homes Bonus, to support the development and implementation from April 2012 of locality working arrangements for the private rented sector and empty homes work.
3. Progress has been made in developing a staffing structure to deliver the new working arrangements alongside potential capital streams such as funding Compulsory Purchase Orders and providing a recyclable loans fund.
4. Consultation with the Council's Environmental Locality teams is underway to agree target areas and discussions are also underway with Registered Social Landlords, ALMOs and Private Landlord Associations to agree a joined up approach.

Recommendations

5. Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Board is requested to note the progress made against recommendation 1 from the Safer, Stronger Communities Scrutiny report into the Private Rented Sector (2012)

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Board on progress against recommendation 1 of the Safer Stronger Communities scrutiny enquiry into Private Rented Sector Housing.
- 1.2 Recommendation 1 was that the Executive Board
 - 1.2.1 supports the principle of adopting a more proactive and targeted integrated management approach in addressing those areas of the city that have greater housing and environmental needs and
 - 1.2.2 requests the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to work closely with the Housing Regulation Team and Locality to begin developing this approach based upon the existing locality working model and neighbourhood planning principles of working collaboratively with other key council services, partners and landlords to maximise and target resources effectively and
 - 1.2.3 requests the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to identify potential “hot spot” areas of the city to undertake a pilot of this approach and
 - 1.2.4 requests the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to report back progress to the Executive Board and Scrutiny Board within the next six months on implementing the above

2 Background information

- 2.1 The Safer Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board carried out an investigation into Private Rented Sector in 2011 and published its report in April 2012.
- 2.2 The Board made a number of recommendations which were endorsed by the Executive Board. One general progress report have been given to the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Board.
- 2.3 The report noted that existing arrangements were demand led and at a city wide level in regulating the private rented sector and tackling empty homes. The report also noted that this approach had enabled the Council to address its statutory duties to regulate standards in the private rented sector and in mandatory licensing. The Board also noted the positive work done a city wide level to return empty homes back into use.
- 2.4 However, One of the report’s conclusions was that a locality approach to regulatory and empty homes activity linking up with existing locality working arrangements would compliment existing city wide arrangements and have a greater impact in priority areas of the city.
- 2.5 The Board requested a specific update on this recommendation after 6 months.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 On 5th September 2012 the Executive Board approved a package of measures for investment in Housing over the next three years. Within this package £1.5m was set aside for private sector housing from the New Homes Bonus received by the Council. Of this £1.5m, £1m per annum over the three year period, subject to the continued receipt of New Homes Bonus, was allocated to the development of measures to tackle private rented sector regulatory and empty homes work in localities. The funding will be available from April 2012.
- 3.2 The funding will be split between developing a team of officers to work in targeted localities and capital measures such as funding for Compulsory Purchase Orders and recyclable loans for improving conditions within private rented housing.
- 3.3 A budget has been drawn up to reflect the above proposals and a staffing structure is set to be approved by the Director in November 2012. Current operating procedures are also being reviewed alongside the development of the staffing proposals. Whilst officers must continue to work within existing legal regulations it is the intention to move cases more quickly through to conclusions in order to make a difference.
- 3.4 Discussions have taken place and are continuing to take place with the three Environment Locality Managers so that work can be coordinated in agreed target areas. Discussions have also begun with both Registered Social Landlords and ALMOs within the targeted areas so that there can be a joined up approach to improving areas.
- 3.5 A pilot is underway within Burmantofts albeit without the additional resources which will not be available until April. But it will allow officers to test the approach and prepare for full operations from April 2012.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.5 Consultation is underway at a number of levels, with staff regarding the new structures and ways of working, with partners about joined up approaches and with private landlord associations to engage their support.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 The proposals should enable housing conditions in the poorest quality private rented stock to be improved. This will help contribute to improving the lives of those most in need.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The proposals are in line with the Council's policies and priorities. Areas for activity will be chosen inline with the Council's existing priority areas. The work will also assist the Council to achieve one of its top 25 targets of returning empty homes into use.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 £1m per annum has been made available by the Executive Board for the next three years. This will be subject to continued receipt of the New Homes Bonus. However the work will increase opportunities for the Council to earn New Homes Bonus.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 Officers will continue to operate within their existing powers, although there will be quicker processes put in place. Discussions are underway with the Council's Legal Services as this new approach may lead to increased numbers of compulsory Purchase Orders.
- 4.5.2 The Executive Board decision was eligible to call in. The staffing restructure proposals will be eligible for call in.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 The Council's normal risk management procedures would be applied. Staff working alone externally have strict guidelines for their protection.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The provision of funding by the Executive Board has meant that the Scrutiny Board recommendations can be acted upon with effect from April 2012.
- 5.2 Work is underway with partners to develop the locality working model. The approach will not be fully successful without support from partners.
- 5.3 The pilot underway in Burmantofts will support the development of the locality working model.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Board is requested to note progress made against recommendation 1 from the Safer, Stronger Communities Scrutiny report into the Private Rented Sector (2012)

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 Safer, Stronger Communities Inquiry report into the Private Rented Sector (2012)

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.