

**PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STAFFING – TARGETED PROPERTY SURVEY**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The report seeks Cabinet approval to appoint a full time officer for a period of 12 months to carry out a targeted survey of specific areas of private rented accommodation in the Borough. The purpose of the survey will be to ascertain the extent of poor housing conditions, identify houses in multiple occupation and overcrowding.
- 1.2 Nationally, the private rented sector has doubled from 2.0 to 4.1 million between 1996 and 2012 and so has the dependency on it. This has resulted in a shortage of accommodation in this sector with residents accepting lower standards in their search for a home. In Rushmoor, we have seen a similar increase in demand, and this far outstrips supply. This is due to a combination of increased property prices, lack of affordability and migration to the area.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The private sector housing team has seen an increase in the number of requests for assistance from residents who are concerned about overcrowding, safety and disrepair. Formal enforcement action is always a last resort as our primary aim is to work with landlords to improve conditions. However, over the last year we have served 5 statutory notices requiring improvement or closure of properties where Landlords have not engaged with the Council to improve conditions.
- 2.2 The Department of Communities and Local Government issued guidance to Local Authorities in March 2015 called Improving the Private Rented Sector and Tackling Bad Practice. This document recommends that Councils develop a pro-active strategy to deal with poor quality housing to include:-
- a door-to-door survey
  - the consideration of a selective licensing scheme
  - a black list of rogue landlords
  - the introduction of fixed penalty notices for less serious housing offences.

It is anticipated that the above will help to identify landlords and properties that fall below the required standard. In order for Rushmoor to consider using these powers locally we need to have a full and detailed understanding of the condition of our housing stock in specific areas.

### **3.0 PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 In order to establish the level of disrepair, number of houses in multiple occupation and overcrowding in the private rented sector, a door to door survey is required in the worst affected areas.
- 3.2 The private sector housing team will need additional resources to enable this work to be undertaken.
- 3.3 A corporate approach will need to be taken to look at the progress of the survey. This will mean that a group will be formed to include representatives from Private Sector Housing, Planning, Benefits, Building Control and Council Tax who will meet on a regular basis to discuss issues raised, actions needed and outcomes achieved.

### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The cost of employing a qualified person on a temporary contract for a twelve-month period to carry out the survey will be between £30,837 and £38,030 including on costs. The existing private sector housing team will support any additional actions and enforcement coming out of the survey.

### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 A survey of the private rented sector in Rushmoor will enable targeted work to make improvements to enable residents to live in homes that are safe and are not overcrowded. The survey will provide reliable base line data to:-
- Consider ways in which we can use the proposed new powers to deal with rogue landlords
  - Identify, improve and make houses in multiple occupation safe and well managed.
  - Ensure that properties are licensed as appropriate.
  - Consider the introduction of a selective licensing scheme.
  - Improve disrepair in the private rented sector.
  - Reduce overcrowding in the private rented sector.

### **6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 This report is seeking approval to recruit a full time qualified person to work within the private sector housing team on a temporary contract for a twelve month period.

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