

Appendix 2

RUSHMOOR BOROUGH COUNCIL

Private Sector Housing Survey Report

March 2016 – March 2017

David Roberts



Contents

	Executive Summary
1	Introduction
2	Aims of the survey
3	Methodology
4	Recording of information
5	Results
6	Area 1
7	Area 2
8	Area 3
9	Area 4
10	Area 5
11	Area 6
12	Area 7
13	Area 8
14	Area 9
15	Area 10
16	Area 11
17	Area 12
18	Conclusion
19	Appendices

Executive Summary

Background

Rushmoor has seen an increase in demand for accommodation in the private rented sector similar to that experienced nationally. This may be attributed to:

- The increase in property prices;
- The lack of affordable properties;
- Increase in the cost of renting locally and;
- Increase of migration to the area.

This rise in demand has meant that local residents have accepted a lower standard of accommodation. Because of this, we have seen an increase in the number of requests for assistance with disrepair and overcrowding.

Methodology

To help us to get a better idea of the condition of our private housing stock, Cabinet gave approval to appoint a surveyor on a twelve-month contract to carry out a targeted door-to-door survey. This is in line with guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued in March 2015 - "Improving the Private Rented Sector and Tackling Bad Practice."

The survey started at the end of March 2016 and focussed on 12 areas, which were pre-determined taking into account the indices of multiple deprivation, local population, age of residents, local knowledge and history of complaints about poor housing conditions.

Results

Within the 12 areas, 6,447 properties were visited and 161 hazards were identified using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The main hazards identified were damp, excess cold and fire safety. A total of 2.3% of the properties surveyed contained at least one hazard.

The survey also identified smaller, non-licensable Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs), a record of which has been kept in expectation of the proposed changes in the mandatory licensing scheme due to come in to force in October 2017. It was noticeable that the results of the survey varied between areas, with more issues of disrepair identified in Aldershot and the identification of smaller HMOs identified in Farnborough.

Conclusion

The survey achieved its aims in identifying issues of disrepair, overcrowding and HMOs. The actions taken by the private sector housing team has had a positive effect on the health and wellbeing of residents by identifying those in need of

assistance. The survey provided the opportunity to gather intelligence on property occupation that can be utilised in the future and it identified properties in poor condition owned by well-known landlords in the borough.

The survey also identified matters of interest to other teams within the council, such as food safety and environmental health.

1. Introduction

Nationally, the private rented sector has doubled from 2 to 4.1 million between 1996 and 2012 and dependency on it has increased. This has resulted in a shortage of accommodation, with residents accepting lower standards in their search for a home. Locally, we have seen a similar increase in demand, which is outstripping supply. This is partly due to an increase in property prices, a lack of affordability and migration to the area.

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.

In March 2015, The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued guidance to local authorities called “Improving the Private Rented Sector and Tackling Bad Practice.” The guidance recommended that councils develop a proactive strategy to deal with poor quality housing to include:

- A door to door survey
- Consideration of a selective licensing scheme
- A blacklist of rogue landlords
- Introduction of fixed penalty notices for less serious housing offences

In November 2015, members of Cabinet gave approval for a surveyor to be appointed on a 12-month contract to carry out a targeted survey of private sector properties within the borough.

The surveyor joined the council on 14 March 2016 and after a two-week induction period, the survey started on 29 March 2016.

2. Aim of the Survey

The aim of the survey was to gather more information about the condition of private housing in Rushmoor by:

- Identifying HMOs
- Identifying disrepair and poor housing conditions
- Identifying overcrowding

The information will be used to drive up housing standards, identify properties in need of intervention and to find and prevent rogue landlords from operating in Rushmoor.

3. Methodology

A door-to-door survey of 12 pre-determined areas was carried out (Appendix 1). These areas were selected based on local knowledge and use of the indices of multiple deprivation. Three separate visits were made to each address to gather information and if no response was received on the third visit, a view was taken as to whether further investigation was needed or whether no further action was necessary.

The purpose of the survey was explained to residents and this prompted them to provide information about the status of other properties in their road or locality. This information was recorded and where appropriate further investigations were carried out.

Different forms of questioning were used to gather the information and these were adapted depending on the circumstances.

Questions asked by the surveyor included:

- Do you own the property or are you renting?
- Do you know who your landlord is?
- How many people live at the property?
- Do you have any issues with disrepair in your home?
- Do you have hot and cold water?
- Do you have heating in the property and does it work?
- Do you have a working smoke detector?
- Do you know if you have a gas safety certificate?
- Are there any issues in the property that are of concern to you?

The surveyor used the doorstep intervention to take a view on the general condition of the property, for example:

- Was there a handrail to the staircase?
- Were there smoke detectors visible?
- Was there any visible disrepair?
- Did the amount of shoes in the hallway correspond with the number of tenants?

If the surveyor was concerned about the property, he asked the occupier if he could carry out an internal inspection.

Inspections in the original 12 survey areas were finished at the end of February 2017 and so for the last few weeks visits were carried out on living accommodation above takeaways and restaurants within the borough. The Immigration Service and our food team identified these premises.

Revisits to properties in Aldershot were carried out and this uncovered a known, licensed HMO that was having extensive building works carried out with the tenants in situ. This meant that tenants were living on a building site with no cooking facilities, limited washing facilities, dangerous fire hazards along with a cockroach infestation. This was passed to the team and resulted in a Prohibition Order under the Housing Act 2004 being served, prohibiting the use of the property for living and sleeping whilst the works were being carried out. This Prohibition Order has recently been revoked and the property is in good order throughout.

4. Recording of Information

Information on the type of property i.e. semi-detached, detached or terraced was recorded along with the type of occupancy i.e. single family, owner-occupier or HMO and the information was recorded on the database.

If a more detailed inspection was required, an inspection sheet was used and the information transferred on to the database.

If further investigations were required by the private sector housing team, an email was sent to the “privatehousing” in-box. This meant that there was a record of how many cases were passed to the officers for action.

The inspection of accommodation above restaurants and takeaways was recorded on a hard copy form, which was then attached to the property address on the database.

5. Results

6,447 properties were visited and of these, a response was received from 5,777 on the first visit, 266 after a second visit and 31 after the third visit. A total of 80 cases were passed to the private sector housing team for further investigation. There were 140 properties where no response was received and a number of these were due to problems with communication where a different language was being spoken by members of the household. A Nepalese speaker from our customer services unit (CSU) helped to carry out revisits in areas 1 to 3 where there were language difficulties. Due to service pressures, this service was not available after area 3 and therefore several properties remain uninspected. The private sector housing officers, with the use of a translation service, will make re-visits to these properties. Of the properties where no response was received, an external assessment was made as to whether the property should be recorded as in good condition or in need of further investigation. Photographic evidence was taken of the property and details

passed to the private sector housing team for their decision as to whether a further visit was required.

It was found that properties in Aldershot had more issues with disrepair, whilst in Farnborough there were smaller HMOs. This is in line with existing knowledge and was therefore no real surprise.

The survey identified 161 separate hazards and a graph showing the numbers and type of hazards is in Appendix 2 at the end of this report. This does not show the exact number of properties that contained hazards as some properties contained multiple hazards. However, looking at the number identified compared to the number of properties visited, the figure suggests that less than 2.3% of properties contained a hazard, which is less than the national average.

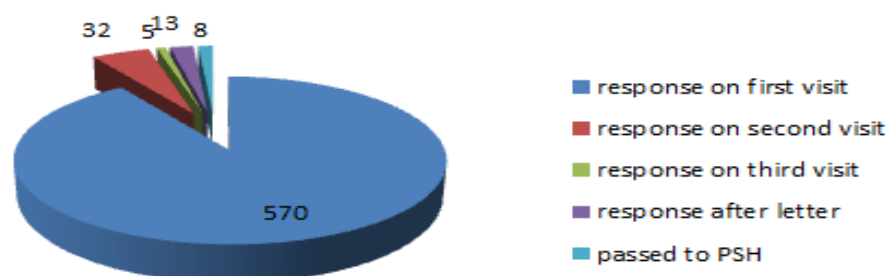
The most common hazards identified during the survey were dampness, excess cold and fire safety.

The survey did not identify any additional licensable HMOs. However, it has uncovered many smaller HMOs that do not need a licence but do require works to make them safe and suitable for the occupants. This is especially the case in areas 7 and 8, which cover Mayfield Road and Caswell Close (former GLC estate). This was expected as these properties have large rooms and are cheap to purchase as buy to let in comparison to other properties in Farnborough.

The investigation of accommodation above restaurants and takeaways has been slow due to difficulties in gaining access. A number of issues were identified regarding fire safety and possible overcrowding and these have been passed to the private sector housing team for further investigation.

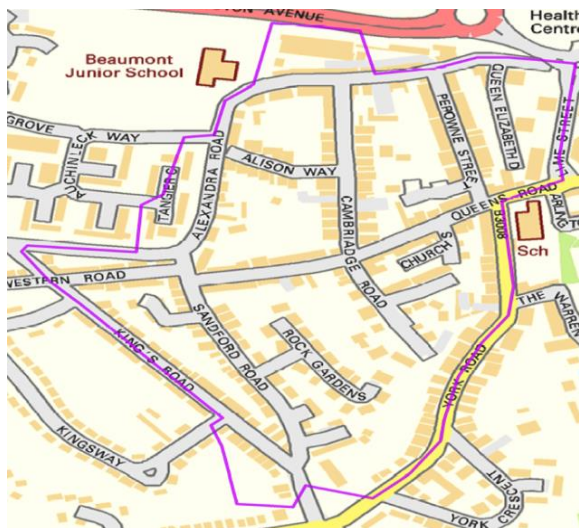
In order to demonstrate the findings of each area of the survey there is a breakdown of the visits carried out and details of what was found.

6. Breakdown of Visits Area 1



The survey started in area 1, which gave the surveyor the opportunity to experience and develop surveying and questioning techniques. As expected, this was one of the

least challenging areas with no serious issues of disrepair. The area contained a small number of large licensed HMOs.



The survey area was centred around Cambridge Road and moved towards central Aldershot along Queens Road

Out of 628 properties visited in this area, eight cases were referred to the private sector housing team. A number of these were known HMOs, where there were minor issues of disrepair.

A property in Perowne Street had a defective window at the front and the occupant had attempted to repair it. The repair had left a large gap to the top of the pane of glass, which had the potential to cause an excess cold hazard.

Several attempts were made to gain access to the property without success and so the case was referred to the private sector housing team. Further investigations were carried out and it was found that the occupant was an elderly man who said that he was the owner of the property. The private sector housing team found that this was not the case and the man was a sitting tenant. The property had been sold by the tenant's siblings without his knowledge. This highlighted the difficulties in trying to determine ownership of properties and that thorough checks, such as land searches are important.

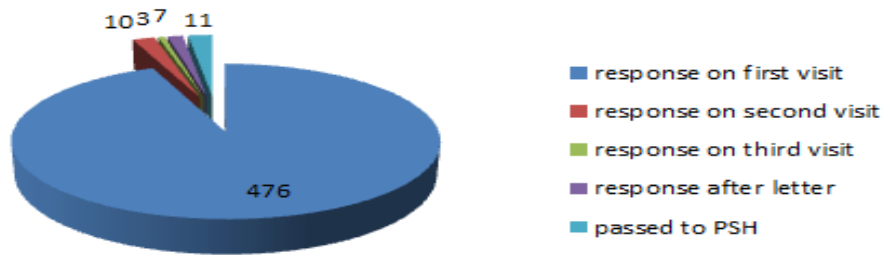
The new owners of the property confirmed that they were prepared to carry out the works to repair the window, but the tenant wanted to do it himself.

The tenant was signposted to agencies that could provide practical help or financial assistance but he was not interested. This highlighted that some residents are fiercely independent and do not want the intervention of the council.

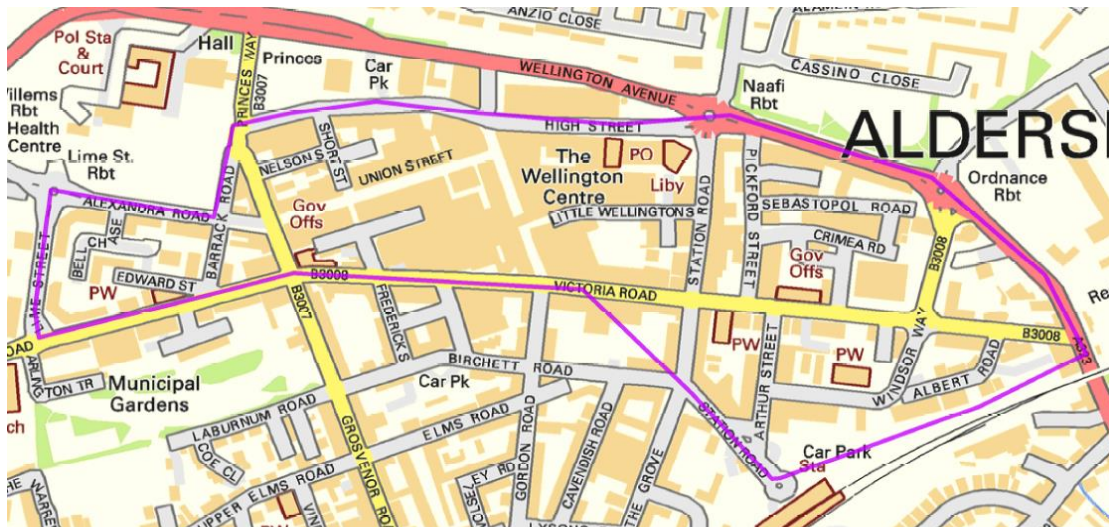


The repair carried out by the occupant was not effective and created an excess cold hazard.

7. Breakdown of visits Area 2



At the end of April, the survey moved in to area 2, in central Aldershot from the bottom end of Grosvenor Road, along the High Street to Victoria Road and Station Road. This area contained a number of residential properties above commercial units that have been converted into self-contained flats or shared accommodation along with stand-alone blocks of flats, such as, Enterprise House and Pickford House. A number of HMOs are contained in the area that the private sector housing team are aware of including Star Yard, a development located in Victoria Road. This was an HMO occupied by more than 20 residents, but is now subject to planning enforcement action to remove it from use.

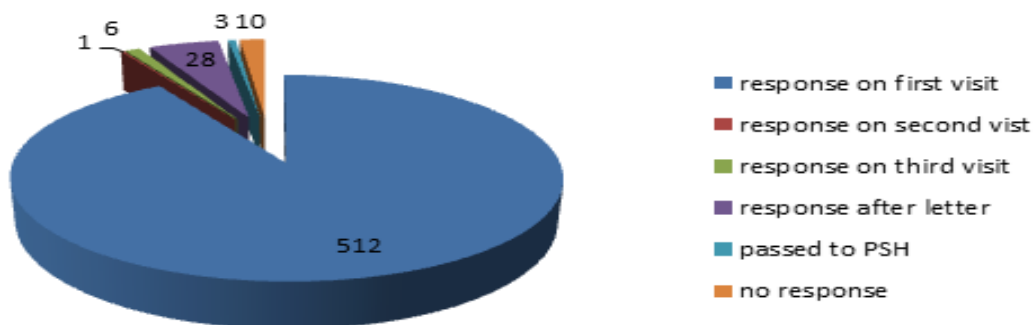


There were 11 properties in this area referred to the private sector housing team, of which several had inadequate fire safety measures. A property in Union Street had water leaking onto the electrics and another had wires running from the electrical supply to the commercial premises on the ground floor. Wires were trailing across the main entrance stairway and in the living room there were exposed and dangerous electrical cables.

The most serious case of disrepair and overcrowding found in this area was residential accommodation above a commercial unit at 5a Wellington Street. The disrepair and fire safety risks were of such a serious nature that we had to call Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service for assistance, as it was felt there was an imminent risk to health and safety due to poor electrical installations combined with a lack of fire safety measures.

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service used their powers under Article 31 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to prohibit the use of the property for the purpose of living and sleeping with immediate effect. This case highlighted the benefit of effective partnership working to keep our residents safe and the use of all available legislation, and not just the powers that we have under Housing Act 2004.

8. Breakdown of visits Area 3



At the beginning of May, the survey moved in to the Cargate Avenue area of Aldershot and along one side of Grosvenor Road. This area was found to be predominantly owner occupied with some large HMOs that the private sector housing team are aware of. In Grosvenor Road, Lysons Road and Upper Elms Road the type of properties changed to smaller two-storey terraced houses, the majority of which were found to be owner occupied.

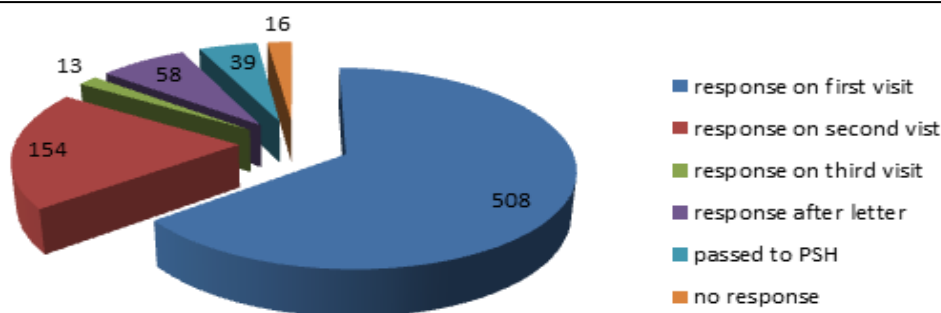


Information was received that a property at 9 Cargate Grove had been empty for over two years. The details of this property were passed to the strategy and enabling team for further investigation.

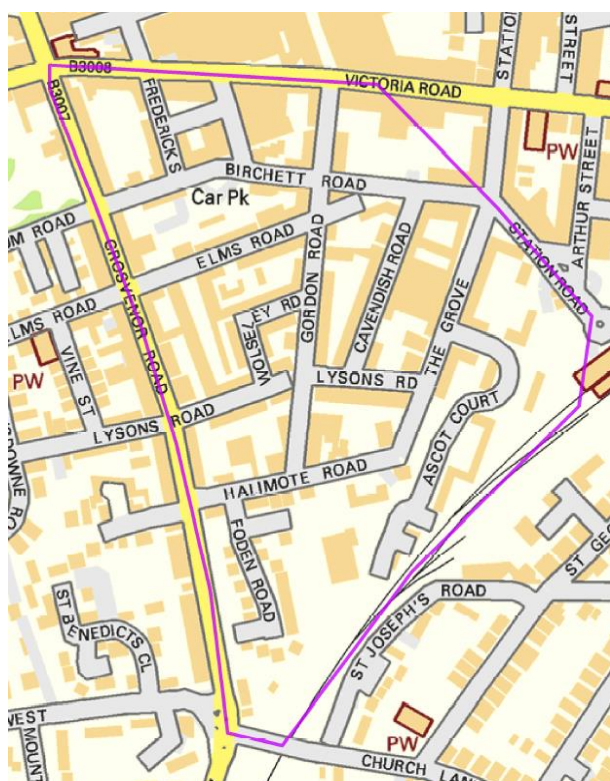
Minor issues of disrepair were found in this area, mainly around fire safety and missing handrails, the majority of which were found in the accommodation above the commercial units in Grosvenor Road.

There were no major issues of disrepair found in this area, but three properties had minor disrepair issues that were referred to the private sector housing team for further investigation.

9. Breakdown of visits Area 4



Area 4 had the largest number of properties to survey, 788. This included a number of purpose built self-contained flats in Ascot Court and Stratfield House. In Gordon Road, Lysons Road and Halimote Road the properties were mainly two-storey terraced.



A high proportion of residents living in the area were Nepalese, split equally across the owner occupied and privately rented sectors.

A number of issues of disrepair were found in this area. Damp and mould was a problem in some of the top floor flats in Ascot Court. Although the properties were built in the 1990's, poor construction and materials such as softwood window frames have led to much of the disrepair experienced by residents

Some of the disrepair found at Ascot Court highlighted the difficulties in achieving reasonable time effective repairs when there are split responsibilities between owner-occupiers, tenants, agents and management companies involved in a complicated management chain. There was unwillingness for parties to take responsibility for repairing the defects and it took a considerable amount of time and effort on the part of the council to achieve a resolution.

This area also revealed a number of cases of overcrowding and led to the service of a Prohibition Order on a property in Lysons Road. A further Prohibition Order was served to stop the use of an attic as sleeping accommodation in Wolsey Road.

In Birchett Road, a property had a sky dish supported only by the cables, which was directly above a public footpath. Further investigation led us to find multiple issues at the property including fire safety measures and unsafe windows where panes of glass were hanging from the frames and there was a risk of this falling onto the car park below. These issues have now been resolved.

This proved to be a challenging area that took almost two months to complete. This was due to the number of properties, the number of defects found and the language issues with the high proportion of Nepalese households encountered.

Recent events have highlighted that one of the limitations of the survey is that the information gathered can change. A property in Gordon Road was owner-occupied when visited during the survey and months later, we received information that it was overcrowded. Our investigations revealed that the property had been sold three months earlier and the new owners had let it out to seven individuals as an HMO. There was a lack of fire safety measures and inadequate amenities. This led to a Prohibition Order being served restricting the number of people who can live there.

This shows that the survey was a snapshot in time showing tenure, condition and type of occupation in the borough, and how quickly things can change.

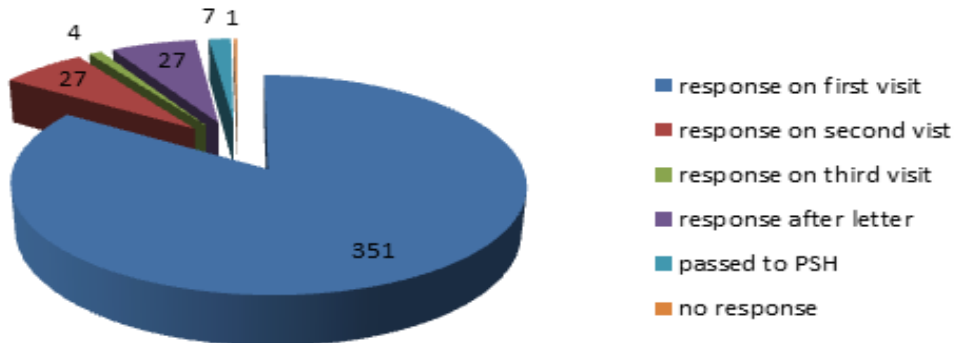


Sky dish supported by wires

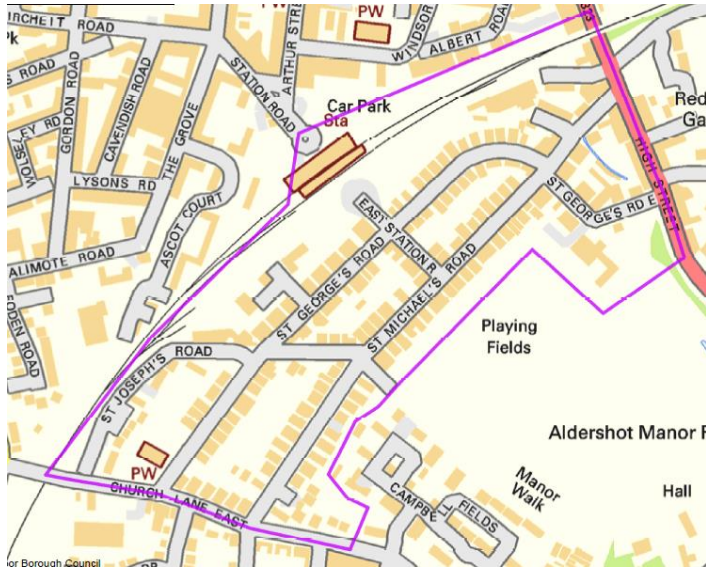


The wood at the bottom of the top sash loose, which meant that the glass was just hanging in the frame with a risk of it falling out

10. Breakdown of visits Area 5



In mid-August, the survey moved into St Georges Road and St Michaels Road in Aldershot. This is a residential area consisting of 1920-30s two storey properties. A number of non-licensable two-storey HMOs were found with insufficient fire precautions.



A property in St Michaels Road was an unlicensable two-storey HMO, occupied by five elderly Nepalese tenants, which had missing spindles on the staircase. Another property in St Michaels Road had damp and mould issues on the first floor ceilings which was due to a missing flashing at the abutment of the roof and chimneystack. All cases were forwarded to the private sector housing team for further action.

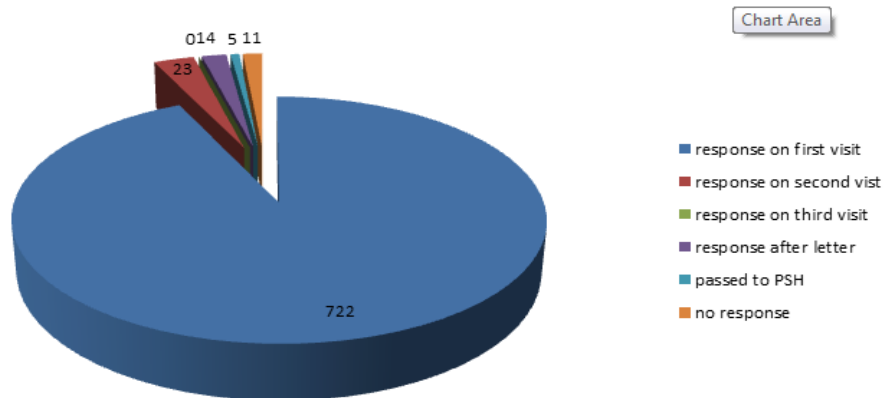
Some of the gardens in this area were large with some outbuildings that aroused suspicion that there may be an issue with “beds in sheds”. However, on investigation, this was not the case.



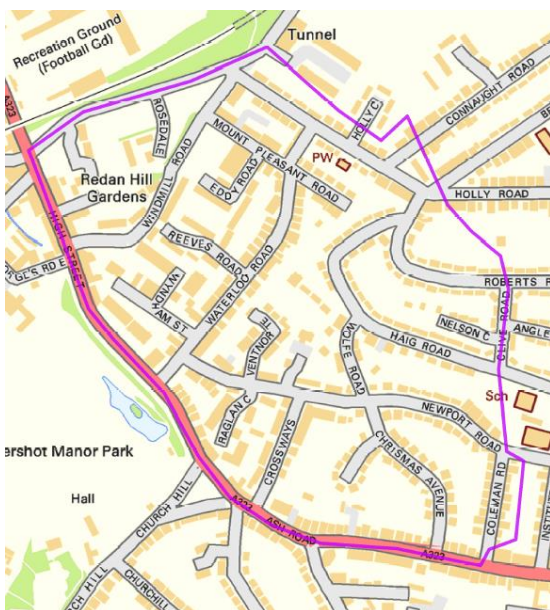
While carrying out the survey in this area a resident raised an issue about parking in St Michaels Road. There are two HMOs opposite each other and the tenants use the limited on street parking that is controlled by the use of resident parking permits.

The resident was advised that under housing legislation we have no powers to deal with on-street parking but referred the matter to the parking team for advice.

11. Breakdown of visits Area 6



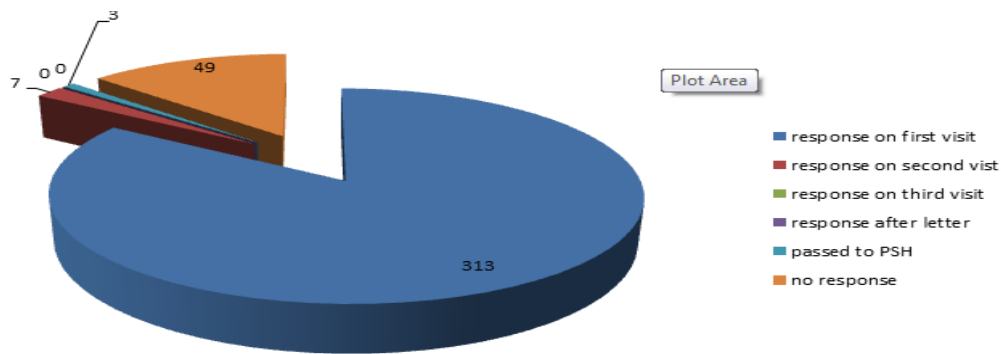
By mid-September, the survey moved in to area 6 at the bottom end of Aldershot High Street and along Ash Road, including the side roads to the north side of this area.



There was some accommodation above commercial properties in the High Street and some larger properties along Ash Road.

Minor issues of disrepair were found and five properties were referred to the private sector housing team. One property in Christmas Place was occupied as a HMO and was overcrowded with inadequate fire safety measures. This property was managed by an agency and once the owner was aware he gave notice to the agency and the tenants in order to bring the property back into single-family use.

12. Breakdown of visits Area 7



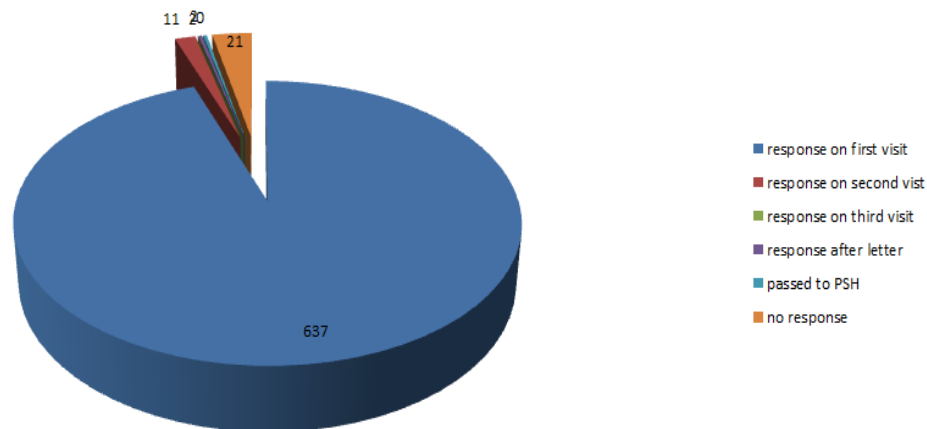
In October, the survey moved from Aldershot to Farnborough, starting on the former GLC estate, centred around Mayfield Road



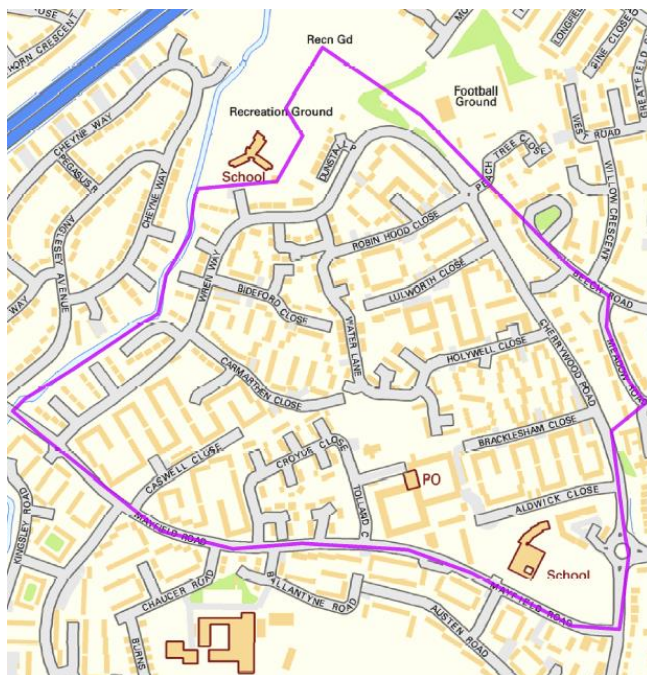
The majority of properties in this area are ex-local authority/housing association with large rooms and relatively inexpensive to purchase, making them ideal for the buy to let market. Some were found to be let out to a number of tenants as HMOs. Whilst these smaller HMOs do not currently require a property licence, they still have to meet requirements for amenities, repairs and fire safety.

Two properties in Chaucer Road and Austen Road were referred to the private sector housing team due to fire safety deficiencies including lack of smoke detection and fire doors. The properties have now been re-visited and all of the necessary works have been carried out satisfactorily.

13. Breakdown of visits Area 8



Area 8 was a continuation of area 7, on the former GLC estate covering Mayfield Road and Caswell Close. The area contained similar properties with similar problems, two properties in Caswell Close were referred to the private sector housing team, one for fire safety issues and the other as the front window was boarded up

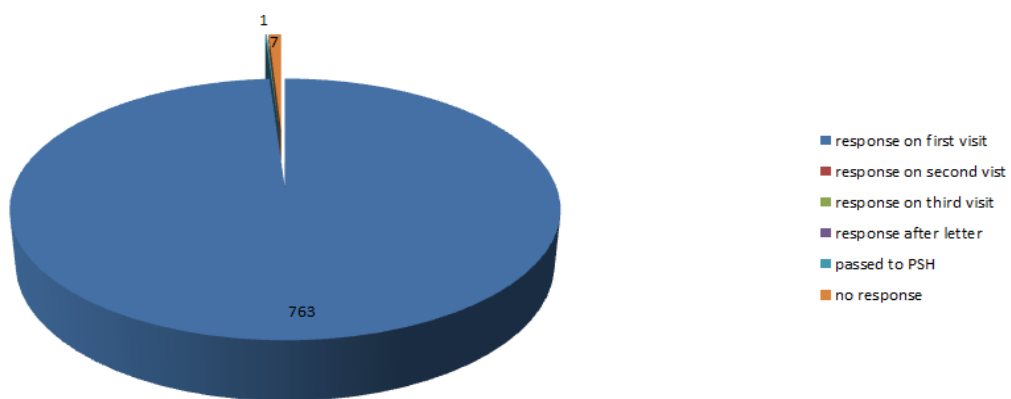


The property was owner-occupied, and the owner could not afford to carry out the repairs, so the private sector housing team gave advice on the financial assistance available to facilitate repairs. This issue remains un-resolved, as the owner of the property is unsure of what action they wish to take.

Five properties were identified in this area as non-licensable HMOs. There is a proposal under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to extend the mandatory licensing scheme to include one and two-storey properties with five or more people living as two or more households. This is likely to come in to force in October 2017.

A record of all known properties found meeting these criteria since starting the survey has been kept to assist in future roll out of the new licensing scheme. The Government is due to issue guidance to local authorities on the proposed measures by October 2017.

14. Breakdown of Visits Area 9



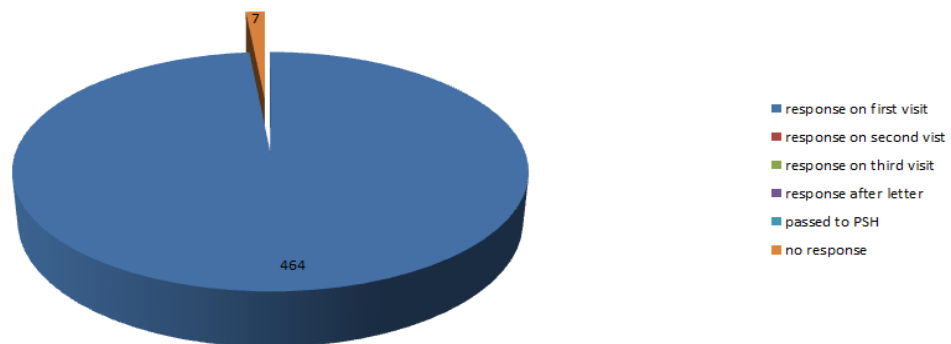
In November, work in area 9 commenced around Sandhill and the Grange Estate near to Farnborough Sixth Form College. Primarily the area is made up of two-storey semi-detached properties, some of which are ex local authority/housing association.



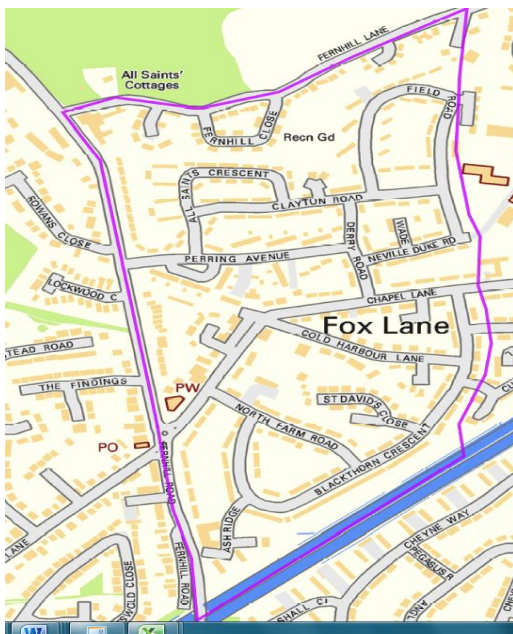
As with the other areas of Farnborough, three non-licensable HMOs were identified. However, most of these were in good condition.

One property in Beech Road was referred to the private sector housing team for further action as the heating was not working and a window to the front of the property was damaged. The landlord of the property was approached and agreed to do the works, which are currently underway.

15. Breakdown of visits Area 10



In December area 10 started, covering Fernhill Road and Chapel Lane in Cove.

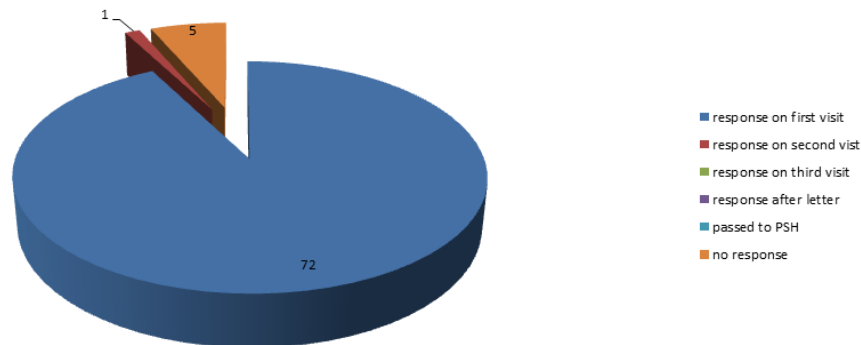


The area contained a mixed range of properties from large owner-occupied to smaller ex local authority/housing association.

As with other areas in Farnborough, seven non-licensable HMOs were found but no issues of disrepair were identified.

When the survey was nearly finished, a loose cast iron gutter pipe was found hanging from the flats above the shops on Fernhill Road. This was directly over a public footpath and a café that had tables and chairs outside. Immediate action was taken to contact the landlord of the flat to arrange for repairs to be carried out which have now been completed.

16. Breakdown of visits Area 11

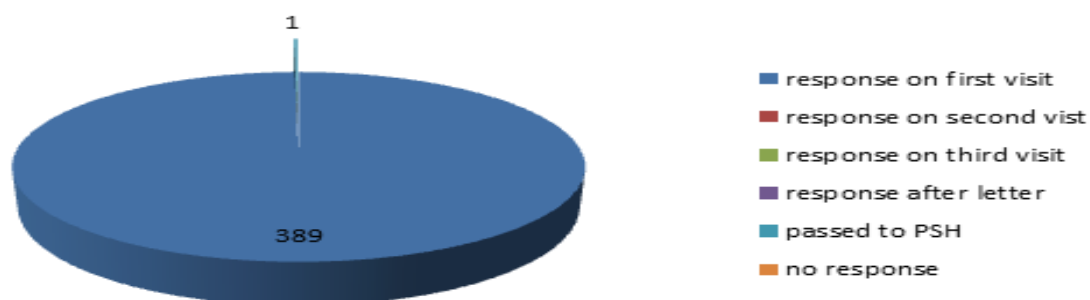


Visits in area 11 started at the beginning of January, this was the smallest area with just 78 properties.



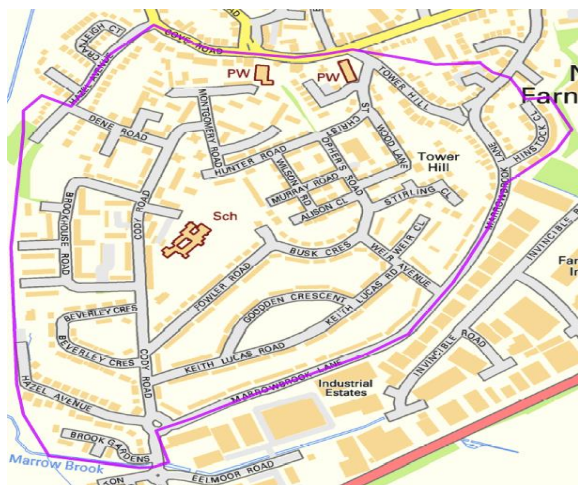
The area consisted mainly of ex local authority/housing association properties along with a number of smaller more recent developments. In Whetstone Road, there is a parade of shops with residential accommodation above; one non-licensable HMO was identified. Of the residential properties in this area, four out of five failed to respond to the survey. However, one of the properties eventually called to complain of odours from the extraction units of the takeaway below. This information was passed to the environmental health team to act upon.

17. Breakdown of Visits Area 12



In mid-January, we moved in to the final area of the survey. This centred on Cody Road, which is predominantly flats that are ex local authority/housing association properties, leading towards the Tower Hill area, which has more privately owner occupied properties.

There were a number of ex-military properties that used to belong to the RAE/DERA, which are owner-occupied or tenanted. The majority have been updated and have had central heating systems installed. However, two properties had not been modernised, with only an open fire available. The occupants of these properties were advised of their options dependent on whether they were owner-occupiers or tenants.



This area had fewer two-storey non-licensable HMOs than encountered in the other areas of Farnborough.

One issue that was passed to the private sector housing team was in relation to a HMO in Cody Road. The property was overcrowded, the flooring was in a poor condition, there was damp and mould and the fire door to the kitchen did not close

properly. The landlord is currently carrying out the required works and has reduced the number of occupants.

18. Conclusion

The original aims of the survey have been met. Numerous issues of disrepair and overcrowding have been reported and dealt with by the private sector housing team. From the resulting actions of the private sector housing team an immediate positive impact has been made on resident's health and well-being

The survey has provided intelligence on a number of smaller HMOs and this information can be utilised when the proposed changes to the mandatory licensing scheme take place.

Issues that were identified in relation to the functions of other areas of environmental health and housing and have been passed to food safety and environmental health for their action.

The survey showed the benefit of working closely with other agencies, such as the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, and the Immigration Service who work with us to improve housing conditions through identifying and dealing with poor quality housing.

19. Appendices

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Number of hazards identified throughout the survey

