

CABINET

Wednesday, 13 March 2019

EAST SUFFOLK PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY (REP1962)

<p>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</p> <p>1. In 2017 the Council adopted the East Suffolk Housing Strategy which set out joint ambitions for Housing, across Suffolk Coastal and Waveney. This high level strategy provides the overarching framework for all housing services. The Private Sector Housing Strategy is the more detailed review and plan for this service area. It identifies the challenges facing the sector, identifies what we have achieved to date and specific actions detailing how we will deliver solutions to the most pressing issues between now and 2023.</p> <p>2. The strategy also aligns policies relating to enforcement, empty homes and Renovation Grants in preparation for East Suffolk.</p>
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Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
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Wards Affected:	All Wards in the District
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Cabinet Member:	Councillor Chris Punt Cabinet Member for Housing
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Supporting Officer:	Teresa Howarth Principal Environmental Health Officer 01394 444206 teresa.howarth@eastsoffolk.gov.uk
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1 THE STRATEGY

- 1.1 The strategy is attached at Appendix A. The draft was published on the East Suffolk website and circulated to stakeholders including Landlords, Letting Agents, Health and Social Care professionals and internal partners.
- 1.2 The resulting comments have been reviewed and were largely supportive.

2 RENOVATION GRANT POLICY

- 2.1 Currently there are no Renovation Grants available across Waveney but Suffolk Coastal has an established policy which delivers financial assistance to qualifying owner occupiers who cannot afford to carry out essential works, first time buyers who take on renovation projects but have used all resources to purchase a property and landlords who are prepared to let at an affordable rent after works are completed. The new policy, set out in Appendix A to the strategy, builds on this model and makes several key changes.
- 2.2 The target standard on completion of grant aided works is that the property is free from significant hazards to health with no significant disrepair. Works to facilitate decluttering of a home are included, where supported by a social care or health worker. Hoarding is a problem that often requires long term support and there is very little funding available to support solutions.
- 2.3 The policy introduces a minor works grant to support works costing between £1,000 and £5,000 to help patients return home from hospital, support warm homes initiatives, and for flood defence works.
- 2.4 All owner occupied grants are linked to financial assessment and landlords' grants require the property to be let at an affordable rent and for the Council to have nomination rights.
- 2.5 There are conditions attached to the grant which require repayment if they are breached. These conditions are enforced for 5 years for minor works and 15 years for renovation grants, allowing recycling of funds. Consultees were concerned that the proposed 15 years was too long but as this is already a 5 year reduction on the policy that has been in place in Suffolk Coastal, it is proposed to keep the condition at 15 years but review grant take up after 12 months. Repaid grants provide funds for new grant applications and too short a period would lead to funds diminishing and the programme being unsustainable.

3 ENFORCEMENT POLICY

- 3.1 A new enforcement policy for Private Sector Housing has been written which clarifies for stakeholders how the service will balance education and enforcement to ensure actions protect residents without penalising responsible landlords. This policy forms Appendix B of the strategy.

4 EMPTY HOMES

- 4.1 The issue of long term empty homes is addressed in the policy and recognition is given to the need for additional resources to tackle this problem more comprehensively. In the meantime the East Suffolk Private Sector Housing team are producing a series of costed case studies to build up a better picture of the options available and recommend an approach most likely to deliver a long term empty home back into use.

5 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO EAST SUFFOLK BUSINESS PLAN?

5.1 The strategy aligns with the Vision in the East Suffolk Business Plan of improving the quality of life for those living in the District. By improving housing to meet the needs of residents, the three pronged approach of working with communities to make their housing safer and more suitable is met. This proposal also helps deliver the aims of the Housing and Health Charter.

6 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial reserves from repaid and recycled grants exist to support the new Renovation Grant policy; expenditure will be monitored as the grants are rolled out across East Suffolk to determine demand for this assistance and whether any amendments should be made to the policy to ensure it is focussed in the right areas.

6.2 There are no Governance issues associated with this strategy which will be implemented in accordance with the adopted East Suffolk Constitution.

7 OTHER KEY ISSUES

7.1 The strategy has been prepared with reference to the Council’s Equality Policy. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is included at Appendix B.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The draft strategy has been made available for consultation via the website and circulated to key stakeholders. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is included at Appendix B.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 The strategy is a live policy document that will be monitored and reviewed regularly. Further options that appear viable as an alternative approach to resolving key issues will be evaluated. Not having a strategy could lead to a loss of focus for the service area and a return to a service that is wholly responsive rather than proactively focussed on priority areas.

10 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

10.1 To formally adopt the Private Sector Housing Strategy and agree priorities for that service area to 2023.

<p>RECOMMENDATION</p> <p>That Cabinet adopt the Private Sector Housing Strategy and associated policies.</p>

APPENDICES	
Appendix A	Private Sector Housing Strategy
Appendix B	Equality Impact Assessment