



<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>3 June 2020</b>
<b>Part:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Private Sector Housing Strategy</b>
<b>Contact:</b>	Cllr Margaret Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing Lynne Hunt, Private Sector Housing Team Leader
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide members with an overview of the strategy development of the Private Sector Housing Strategy.</li> <li>2. To provide members with an update on the key priority areas for Private Sector Housing over the next four years.</li> </ol>
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. For Members to offer feedback on the four commitments set out in the strategy.
<b>Period for post policy/project review</b>	This strategy will be monitored annually by the service in conjunction with the wider Housing Service plan.
<b>Corporate objectives:</b>	<p>The Strategic Housing Service's responsibilities and activity in relation to the Private Rented Sector contributes to the following corporate objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean, safe and enjoyable environment</li> <li>• Building strong and vibrant communities</li> </ul>
<b>Implications:</b>	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>Failure to actively regulate the private sector could have financial implications for the council in relation to prevention of homelessness and in relation to pressures on temporary accommodation provision. Additionally undertaking enforcement action to improve the standards of the private rented sector will require sufficient staff resource and additional legal input, which is costly.</p>
<b>'Value for money' implications</b>	<p><u>Value for money</u></p> <p>Any income gained from activity related to regulating the private rented sector, is ring-fenced and must be retained for</p>

	expenditure within the general fund to deliver an effective private sector housing service.
Risk implications	Failure to effectively regulate and enforce in the private sector could have a reputational impact for the authority and result in poor quality accommodation in the private rental sector.
Community Impact Assessment	Attached at <i>Appendix 2</i>
Health and safety Implications	One of the key aspects of work with the Private Sector Housing (PSH) is to ensure that homes are safe to live in. Where problems with a health and safety implication are found in rented properties the landlord will be required to remedy these, or face enforcement action if they do not. This is guided by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-health-and-safety-rating-system-hhsrs-guidance">https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-health-and-safety-rating-system-hhsrs-guidance</a>
Consultees:	Natasha Beresford, Group Manager, Strategic Housing  Fiona Williamson, Assistant Director Housing  Mark Gaynor, Corporate Director Housing and Regeneration  Private Sector landlords and tenants
Background papers:	Appendix 1 – Private Sector Housing Strategy  Appendix 2 - Community Impact Assessment  Appendix 3 – Staff structure
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	Private Sector Housing (PSH)  The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)  Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)  Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)  Registered Providers (RP)  Building Research Establishment (BRE)

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. There is no statutory responsibility to deliver a Private Sector Housing (PSH) strategy, as a service there is a commitment to doing having one in place, as we feel it is important to provide structure and a clear overview of our approach to improving the PSH across Dacorum.

- 1.2. The purpose of this report is to provide members with an opportunity to provide comments on our draft Private Sector Housing Strategy. This new strategy will outline our key priorities to ensure we are offering a structured and consistent service, enabling household's access to suitable, affordable and secure housing in the borough. It is also felt that the strategy will provide clear guidance on the remit of the service and inform landlords and tenants appropriately.
- 1.3. We have continuously reviewed the transferring service, to ensure we are offering a structured and consistent service to allow households in the borough access to suitable, affordable and secure housing. It is important that the service is delivered with a balanced approach to providing advice, proactive engagement and only where necessary enforcement, as we recognise that the latter is a last resort and is resource intensive.

## **2. Context**

- 2.1. In November 2019, The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced additional grant funding. The Private Rented Sector Innovation and Enforcement Grant was made available to local authorities to support new, innovative, or targeted short-term initiatives to support the improvement of housing conditions and tackling rogue landlords.
- 2.2. The service submitted a bid in November 2019 to use this funding to commission a new stock condition report to support our service direction and implementation of the PHS strategy. Dacorum were successful and in January 2020 were awarded £69,017, being only 1 of 3 Councils from Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire to receive funding.
- 2.3. The council commissioned the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to deliver this area of work which was completed in April 2020. The new stock condition survey report and data, has been used to assist in the current understanding of the stock condition across Dacorum, reinforce our strategic direction, to assist with the implementation of this new strategy and the key focus for the service over the next four years.
- 2.4. The new data shows us there are 66,078 dwellings in Dacorum, 61% of which are owner occupied, 18% private rented and 21% social rented. Figures from the report estimate that there are 1,140 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) with an estimate of 234 that will require mandatory licensing. Dacorum currently have 89 HMO licenced and a further 36 applications pending.

## **3. Remit, Staffing and Resources**

- 3.1. The team continue to demonstrate that they are committed to ensuring that all Dacorum residents live in homes that are safe and meet the required standards, but also recognise most landlords want to be compliant and provide a good standard of home to their tenants.

The tables below, shows a small reflection of the team work comparison of work over the past two years. The data in the tables, shows in many areas the figures in 2019/2020 have as much as doubled compared to the 2018/2019, and how the service has increasing demands on the team.

Year	Description	Jun	Sept	Dec	Mar
2018-2019	Number of licensed HMOs (monthly)	43	41	43	47
2019-2020	Number of licensed HMOs (monthly)	50	62	78	89
Year	Description	Jun	Sept	Dec	Mar
2018-2019	Number of inspections/visits undertaken (quarterly)	15	87	28	25
2019-2020	Number of inspections/visits undertaken (quarterly)	42	57	67	68
Year	Description	Jun	Sept	Dec	Mar
2018-2019	Number of service requests received & response times (quarterly)	<b>Total = 48</b> 0 to 3 days = 36 4 to 10 days = 10 Unspecified = 0	<b>Total = 46</b> 0 to 3 days = 42 4 to 10 days = 2 Unspecified = 2	<b>Total = 42</b> 0 to 3 days = 38 4 to 10 days = 2 Unspecified = 2	<b>Total = 46</b> 0 to 3 days = 42 4 to 10 days = 2 Unspecified = 2
2019-2020	Number of service requests received & response times (quarterly)	<b>Total = 54</b> 0 to 3 days = 54 4 to 10 days = 0 Unspecified = 0	<b>Total = 58</b> 0 to 3 days = 53 4 to 10 days = 0 Unspecified = 5	<b>Total = 66</b> 0 to 3 days = 62 4 to 10 days = 1 Unspecified = 3	<b>Total = 100</b> 0 to 3 days = 94 4 to 10 days = 1 Unspecified = 3

3.2. Following publications, social media updates and promoting the service the team have received an increase in referrals, HMO applications, enforcement work, this entailing an increase in inspections and service requests.

3.3. The draft strategy has been available on our website for consultation and feedback from landlords, tenants, letting agents and other professional partners. All feedback received will be considered prior to the strategy being finalised.

#### 4. The commitments

Using feedback received to date on the service, along with relevant legislation and requirements, BRE stock survey data and the council's own data we have set out our four commitments for the new PSH Strategy. These are:

4.1. **Commitment 1:** We proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions across Dacorum's private housing sector. We recognise the importance of proactively engaging with landlords and tenants to address property condition and support remedial action.

4.2. **Commitment 2:** We will continue to work with partners, Landlords and Registered Providers to ensure that homes meet required standards so that residents can thrive in safe and clean environments. The service has found that through proactive engagement and liaison we have been able to

promptly resolve issues arising, without necessitating costly enforcement activity.

- 4.3. **Commitment 3:** We will work effectively to reduce the number of empty homes across the borough. The service is currently advertising a new 1 year fixed term post agreed as part of 2019/20 budget setting proposals, it is intended that this post will enable the service to deliver a focussed approach to empty homes, which cannot currently be resourced.
- 4.4. **Commitment 4:** We will tackle unlicensed HMOs across the borough. We will tackle unlicensed HMOs across the borough. By addressing unlicensed properties, we will build confidence within the local community and improve the standard of accommodation in the borough.

## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1. The outlined commitments will underpin this strategy and ultimately enable us to deliver our vision of: "Ensuring that private sector housing in Dacorum is always a safe and suitable housing option". Which we believe is pivotal to enabling us to deliver against the statutory requirements and start to prioritise key areas that are needed to improve the accommodation within this sector.
- 5.2. This reasserts the Council's corporate commitment to work with partners to prevent and tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, by helping increase the supply of affordable, decent rented homes in Dacorum.
- 5.3. The report informs members of the work that is on-going to regulate the service.
- 5.4. This draft document offer members an opportunity to provide comments on the Strategy document and proposed commitments.