

REPORT TO: CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING, 23 SEPT 2008

REPORT BY: ALAN CUFLEY HEAD OF COMMUNITY HOUSING

WRITTEN BY: ROY SCANLON, Housing Renewals Manager

SUBJECT: PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING
Stock Condition Report

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To inform the Cabinet Member of the findings of the Private Sector House Condition Survey and highlight the need for the city council to continue to financially support Private Sector Housing Renewal providing assistance for vulnerable residents to improve the condition and thermal comfort of their homes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. That the Cabinet Member notes the results of the comprehensive Private Sector House Condition Survey.
- b. That the Cabinet Member supports the continued use of innovative and accessible city council funded financial assistance packages to support Housing Renewal, Improvement and Refurbishment in the private sector.
- c. That the Cabinet Member welcomes the proposal to run a Winter Warmth Campaign for 2008/9 to offer advice and practical support to older residents to improve the thermal comfort of their homes.

3. BACKGROUND

The council is expected by the Government to conduct a Private Sector Stock Condition Survey every five years. The last survey of the private sector stock was carried out in 2003 and at his decision meeting in July 2007 the Executive Member for Housing approved the commissioning of a new stock condition survey.

Portsmouth has a high proportion of older housing stock (pre 1919), 46.1% against a national average of 24.9% together with an unusually high number of homes being terraced, 50.7% against the national average of 16.8%. It has a wide variety of types of homes in the private sector, from high rise flats to system built houses. All must be considered in the survey.

Consultants working for the council carried out a citywide House Condition Survey at the end of 2007 and have now produced their final report. The survey looked at dwelling age and type profiles, the condition of properties in terms of unfitness, disrepair, amenities, energy efficiency and compliance with the Housing, Health & Safety Rating system and the Decent Homes standard.

4. FINDINGS

The evidence from the survey confirms that the city of Portsmouth has a significant problem. Notably house conditions are below the national average in the private sector, that the number of non decent homes is substantially above the national average and that to rectify current poor house conditions £370m would be required.

The survey also looked at age profiles of occupants, their income, the availability of equity within owner occupied properties and the preferred methods of paying for repair of homes.

Importantly, some improvement has been made in terms of the level of unfitness. Over the last five years the number of unfit properties is down from 9.9% in 2003 to 7.4%, however, non-decent homes remains a significant problem and progress towards the PSA7 target of 70% of vulnerable people to live in decent homes by 2010/11 has become more challenging.

It is worthy of note that the number of failures under the Decent Homes standard (DHS) has increased since the Housing Health and Safety Rating System was introduced by the Government in 2006, replacing the fitness standard as criterion A in the DHS. The most common reasons for failure are energy efficiency and Category 1 hazards (a serious health and safety risk to the current occupier that must be mitigated by the city council if they become aware).

The survey indicates the link between condition problems and the age profiles of the head of household. It highlights that where those residents are over 65 years they are likely to be above the city average on all condition indicators. In addition residents under 25 years of age are showing as twice as likely to be suffering fuel poverty (spending more than 10% of their income on energy costs) than the city average.

Generally conditions in the private rented sector were worse than those in the owner occupied sector. However, in this growing sector of the market there has been a reduction in the number of unfit properties.

Further details of the survey can be found in the Executive Summary at appendix A.

5. HOUSING STOCK CONDITION

The significance of a well maintained, decent housing is well researched and established.

The city needs the housing stock to be fit for purpose for a number of reasons.

These include improved health and well being of residents, better economic conditions through a robust housing market and investor confidence. The impression of the city to visitors is also a factor.

Improvements to the fabric of the built environment also make a significant contribution to the ongoing regeneration of the city's older housing areas.

2005 Defra data shows that carbon emissions for Portsmouth are 1,277 thousand tonnes. Domestic accounts for some 398 thousand tonnes, the majority will be from buildings).

NI 186 – reducing carbon emissions: We have a new national indicator, which monitors the council on reducing carbon emissions for the whole LA area. This is also an LAA target.

6. WINTER WARMTH CAMPAIGN

The results from the survey highlight many issues, not least the poor levels of thermal comfort in the city's private sector housing, especially in vulnerable households and the link to non-decent homes.

Portsmouth also has, unfortunately, a much higher incidence of deaths amongst older people than the national average during the winter months. It is therefore been arranged to repeat the highly successful Winter Warmth Campaign that has run in previous years. Support in the form of advice, financial assistance and practical guidance will be available from the city council's Housing Renewal team as before. During 2007/08 the intervention of the team lead to carbon savings of 526 tonnes.

7. RESOURCES

Expenditure on private sector housing by the city council is made solely through the Housing Investment Programme with the latest programme for 2008/9 through to 2014/15 being approved on 22 July 2008.

The provisions for Private Sector Renewal within this programme are estimated at approximately £5.9m for 2008/09 decreasing to £5.1m for 2011/12. The Cabinet Member will note that the Regional Housing Board has provided £7.2m for the period 2008/11 in support of the programme recognising the significant contribution and the commitment to private housing improvement from the Council to date.

8. CONCLUSION

The findings of the private sector Home Condition Survey reinforce the view that the need to support private sector renewal has not diminished and the provisions of the council's Financial Assistance Policy for Private Sector Renewal are essential to enable our residents to live in decent, safe and fuel efficient homes.

Consequently, it remains extremely important for Members to continue to support the level of financial assistance to facilitate private sector housing improvement and renewal with the budget, currently under significant pressure.

It is equally important to continue to provide vulnerable, older residents with information about keeping warm and safe in the coming winter months.

9. CITY SOLICITORS COMMENTS / EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The City Solicitor is satisfied that it is within the Council's powers to approve the recommendations as set out.

As this report is within existing policy provisions an Equalities Impact assessment is not required.

10. SIGNING OFF THE REPORT

Signed.....
Alan Cufley Head of Community Housing

Dated.....

11. APPROVAL TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out above were approved / approved as amended / deferred / rejected by the Cabinet Member for Housing, on.....

signed.....

Councillor Steve Wylie
Cabinet Member - Housing