

Committee: Housing Board

Agenda Item

Date: 7 June 2016

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Title: Update on UDC's Well Homes Initiative

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Item for information

Summary

1. The report provides the Housing Board with an update of the Private Sector Housing work.

Recommendations

2. That the Housing Board acknowledges the Private Sector Housing work delivered and its contribution to the health and wellbeing agenda

Financial Implications

3. None

Background Papers

4. Uttlesford District Council Housing Strategy

Published Papers

5. The District Council Contribution to Public Health: A Time Of Challenge And Opportunity – The Kings Fund – 2015

Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	No communication/consultation has taken place
Community Safety	No direct impact on community
Equalities	No impact on equalities
Health and Safety	No impact on employee health and safety
Human Rights/Legal Implications	All intervention work is carried out in accordance with existing legislative framework and the Councils' enforcement policy
Sustainability	Enforcement work undertaken to sustain

	occupation of decent housing stock
Ward-specific impacts	No specific impact - information is available for all wards.
Workforce/Workplace	In house resource

Situation

7. There are 27,355 private sector dwellings (Census, 2011) in Uttlesford. These are made up from 22,746 owner occupied dwellings and 4609 dwellings owned by private landlords.
8. The average house price in Uttlesford is £450,300 compared to a regional average of 299,400. This is approximately 11 times the average income. This places more pressure on the rental market and drives up rental prices. As a consequence, increasing numbers of low income earners are being pushed into the lower end of the property rental market.
9. The Councils Environmental Health Service is responsible for the delivery of a range of services under the heading of 'Private Sector Housing'. These services are explained below along with the achievements delivered by the service in 2015/16.

Private Sector Housing Complaints

10. Under the Housing Act 2004, the Council have powers to control, minimise and prevent poor housing conditions. 29 potential hazards have been identified within the Act that can present a risk to an occupier or visitor to a dwelling these are rated into categories 1 to 5 (5 being the least hazardous).
11. Where category 1 hazards are identified the Council must take action to protect the health, safety and welfare of tenants, homeowners and the public. Typically, in the private rented sector this may result in formal action and works in default to remedy a defect if there is imminent risk to health & safety.
12. In 2015/16 the Environmental Health service investigated 88 complaints relating to poor housing. Of these, action was taken to remove 22 category 1 hazards. The work of the team is now being appraised using a Health Cost Calculator, development by the British Research Establishment (BRE) which to date calculates the savings of these interventions to the NHS and to society of over £40,000.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

13. The definition of HMO is provided Housing Act 2004. Large HMOs (3-storey or more with 5 or more occupants & share facilities) require a Mandatory HMO Licence, issued by the Environmental Health Service.
14. Each year the Council receives many complaints from persons living in HMOs regarding poor conditions and mismanagement. Due to the nature of the accommodation, HMOs are considered to be a higher risk and more likely to

present poor housing conditions. The Environmental Health Service has a duty to investigate complaints of poor standards and management and takes appropriate action against landlords to remedy the problem.

15. In 2015/16 the Environmental Health Service identified 7 HMOs requiring mandatory licensing.

Private Sector Landlords Forum

16. Locally and nationally some of the worst housing is in the private rented sector and the Council has recognised the need to work proactively with landlords and letting agents to achieve improvements. The Council organises a private sector landlord forum once a year and seeks to establish contacts through letting agencies and directly with landlords through emails and newsletters.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

17. The Council administers and provides DFGs allowing disabled people to live as comfortably and independent as possible in their own home. DFGs are known to reduce falls and reduce the need for additional nursing or social care. They also improve levels of independence, dignity, well-being, control, and autonomy in day-to-day self-management of disabled people.
18. Alongside the social improvements there are strong economic arguments in support of the service that are being increasingly recognised. Studies have shown that an adaptation of £3,000 leads to a saving to society of £16,400. The main savings arise from the reduced need for care home provision, reduced need for social care provision, reductions in hospital admissions and discharge (bed blocking) times.
19. In 2014 the funding allocation for DFGs has passed from central government to Essex County Council (ECC). Recently our funding has increased, although we continue to be one of the lowest funded in the country. We have brought this repeatedly to the attention of ECC, and are engaging with them in their County wide review of DFG delivery with a view to increasing our share proportionately.
20. Currently we operate in partnership with the Papworth Trust on matters relating to DFG delivery. However, we also recognise that the service can be improved and over the next 12 months we will be looking at how to do this. It is important to note, that we are not in isolation and as part of this review with are talking to neighbouring authorities and commissioning services at ECC.
21. In 2015/16 60 referrals were made from Occupational Therapists to Environmental Health DFG applications. Our income from ECC was £98,000, yet our DFG expenditure was £210,000. In 2016/17 our income from ECC will increase to £160,000.

Home Repair Assistance Grants (UHRAs)

22. The Council offers discretionary grant assistance to occupiers of dwellings and mobile homes to carry out essential repairs or improvements. Powers are given to

local authorities to provide this form of assistance under The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002.

23. All applicants need to be on a means tested benefit to receive the grant, which is up to £3,000 or up to £5,000 in the case of mobile homes where thermal insulation or energy efficiency measures are carried out in addition to repairs. For additional work over the grant limit, an interest free loan of up to £7,000 can be given, which becomes repayable once the property is sold or the applicant no longer lives there.
24. In 2015/16, the team received 6 HHRA applications and paid out over £8,000.00 for repairs. We are seeking to review this Policy and attempt to help those in greatest need through projects that will target certain properties through profiling factors such as the age and construction of the property, age, health and income of the occupants etc.

Empty Homes Enforcement

25. The Environmental Health Service plays an active role in creating homes from empty properties and in doing so plays a role in tackling the housing crisis in an environmentally sustainable way.
26. Our enforcement powers include the power to compulsory purchase a property. Other provisions include the application of Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) that gives the council the right to possession of the dwelling but not ownership.
27. Throughout 2015/16, 246 long-term empty properties have been identified. UDC's Empty Home Officer has returned 149 to occupation following active intervention.

Future work

28. Poor housing has a direct link to poor health, comfort and mental wellbeing. The work undertaken by the Council contributes directly to the health, protection and wellbeing of residents. Evidence shows that the worst housing is in the private rented sector.
29. Much of the work of the Environmental Health service is reactive. However, we recognise that there is a need be more proactive in identifying poor housing conditions and the landlords responsible. Over the coming year we will be looking at how to do this.
30. We are hopeful of attracting more resources through a growth bid for an additional p/t officer and from partners such as Public Health England.

Risk Analysis

31.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
DFG Grant funding is reduced	1 present advice is that funding will continue at existing level.	3 additional capital budget may be required to satisfy demand - current scheme is already under funded	Seek to ensure grant fund is maintained at current level and/or increased. Participate in ECC review process
Increase in empty homes in the district	1The council is working to bring empty properties back into residential use to help meet housing requirements and raise housing standards	3 Long term empty properties may become targets for anti-social behaviour, vandalism, fly tipping and pose a health and safety risk to the community	Continue to take active intervention where possible

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project