

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2016 – 2021

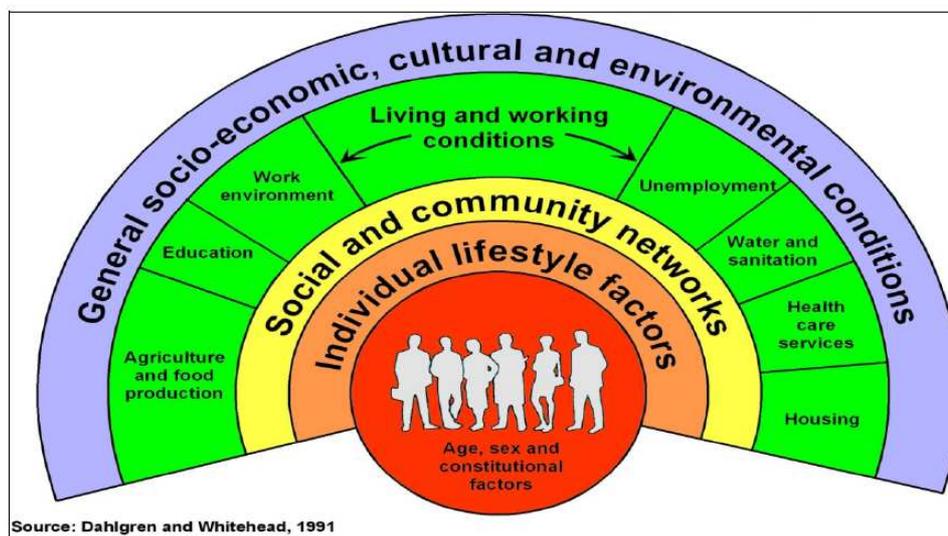
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Foreword by lead portfolio holder

(To be completed)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is a strategy to deal with housing issues in the private sector, both for homeowners and the private rented sector. Its primary focus is to ensure that UDC homes are healthy and supports Uttlesford District Council's health and wellbeing agenda. It has been developed by the Council in order to set service priorities for the next five years.
- 1.2 The strategy builds on the stock modelling data delivered in 2015 by the Building Research Establishment (BRE). This data identified and highlighted the extent of the poor housing, in particular, category 1 hazards found in homes in UDC. It also highlighted the health impacts of poor housing and the likely costs they present to the NHS and to society.
- 1.3 A category 1 hazard is one that presents a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety. The most numerous category one hazards in UDC are falls and excess cold.
- 1.4 The link between housing and health is well defined. The quality of a home can have a significant impact on our lives impacting on both physical and mental health. Poor housing conditions have an adverse effect on public health & wellbeing and contribute to health inequalities. Making modifications to improve a home can lead to enhanced health & wellbeing that can bring benefits not only to individuals but also wider social economic benefits.



- 1.5 Investment in our homes and ensuring standards are maintained delivers a wide range of positive outcomes
 - Fewer homes that pose a risk to health and well being
 - Improved outcomes for families and young people

- More independence for older or vulnerable households
- Lower carbon emissions improved energy efficiency and reduced fuel poverty
- Less anti-social behaviour relating to derelict or nuisance properties
- Communities that are more attractive and economically vibrant

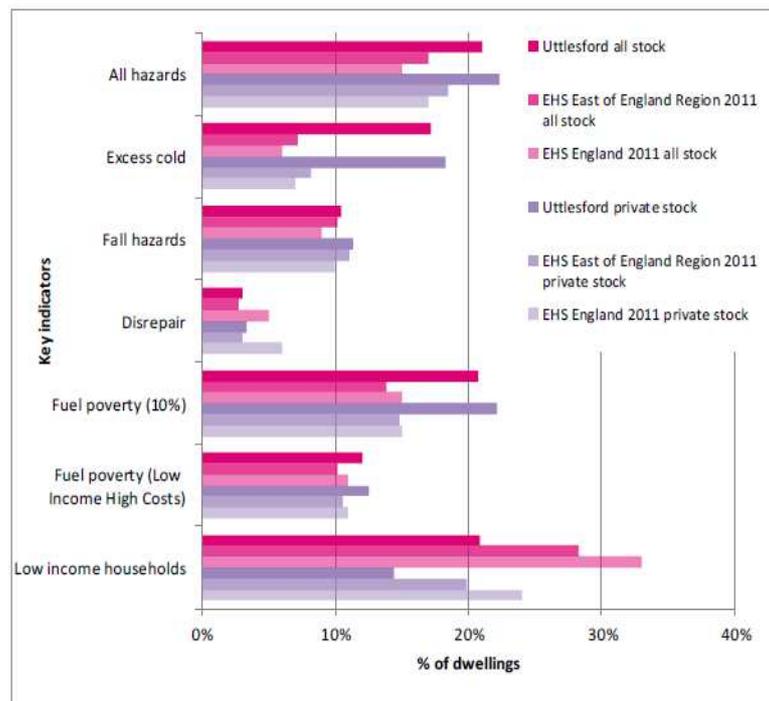
1.6 This strategy does not stand alone. It has been developed in line with the key objectives listed within UDCs Housing Strategy published in 2016. It sets out what the Environmental Health Service and other service areas will do to support good standards within the private sector. It sets out the challenges we know exist and our proposed actions to deal with them.

1.7 UDCs housing market made up of a private, private rented and a social sector. There are around 31,316 (2011 census data) dwellings in UDC. Of these 74% of homes are owner occupiers, which equates to 22,746 dwellings, 12% or 3961 dwellings are listed as social housing and 14%, namely 4609 dwellings are rented from a private landlord. For all stock Uttlesford performs better than the English Housing Survey (EHS 2011) average for various indicators such as disrepair, low income households, however performs slightly worse for falls and fuel poverty. Levels of excess cold are considerably higher in Uttlesford compared to EHS average.

1.8 The table to the right provides estimates of the percentage of dwellings meeting the key indicator criteria assessed by the housing stock models for all stock and private sector stock.

It compared Uttlesford property stock with the East of England and England (EHS 2011).

It is clear that there are some significant challenges with some homes clearly below standard.



1.9 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 provides local housing authorities with a general permissive power to provide assistance to occupiers for the purpose of improving living conditions. It is government's view that the responsibility to maintain privately owned homes rest first and foremost with their owners, however the legislation is intended to enable the Council to provide assistance and resources for the most vulnerable should it wish to do so.

1.10 In order to exercise this power a local authority must first adopt a policy for the provision of assistance. The current policy on homes repairs assistance was agreed

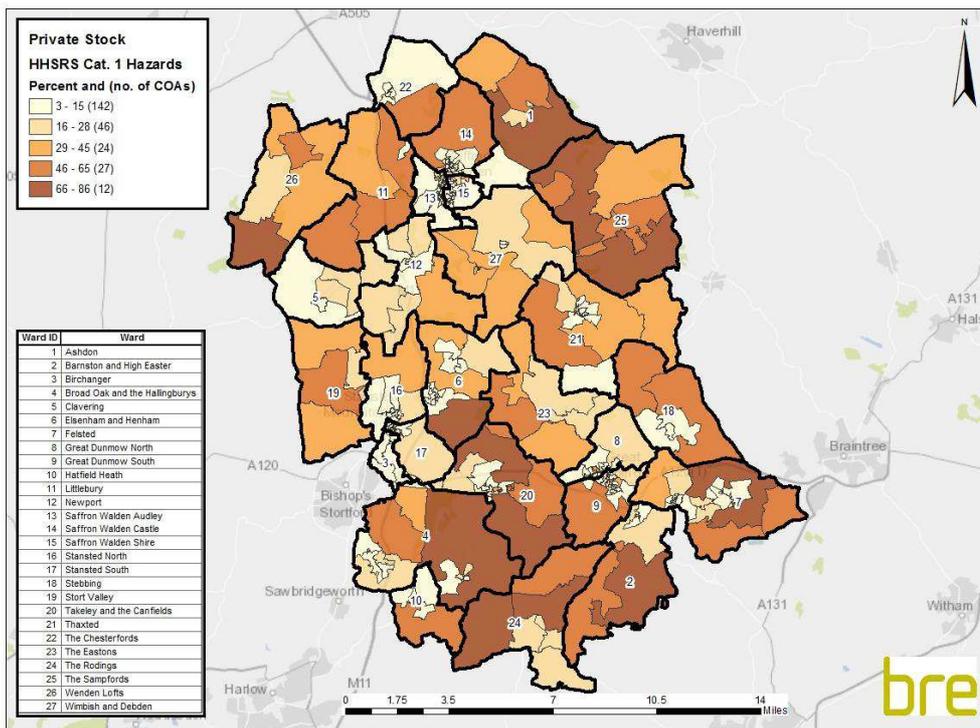
by the Council in 2003 and does not reflect current knowledge. We will look to amend this policy alongside the strategy to target known problems and link works to improvements in health outcomes.

- 1.11 It is estimated that there are 6,314 dwellings in the private sector with a category 1 hazard, which equates to 22% of all private properties, compared with 19% regionally and 17% nationally. 1,186 dwellings in the private rented sector have category 1 hazards. This equates to 27% of properties in the private rented sector.
- 1.12 Collectively, it is estimated that poor housing conditions within the private sector are responsible for over 286 harmful events requiring medical intervention each year. These range from respiratory diseases like COPD associated with cold homes, to fractures and injuries associated with homes containing fall hazards. It would cost £27.7million to mitigate all of these serious housing hazards, but would return savings to the NHS of £1.6 million per year, with further savings to wider society of £3.8 million per year.
- 1.13 The Climate Change Act 2008 legislated for a reduction in our carbon emissions, compared to 1990, of 34% by 2020 and on our way to 80% by 2050. It set legally-binding carbon budgets for our country for the next 12 years across all sectors of the UK economy - including our homes and communities, and our workplaces. Reducing demand for energy through eliminating waste cost effectively is one of the best ways to reduce emissions. Three quarters of the energy we use in our homes is for heating our rooms and water, most of which comes from gas-fired boilers. Together this accounts for 13% of the UK's CO2 emissions
- 1.4 To do this we need to make our homes, more energy efficient, and heat and power them from low carbon sources. The Council and its partners are well placed to provide advice and energy company funded grants to improve the energy efficiency of the owner occupier and private rented sector
- 1.15 Clearly, it is not the Council's position nor does it have the resources to introduce an intervention programme to resolve these problems. However, there are areas where targeted intervention would help those most in need and where the costs associated with the intervention would demonstrate positive outcomes with relatively low payback periods.
- 1.16 With the introduction of the Care Act, there is now a legislative obligation as well as a moral argument to improve the health and wellbeing of those most vulnerable in society. It is recognised that improvements to living conditions will fulfil some of these responsibilities. We will therefore look at innovative cost effective solutions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in society. Alongside this work we will work proactively with our landlords, promoting better standards and raise awareness. We shall also take decisive enforcement action against landlords who capitalise on the vulnerable
- 1.17 The purpose of this document is to provide a clear direction for the Council and its private sector housing service to address the following five key priorities:
 - 1. Raise standards in the private sector by encouragement and support to owner occupiers to maintain safe homes, free from category 1 hazards.**

2. Encourage, support and regulate private landlords and agents to provide safe and well managed properties, free from category 1 hazards.
3. Helping older and vulnerable people remain in their own homes.
4. Maximise use of the existing private sector housing stock.
5. Enable more sustainable homes by increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

1.18 The accompanying action plan provided within Appendix A addresses how we will deliver these priorities and the timeframe for progressing this work. However, we recognise that new issues will arise and national policies may change during the lifetime of the strategy and there may be a need to renew the action plan as and when deemed necessary to ensure it remains relevant.

2. Key priority 1 - Raise standards in the private sector by encouragement and support to owner occupiers to maintain safe homes, free from category 1 hazards



Percentage of private sector dwellings in Uttlesford with the presence of a HHSRS category 1 hazard

2.1 There are estimated 22,746 owner occupied homes in UDC. Approximately 5128 dwellings have category 1 hazards. The main hazards are excess cold (4190) and falls (2581). The estimated costs of mitigating these hazards are £23m for excess cold and £3m for falls.

- 2.2 The highest concentrations of fuel poverty in the private sector are found in the wards of The Sampfords, Littlebury and Wendens Lofts. For excess cold, the highest concentrations are in the wards of The Sampfords, Wendens Lofts and The Rodings. The highest concentrations of all HHSRS hazards in the private sector are found in the wards of The Sampfords, Wendens Lofts and The Rodings.
- 2.3 The key challenge is to encourage those owner occupiers who may be on low income or limited means to invest in their homes, and remove category 1 hazards. Some of the main obstacles are likely to be the costs involved in carrying out the works, confidence and trust in the services and builders they use and willingness to engage.
- 2.4 In UDC 21% of all households are considered to be on low incomes. With limited grant funding available to support the vulnerable, the Council will prioritise vulnerable households for assistance and will change the current policy to include a range of grants, offers and loans to encourage uptake and assist those in greatest need.

Proposed Actions

- Develop a comprehensive range of offers and grants with the limited resources available that that will reduce hazards in the home.
- Devise and implement a campaign to target promotional measures to those in greatest need.
- Increased public awareness of the range of services available to encourage and support owner occupiers
- Encourage and support greater access to home appreciation loans and equity release products to fund repairs and maintenance
- Report on the improvements made using the BRE Health Cost Calculator to demonstrate the savings to the NHS and wider society

3.0 Key priority 2 - Encourage, support and regulate private landlords and agents to provide safe and well managed properties, free from category 1 hazards.

- 3.1 In UDC, the private rented sector accounts for 14% of all households (4609 dwellings). There has been significant growth in the private rented sector in recent years and new measures are being developed to deal with poor landlords. Such measures encourage local authorities to make full use of enforcement powers to tackle dangerous and poorly maintained dwellings. With fewer houses being built, high property values and limited social rented homes, the sector looks set to grow and will continue to remain an important source of housing.
- 3.3 In the majority of cases the rented sector provides high quality housing opportunities, but there are some challenges. The private rented stock is generally worse than the owner occupied stock for indicators relating to hazards; disrepair, fuel poverty and energy efficiency. It is also worse than the owner occupier stock for low income households and for the low income high cost definition of fuel poverty. 27% of the private rented stock is thought to have one or more category 1 hazards.

- 3.4 The council has a statutory duty and a range of powers to address sub-standard conditions such as category 1 hazards. It can also intervene in cases of illegal eviction and harassment. Last year we received 47 reports from tenants regarding poor conditions. Demand for action is largely initiated by the tenant and is therefore reliant on high levels of public awareness. Over the course of the strategy we will aim improve public awareness tenants' rights and responsibilities and the services we provide. We will also update our enforcement policy to ensure that it reflects current legislative and government thinking.
- 3.5 We also acknowledge that the majority of landlords are not career landlords and own one or two properties. We proposed to engage with our landlords further and keep them updated on legislative changes and good practice. The landlord forum in one attempt to do this, however, we will look to do more to whilst still operating a robust enforcement regime.
- 3.6 The Council does not have many mandatory licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) within the District. However, during the lifetime of the strategy we anticipate that the government will change the current definition of mandatory HMOs. If this occurs we will look at ways of identifying HMOs and engage with landlords to improve conditions and reduce the health and safety risks to tenants.
- 3.7 In recent years the Government also announced a range of measures aimed at improving standards in the sector including the requirement to install Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms, the requirement for letting agents to publicise their fees, the redress scheme and measures to prevent retaliatory eviction. The service will look at adopting good practice methods to implement and enforce these changes.

Proposed Actions

- Encourage and support landlords and agents to reduce number of category 1 hazards in private rented homes with a particular focus on HMOs and poorest performing areas
- Respond to changes to government policy on HMOs
- Improve the sector by ensuring that all landlords and agents have access to up to date information
- Regulate robustly and take action against the worst landlords and agents
- Increased awareness of tenants' rights, responsibilities and support available.

4. Key priority 3 – Helping older and vulnerable people remain in their own homes

- 4.1 UDC has a growing number of older households, people with disabilities and complex needs. Much of the existing housing stock is not designed with the needs of these groups in mind.
- 4.2 With people expected to live longer, the need for home adaptations to support independence is set to increase. The main types of adaptations needed include adapted

bathrooms and toilets, lifts and level or ramped access. The Council has a statutory duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to provide Disabled Facilities Grants. The grants are available up to a maximum of £30,000 and are means tested. Grant funding is sourced from the Better Care Fund managed by Essex CC. However, often this is not enough and each year the Council supports the service by meeting the shortfall in expenditure. In 2015/16 £227,500 was spent on DFGs. UDCs contribution was £124,500 to this service.

- 4.3 It is becoming increasingly clear that the benefits of DFG adaptations are far wider than the provision of assistance to disabled people at home. They allow the individual to maintain a level of dignity, prevent falls and other complications. Without these measures an individual would be put at greater risk of accident or illness. Recent research (Foundations - Local Government Ombudsman Report) indicates that the cost of residential care is around £29,000 per year, whereas the average cost of providing adaptations is less than £7,000. Therefore effective adaptations can result in clear savings to local government.
- 4.4 There is increasing recognition that the current delivery model is outdated and needs to be streamlined to reduce delays that can place additional health related complications onto the customer.
- 4.5 We will explore new innovative ways to deliver DFGs with the main aim to increase delivery times and provide a comprehensive service for all. We will also investigate whether it's possible to increase the scope of the service to assist with earlier hospital discharge and /or to move people out of residential care and back into their homes.
- 4.6 We will also take a wider look at the homes of disabled persons to see if there is a need for low level intervention and practical help to remove hazards and improve health and safety. We will work with partner agencies with existing support schemes on the best ways to deliver this service across UDC.

Proposed Actions

- Improve the DFG service delivery to reduce complications, increase the speed of adaptations and reduce costs
- Ensure that those who need adaptations get help to remain in or return to their accommodation receive the appropriate level of advice, support and assistance
- Improve customer relations throughout the DFG process
- Reduce number of category 1 hazards relating to falls in households with older people/children to prevent early and/or unnecessary admissions of residents to hospital, nursing care and or residential care
- Work with partners and support agencies to increase awareness of support services to improve and retain independence.

5. Key priority 4. Maximise use of the existing private sector housing stock

- 5.1 Homes which are left empty for prolonged periods can have an impact on the appearance and the vibrancy of the area, as well as taking housing out of use when there are more and more people in need of accommodation. Dwellings suffering long-

term neglect can blight a neighbourhood, increase prevalence of nuisance, pests and ASB. They can even present a danger to the public.

- 5.2 In recent years the council has stepped up pressure on owners who keep their properties empty for long periods. Much of this has involved effective dialogue and persuasion with owners. However the threat of enforcement such as compulsory purchase continues to be a useful tool in the armoury against empty homes. The Council has been rewarded for this work through the New Homes Bonus Scheme and additional Council Tax receipts. Although the government has announced changes to the NHB scheme, the work of Council in bringing empty homes continues to be a key outcome in delivering the Councils Housing Strategy.
- 5.3 In recent years the numbers of empty dwellings within UDC as a direct result of officer intervention has reduced significantly. UDC has some of the lowest levels of Empty Dwellings in Essex with 168 empty dwellings recorded in 2015 compared with an Essex average of 305.
- 5.4 UDC is part of the PLACE scheme (Private Lease Agreements Converting Empties). The scheme allows UDC to provide grants of up to £50,000 to carry out repairs in exchange for a lease agreement. Under the scheme the property would be leased and managed as an affordable home for a period of three years before being returned to the owner in sound condition. Other grants and loans are also available.
- 5.5 Throughout the lifetime of this strategy we will raise awareness of the PLACE scheme and where appropriate take enforcement action.

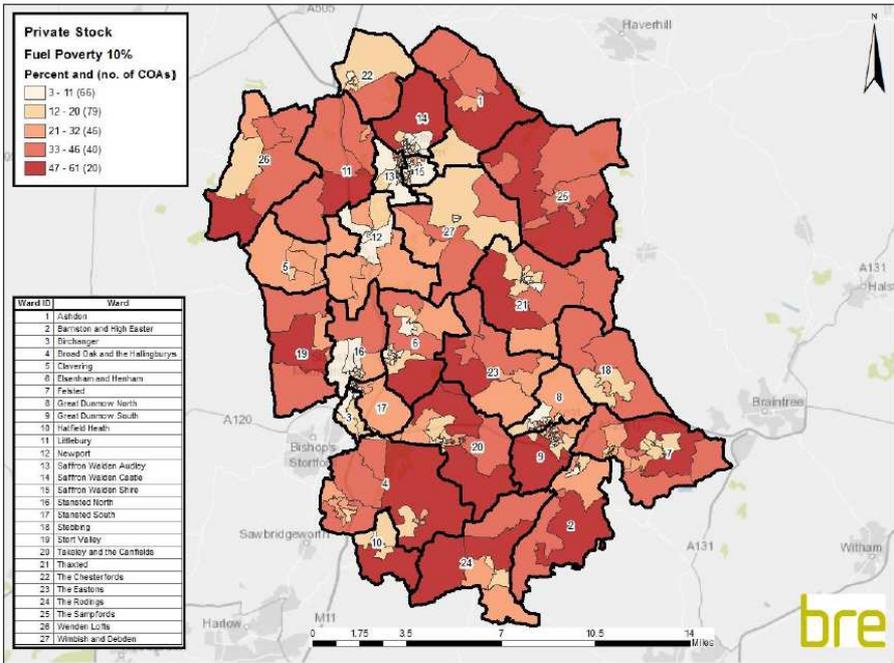
Proposed Actions

- Maintain accurate information about the numbers of long-term empty properties.
- Encourage owners of privately owned empty homes to bring them back into use using the PLACE scheme.
- Target owners whose empty homes cause a significant detrimental impact to the neighbourhood.

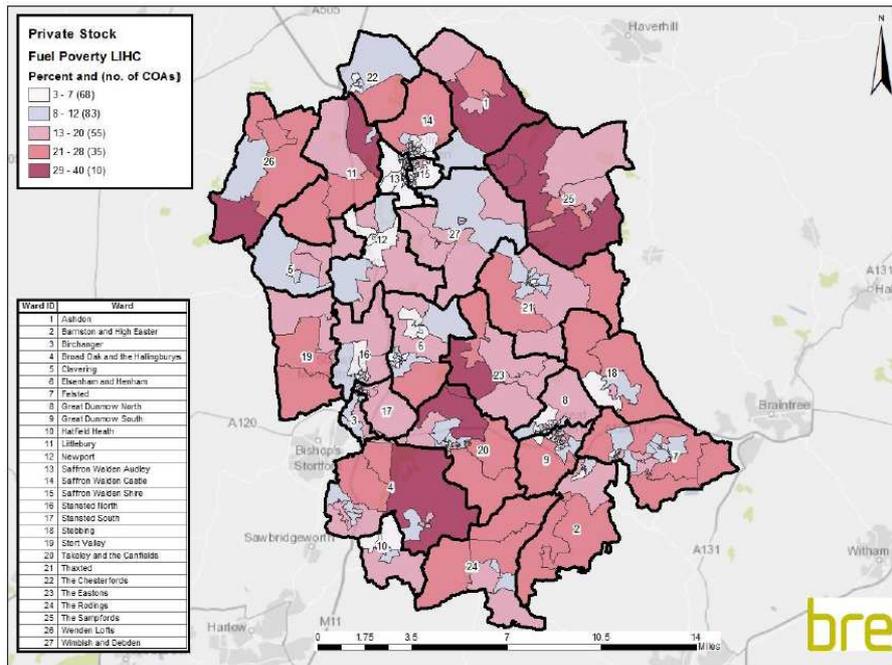
6. Key priority 5. Enable more sustainable homes by increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

- 6.1 Fuel poverty and excess winter death are issues in Uttlesford. Being able to afford heating bills and ensuring homes are warm and not damp or draughty reduces ill health and demands put on health services.
- 6.2 UDC's private sector housing stock shows lower than average overall levels of energy efficiency when compared to other areas. The estimated average Simple SAP for the private sector stock in Uttlesford is 50 which correspond to an EPC rating of E. The number of private sector dwellings with an EPC rating below band E is estimated to be 6,882 (24.3%). The number of private rented dwellings in Uttlesford with a rating below band E (i.e. bands F and G), is estimated to be 1,273 (28.8%). By comparison, in 2014, the national average was 61 points (ref English Homes Survey).

- 6.3 A significant amount of work has been done in recent years to improve the energy efficiency of private sector homes in UDC. A number of initiatives have been running that vary according to governmental grants made available. In addition we are actively promoting oil clubs and working with the CAB on the winter warmth campaign. The Council is rolling out the Government's energy efficiency ECO programme to target energy inefficient properties to reduce carbon emissions, reduce fuel poverty and deliver better health outcomes essential to reduce cold weather related illness and winter mortality
- 6.5 UDC wide excess cold is the most common category 1 hazard, found in 18% of owner occupied stock and 22% of private rented dwellings. 21% of all housing stock is estimated to be fuel poor, compared to 14% regionally and 15% nationally. 28 % of households living in the private rented sector are thought to be living in fuel poverty.
- 6.6 The highest concentrations of fuel poverty in the private sector are found in the wards of The Sampfords, Littlebury and Wendens Lofts. For excess cold, the highest concentrations are in the wards of The Sampfords, Wendens Lofts and The Rodings. We have mapped fuel poverty 'hot spots' around the Uttlesford and will use this to target future interventions.



Percentage of private sector dwellings in Uttlesford occupied by households in fuel poverty - 10% definition



Percentage of private sector dwellings in Uttlesford occupied by households in fuel poverty – Low Income High Costs definition

- 6.7 Tackling fuel poverty has a direct impact on residents, enabling them to heat their homes to a standard that maintains their health.
- 6.8 We have already mentioned that we will be reviewing our grants policy to provide a more comprehensive range of grants, loans and offers to create and live in warmer, healthier homes, reduce CO2 emissions and cost of fuel bills.
- 6.9 Throughout the lifetime of the strategy we will continue to work with our partners to reduce incidents of excess winter deaths and fuel poverty. This work will be rolled out in parallel with our approach to tackle the poorest housing within the district, providing an integrated holistic approach to improving the health and wellbeing of vulnerable UDC residents.

Proposed Actions

- Improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions by targeted work and maximise funding opportunities in the worst performing areas and property types
- Reduced incidence of fuel poverty through targeted work in the poorest performing areas and property types

7. How will we deliver – objectives & outcomes

- 7.1 The action plan contained within Appendix A provides information on the work and targets required to meet the outcomes of the strategy. These will be monitored on an annual basis to ensure delivery.

- 7.2 In addition the strategy will be reviewed in accordance with legislative and central government guidance to ensure that the strategy remains relevant and responsive to emerging needs.
- 7.3 Each year we will present a report to the Housing Board on the work of the service area to ensure a level of scrutiny
- 7.4 Effective delivery requires the right level of resource and commitment. Partnerships will be key to securing many of the outcomes and we will work to improve and expand our relations with these groups

Further information

Should you wish to discuss the contents of this strategy, provide comments or ask any questions, please contact the Environmental Health Service at Environmentalhealth@uttlesford.gov.uk Tel 01799 510482.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Action Plan

Key Priority	Action	Timescale for delivery	Outcome/measure
Raise standards in the private sector by encouragement and support to owner occupiers to maintain safe homes, free from category 1 hazards		To be completed	To be completed
	Develop a comprehensive range of offers and grants with the limited resources available that that will reduce hazards in the home.		
	Devise and implement a campaign to target promotional measures to those in greatest need.		
	Increased public awareness of the range of services available to encourage and support owner occupiers		
	Encourage and support greater access to home appreciation loans and equity release products to fund repairs and maintenance		
	Report on the improvements made using the BRE Health Cost Calculator to demonstrate the savings to the NHS and wider society		
Encourage, support and regulate private landlords and agents to provide safe			

and well managed properties, free from category 1 hazards			
	Encourage and support landlords and agents to reduce number of category 1 hazards in private rented homes with a particular focus on HMOs and poorest performing areas		
	Respond to changes to government policy on HMOs		
	Improve the sector by ensuring that all landlords and agents have access to up to date information		
	Regulate robustly and take action against the worst landlords and agents		
	Increased awareness of tenants' rights, responsibilities and support available		
To enable people whose independence may be at risk safely remain in or return to their home longer			
	Improve the DFG service delivery to reduce complications, increase the speed of adaptations and reduce costs		
	Ensure that those who need adaptations get help to remain in or return to their accommodation receive the appropriate level of advice, support and assistance		
	Improve customer relations throughout the DFG process		
	Reduce number of category 1 hazards relating to falls in households with older people/children to prevent early and/or		

	unnecessary admissions of residents to hospital, nursing care and or residential care		
	Work with partners and support agencies to increase awareness of support services to improve and retain independence		
Maximise use of the existing private sector housing stock			
	Maintain accurate information about the numbers of long-term empty properties		
	Encourage owners of privately owned empty homes to bring them back into use using the PLACE scheme		
	Target owners whose empty homes cause a significant detrimental impact to the neighbourhood		
Enable more sustainable homes by increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.			
	Improve energy efficiency by targeting work and maximise funding opportunities in the worst performing areas and property types		
	Reduced incidence of fuel poverty through targeted work in the poorest performing areas and property types		