

For publication

Private Sector Housing

Meeting:	Enterprise & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Date:	10 th February, 2022
Cabinet portfolio:	Housing
Directorate:	Housing

Background

The number of privately rented households across the country has increased rapidly over the last 20 years, rising from a total of just over two million households in 2000 to a total of 4.55 million households as of 2019. Whilst the quality of privately rented housing has also improved, a number of privately rented properties still do not meet minimum legal standards and a small number of rogue or criminal landlords continue to knowingly rent out unsafe and substandard accommodation. It is these landlords that Government and local authorities are determined to crack down on and disrupt their business model.

In 2019 Chesterfield Borough Council Stock took part in a joint project, hosted by Derby City Council as part of a collaboration between Derbyshire County Council, Derby City Council and all the District/Boroughs. The stock condition report found 16% of Chesterfield's residents were living in privately rented homes approximately 26% of those homes failed to meet the decency standard. Reflecting national trends, the report found correlations against poor housing conditions and deprivation. This data reflects the importance of a robust approach to enforcement of landlords who rent out poor quality housing.

Journey so far

The Council has an overarching Housing Strategy which aims to enhance Chesterfield's housing offer so that anyone wishing to live in Chesterfield can live in a quality home they can afford.

The Council has in place an existing Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy, and the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Team are actively enforcing against private landlords whose accommodation falls below the required standard and have over recent years achieved a good record of successfully prosecuting rogue landlords.

However, it was acknowledged that the Enforcement Team were under-resourced in relation to the demands on the service and as a result, the team were only able to react to the most urgent disrepair cases reported to them. In addition, the team didn't have any resource to actively tackle problematic empty properties within the borough. So, whilst the team are carrying out good work and taking action against rogue landlords, there is so much more with regards to tackling the poor behaviour of rogue landlords, fostering and contributing towards relationships with partner agencies that is required.

In April 2020 cabinet approved the Private Sector Housing Project Plan including the addition of 2 new posts within the Private Sector Housing Team.

- A Senior Environmental Health Officer (EHO) to work in the Enforcement Team and
- An EHO to work primarily on problematic empty homes.

Private Sector Housing Update

Recruitment

The team have continued to take appropriate and proportionate enforcement action against those private sector landlords who fail to engage with the team and continue to allow their tenants to live in poor quality accommodation, this has resulted in the successful prosecution of a private landlord in Dec 21.

We have been successful in recruiting to the Senior Environmental Health Officer post and the officer is due to start work with us at the end of the month.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to recruit to the Environmental Health Officer post. We feel this is in part due to the nationwide shortage of Environmental Health Officers, able to carry out Private Sector Housing work. Certainly, it has been an issue throughout Derbyshire and is reflected in the outcome of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health's workforce survey [Workforce survey England - CIEH](#)

To overcome this issue, we have redrafted the job role to appeal to a wider audience and have included the role within the Housing Reshape that is currently in progress. Members of staff affected by the reshape will then be considered for the role before the position is advertised.

Moving forward, the team are researching the possibility of creating an apprentice EHO role, so that Chesterfield Borough Council can train a member of staff to become an EHO and hopefully retain them within the authority.

Strategic progress

Whilst a large amount of Private Sector Housing Work is reactive, the legal action we take against landlords relies on us having appropriate policies and procedures in place. To enable the team to take a wider range of action in relation to poor private rental properties and importantly to give clear and appropriate guidance to landlords, the team have been working on the following policies which we require cabinet approval. Please also see the accompanying short power point presentation which explains the purpose of these policies.

Reports that require cabinet approval

- Private Sector Housing EPC policy.
- Private Sector Housing Fees and Charges Policy.
- Private Sector Housing Amenities and Space Standards policy.
- Revised Private Sector Housing Park Homes policy.
- Park Homes Fit and Proper Person policy.

In Conclusion

The Private Sector Housing Team continue to work hard to enforce against those landlords who fail to carry out their legal duties. Much work has been done over the last 12 months to increase capacity within the team and improve both the enforcement service and education of landlords. However, we recognise that we are on a journey and there is much work still to do.

As part of our journey, we would welcome the opportunity to work with members to continue to improve our offer and establish trust within our communities to enable the service to operate at its maximum potential.