

Gloucester City Council

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| Meeting: | Cabinet | Date: | 20th July 2016 |
| Subject: | Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on actions to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector | | |
| Report Of: | Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning | | |
| Wards Affected: | All | | |
| Key Decision: | No | Budget/Policy Framework: | No |
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| Appendices: | 1. Report of the Task and Finish Group | | |
| | 2. Cabinet Response to Recommendations | | |

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group on actions to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector and to provide a formal Cabinet response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, as set out in Appendix 2 to this report, (and summarised in 2.2) be addressed and the opportunity be taken to action these matters at the earliest opportunity.

2.2 Summary of recommendations:-

- 2.2.1 The current programme of proactive work to improve the worst privately rented accommodation in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) should be maintained into the future

- 2.2.2 Funding to support the Private Sector Housing Officer's work should continue until at least April 2017 to allow these improvements to be sustained into the future.

- 2.2.3 The City Council should await the outcome of the recent Government consultation on extending mandatory HMO licensing before taking any further steps to introduce a discretionary licensing scheme

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 Appendix 1 sets out the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on actions to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector. The recommendations are summarised in Appendix 2.
- 3.2 The Task and Finish Group's report was endorsed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee for submission to Cabinet at a meeting held on 7th March 2016.
- 3.3 Cabinet needs to provide a formal response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee indicating whether the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group are accepted and when they will be implemented.

4.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

- 4.1 We are starting to notice that some Landlords who have been subject to previous enforcement are beginning to support and advise other Landlords who have been found to managing their properties badly.
- 4.2 Also, as our interventions improve accommodation, tenants' standards and expectations are also raised and the tenants themselves will apply pressure on landlords to ensure they carry out the necessary improvements.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 If the proactive work ceases in October 2016 (when the current funding for the extra member of staff in the private Sector Housing Team ends), we are likely to find that:-
 - We will be unable to tackle the growing list of pending cases that require investigation
 - The properties that have been improved will fall back into poor condition.
 - The poorly performing Landlords that have been brought into line will revert to their previous behaviours
 - Income is lost because we are unable to identify licensable HMO's
 - Good landlords will be less inclined to operate in Gloucester.
 - We will be unable to sustain improvement in the target areas.

Therefore, this option is not recommended

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 Cabinet is asked to accept and implement the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group as set out in Section 6 of Appendix 1 and summarised in Appendix 2.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 7.1 The financial analysis (see paragraph 8.0) concludes that we are able to support the costs of an additional member of staff, certainly until April 2017 and therefore a combination of financial monitoring to analyse current and future HMO licence income and a review of the current team workload will be carried out to suggest how this proactive method of working can be sustained after April 2017.
- 7.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be monitoring implementation of any recommendations agreed by Cabinet in approximately 6 months' time.
- 7.3 The link between health and housing is well known and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is the method used to assess hazards in the home. There are established tools for measuring the savings to the NHS when these hazards (such as cold, damp or danger from falls) are removed and these savings are reported through to the Gloucestershire Health and Well Being Strategy. Further working with the Health and Well Being Board can look at ways in which we can maximise the opportunities to pool funding and develop initiatives to improve housing conditions and reduce the impact on health services.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 An additional £37,000/year is required to finance an additional member of staff.

Following a reduction of hours from a member of the team a saving of £16, 936 has been identified.

HMO estimated income allocated to this year will be approximately £33,500, of this income, £21,200 is available to support additional staff costs.

Therefore, in total, a budget of £38,136 is available to support additional staff costs.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report).

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 All enforcement actions are governed by the Environmental Health enforcement policy and in accordance with statutory instruments. The Housing Act 2004 is the overarching statutory legislation that enables improvements in housing conditions. It also imposes a duty on local authorities to deal with all Category 1 hazards and licence all HMO's that fall within the mandatory licensing criteria.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report).

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 10.1 A risk analysis has not identified any high risks

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 11.1 An improvement in housing conditions will positively benefit the most vulnerable tenants as they are likely to live in the worst housing conditions.
- 11.2 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

12.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 12.1 Reducing the problems caused by poorly managed tenanted properties will increase community confidence in an area and reduce anti social behaviour incidences.

Sustainability

- 12.2 Improving the condition of properties will sustain a good and affordable supply of properties available for private renting

Staffing & Trade Union

- 12.3 The Task and Finish Group has recommended that the Private Sector Housing Officer's work should continue until at least April 2017.

Background Documents: None