



# Northumberland

## County Council

### **CABINET**

DATE: 7<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2021

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### **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY 2021 - 2023**

**Report of:** Daljit Lally, Chief Executive

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Colin Horncastle, Portfolio Holder for Community Services

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#### **Purpose of report**

The following report presents Cabinet with the draft **Private Sector Housing Strategy 2021-2023**, providing details of the proposed strategic objectives for the Council's Private Sector Housing Service for the following three years.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Cabinet approve the content of the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy and agree its adoption.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the "We want you to feel Safe, Healthy and Cared for" [LIVING] " priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021 which states

*Having a decent roof over your head is fundamental to this health and well being. None of you should be forced to live on the streets, or in a "home" that is a health hazard or physically impedes independence.*

#### **Key issues**

1. The current Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019 - 2022 was developed to reflect current corporate priorities, regional and national Government priorities and the current financial climate. The priorities identified within the strategy are;
  - a. Growing Our Communities
  - b. Supporting our Residents
  - c. Improving Homes and Communities
2. The draft Private Sector Housing Strategy is a sub-strategy of the overarching Housing Strategy and sets out how we plan to work with partners and stakeholders to deliver services and support good quality housing and management standards

within private sector homes in Northumberland. By this we mean homes which are owner occupied and have either been bought outright or with a mortgage, and those that are rented from a private landlord.

3. The Private Sector Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2021 - 2023 builds on the aims and objectives of the previous Private Sector Housing Strategy (2015-2020). Whilst much has been done to deliver the aims and objective of the 2015 strategy, recent changes in Government policy have necessitated the production of a new strategy.
4. As agreed by Executive and Informal Cabinet in November 2020, a four-week consultation has been undertaken across the council and with partners and stakeholders. Six responses were received all from Town or Parish Councils and all of which were generally supportive of the Strategy with only minor amendments being made.
5. A Delivery Plan profiling the plans for delivery of the priorities identified will be produced following approval of the draft strategy.

## **Background**

### **Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019 - 2022**

**Our vision is to Improve access and supply of affordable housing by delivering the right type of homes in the right places for both existing and future communities.**

The overarching strategy supports the Council's aspirations for housing growth and the delivery of the Northumberland Local Plan which states;

*Our strategic approach to housing provision is underpinned by the Government's NPPF requirement to positively seek opportunities to meet our identified needs for housing, significantly boosting the supply of housing to help support wider opportunities for economic growth while enabling sufficient flexibility to quickly adapt to changes in circumstances that may occur*

The updated Housing Strategy supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Priorities and the delivery of the principle within the Northumberland Local Plan that having a decent home is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Northumberland.

The priorities identified within the updated strategy are;

1. Growing Our Communities
2. Supporting our Residents
3. Improving Homes and Communities

Priority 3 of the Housing Strategy, *Improving Homes and Communities; Making better use of existing housing stock*, underpins the Private Sector Housing Strategy.

Empty and derelict properties are a wasted resource that could be better used to relieve homelessness and address housing needs. Empty homes can also have a negative impact on their surrounding communities.

Consequences of long term empty properties can include attracting crime, thereby reducing the value of neighbouring properties, being an eyesore, costing time and money to local authorities and being costly for the owner to maintain. There are clear economic and social benefits in overcoming these problems by returning empty homes to occupation.

As part of our drive to meet housing demand, achieve sustainable communities across the county and secure lifetime homes we will work to ensure the best use of existing homes across all tenures in the County.

The **Private Sector Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2021-2023** outlines Northumberland County Council's plans to meet people's housing needs by maintaining and improving the existing private housing stock in the County, contributing to the delivery of the Council's Corporate priorities.

The priorities within the strategy are as follows;

- *Priority 1 Increase access to affordable homes in the private sector by bringing empty homes back into use*

We need to make the best use of Northumberland's existing housing and ensure that it is contributing effectively to meeting our communities' housing needs. This involves empty homes becoming re-occupied to provide additional affordable housing of all types and tenures and increasing the choice of housing available particularly in the private rented sector. Some degree of turnover in any housing market is normal but long-term empty homes can attract problems such as fly tipping, vandalism and arson. These properties can be a blight on our community as well as a wasted housing resource.

- *Priority 2 Encourage a healthy Private Rented Sector - Improve the condition, safety and energy efficiency of private sector housing*

All private housing should at least meet the minimum standards that comply with the legislative standards ensuring that the property does not cause a physical hazard or nuisance to residents and the local neighbourhood.

- *Priority 3 Provide advice and support and take action where necessary for homeowners, landlords and tenants in the private sector*

Awareness of rights and obligations is relatively poor across the private rented sector. This is partly due to a section of small-scale landlords taking a passive approach to their role and remaining in relative ignorance of the legal framework they are operating in. Letting a property through a letting or managing agent is not

always a guarantee that the property will be managed any better. Many households in private rented properties are not aware of their rights and obligations as tenants which can lead to people living in substandard housing, for example, if they are not willing to make a complaint on property conditions to their landlord for fear of facing retaliatory eviction. This combination can lead to poorer property conditions, unchallenged inadequate management standards and illegal eviction.

- *Priority 4 Provide services to assist access to sustainable tenancies in the private rented sector*

Some people want to rent privately to live in their preferred area and others may not have any other choice due to exclusion from social housing. However, for those on the lowest levels of household incomes (and those on benefits) the main issue is gaining access to the PRS. Landlords may have concerns about their ability to sustain the rent payments and often require additional security, such as a guarantor or bond, or significant upfront rent (usually at least one month in advance) before they will accept a tenant, and this is particularly difficult for those who cannot afford it and those who are trying to recover from homelessness.

The proposed Strategy will form the framework for the development and delivery of private sector housing initiatives across the county, ensuring that all Residents of all tenures across the county have the opportunity to live in safe, secure and warm homes.

### **Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	Supports the delivery of the Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019-2022, Corporate Plan and Local Plan
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Current initiatives to meet the priorities detailed will be met from existing resources. The existing agreed Empty Homes Reserve of £50k will aid the delivery of Priority 1. Any new initiatives requiring investment will be agreed through future budget setting processes.
<b>Legal</b>	None
<b>Procurement</b>	None
<b>Human Resources</b>	None
<b>Property</b>	Details the council's ambitions for Private Sector Housing Services for the next 3 years. This is likely to lead to an increase in council-owned stock through effective use of purchase & repair schemes. This is reflected within the current MTFP
<b>Equalities</b>	As part of the consultation an EIS will be completed to ensure that fair access to housing for all residents is considered.

(Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	none
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	none
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Enables provision of suitable accommodation for all residents
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	none
<b>Wards</b>	All

**Background papers:**

Housing Strategy for Northumberland 2019 - 2022

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Housing/Policies.aspx#ourhousingstrategiesandpolicies>

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

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