

# Private Sector Housing Strategy

2020 - 2024



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# Foreword

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**The Council's Corporate plan 2020-2024 renews our commitment to a thriving private rented sector, reinforcing the priority commitments given in the 2019 Housing and Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategies.**

We are keen to maintain confidence in the sector and improving access to safe and healthy homes. I am proud to introduce this strategy which identifies 5 key priorities to deliver safe homes, adapted living, tackle empty homes, increase partnerships and promote energy efficiency.

Including the Private Sector Housing Team within my housing portfolio in 2019 opened the door for several joint working opportunities to prevent homelessness, make the best use of the council's housing stock, inform design standards for our new temporary accommodation and gain an improved understanding of where our resources should be prioritised.

We recognise that poor quality private housing and fuel poverty can have a detrimental effect, not only on the health and wellbeing of the people living in poor quality and badly managed homes, but also on the general quality of life in an area. In a year where private rented sector legislation has significantly changed, we are therefore committed to providing a range of advice and assistance to improve the provision, quality, management and energy efficiency of homes within the District.

We must also respond to increasing demand for adaptations to enable our residents to remain living independently in their homes, or to support them to move to a previously adapted home.

Issues with long term empty homes, whilst not a major issue in our district, must also be given prominence to ensure they are brought back in to use in an area with high demand for housing.

We know that to make the outcomes of this strategy a success we need to build effective relationships with private rented sector landlords and agents, as well as owner occupiers. A Landlord Forum will provide the platform for positive outcomes to our actions, as well as full integration of the team with the wider housing service.

I look forward to working with all those involved in the sector to help achieve improved outcomes for our residents.

## Strategic Private Sector Housing Priorities 2020 - 2024

- Achieving high standards in the private rented sector.
- Enabling safe independent living.
- Tackling privately owned empty homes.
- Energy efficiency.
- Create a fully integrated private sector housing service.



Cllr Jill Cleary  
Portfolio Holder for  
Housing Services

# National context

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The number of households in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in the UK increased from 2.8 million in 2007 to 4.5 million in 2017, an increase of 1.7 million (63%) households. Overall 23.9% of private sector dwellings in England in 2018 were private-rented.

Households in the PRS are getting older; between 2007 and 2017, the proportion of head of household aged 45 to 54 increased from 11% to 16% while those aged 16 to 24 dropped from 17% to 12%. 29.6% of households nationally are aged 65 years and over.

In 2017, 62% of households in the PRS in the UK had spent under three years in the same accommodation and only a small proportion (4%) had been in the same residence for 20 years or longer.

In terms of meeting the Decent Homes Standard 19% of private sector housing nationally (2018) is non-decent. With the exception of Category 1 hazards the reasons for Decent Homes failure are no longer presented at national level. In 2018, 11.7% of private dwellings in England exhibited Category 1 hazards.

Nationally, 17.3% of owner-occupied dwellings are assessed as non-decent with an equivalent figure for the private-rented sector of 24.6%.

Significant national growth in private-renting in England has been recorded since 2003, with the private-rented sector overtaking the size of the social rented sector for the first time since 2012-13. Increases nationally have been related to the removal of rent controls, the introduction of assured short-hold tenancies, the growth in buy-to-let and the shortage of affordable properties for purchase.

This rapid expansion of the PRS has been recognised and subsequently reflected in a number of national strategies and the introduction of new legislation in the last few years.

## Legislative context

Private Sector Housing must comply with a number of statutory provisions, which over the last five years have increased the duties on landlords to improve property standards within the district.

These include but are not limited to:

### Housing Act 2004

This Act came into force in April 2006 and reformed housing legislation for landlords, owners and occupiers. The Act places both mandatory duties on housing authorities as well as giving a range of discretionary powers. These include: The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), mandatory licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and powers to return empty properties back into use.

### Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

This legislation empowers local housing authorities to provide financial assistance for housing renewal in the form of grants, loans or other assistance to tenants and private owners in accordance with a locally determined policy.

### Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, The Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes) (England) Order 2008, and Disabled Facilities Grant General Consent 2008

The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, amended by the Regulatory Reform Order 2002, provides the primary legislation governing mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). The Disabled Facilities Grant General Consent 2008 covers discretionary grant assistance, the current scope of DFGs and sets out the conditions in which a local authority can place a charge on a property in respect of DFGs.

### The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015

This Order identifies the requirements, obligations and actions required by a relevant landlord and the Council in relation to smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in privately rented properties.

### Housing and Planning Act 2016

The Housing and Planning Act introduced a wide new package of measures affecting

Local Housing Authorities and Local Planning Authorities. The principal matters covered by the Act relevant to this Policy Framework are:

- Introducing the framework for Civil Penalties in respect of certain housing offences .
- Allowing Local Authorities to apply for Banning Orders .
- Creating a national database of Rogue Landlords and Letting Agents.
- Allowing tenants or Local Authorities to apply for Rent Repayment Orders where landlords have committed certain offences.

### Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018

The Act is to help drive up standards in rented homes in both the social and private sectors and provide an alternative means for tenants to seek redress from their landlord if their rented property presents a risk of harm to the health and safety of the occupiers.

### Tenant Fees Act 2019

Landlords or agents are no longer able to require tenants in the private rented sector in England, or any person acting on behalf of the tenant or guaranteeing the rent, to make certain payments in connection with the tenancy.

### Minimum Energy Standards

From 1 April 2020, all rented properties are required to have a minimum energy performance certificate rating of E or above unless they have a valid exemption in place.

### The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020

Landlords are required to have the electrical installations in their properties inspected and tested by a person who is qualified and competent, at least every five years. The regulations apply to new tenancies from 1 July 2020 and existing tenancies from 1 April 2021.

More detailed information on the National Context can be found in the Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey report.

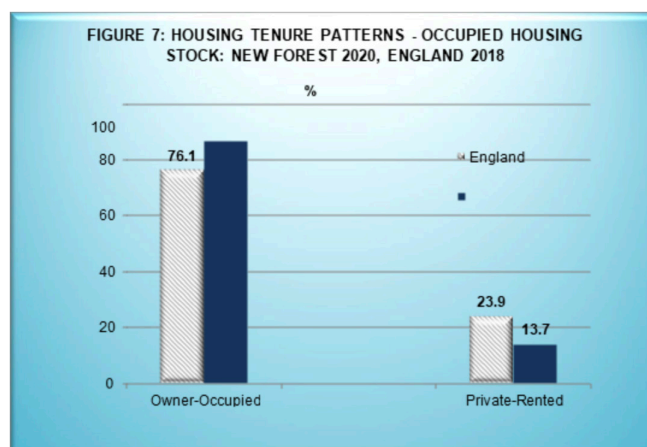
# Local context

New Forest District contains a private sector housing stock estimated at 76,464 dwellings. In January 2020, 94.5% were occupied with the remaining 5.5% being vacant.

Houses and bungalows comprise 68,414 dwellings (89.5%) with the remaining 8,051 dwellings (10.5%) in flats.

The age of a home is strongly associated with its condition and energy performance. The oldest homes (pre-1919) generally perform less well in these respects than newer homes. Private sector housing in the New Forest is representative of all building eras but is predominantly of post Second World War Construction.

The highest concentrations of older housing (pre-1919) are recorded in the National Park HMA (37.1%), while rates of post-1980's housing are highest in the South Coast HMA (38.2%).



## Tenure

Housing tenure patterns in New Forest differ from the national profile from England. 23.9% of private sector dwellings in England in 2018 were private rented compared to 13.7% locally. Rates of owner-occupation locally of 86.1% compared with 76.1% owner occupation nationally.

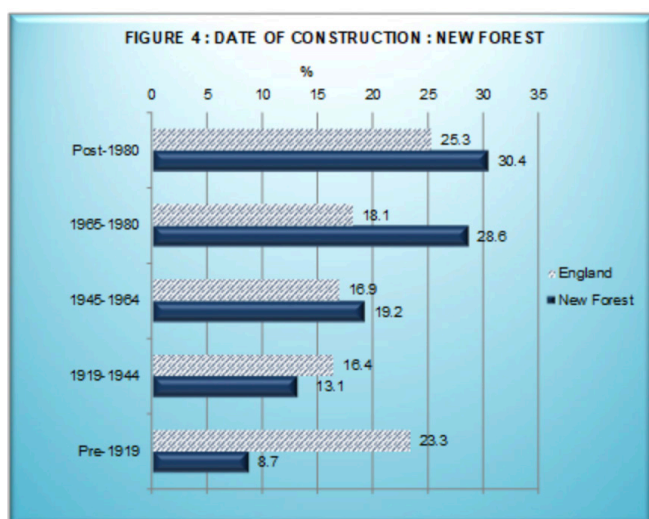
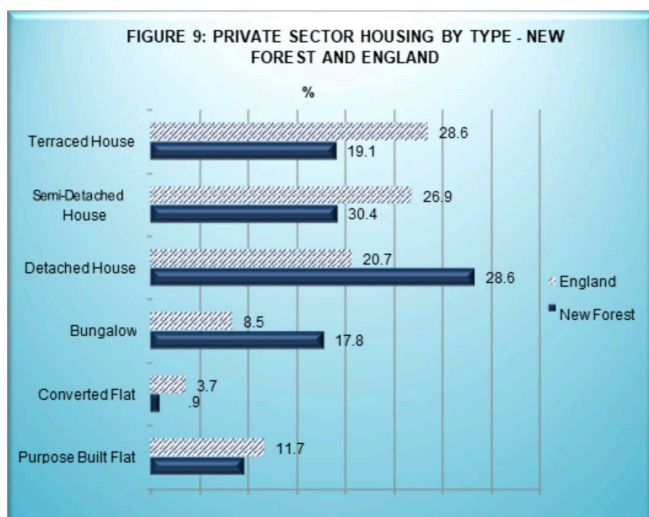
Private sector households are typically small in size and in line with national trends exhibit an ageing profile. 13,112 households (18.1%) are single person in size, an additional 36,540 households (50.6%) contain two persons. Only 2,829 households (3.9%) contain five or more persons. The average age of heads of household is estimated at 57 years; 27,350 households (37.8%) are headed by a person aged 65 years and over.

## Housing Conditions

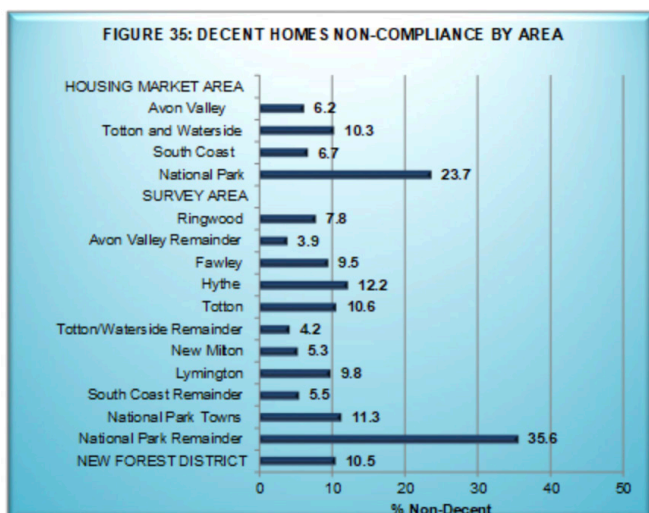
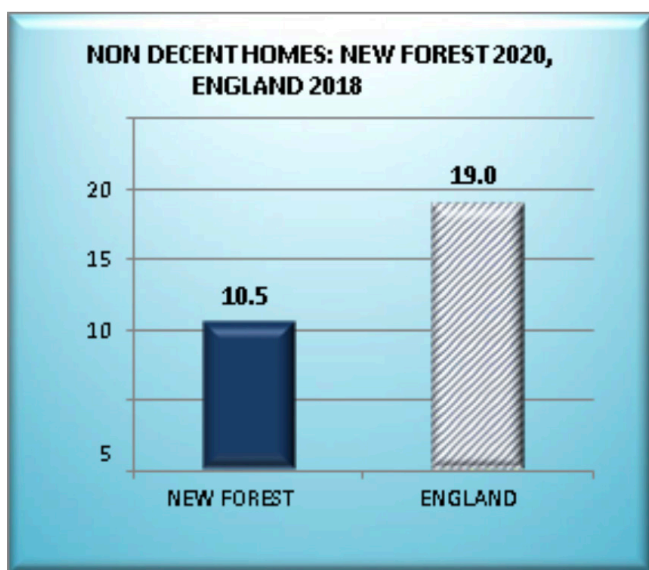
Housing conditions against national standards can only be measured fully within the occupied housing stock. Information from the English Housing Survey enables housing conditions in the New Forest district to be placed in a national context. Housing conditions locally, with regard to the Decent Homes Standard, are significantly better than the national average. Locally, 10.5% of occupied private housing fails the Decent Homes Standard compared to 19% of private sector housing nationally (2018). With the exception of Category 1 hazards the reasons for Decent Homes failure are no longer presented at national level. In 2018, 11.7% of private dwellings in England exhibited Category 1 hazards. The equivalent figure in the New Forest district is 2.2%.

Within the Decent Homes Standard itself the following pattern of failure emerges:

- 1,555 dwellings (2.2%) exhibit Category 1 hazards within the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS);
- 3,504 dwellings (4.8%) are in disrepair;
- 195 dwellings (0.3%) lack modern facilities and services; and
- 4,220 dwellings (5.8%) fail to provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.



# Local context CONTINUED



## Environmental conditions

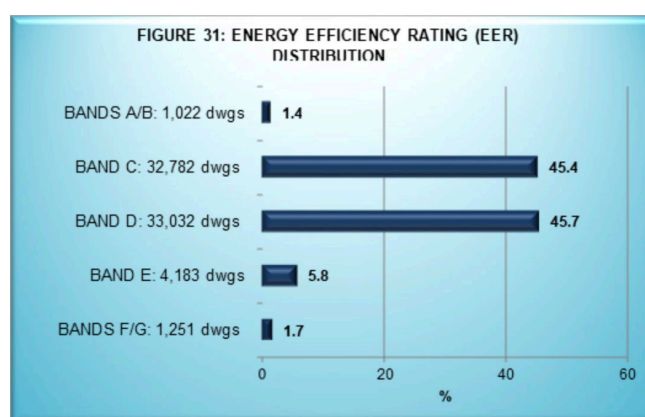
Overall, 2,427 dwellings (3.4%) are located in residential environments experiencing liveability problems (Decent Places). Problems with upkeep affect just 109 dwellings (0.2%), traffic problems affect 1,749 dwellings (2.4%) while utilisation issues affect 569 dwellings (0.8%). As an overall assessment, surveyors were asked to grade the visual quality of the residential environment. Surveyors assessed the environment as below average for 3,342 dwellings (4.6%), as average for 56,832 dwellings (78.6%) and as above average or good for 12,096 dwellings (16.8%). Visual environment quality issues are more significant in areas of private-rental, pre-1919 housing and around dwellings constructed between 1975 and 1981. At an area level they are most significant within the Totton and Waterside HMA.

## Energy efficiency and fuel poverty

Home energy efficiency levels are encouraging and above the national average. 68,049 dwellings (94.2%) comply with Decent Homes thermal comfort requirements and the occupied housing stock has an average SAP rating of 66.1

compared to the English private sector average of 62.2 (2018). Average SAP ratings increase for modern properties ranging from 53.7 for dwellings constructed pre-1919 to 71.3 for dwellings post-1981. Average SAP ratings at 69.6 are also higher within the private-rented sector. At the sub area level, the lowest average SAP ratings are recorded in National Parks Remainder (53.6) and National Parks Towns (62.4).

66,836 occupied private dwellings (92.5) fall within the highest Energy Efficiency Rating (EER) bands (A, B and C) compared to 81.2% of private housing nationally. Conversely the proportion of private dwellings in the lowest EER bands (E, F and G) is below the national average. 6.5% of private dwellings in the New Forest (5,434 dwellings) fall within EER bands E, F and G compared to 18.8% of private dwellings nationally.



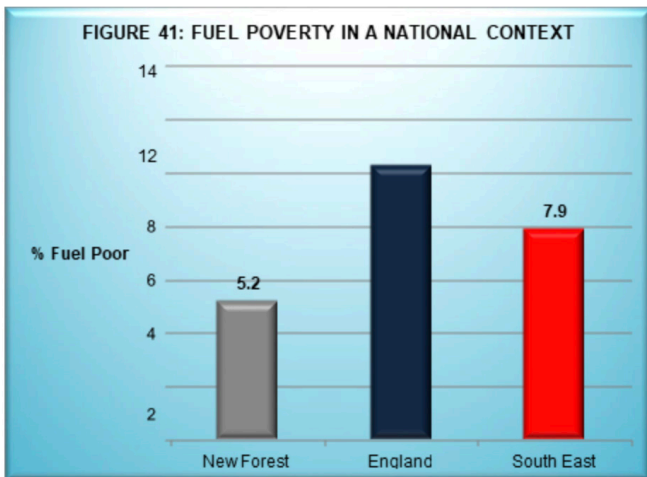
With the exception of the National Park energy efficiency ratings show limited variation geographically. Average SAP ratings of 59 for the National Park HMA are significantly below the District average of 66 and impact particularly on the rural remainder of the National park where the average SAP rating is 55.

Fuel poverty in England is now measured using a Low-Income High Costs framework (LIHC). Under this definition a household is considered to be fuel poor where:

- They have required fuel costs that are above average: and
- Were they to spend that amount, they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

Under the definition, 3,777 households in New Forest (5.2%) have low incomes and high fuel costs and are in fuel poverty. Rates of fuel poverty are below the current average for England (10.3%) and the South East regional average of 7.9%; national and regional figures refer to 2018.

# Local context CONTINUED

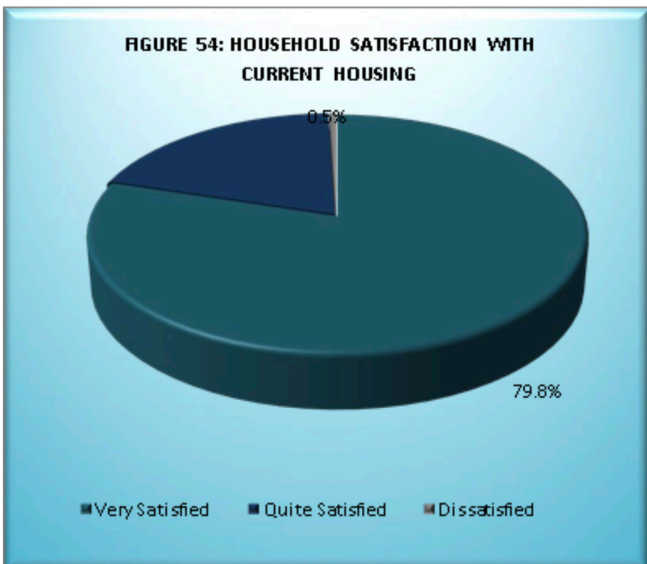


### Household illness/disability

8,673 households in New Forest (12%) indicated that at least one family member was affected by a long-term illness or disability.

Household illness/disability is strongly age related. 6,827 of the households affected by illness/disability (78.7%) have a head of household aged 65 years and over.

The majority of households experiencing illness/disability also experience mobility problems within their existing dwelling – 7,553 households (87.1%). The most common mobility problems relate to climbing steps and stairs, using bathroom amenities and access to gardens.



### Household attitudes

Housing satisfaction levels are very good. 57,667 households (79.8%) are very satisfied with their current home, an additional 14,235 households (19.7%) are quite satisfied. Only 366 households (0.5%) expressed direct dissatisfaction with their home. Household satisfaction with their local areas is also high. 58,958 households (81.6%) are very satisfied with the area in which they live, an additional 13,119 households are quite satisfied (18.2%). Just 191 households (0.3%) expressed dissatisfaction with their local area. The majority of households

– 68,836 households (95.3%) – regard their area as unchanging over the last five years; 1,991 households (2.8%) think their local area has improved while 1,440 households (2.0%) think their local area has declined. Almost 90% of households (1,290) who thought their area had declined in the last five years reside within the Totton and Waterside HMA.

### Empty homes

At the time of survey 72,269 dwellings (94.5%) were occupied; the remaining 4,195 dwellings (5.5%) were vacant. The majority of vacant dwellings (2,592 dwellings – 3.4%) have been vacant under 6 months and are expected to return to occupancy in the short-term. These will typically include dwellings for sale or rent and those currently undergoing major repairs and/or improvements.

A further 685 vacant dwellings (0.9%) were assessed as vacant for over 6 months and are typically regarded as problematic in occupancy terms; the remaining 918 vacant dwellings (1.2%) were deemed to be either holiday lets or second homes. Short-term vacancy rates are in line with normal housing market turnover expectations.

More detailed information on the local Context can be found in the Private Sector Housing Stock Condition Survey report.

# Corporate context

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## **The provision of a strong and healthy private rented sector features heavily in the Council's corporate vision for the next four years.**

Our 2020-2024 Corporate Plan aligns with the Housing and Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategies to reinforce a number of key activities which will produce better outcomes for residents in the private rented sector.

The Council's Housing Portfolio was enhanced in 2019 with the addition of the private sector housing team. We firmly believe that decent housing conditions, adequate supply and solutions for homelessness require the private rented sector to perform its part in responding.

The Council recognises its important role in supporting residents, landlords & letting agents in maintaining the provision of safe and healthy homes. In order to support and monitor this a number of key actions feature in the Corporate Plan; charging the Private Sector Housing Team with delivering the following actions within this strategy.

- Work with the Task & Finish Group to develop and deliver the new Private Sector Housing Strategy by the end of 2020/21.
- Improve standards by setting up a Landlord forum to meet six monthly during 2021.
- Implement a new strategy to tackle empty properties by the end of 2020.
- Protect the health and safety of tenants in private rented properties.
- Enabling the best use of housing to meet the needs of local people, including support for a strong high quality private rented sector.



# Actions to date and future direction of travel

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**Through 2018 to 2020 New Forest District Council has strengthened its strategic and operational approach toward delivering a robust housing service for residents in both the social and private sector.**

In early 2019 the Council recognised that its approach to Private Sector Housing in the district required a new vision to meet the requirements of the sector. A Task and Finish Group of members and senior officers, led by the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, reviewed provision and performance to establish the set of key priorities listed within this strategy.

Since the start of 2019 the Council has:

- Re-branded the name of the team from Housing Grants and Improvements to Private Sector Housing.
- Moved the Private Sector Housing team to operate within the Housing Service to enhance joint working in order to prevent homelessness, improve property condition and improve co-operation with landlords.
- Ensured vacant adapted council dwellings are used primarily for applicants with disabilities.
- Amended bathroom refurbishment programmes in our three Extra Care facilities and bungalows to incorporate level access showers.
- Moved the Private Sector Leasing scheme from the homelessness team to Private Sector Housing, adapting the lead role to incorporate Landlord Liaison.
- Increased the number of Private Sector Leased properties by 8.
- Increased the amount of funding for disabled adaptations for our own housing stock to bring it in line with the amount provided for the Private Sector.
- Provided up to date training for the team to ensure they are equipped to carry out their roles at a time when new legislation is frequently being introduced.
- Taken a new approach to the recruitment of specialist officers to encourage applicants with transferable skills to apply to vacant positions.
- Utilised an improved Corporate IT infrastructure to move from paper-based processes to online processing, including the use of tablets to ensure site visits and follow ups are more efficient and flexible.
- Launched a private sector housing survey in December 2019 to establish the condition of homes in the district to inform this strategy and key priorities.
- Taken on the management of the Council's mobile home park at Stillwater Park.
- Procured new software to manage the day to day work of the Private Sector Housing Team.



# Strategic priority 1

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## Achieving high standards in the private rented sector

### Actions

- Strengthen our relationship with Private Landlords and Letting Agents in the New Forest by:
  - Enabling our Private Sector Landlord Liaison Officer to be the first point of contact for Landlords and Agents.
  - Promoting the Council's Private Sector Lease Scheme.
  - Raising awareness of Council responsibilities and services.
  - Providing support to tenants at risk of homelessness.
- Set up and maintain a successful Landlords' Forum to:
  - Provide partnership working opportunities.
  - Co-operate with local landlord associations.
  - Launch initiatives with landlords such as energy efficiency or greener homes.
  - Improve access to training and learning.
  - Provide forums for discussion and networking.
- Encourage and support landlords and agents to reduce the number of hazards in private rented homes.
- Increase awareness of tenants' rights, responsibilities and the support available.
- Help tenants living in poor quality private rented properties by responding to their concerns quickly and effectively.
- Develop a robust enforcement policy, where co-operation with landlords has failed, to assist with proportional and consistent legal action.
- Adopt a charging structure for the serving of enforcement notices.
- Introduce the use of civil penalties.
- Pro-actively work to identify properties in multiple occupation that are licensable.
- Operate a high-quality mandatory HMO licensing scheme to ensure shared accommodation is safe and provides appropriate facilities to occupiers.
- Work closely with Registered Providers (RPs) to ensure good quality affordable housing is maintained and where necessary ensure appropriate follow up actions have been taken.



# Strategic priority 2

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## Enabling safe independent living

### Actions

- Increase awareness of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) through improved promotion and partnerships with charities and groups representing people with disabilities.
- Reduce the time taken to deliver adaptations in line with progressive targets which achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable people.
- Overhaul our response to hospital discharge cases by creating a new and responsive procedure alongside hospital discharge teams.
- Develop work with Hampshire City Council's adult/ children's services to improve working relationships with local hospitals and community teams to fast track adaptations to assist people home from hospital via a Hospital Discharge Grant.
- Ensure that those who need adaptations receive the appropriate level of advice, support and assistance; delivered in a prompt and timely fashion.
- Review the financial assistance policy to ensure it is aligned to our priorities.



# Strategic priority 3

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## Tackling privately owned empty homes

### Actions

- Implement a new strategy to tackle empty properties in 2020/21.
- Pro-actively work to identify long term empty properties.
- Target owners whose empty homes continue to cause a significant detrimental impact to the neighbourhood.
- Provide support, advice and information to homeowners to bring empty properties back into use.
- Work with other departments, including Council Tax to identify and help bring back into use any long term empty properties within the district.



# Strategic priority 4

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## Energy efficiency

### Actions

- Provide advice and assistance on energy efficiency measures, alternative methods of heating and energy provider switching services to residents, including the new Green Homes Grant.
- Identify and bid for funds to promote energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty.
- Improve access for residents to information and advice to resolve situations of hardship.
- Explore partnerships with Citizen's Advice and other community support agencies.
- Ensure landlords are compliant with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES).



# Strategic priority 5

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## Create a fully integrated Private Sector Housing service

### Actions

**Work with other departments within the Housing Service and the Council to help meet the priorities within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the Housing Strategy:**

- Replace the IT Management System to enable integration with Housing Options systems and databases.
- Review all procedures and policies.
- Review all external communication templates.
- Joint approaches with the Housing Options team to tackle poor accommodation standards to prevent homelessness.
- Work to identify the links between poor private sector properties and homelessness.
- Provide training on legislation and property standards to empower Homelessness Officers to provide appropriate property advice.
- Provide training on homelessness legislation to empower Housing Standard Officers to provide appropriate Housing Options advice.
- Explore the best use of existing Council housing stock before assessing referrals for DFGs.
- Work alongside Allocations and Homelessness Officers to provide solutions to individual housing issues.
- Help facilitate a supply of safe, good quality affordable housing which is accessible and adaptable.
- Provide advice and assistance in designing and acquiring properties for temporary accommodation.
- Re-align job roles within the service to offer consistency of approach.
- Feed in to the design of new Council Housing and temporary accommodation.



# Monitoring and review

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**Performance and progress against each of the actions within this strategy will be reviewed annually in conjunction with members and stakeholders.**

A transparent annual position statement will be produced to highlight our progress and how effective these measures have been in reducing homelessness and rough sleeping.

We are keen to understand the ongoing impact on our residents and our annual review will incorporate a full statistical analysis of approaches to the service. This will enable us to be responsive in tackling any emerging issues.

New actions and targets may be agreed if further changes are made to national legislation and policy. There is likely to be further legislation implemented over the next couple of years to increase safety and enhance security of tenure in the private rented sector.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, working with the Executive Head of Governance & Housing and Service Manager – Housing Options, Rents, Support and Private Sector Housing will lead the review of the delivery plan.

In reviewing its strategy annually this council remains committed to embracing amended policy direction and incorporating it within annual updates.



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