

## **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSE CONDITION SURVEY**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This purpose of this report is to agree the provision of budget to enable a private sector housing stock condition survey to be carried out.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Local Authorities have a statutory duty to consider the condition of the housing stock in their district. Information can come from a number of different sources but primarily it is obtained through stock condition surveys.
- 2.2 Stock condition data including energy efficiency is one of the essential requirements in identifying local issues, needs and expectations in terms of housing renewal. The data is needed for determining policy options, and priorities for action.
- 2.3 One of the Council's Strategic Housing Priorities is 'To ensure that all homes in the District are of a suitable standard for modern living and for the promotion of safety and good health'. Up to date information on stock condition is needed in order to decide how this can be achieved.
- 2.4 Stock condition information can also be used for monitoring compliance with Government targets.
- 2.5 The last stock condition survey was carried out in 2002.

### **3 NEED FOR A NEW SURVEY**

- 3.1 A new survey is needed following changes to housing law.
- 3.2 Under the 2002 survey the condition of the stock was assessed against the fitness standard. The Housing Act 2004 has, however, introduced a new assessment method called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which will take effect from 6 April 2006 (appendix 1).
- 3.3 A new survey will therefore be needed to ensure that the information on the stock condition is current.
- 3.4 Following recent consultative work the Audit Commission identified the need to undertake a new survey as a matter of urgency in order to provide up to date information to underpin the development of a new private sector housing strategy and subsequent policies and initiatives. The report from the Housing Inspector will be the subject of a separate report to this Committee.

- 3.5 The changes to the housing standard are reflected in the Decent Homes Standard (appendix 2). A new stock condition survey will enable compliance with the Government's Decent Homes target to be monitored.

#### **4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The survey will enable policies to be developed to improve the condition of the private sector housing stock and to reduce fuel poverty.

#### **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There will be an estimated cost of £40,000 to engage a contractor to carry out the survey. Opportunities will also be sought for joint commissioning or undertaking the work through other Essex local authorities to see if economies of scale can be achieved, however, this will depend on whether other Councils also need to update their information and whether they have the necessary resources.
- 5.2 There will also be a need to establish a detailed specification of what is required from the survey and to manage the contract, however, this will be met from existing staff resources
- 5.3 The funding for this work will be met from the closure of accounts 2005/06.

#### **6 RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That a private house condition survey be carried out.

Graham Woolhouse

Head of Housing, Health and Community Care

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#### **Background Papers:-**

None

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## APPENDIX 1

**THE HOUSING HEALTH & SAFETY RATING SYSTEM (HHSRS)**

The HHSRS replaces the housing fitness regime and comes into effect on 6 April 2006.

The purpose of the HHSRS is not to set a standard but to generate objective information in order to determine and inform enforcement decisions.

The principle behind the HHSRS is that a dwelling including the access, structure, outbuildings and amenity space should provide a safe and healthy environment for the occupier and any visitors. To satisfy this principle a dwelling should be free from any unnecessary and unavoidable hazards and where hazards are necessary or unavoidable they should be made as safe as reasonably possible.

The approach acknowledges that all dwellings, even new ones, contain hazards. The HHSRS is designed to rate the severity of hazards. It differentiates between those where there is a small chance of relatively minor harm and those where there is an imminent risk of major harm or death. The higher the hazard score, the greater the threat to health and safety.

The HHSRS assesses 29 categories of hazard, including factors which were not included or were only covered inadequately by the housing fitness standard. It provides a rating for each one. It does not provide a single rating for the whole dwelling. A hazard rating is expressed through a numerical score which falls within one of 10 bands. Scores in bands A to C are termed Category 1 hazards. Scores in Bands D to J are Category 2 hazards.

The assessment is based on the risk to the potential occupier who is the most vulnerable to that hazard on the basis that a dwelling that is safe for the most vulnerable person is safe for all.

Enforcement action will depend on

- a) whether the authority has a duty to act (Category 1 hazards) or a power to act (Category 2 hazards) and
- b) the most appropriate course of action to deal with the hazard.

A range of enforcement options are available including serving an improvement notice, taking emergency action, serving a hazard awareness notice and making a demolition order. Although the HHSRS assessment is based on the most vulnerable potential occupant authorities can take account the vulnerability of the actual occupant in deciding the most appropriate course of action.

**APPENDIX 2****DECENT HOMES**

As part of the 2002 spending review, the Public Services Agreement 7 (PSA) was extended to include private sector homes. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) issued guidance for the implementation of the decent home standard in February 2004, to increase the number of vulnerable groups living in decent Private Sector housing to 65% by 2006, 70% by 2010 and 75% by 2020.

Vulnerable groups are defined as families with children, older persons or persons with a long-term illness or disability who are in receipt of an income related or disability benefit.

A decent home must meet the following criteria

- It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing.
- It is in a reasonable state of repair.
- It has reasonably modern facilities and services, and
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

In order to meet the minimum standard for housing a home will now have to be free of Category 1 hazards.