

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 1st November 2021

Report Title: Commission of Housing Stock Condition Survey and Report

Report By: Andrew Palmer – Assistant Director of Housing and Built Environment

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Cabinet about the need to commission a new housing stock condition survey. The survey will inform and support the Councils future strategic planning activity related to housing. This survey is necessary to support the fulfilment of our duty under section 3 of the Housing Act 2004. It will inform the Councils future Housing Strategy as well as other strategies on homeless, climate change and empty homes. The survey will inform future approaches to compliance and inspection under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004, as well as other compliance mechanisms such as Additional HMO (houses of multiple occupation) licensing and Selective licensing. It will also assist in any reviews of our Financial Assistance and Housing Enforcement Policies

Recommendation(s)

That the Council agree to proceed with the commissioning of a stock condition assessment in line with the budget proposed of £46,000

Background

2. Under s3 of the Housing Act 2004 a local housing authority has a duty to keep the housing conditions in their area under review with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by them under the provisions of the act.
3. These provisions include matters relating to housing conditions which encompasses housing health and safety rating system inspections (HHSRS) and associated appropriate enforcement action. It also includes provisions for the licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMO), selective licensing of other residential accommodation and management orders on properties.
4. The method used by local housing authorities to undertake this review and the one which is the recognised course of action, it the commissioning of a housing stock condition survey and report.

Rationale for Commissioning a Housing Stock Condition Survey

5. A housing stock condition survey and report is required to support and inform the Councils strategic planning activity for the future. This includes its, Housing Strategy, Homeless Strategy, Climate Change Strategy and Empty Homes Strategy. It will also influence a review of other policies such as the Financial Assistance Policy and Housing Enforcement Policy.
6. It does this by providing both qualitative and quantitative data and analysis of the housing stock, in line with considerations of other influencing factors and stressors. Key themes would include updated data on changes in tenure, condition of properties including the presence of category 1 hazards, household characteristics, availability, and adaptability of properties for mobility impaired tenants etc.
7. The information provided by the housing stock condition survey will inform inspection priorities. This has become even more important with a reduction in resources. It is vital officer resource is directed on the properties, and in the areas considered to be in the poorest condition and present the greatest risk to health and safety of occupiers. The survey will involve both a desk top study and a proportion of door to door inspections. A communications plan will be developed and agreed.
8. The report also provides an evidence base to allow the council to make an informed decision as to whether it should consider the introduction / continuation of licensing schemes such as Additional HMO Licensing and Selective Licensing in the area. This evidence base must be clearly demonstrated in the application process of any future housing licensing scheme.

Potential Consequences of not Commissioning a Housing Stock Condition Survey

9. As mentioned above it is a duty under s3 of the housing Act 2004 for a local authority to keep its housing stock under review. The purpose of this is to identify the actions that may need to be taken by the Council under the provisions of the act. In order to do this an up-to-date stock condition survey is an effective way to review the current status of the housing stock and identify changes that have occurred since the last survey and any improvements, current stressors that are affecting the area.
10. The findings and data produced will support and inform the planning and development of future housing strategies and also other linked strategies that are affected by it, climate change, planning etc. Well drafted strategies underpinned by current evidence and data allow the Council to ensure their housing resource is directed in the most appropriate way and on the issues most in need of addressing. This provides a rationale for the prioritisation of both reactive and proactive inspection programs and our future approach to dealing with non-compliance with housing related legislation.

11. The previous stock condition data is from 2016 and can no longer be fully relied upon to demonstrate the current condition of the local housing stock. Whilst the Council supplemented the 2016 data with live data collected from actual inspections undertaken as part of the previous selective licensing scheme, this was not considered sufficient by the Minister to support a further selective licensing scheme.
12. If the council wish to consider making a new application for a selective licensing scheme in the future, it will need to demonstrate it has addressed the feedback given by the Minister and the reasons it was not approved. An up-to-date housing stock condition survey is a key component of this. The report provides an overview and analysis of the area and the properties on a scale which simply cannot be achieved by using our own M3 data base and visit data. The report can be used to inform whether any future proposals to implement further selective licensing schemes would assist in improving housing condition in the area and should be considered alongside other compliance mechanisms available under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004.
13. The current Additional HMO Licencing Scheme is due to end in May 2023. If the council wishes to consider implementing a new scheme after this date, the same principles will apply in terms of demonstrating a sufficient evidence base for it. Some of this will be based on the findings and outcomes of the current scheme, but again a holistic view of the housing stock and other influencing factors in the area will also need to be considered.
14. There are also time constraint impacts on obtaining a new housing stock condition survey. It would need to be completed before a decision is made on proposing a new scheme. Any intention for a new Additional HMO Licensing Scheme to directly follow the current scheme will need to be planned many months in advance to comply with consultation requirements. As with the selective licensing scheme, any decision not to implement a new Additional HMO Licensing Scheme will have further consequences not only on compliance mechanisms available but also in the protection that is afforded to tenants living in the area and landlords who are operating in the area.

Financial Implications

15. The survey report will be commissioned in line with the Councils procurement procedures and is estimated to cost in the region of £46,000 although some contingency will need to be factored in for price rises.
16. Following the Corporate Oversight Meeting on 5 October 2021 and subsequent discussion with finance colleagues it was agreed by the Assistant Director Financial Services & Revenues the survey can be funded through a transfer on savings across other housing cost centres in order to commission this important piece of work.

Timetable of Next Steps

1. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Commission Housing Stock Survey via the Procurement Hub	30 th November 2021	May/June 2022	Sandra Thornton

Wards Affected

All

Implications

Relevant project tools applied? Yes/**No**

Have you checked this report for plain English and readability? **Yes/No**

Climate change implications considered? **Yes/No**

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness - No

Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17) - No

Risk Management - No

Environmental Issues - No

Economic/Financial Implications - Yes

Human Rights Act - No

Organisational Consequences - No

Local People's Views - No

Anti-Poverty - No

Additional Information

Officer to Contact

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