

**Private Sector Housing Update**

1. Private Sector Housing forms part of the Community Services Division within the Social and Community Group.
2. The total private sector housing stock in the Borough is estimated at 45,500 dwellings. There are 12,000 dwellings in Cheltenham which are classed as non-decent measured by the Governments Decent Home Standard. Almost 4000 of these are occupied by vulnerable households. There are, in addition, 4000 dwellings which contain a serious health hazard and 2400 households in fuel poverty, a situation which is getting worse with rising fuel costs. There are 3500 houses in multiple occupation within the borough, which, due to their type and nature, often contain the worst housing conditions. Those deemed to be the highest risk to the occupants having regard to their size and occupation are covered by a central government licensing scheme administered by the Council.
3. The Private Sector Housing Service is committed to improving housing standards in Cheltenham, particularly in deprived areas of the town, and to helping to provide much needed affordable housing. Our work will increasingly be driven by the aspirations of the community as enshrined by the Cheltenham Community Strategy and the Council's statutory obligations.

Private Sector Housing (PSH) work includes :

- health and safety, fire safety, disrepair and management issues in respect of privately rented accommodation, including houses in multiple occupation;
- housing standards in student accommodation;
- action to bring vacant privately-owned properties back into use as housing accommodation;
- assistance to vulnerable owner-occupiers whose houses do not meet minimum health and safety standards;
- licensing of and enforcement of standards on mobile home sites;
- working in partnership, helping to enable the improvement of the energy efficiency of the residential housing stock pursuant to the requirements of the Home Energy Conservation Act, having regard to the county affordable warmth strategy and the council's climate change strategy;
- the provision of disabled facility grants to adapt dwellings to meet the needs of disabled persons;
- provision of lifelines to give independence and peace of mind to vulnerable people.

PSH play an important role in ensuring satisfactory conditions in privately rented and owner occupied housing. A specialist team of officers deals with a wide range of property related issues including nuisance and drainage complaints, filthy and verminous premises, unsafe and sub-standard housing, fire safety, repair and amenity standards in houses in multiple occupation (i.e. bedsits and converted flats).

The work of PSH focuses almost solely on those statutory activities for which there is a mandatory duty for the Council to carry out. There is currently no capacity to carry out discretionary work such as Empty Dwelling Management Orders enforcement under the Housing Act 2004.

4. Mandatory duties of the Council (undertaken by PSH) include:
- Taking the most appropriate course of action in respect of dwellings which contain category 1 hazards under the Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) (Part 1 Housing Act 2004). This generally entails enforcement work in rented accommodation but may involve loans and grant aid fund remedial works where there are vulnerable owner occupiers;
  - To inspect, licence and take appropriate enforcement action in respect of licensable Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) (part 2 Housing Act 2004). This included all HMO's of three or more stories (including basements) with five or more occupants and two or more households;
  - To deal with statutory overcrowding (Part X Housing Act 1985)
  - To inspect Mobile Home Parks to enforce site licence conditions
  - The provisions of adaptations and facilities to meet the needs of people with disabilities (Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996)
  - Energy Conservation (Home Energy Conservation Act 1995). To have in place a strategy for the promotion of the adoption of energy efficiency measures and to work towards specified energy efficiency improvement targets aimed at reducing fossil fuel use.
  - Taking action in respect of statutory nuisances (in connection with residential dwellings) affecting public health (Environmental Protection Act 1990).
  - Protecting public health in respect of blocked and defective drains and sewers (Building Act 1984).

5. The work of the PSH contributes to the following national indicators and LAA targets:

- NI33 - Arson incidents
- NI121 - Mortality rate from circulation diseases at ages under 75
- NI137 - Healthy life expectancy at age 65
- NI138 - Satisfaction of people over 65 with both home and neighbourhood
- NI139 - The extent to which older people achieve the support they need to live independently at home
- NI155 - The number of affordable homes
- NI187 - Tackling fuel poverty (also LAA target)

LAA Targets:

- Number of measures (cavity wall/loft insulation and central heating) installed via Gloucestershire Warm and Well Scheme

6. The following targets are set down in the Electronic Service Plan (ESP) and measure the performance of PSH:

<b>Local PI Code</b>	<b>Performance measures</b>	<b>2008/09 Target</b>
CS 18 PSH	To facilitate bringing back into use 40 long term empty properties 2008/09	40
CS 19 PSH	To facilitate the making safer of 500 dwellings 2008/09	500
CS 20 PSH	To make decent 50 dwellings occupied by vulnerable households 2008/09	50
CS 21 PSH	To improve 400 homes in Cheltenham under the county wide Warm and Well scheme	400
CS 22 PSH	To have inspected 100 HMOs subject to licensing and served appropriate Housing Act notices as necessary. To have carried out investigations to determine the status of all those houses suspected of being in contravention of the scheme by June 2008 (Estimated 70)	100
CS 23 PSH	To have inspected all licensed mobile home parks by March 2009 to determine site licence contraventions and instigated appropriate action where contraventions are found.	13
CS 24 PSH	Increase the number of lifeline customers year on year	1208
CS 25 PSH	Approve aids and adaptations under the disabled facilities grant	115
CS 26 PSH	Percentage of service requests should be responded to within three working days	95%
CS 27 PSH	Percentage of valid grant applications should be refused or approved within 3 weeks	92%
CS 28 PSH	Percentage of grant payments should be processed and passed to creditors within 2 weeks of a valid request	90%
CS 29 PSH	Customer satisfaction of the Private Sector Housing service	90%

7. The Private Sector Renewal Grant (PSR) is a cash grant given to the Council by Central Government to fund schemes designed to improve the private sector housing stock, with central government emphasis currently on providing decent homes for vulnerable persons through third party loans. The PSR currently funds:

- Health and Safety loans and grants
- Vacant property grants
- Grants for Energy Efficiency works under the Warm and Well Scheme (administered by SWEA)

(Disabled Facilities grants are currently funded from a separate government contribution)

In 2007/8 this cash grant amounted to £655k but was reduced to £448k in 2008/9

A further reduction in this grant funding would affect performance of PSH, but it is hoped that following the bidding round this year the funding will rise again to the 2007/8 level.

The main risk to the performance of PSH is the current inability to recruit professional staff to carry out inspections and work which enables the Council to meet its mandatory duties.