

Rugby Borough Council
Housing and Property Service



Private Sector Housing Strategy
2015 – 2017

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1.0 Introduction

According to the 2011 Census data, there are 41,900 homes, across the various tenures, in Rugby borough.

The rates of private-renting in Rugby are in line with the county average. However, Rugby has experienced a higher rate of growth in this sector in the last 10 years, with the number of households privately-renting their homes increasing by just over 150% from 2,100 to 5,300 homes.

Rugby's future as an attractive, thriving and sustainable town relies heavily on a plentiful supply of good-quality homes that are safe and decent, and which meet a range of different housing needs.

This strategy sets out our priorities for the private-housing sector (owner-occupied and private-rented housing), and gives background to the challenges that we know exist. The accompanying action plan explains what we will do in response, how we will do it and when.

2.0 Priorities of the Strategy

The priorities are to improve:

- The quality of the private sector.
- Access for households to live in private-sector properties

Sitting under this are the following themes:

- Bring empty homes back into use
- Improved private-sector housing conditions (both private-rented and owner-occupied)
- Working more closely with private-sector landlords
- Increased support and housing options for potentially vulnerable home-owners and tenants.

3.0 How the Strategy Will Help to Meet the Strategic Objectives of the Council

The overall objective of the council is to achieve a *borough that is clean, green and safe*.

Our priorities are to achieve outcomes for:

- People
- Business
- The environment
- How the council operates

The outcomes which are sought by the Corporate Strategy (2012 – 2016), that are most relevant to the private-sector housing strategy are:

- High standards of existing and future housing stock
- Regeneration of our priority neighbourhoods
- Improved health and wellbeing for all age groups

4.0 The Legislative Context

There are three key issues that are of particular relevance to private-sector housing both nationally and locally:

- The Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Category 1 and Category 2 complaints
- Mandatory HMO licensing

4.1 The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

The HHSRS, introduced by the Housing Act 2004, provides a comprehensive basis to evaluate the potential risks to health and safety from any deficiencies within people's homes. The legislation gives councils the power to:

- serve notices on landlords (or their managing agents)
- enforce these notices
- to improve the condition of rental properties

The HHSRS lists 29 hazards, and provides a comprehensive basis on which to evaluate these risks:

1	Damp and mould growth	16	Electrical hazards
2	Food safety	17	Un-combustible fuel gas
3	Excess cold	18	Fire
4	Personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage	19	Volatile organic compounds
5	Excess heat	20	Hot surfaces and materials
6	Water supply	21	Crowding and space
7	Asbestos	22	Collision and entrapment
8	Falls associated with baths etc.	23	Entry by intruders
9	Biocides	24	Explosions
10	Falls on the level	25	Lighting
11	Radiation	26	Ergonomics
12	Falls associate with stairs and steps	27	Noise
13	Carbon monoxide	28	Structural collapse and falling elements
14	Falls between levels	29	Domestic hygiene, pests and refuse
15	Lead		

The Public Health and Licensing team, based within the council, carries out HHSRS inspections. The inspections are either triggered by complaints received from the public, who live within private-rented housing (including housing association homes), through a referral or through other pro-

active work. These inspections effectively cover all aspects of the property and give an informed view of the risk the premises presents to the most vulnerable potential occupant.

Hazards identified through these inspections are then defined as category 1 or category 2, depending on their severity.

4.2 Category 1 and Category 2 Hazards

Where category 1 hazards are present and deemed serious, the council has a legal duty to take action, utilising applicable legislation and enforcement tools to ensure that issues are resolved.

Other hazards will fall under category 2 and are less serious. The council has the discretion to act and ensure such hazards identified are reduced to a satisfactory level and no longer pose a risk to the occupants.

4.3 Mandatory Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

Properties subject to mandatory licensing, which can last up to five years, must:

- be more than two storeys
- have five or more occupants
- comprise of two or more households
- have shared amenities

This affects approximately 44 properties within the borough, many of which will also require a full HHSRS inspection within the five years of the licensing.

Where an unlicensed HMO is identified, the council will work with the landlord, in the first instance, to assist with the licensing process. However a fine of up to £20,000 can be imposed for controlling or managing an unlicensed HMO.

Prosecution will only be used as an option when the landlord has failed to comply with requirements, or their actions have resulted in tenants being put at serious risk.

There are fees for HMO licences, with additional higher fees being payable by those who are unlicensed (to cover the extra regulatory activity needed). License applications should be made directly to the council and by the person in control of the premises. The fees are:

- £350 for applications made by landlords before use
- £600 for HMOs operating without a license

Further detailed information can be viewed on the council's website.

5.0 Other Activities Carried Out by the Council:

The council works closely with other agencies to tackle issues of improving private-sector housing. The core activities undertaken are:

- Selective licensing
- Private-Sector Landlords' forum
- Deposit assistance scheme
- Tackling empty properties
- Affordable warmth initiatives
- Handy-person scheme (Orbit Care and Repair)
- Disabled facilities grants
- Renovation loans

5.1 Selective Licensing

Selective discretionary licensing gives councils the option to extend licensing beyond mandatory licensed HMOs. Potentially, councils can introduce licensing for all privately rented properties in a given area, subject to certain criteria being met in terms of low housing demand and significant problems of anti-social behaviour.

The selective licensing process is currently being reviewed by the government, and the council will evaluate proposed changes as and when the detail emerges.

5.2 Private-Sector Landlords' Forum

The National Landlords' Association and the council jointly facilitate a Private-Sector Landlords' Forum in Rugby. The forum, which meets quarterly, aims to:

- Improve relationships between private-sector landlords and the council
- Provide training opportunities for landlords – particularly in terms of keeping them up to date on legislative changes that may affect them
- provide an arena in which landlords, agents and the council can share information and concerns
- encourage networking amongst landlords, the council and other relevant partners

5.3 Deposit Assistance Scheme

The *Deposit Assistance Scheme* aims to help customers who are in housing need or threatened with homelessness to access suitable, affordable accommodation within the private-rented sector and support them in sustaining their tenancies. Essentially, the council acts as a guarantor for between 6-24 months, with rents linked to the local housing allowance.

The council intends to develop this scheme and provide incentives for landlords to join it. This will help to assist with discharging our homelessness duties into the private-rented sector.

The scheme is administered by the council's Housing Options Team and is discussed with applicants as a potential housing option when they approach us for initial housing advice.

5.4 Tackling Empty Properties

Empty properties are not only a wasted housing resource but can also have a negative impact on neighbourhoods, in terms of attracting anti-social behaviour and crime, as well as reducing neighbouring property values.

As of January 2015, there were 436 empty properties in the borough, of these, 134 had been empty for more than two years. This is approximately 1% of the borough's housing stock.

Regular checks are carried out on the status of these properties and advice is offered to assist property owners in bringing them back into use. Some examples of the information that we provide include making them aware of VAT exemptions and potential energy efficiency funding. This information is also distributed through the Landlords' Forum.

The Planning Enforcement Team takes the lead on tackling nuisance long-term empty properties. It can, if necessary, use legal remedies to enforce improvement works or even force the sale of the property.

The Community Safety Wardens (CSWs) are a reactive, out-of-hours service responding to calls from the public about anti-social behaviour at empty properties. The CSWs work closely with the council's Enforcement Teams and also share information with our partner agencies such as the police to help tackle these issues.

Problem Property Group meetings are held when needed. These are meetings which take a cross-council team approach to dealing with properties that are proving especially problematic, and taking up a lot of resource in terms of officer time across the different services.

5.5 Affordable Warmth Initiatives

Improved affordable warmth is something that we are committed to, as it has a positive impact on the health, wellbeing and quality of life of residents.

The council has an active programme of energy efficiency improvements for its own housing stock, including a window replacement programme, electric-to-gas heating conversions and boiler upgrades. The council expects landlords to follow this positive lead when letting and maintaining their properties.

We also do a lot of working with external partners to increase their understanding of affordable warmth and its impact on well-being. Examples of such initiatives include:

- giving energy-efficiency advice to community and voluntary groups
- training for RBC staff and NHS staff (for example midwives and hospital-discharge teams)
- advice sessions for residents via the council's website, through social media (Twitter), Act on Energy (a Warwickshire based affordable-warmth charity). We will also give advice to individuals, via home visits, where appropriate
- offering crisis measures including boiler-servicing grants, insulation grants and temporary emergency heating, in partnership with Public Health Warwickshire

5.6 Handy-Person Scheme (Orbit Care & Repair)

The Handy-Person Scheme, provided by Orbit Care & Repair, is a minor repairs service for older homeowners, private-tenants and for people who are disabled. There is a fee payable by people making use of this service.

The list of minor repairs, below, is not exhaustive and some smaller jobs may also be considered:

- Repairs to doors and windows.
- Plaster work
- Minor brickwork
- Plumbing
- Carpentry
- Minor aids and adaptations (grab rails and mop stick stair rails)
- Repairs to floors
- Installation of key safes
- Smoke alarm fitting

If an applicant for this service is in hospital, then a social worker or hospital staff may arrange for Orbit Care & Repair to visit the service-user in hospital, to discuss their needs and plan the required works. In some circumstances, they may visit the applicant at home instead, when they have been discharged.

5.7 Disabled Facilities Grants

The council offers *disabled facilities grants* towards the cost of providing adaptations and facilities to help people to continue to live, as comfortably and independently as possible, in their current home.

Administered by the Orbit Care & Repair team, applicants receive support throughout the application process, from the initial assessment of need through to completion of the required works.

5.8 Renovation Loans

The council offers practical support through *Renovation Loans*. These are available for owner-occupiers, on a low income, to help them bring their homes up to a decent standard (a home that is safe, warm, weather-proof and has reasonably modern facilities).

Example measures that are covered by the loans include the repair of faulty electrics and gas, leaking roofs, damp and heating issues.

The minimum loan amount will be £1,000 whilst the maximum is £5,000 per household. All loans are secured on the property and a legal charge is registered with the Land Registry, so that the loan is repayable upon sale or transfer of ownership of the property.

A one-off 9% administrative charge will be made by the Care & Repair Agency to cover their costs in arranging the loan. There is a £350 charge made by the council to cover administration costs, including Land Registry searches. Interest is also charged, which is index-linked to Retail Price Index (RPI).

6.0 Working with partners

Delivery of the strategy action-plan will require partnership working both within the council and externally.

The key partners are:

- Rugby Borough Council Services
- Public Health Warwickshire
- Orbit Care and Repair
- Act on Energy
- Rugby Landlords' Forum
- National Landlords Association

Action	Who	When	Outcome sought	How do we know we have achieved this?
1. Bring empty homes back into use:				
Identify and implement solutions for those properties that have been empty for more than two years	Planning Enforcement Team / Housing & Community Development Team	31 March 2016	<p>Properties are brought back into use to meet housing need, across tenure, within the borough.</p> <p>Happier communities that potentially feel these properties blight their neighbourhood.</p> <p>Increased revenue income (New Homes Bonus and Council Tax)</p> <p>RBC resources no longer need to be deployed to tackle resulting issues.</p> <p>Potential reduction in crime and disorder and resulting need for reactive services</p>	<p>Number of empty properties</p> <p>Feedback through the community audits.Council Tax and New Homes Bonus statistics.</p> <p>Complaints monitoring and case studies of problematic empty properties</p> <p>As above</p>
Work with partners to redevelop Bell House	Housing & Community Development Team	31 March 2016	<p>Redevelop to provide much needed 1-bedroom general-needs affordable housing.</p> <p>Tackles the issue of a currently derelict property.</p>	<p>The new homes being built</p> <p>Community perception survey after the new build has been completed.</p>

Action	Who	When	Outcome sought	How do we know we have achieved this?
			<p>Potential apprenticeship and training opportunity</p> <p>Increased revenue income (New Homes Bonus and Council Tax)</p> <p>RBC resources no longer need to be deployed to tackle resulting issues.</p>	<p>Requirement of the main contractor in the contract agreement with the registered provider</p> <p>Council Tax and New Homes Bonus statistics.</p> <p>Complaints monitoring and case study</p>
Identify a solution for empty private pitches at Woodside Gypsy and Traveller park	Planning Enforcement Team / Housing & Community Development Team	31 January 2016	<p>Bring these pitches back into use to meet the needs identified in the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2014.</p> <p>Reassures the community by tackling the issues of anti-social behaviour, including fly-tipping.</p> <p>Increased revenue income (New Homes Bonus and Council Tax)</p> <p>RBC resources no longer need to be deployed to tackle resulting issues.</p>	<p>Number of pitches brought back into use</p> <p>Community perception survey</p> <p>Council Tax and New Homes Bonus statistics.</p> <p>Complaints monitoring and case studies of problematic empty pitches</p>
2. Improved private-sector housing conditions				

Action	Who	When	Outcome sought	How do we know we have achieved this?
Review the effectiveness of the existing portfolio of loans to help homeowners improve their properties	Regeneration Manager	31 January 2016	<p>Understand what works and what does not work so that more effective solutions can be identified.</p> <p>Helps homeowners to make their homes warmer, safer and healthier.</p> <p>Positive impact on the local economy, in terms of materials and labour.</p> <p>Potential for reduced dependency on acute services / hospital admissions in terms of illness exacerbated by cold</p>	<p>New policies</p> <p>SAP / EPC data before and after. Perception surveys.</p> <p>Interviews with contractors (which are local ones registered with Constructionline). Clarify where they sourced materials from.</p> <p>Case studies</p>
Implement a programme of energy efficiency improvements in the Benn Ward	Regeneration Manager	31 September 2016	<p>Improved health and well-being of homeowners and tenants.</p> <p>They will benefit from warmer homes, which are more affordable to heat.</p> <p>Potential for positive impact on the local economy, in terms of materials and labour.</p> <p>Potential for reduced dependency on acute services / hospital</p>	<p>Case studies</p> <p>SAP / EPC data before and after. Perception surveys</p> <p>Interviews with contractors</p> <p>Case studies</p>

Action	Who	When	Outcome sought	How do we know we have achieved this?
			admissions in terms of illness exacerbated by cold	
Implement a programme of External Wall Insulation improvements in Long Lawford	Property Manager	30 June 2016	<p>Improved health and well-being of homeowners and tenants.</p> <p>They will benefit from warmer homes, which are more affordable to heat.</p> <p>Potential for positive impact on the local economy, in terms of materials and labour.</p> <p>Potential for reduced dependency on acute services / hospital admissions in terms of illness exacerbated by cold</p>	<p>Case studies and number of households involved in the scheme</p> <p>SAP / EPC data before and after.</p> <p>Perception surveys</p> <p>Interviews with contractors</p> <p>Case studies</p>
3. Working more closely with private-sector landlords				
Increase opportunities to refer applicants to private-sector housing	Enforcement Team / Private Sector Accommodation Officer	31 December 2015	<p>Increased housing options for people</p> <p>Ability to meet broader range of housing needs</p> <p>Increased choice, possibly through leasing</p>	<p>Records of private-sector landlords acceptance of referrals</p> <p>Profiling data of people referred to and accepted by private-sector landlords</p> <p>Mapping where properties are</p>

Action	Who	When	Outcome sought	How do we know we have achieved this?
Help landlords to improve the quality of their properties	Enforcement Team / Private Sector Accommodation Officer	31 August 2016	<p>Improved health and well-being of tenants.</p> <p>Options appraisal/viability study</p> <p>Potential for positive impact on the local economy, in terms of materials and labour.</p> <p>Potential for reduced dependency on acute services / hospital admissions in terms of resulting illness</p>	<p>Perception surveys</p> <p>Case studies</p> <p>Reduced amount of category 1 and 2 hazards in private-sector properties</p>
Introduce criteria for assessing the quality of landlords and properties that we refer people on to.	Private Sector Accommodation Officer	30 April 2016	<p>Effective risk management, particularly in terms of safeguarding vulnerable children and adults.</p> <p>Helps to ensure that we are signposting people to warm and safe homes.</p>	<p>Procedures / protocol in place, concerning category 1 hazards, gas safety, EPC/SAP.</p> <p>Case studies</p>
Increase landlords awareness of their obligations in terms of the Housing and	Enforcement Team / Private Sector Accommodation Officer	31 December 2016	<p>Potential catalyst for landlords to improve their properties</p> <p>Improved health and well-being of tenants.</p>	<p>Case studies, number of landlords advised and by what mechanism</p> <p>Perception surveys</p>

Action	Who	When	Outcome sought	How do we know we have achieved this?
Health Safety Rating System (HHSRS)			Potential for positive impact on the local economy, in terms of materials and labour.	Interviews with landlords
Identify incentives for private-sector landlords to work with the council	Private Sector Accommodation Officer	31 March 2016	Working more closely with landlords to increase residents' access to private-sector accommodation	Options appraisal for incentive schemes Number of landlords signed up to a scheme
4. Increase support and housing options for potentially vulnerable homeowners and tenants				
Evaluate potential to extend RBC telecare services into private sector.	Operational Housing Manager	31 March 2017	Helps people to be safe whilst living independently in their own homes. Potential for reduced dependency on acute services / hospital admissions in terms of resulting illness Potential for earlier hospital discharge Potential for tenants to sustain their independence and not fall into acute housing need Potential revenue income stream for	Case studies Number of residents that use the scheme and frequency of hospital admissions Financial monitoring

Action	Who	When	Outcome sought	How do we know we have achieved this?
			the council	
Work with WCC to reshape housing support in Rugby	Regeneration Manager	31 March 2017	Reformed services by WCC Provide services to meet need in an environment of significantly reduced resources	New services launched Vulnerable people more able to live independently, in line with the revised specification for support services Measures agreed and monitoring mechanisms established Monitor repeat presentations as being homeless or in housing need
Develop projects to sustain floating support and help people to become tenancy ready / sustain their tenancy	Regeneration Manager	31 January 2016	Effective risk management, particularly in terms of safeguarding vulnerable children and adults. Helping people to avoid future homelessness. Increased pool of private-sector landlords wishing to house young	Procedures / support packages introduced Monitoring individuals' tenancy sustainment plans Monitor repeat presentations as being homeless, in housing need or accessing hospital admissions Number of people supported by

Action	Who	When	Outcome sought	How do we know we have achieved this?
			people as a consequence of support being in place to avoid tenancy breakdown	ASH project: supporting 16-25-year-olds and adults with low-level mental-health issues/vulnerable.
Identify a sustainable local solution to support home-owners at risk of repossession.	Housing & Community Development Team Leader Housing Options Team	31 January 2016	Effective tool for prevention of homelessness, and potentially helping to increase supply of council homes. Minimises the potential disruption, uncertainty and distress for families. Enables families to be more resilient and maintain established links within their neighbourhoods as well as in employment, training and education.	Monitoring number of acquisitions through this route Number of repossessions prevented Case studies Case studies
Develop a mechanism for providing advice and information for households living in the private-sector	Private Sector Accommodation Officer	30 June 2016	Enable private-sector tenants to understand fully their responsibilities and their landlord's responsibilities.	Number of tenants advised