

The Private Sector Housing Team-

Best Value Review - Executive Summary

The Teams Aims:

to encourage provision of a private sector housing stock that is sound, fit and energy efficient and in reasonable repair;
and privately rented accommodation that is properly managed.

Key Objectives:

- to eliminate unfit housing in the Borough in the medium term;
- to reduce significantly disrepair affecting pre-1919 and inter-war housing;
- to provide financial and other assistance to the elderly and those on low incomes in order to improve their living conditions;
- to ensure that all HMOs in the Borough meet locally adopted standards;
to reduce the number of empty private properties significantly over the next five years;
- to influence private landlords to provide good standard, affordable accommodation and reduce conflict with tenants.
- to improve energy efficiency in residential accommodation.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING - PROFILE AND RESOURCES

Profile

The Borough has 44,000 private sector dwellings, housing some 85% of the Borough's population. Maintaining a private sector housing stock that is sound, in good repair, safe, warm, fit for human habitation and suitable for use by the occupants is therefore of importance in terms of the health and living conditions of a significant portion of the Borough's population. It also makes an indirect contribution to the Borough's economy and Guildford as an attractive place to live and work.

Whilst the primary responsibility for maintaining private sector housing lies with the owner of the property, the Council does have enforcement duties in respect of unfit housing, area renewal and houses in multiple occupation; the ability to assist, through grant aid, the improvement and repair of private

sector housing; and a general enabling role to secure improvements and maintain this sector, given its importance to the community as a housing resource.

Major Work Areas

The nature of the work can be broadly separated into specialised areas, firstly the programmed work such as the licensing of mobile home sites and houses in multiple occupation.

Secondly, dealing with complaints and enquiries from residents, landlords, tenants and visitors in respect of housing conditions. These are investigated and appropriate action taken to deal with each.

Thirdly, the operation of an in-house agency service directed towards elderly and vulnerable clients to assist them to manage better in their own homes.

Fourthly, promotional activities such as the improvement in the energy efficiency of the housing stock and home safety initiatives.

Fifthly, the administration of the Renovation Grant Scheme offering financial assistance to private owners and tenants.

Principal tasks carried out by the team are:

Process a range of grant applications for home improvements under the Government's statutory scheme:

- i) Renovation Grants.
- ii) Disabled Facilities Grants.
- iii) Common Parts Grants.
- iv) Houses in Multiple Occupation Grants.
- v) Housing Repairs Assistance Grants.

Enforce statutory standards relating to residential properties/mobile homes;

- i) Fitness standards for human habitation, including assessment of structural stability, freedom from dampness, state of repair, natural light and ventilation, space heating provision and suitability of drainage and food preparation arrangements.
- ii) Fitness standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation, including means of escape from fire, numbers accommodated, amenities provided, levels of maintenance and management arrangements.

- iii) Overcrowding in terms of size and number of rooms available to accommodate occupants.
- iv) Public health nuisances, such as noise, rubbish and defects in one property affecting other properties.
- v) Licensing of mobile home sites - both residential and holiday homes.

Operate an agency scheme for vulnerable clients requiring building works (Care & Repair). Service includes preparation of plans/specification of works, obtaining necessary consents, grant approvals and advice on top-up funding options and any temporary rehousing requirements. Homecheck - a dedicated officer carrying out home safety and energy efficiency visits to elderly and disabled clients. Assistance is given with benefit maximisation, form filling, adaptations and introducing other care agencies.

Promote Home Energy Efficiency through publicity, grants and partnership arrangements with other agencies also active in the field.

Aim to reduce energy use by 28% over a 10 to 15 year period.

Promote Home Safety through publicity, home assessments and provision of aids to vulnerable clients.

Co-ordinate Empty Properties Strategy. Involves the identification of long-term empty properties, publicity and encouragement to owners to bring them back into use with the use of grants and short leasing agreements with the Council or Housing Associations.

Investigate illegal eviction/harassment of private tenants. Involves interviewing both tenants and landlords to seek conciliation where possible and, where necessary, prepare evidence for prosecutions.

Advise landlords, owners and tenants on their rights, duties and opportunities.

Review policy and statutory requirements in private sector.

POSITION STATEMENT

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The Private Sector Team has continuously sought to improve the services it provides through a variety of actions. These include:

- Introduction of a computerised database.

- Greater management information for more effective use of resources.
- Restructuring of Enforcement Team
- Increase in administrative support.
- Improved generation of income from HMO registration and Care and Repair
- Contracts in place with statutory agencies to deliver services.
- Re-deployment of staff to extend range of services (Energy Surveying)
- Two year contract with Energy Action Grant Agency to carry out energy surveys.
- Steering Group established for Care and Repair Service.
- Regular landlord forums.
- Participation in bench-marking exercise with other Local Authorities.
- Introduction of customer feedback questionnaires.
- Wide public consultation on strategic issues.
- Physical house condition survey completed.
- Approved strategies by Borough Council in respect of:
 1. Renovation Grants
 2. Energy Efficiency
 3. Empty Homes
 4. Home Safety
 5. Private Sector Renewal
- Annual review of Service through Housing Investment Programme.