

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CABINET – 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

**BETTER HOMES FOR ALL**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR - HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE**

**LEAD CABINET MEMBER – COUNCILLOR RICHARD OVERTON**

**PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT**

**1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 The Better Homes for All programme was introduced in 2018 setting a new focus on improving conditions in the growing private rented sector and tackling rogue landlords in the Borough.
- 1.2 This was further underpinned in the Better Homes for All Cabinet Report 2020, with the development of the Council Programme to 'Protect, Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough'. The Council's Housing Strategy includes as a key objective to 'make BEST use of our existing homes'. This report provides an update on delivery of the programme now covering all housing tenures and incorporating empty homes and affordable warmth.
- 1.3 Over the past 2 years, and against the backdrop of a global pandemic, we have maintained our approach to 'Educate, Encourage and Enforce' by supporting tenants and landlords through unprecedented challenges whilst still continuing to take robust legal action against landlords who deliberately fail to meet their legal responsibilities.
- 1.4 During this time the service has:
  - Addressed 1500 requests for service providing information, advice and support to owners, those renting and landlords
  - Participated in 18 Multi Agency Targeted Enforcement Strategy (MATES) operations
  - Served over 400 enforcement notices
  - Carried out over 450 property inspections linked with the Safer Streets Programme alone
  - Inspected all 240 licensed HMOs to ensure covid compliance
  - Introduced a new Long Term Empty Property Strategy setting an ambitious target to bring 375 long term empties back into use
  - Introduced a new Affordable Warmth Strategy to tackle fuel poverty, improve health and well-being and support our Zero Carbon targets
  - Successfully brought in c. £3m to date of capital funding for energy efficiency measures to domestic properties in the Borough.

1.5 This report sets out proposals to maintain and strengthen the Better Homes for All programme to make best use of and improve the quality of existing homes across all tenures by:

- Introducing a new borough wide support package for landlords and tenants
- Updating our Private Sector Housing enforcement policy, amenity standards and licence conditions
- Setting out proposals to increase our HMO licence fees to ensure we are covering the cost of running the licensing scheme
- Responding to the current energy crisis through extending the scope of our affordable warmth programme to support more households in fuel poverty and achieve our carbon net zero targets for the Borough

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Cabinet note the continued progress of the Better Homes for All Programme.
- 2.2 Cabinet approve the closure of the current landlord accreditation scheme, as detailed in section 5.3 of this report.
- 2.3 Cabinet approve a new Borough wide package of support for private tenants and landlords, including the introduction of a **dedicated landlord tenant coordinator** as detailed in section 5.4 of this report. The full package details are contained within **Appendix 1**.
- 2.4 Cabinet approve the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy 2022 including a revised civil penalty charging matrix and adoption of a number of pieces of legislation to improve standards in the private rented sector, as detailed in section 5.7. The policy is appended to this report as **Appendix 2**.
- 2.5 Cabinet approve a fixed fee structure, in order to ensure consistency, for certain enforcement action taken under Section 49 of the Housing Act 2004 as detailed in section 5.9.5 of this report.
- 2.6 Cabinet approve the revised amenity, space and management standards for HMOs in the Borough as detailed in section 5.12 of this report and **Appendix 3**
- 2.7 Cabinet approve the revised HMO licence conditions to incorporate changes in legislation, including **the introduction of minimum room sizes to tackle overcrowding in HMOs** as detailed in section 5.13 of this report and **Appendix 4**
- 2.8 Cabinet approve the **revised fee structure for Mandatory Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licencing** as detailed in section 5.14 of this report.
- 2.9 Cabinet delegate authority to the Director for Housing, Employment & Infrastructure in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Enforcement and Transport to approve any future amendments to any

enforcement or HMO licensing fee structures; and the Conditions for Houses in Multiple Occupancy required to be licenced

2.10 Cabinet note the energy efficiency measures that will be delivered with £0.5m climate change funding as detailed in section 5.16.3 of this report.

### **3. IMPACT OF ACTION**

The proposals in the Report aim to increase the quality and standard of domestic accommodation across all tenures and support local communities by addressing problem properties that can blight neighbourhoods. The proposals will also contribute to the Council's priorities in relation to reducing inequality, increasing health and wellbeing and addressing zero carbon.

### **4. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>COMMUNITY IMPACT</b>	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-Operative Council priority objective(s)?	
	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support communities and those most in need and work to give residents access to suitable housing</li> <li>• Improve health and wellbeing across Telford &amp; Wrekin</li> <li>• Keep neighbourhoods safe, clean and well connected</li> </ul>
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	Proposals will benefit all residents particularly increasing protection and support for those renting but also enabling improvement measures across tenures and addressing properties that blight neighbourhoods
<b>TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised HMO Licensing fees and enforcement charges will take effect from 1 June 2022</li> <li>• All updated policies will take immediate effect.</li> <li>• Empty property work will be delivered in line with the long term empty property strategy.</li> <li>• Energy Efficiency work will be delivered in line with the Affordable Warmth strategy.</li> </ul>	
<b>FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT</b>	Yes	<p>The Capital Programme will contain the following allocations to support the initiatives in this report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £520,000 LAD2 allocations awarded in 21/22.</li> <li>• The recent award of c. £1.6m for the next phase of LAD and HUG</li> </ul>

		<p>which benefits off grid properties. This includes £650k directly and circa £1m through a joint delivery programme with Shropshire Council the lead delivery partner. These will be incorporated into the Capital Programme through Service and Financial Planning Reports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £500k of capital will be vired from the Councils Climate Change Fund</li> </ul> <p>The Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26 approved the removal of the Landlord accreditation scheme income target of £8k.</p> <p>Base budget funding is available for the Landlord Tenant co-ordinator post.</p> <p>There are budgeted income targets of £35k for Penalty income and £35k HMO licensing income. The proposed HMO and Section 49 fees in section 5.14 and 5.9.5, have been calculated to fully recover our costs. It is not possible to quantify the total income at this point in time, any over delivery will be identified through financial monitoring processes.</p> <p>DR &amp; AEM 12/04/22</p>
<b>LEGAL ISSUES</b>	Yes	<p>The Council has a wide range of powers to address the issues it is seeking to tackle, including defective housing, environmental crime and anti-social behaviour, in particular powers implemented under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to deal with the notion of “Rogue Landlords and Property Agents in England”, introducing Banning Orders, a national database of Rogue Landlords and Property Agents, and rent repayment orders. The Act introduced Civil (Financial) Penalties for breach of a number of offences under the Housing Act 2004 and these powers are being utilised regularly by the PSH Team.</p> <p>The Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006 requires the Council to have regard to the Central Government Regulators’ Code when determining</p>

		<p>policies or principles that guide regulatory activities and to demonstrate openness and fairness in its approach to enforcement.</p> <p>The proposed amended enforcement policy will ensure that activities are fair and consistent and follow the principles of the Regulator's Code. The policy and amenity standards will also ensure transparency for service users so that they are fully aware of what is expected of them and what they can expect from PSH enforcement officers. The policy will additionally provide reassurance that service users can be satisfied that they will be treated fairly and proportionately. In respect of enforcement of housing standards, Legal Services will continue to provide advice and assistance to officers and carry out prosecution of offenders, secure banning orders to prevent rogue landlords from managing properties and to defend the Council's decisions against appeal in the Residential Property Tribunal.</p> <p>Any legal issues arising from implementation of the programme of work as set out will be considered by Legal Services. AG 11/04/2022</p>
<b>OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Yes	<p>The financial risks to the Council in the event of a legal challenge to the change in Policy: - Any change in policy will carry some inherent financial risk to the Council in the event of a legal challenge, however this has been mitigated by ensuring that current and relevant fee-setting and policy guidance has been considered and adhered to. AG 11/04/2022</p>
<b>IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS</b>	No	Borough wide impact

## **PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **5. Background**

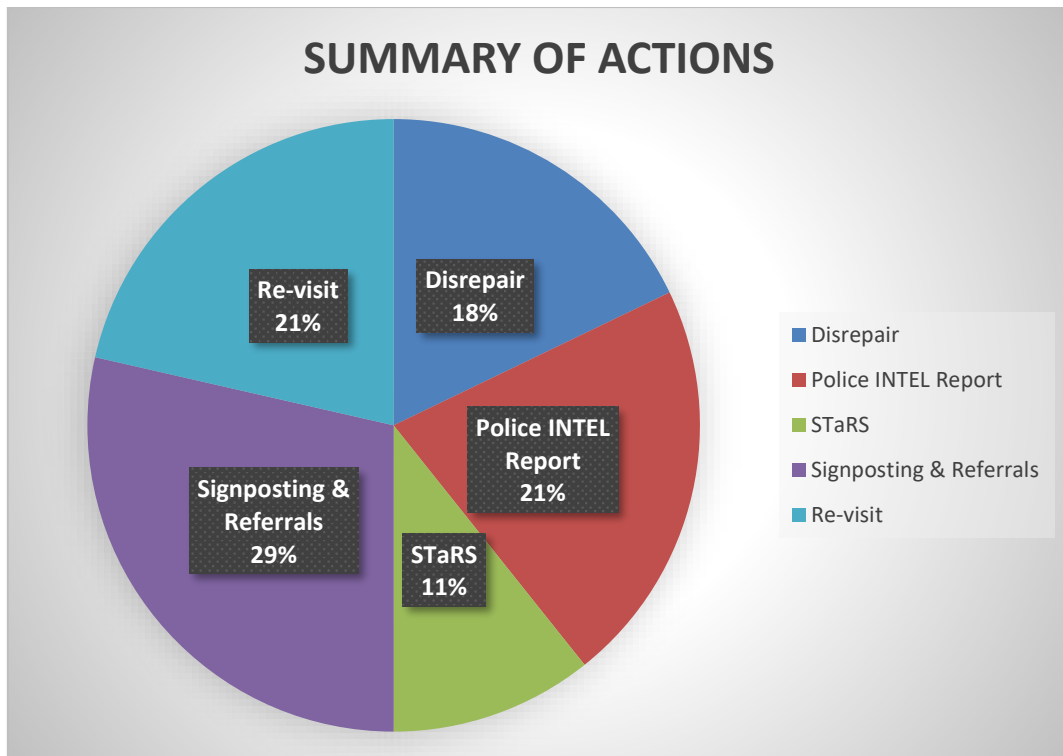
#### **5.1 Private Rented Sector (PRS)**

- 5.1.1 The English Housing Survey reported just over 4.4 million households living in the private rented sector in England in 2019/2020, making up 19% of all households, compared with 1.7 million in 1991. By comparison, 17% (4.0 million) lived in the social rented sector and 65% (15.4 million) were owner occupiers in 2019/2020.

- 5.1.2 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated 10,767 dwellings in the PRS in Telford and Wrekin in 2012. In 2020 this figure had increased to 13,380. **In 2020, the PRS represented 17.2% of the housing stock in the Borough, with some of our South Telford Estates such as Sutton Hill comprising 54% PRS by 2021.**
- 5.1.3 With declining numbers of social housing and owner occupation becoming unaffordable for some, the PRS serves a crucial role for many across all ages but particularly for housing young and also more vulnerable households. Once a transient tenure of choice, the PRS is now very much a necessary and long term housing option.
- 5.1.4 While a majority of landlords in the sector operate legally and provide good quality accommodation, the demand for private rented housing has also provided economic opportunity for less scrupulous landlords.
- 5.1.5 Central Government has responded to issues in the sector by providing Local Authorities with greater and stronger powers to regulate the market. The recent Levelling up White Paper has set out the intention to introduce new standards for the sector and a register of landlords. More detailed proposals are due later this year.

## **5.2 Better Homes for All**

- 5.2.1 Telford and Wrekin, introduced the Better Homes for All programme in 2018. The programme introduced a new focus on providing support for landlords in the form of an accreditation scheme and a strengthened proactive and reactive enforcement regime for tackling criminal landlords.
- 5.2.2 Since then we have seen a global pandemic which has brought with it unprecedented challenges for landlords, tenants and the Council. The work of the service through this time, albeit modified, has remained focussed on protecting the most vulnerable citizens of the Borough. We have dealt with over **1500 requests for service** from tenants and landlords. **424 legal notices** were served on landlords, ensuring properties in the PRS were brought up to a safe standard. **18 Multi Agency Targeted Enforcement Strategy Operations (MATES)** were conducted. Each operation consisted of a number of high risk property inspections.
- 5.2.3 As a result of the **MATES** visits undertaken the Private Sector Housing Team (PSH) is working with landlords and agents to raise the property standards in the addresses where disrepair was identified. Actions resulting from these exercises are summarised in the chart below. This includes signposting tenants to services for support and advice and referrals have been made where appropriate e.g. safeguarding referral to Family Connect (Telford & Wrekin Council). Some tenants are still being assisted by PSH and West Mercia Police (WMP) the exercises having resulted in intelligence reports and criminal investigations:



\*STaRS are commissioned by Telford & Wrekin Council and are a drug and alcohol support/recovery service

Engaging with tenants in this way gives the Council and its partner agencies an opportunity to identify safeguarding issues and get the necessary wraparound support in place for vulnerable tenants who may not otherwise proactively seek out help, or come into contact with services. It also helps the police link potentially transient perpetrators and victims/potential victims of crime to addresses in the area. Furthermore, it builds up intelligence around the type of criminality tenants may be exposed to, or taking part in and whether landlords of interest are complicit with, or turning a blind eye to this activity. In some cases landlords may not be aware of the issues within the address and clearly management practices in these instances need to be improved.

- 5.2.4 **Seven landlords have been successfully prosecuted for serious breaches of the Housing Act 2004, including a breach of a Banning Order. Eight landlords were issued with Civil Penalties** as an alternative to prosecution for breaches under the Housing Act 2004. All landlords issued with civil penalties chose to appeal them at the First Tier Tribunal and **in all cases the Tribunal upheld the Council's action.**

#### Safer Streets Programme

- 5.2.5 We have made great strides in our proactive work in the last 2 years. Through the Safer Streets programme we have carried out **c.450 proactive inspections** of privately rented properties in Brookside and Sutton Hill. In excess of **388 hazards** including fire safety, falls hazards in particular for children under the age of 5, have been remedied in Brookside alone.
- 5.2.6 Due to this project we were able to ensure every property inspected had a valid gas safety certificate, electric safety certificate, proper tenancy agreement and deposit protection for the tenants.

5.2.7 **All HMOs inspected were made compliant with HMO management regulations**, ensuring adequate amenities and were made free from overcrowding.

5.2.8 Two previously unknown HMOs were found with serious breaches and as a result were successfully prosecuted and conditions improved in the HMO.

5.2.9

#### Case Study

One property in Sutton Hill was found to be statutorily filthy and verminous. The landlord had served an eviction notice on the tenant. Through this proactive inspection programme, our safer streets officers were able to intervene, refer the tenant for additional support and commence a clean-up of the property. As a result the landlord was able to carry out the necessary repairs and officers were able to work with both parties to stop eviction proceedings and sustain the tenancy. We continue to provide support for both landlord and tenant.

5.2.10 Our work to improve conditions and management of PRS properties in problematic areas has contributed to a **54% decrease in crime** in Brookside.

5.2.11 We successfully bid for £520k to support energy efficiency improvements under the LAD2 programme. This investment has been focussed in Sutton Hill to maximise on our safer streets outcomes. As a result 61 homes in the Ward will benefit from energy efficiency measures. Other owners, tenants and landlords are also being supported to access advice and other grant programmes.

5.2.12 We have also focussed our resources within the safer streets areas to bring empty properties back into use. As a result, to date, **we have brought back into occupation 5 long term empty properties in Sutton Hill and 16 in Brookside.**

### HMO Covid Compliance Checks

5.2.13 At the onset of the pandemic Central Government directed local authorities to concentrate resources towards HMOs. When the country was being directed to stay at home and isolate, HMOs were identified as high risk, as a number of a unrelated people lived together and shared facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms. Over the last 12 months we have inspected all **240** of our **licensed HMOs** to ensure additional sanitation, cleaning and distancing measures are in place.

5.2.14 These inspections have also resulted in **51 large HMOs** being brought up to the correct HMO licensing standards for fire safety and property management. We have also updated our amenity standards for HMOs as a result of this work (Appendix 3).

### Homes for Ukraine

5.2.15 The service continues to support the **Homes for Ukraine** scheme, by inspecting all host homes to ensure adequate amenities, space and safety of accommodation..

5.2.16 We have so far inspected and approved 42 properties in the borough.

### 5.3 Landlord Accreditation Scheme

5.3.1 Introduced in 2014, our landlord accreditation scheme was established to improve landlord practises in the private rented sector. Having a membership of c.140 at highest, the scheme has had a positive impact and we have built a cohort of



landlords who not only rent good quality properties with good management practises but also help the Council to provide accommodation for our most vulnerable residents. However with organisations such as Wrekin Landlord Association working to support their members, the feedback we have received from some members is that it is overly burdensome to further charge good landlords to be part of our accreditation scheme. There are also a range of national accreditation schemes which offer similar support for a charge.

5.3.2 With increasing pressures on our homeless services to provide accommodation for residents who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, we are no longer able to limit use of accommodation to our accredited landlords. Severe shortages mean all available private rented accommodation is considered.

5.3.3 With increasing regulation and higher fines for non-compliance, there is a risk of good landlords leaving the market and others struggling to meet standards. Feedback received from landlord groups suggests that we need to have an open offer for all landlords in the Borough, not restricted to an accreditation scheme.

#### **5.4 New Landlord & Tenant Support Programme**

5.4.1 In the light of this feedback, the growth of this sector and given the amount of new and existing legislation for private sector landlords to understand and abide by, it is prudent that we review and enhance the support that we offer to all landlords to navigate the market. We acknowledge that many good landlords are providing valuable accommodation for our residents.

5.4.2 Across the housing service we provide a range of advice and support to tenants. In order to join up the range of advice/support available and ensure we are signposting into the right services, a **Landlord & Tenant Support Coordinator** will provide a first point of contact, triage and connection coordinating support across the Housing Service and wider Council as appropriate.

5.4.3 We have also developed a **new Landlord and Tenant Support Package** which we will develop further in consultation with partners including the Wrekin Landlord Association and charitable and Registered Provider partners, and intelligence from existing work with tenants particularly in the Safer, Stronger areas. The support will include:

- A dedicated webpage for landlords and tenants with all information and signposting for all aspects of tenancy support and property conditions and safety.
- A bigger social media presence, including a Facebook page
- Training courses for landlords
- Opportunities for landlords to attend training courses in place of being issued with a civil penalty for low level and first time housing offences

5.4.4 This new Support Programme will replace the existing Landlord Accreditation Scheme. Full details of the new support package can be found in **Appendix 1**

5.4.5 It is envisaged that the removal of the accreditation fee will also help our previously fee paying accredited landlords to alleviate the mandatory increases in our HMO licence fees (set out below).

5.4.6 With the increased offer of support to all landlords in the Borough, there is no excuse or defence for poor practise in the sector. Therefore, where we find such practises we will not hold back on using all **statutory powers** available to us.

## 5.5 Safer Stronger Communities Programme

5.5.1 The positive impacts seen by our interventions in the Safer Streets areas of South Telford are being expanded across all the **Safer Stronger** Community areas. A two year proactive operational plan including bespoke neighbourhood action plans incorporating targeted housing support and enforcement activity is currently being developed. **Targeted intervention** in areas of high private rent, poor housing conditions and in particular **problematic HMOs** will be prioritised.

5.5.2 With c. **700** property inspections conducted by the end of the safer streets programme and approximately a further c. **700** across the Safer Stronger areas, this will provide us with a rich stock condition survey of our properties.

## 5.6 Stock Condition Survey

5.6.1 Adding to this physical Intel, we have commissioned the **Building Research Establishment** to carry out a **stock condition survey** of the Borough. This rich set of data will help shape our proactive and reactive interventions for the next 5 years+. It will also give us an excellent evidence base for any funding opportunities afforded to us by Central Government.

## 5.7 Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy 2022

5.7.1 We will always seek to work with landlords to improve practice. However, we recognise that there continue to be landlords who operate illegally across our communities and we remain committed to taking robust enforcement action to raise standards and address criminality. To support this we are adopting an updated Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy (Appendix 2). This reflects changing legislation including:

- The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015
- Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards - The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015
- The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020

## 5.8 Reactive Enforcement

5.8.1 The **reactive enforcement team** will continue to investigate all complaints from tenants and other sources about poor conditions in privately rented properties addressing these on a case by case basis and referring to the proactive team where there is a link with a wider investigation. We will increase our communication of how to report concerns borough wide and as part of our work in the Safer Stronger Communities.

## 5.9 Proactive Enforcement

5.9.1 The **proactive team**, with new technical expertise in intelligence and investigatory techniques, working closely with police, trading standards and fire service will work via a multi-agency RAG rating model to target people of interest.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently being dealt with by the Rogue Landlord team</li> <li>• Enforcement action is in progress or anticipated</li> <li>• Multi agency response</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevated concerns/risk</li> <li>• Multiple investigations ongoing or complaints received</li> <li>• Enforcement action under review</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company/individual has been brought to the attention of the Rogue Landlord team and INTEL suggests the company/individual is worth monitoring</li> <li>• Historical concerns, but no current investigations</li> </ul>

5.9.2 Using this model and measures under our new enforcement policy we will target criminal landlords operating in the Borough and the consequent exploitation of our most vulnerable residents.

5.9.3 We will work to proactively find properties being rented out in unsafe and unhealthy conditions and ensure these properties are either brought up to standard or where this is not possible we will prohibit their use in order to safeguard the occupants. We will prosecute those landlords or issue them with civil penalties, the income from which will be ring-fenced back into the delivery of the service supporting communities across the Borough.

5.9.4 We will look to ban the operation of the very worst and repeat offenders from renting properties in our Borough.

### Charges for Certain Enforcement Action

5.9.5 Section 49 of the Housing Act 2004 allows Local Authorities to charge for certain enforcement action. Currently our charges are worked out on an hourly rate based on the investigating officer time. However, in order to ensure fairness and consistency and align with other Local Authorities a fixed fee structure is proposed based on the course of action and time taken:

Action	Fee
Hazard Awareness Notice / Improvement Notice	£271.00
Prohibition Order/Emergency Prohibition Order/ Emergency Remedial Action	£316.00

## 5.10 Supported Accommodation Providers

5.10.1 With growing numbers of supported accommodation providers in the Borough, attracting a premium Housing Benefit rate this is currently a largely unregulated area. At this point we have c.2,000 such properties. While Central Government plan to

increase regulation of this area in the future, T&W are proactively looking to introduce a risk based inspection plan of our supported accommodation providers. This will ensure our vulnerable residents are receiving the support they need and are living in healthy and safe housing conditions.

## **5.11 Support for Older Renters**

5.11.1 A report by Age UK in 2020 found that 750,000 people over 60 live in private rented housing in England. The proportion of households headed by older renters has doubled in the last fifteen years, with the proportion of households headed by middle-aged renters trebling. This means more and more people will be growing old in the private rented sector.

With a shortage of social housing in England, and fewer people able to afford to own their own home, private renting is often the only option. Older renters are an often forgotten and overlooked group, and a significant number of older private renters are particularly vulnerable because:

- They live in fear of being evicted at short notice.
- High rents leave one in three older renters in poverty after the rent is paid.
- They are more likely than older home owners to be unwell.
- Many put up with damp, disrepair or other dangerous living conditions.
- Almost 250,000 older renters, nearly three in ten, do not live in decent housing.

With recent energy price rises, this group of private renters are the most at risk of fuel poverty and the associated health risks of excess cold.

5.11.2 In partnership with Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin, we will develop a package of support for older renters in our Borough. Through our Coordinator we will run surgeries where older tenants can come and seek advice in confidence and we can help to liaise with landlords, inspect their properties and take action where needed and where this is not possible, to help them seek more suitable accommodation. This work will also inform our housing commissioning needs and priorities and inform opportunities to deliver new accommodation options including via NuPlace.

## **Houses in Multiple Occupation**

### **5.12 Amenity, Space and Management Standards for HMOs**

5.12.1 HMO Management Regulations provide discretion to Local Authorities to apply their own standards appropriate to their stock. In order to ensure consistency and fairness, we have published a document (Appendix 3) giving specific standards based on HMO types and sizes.

### **5.13 HMO Licence conditions**

5.13.1 Certain standards such as minimum room sizes and refuse disposal provisions were previously discretionary, they have now been added in statute and as such we have updated our licence conditions to reflect these changes.

## 5.14 HMO Licence Fees

5.14.1 In accordance with Section 63 of the Housing Act 2004, fees payable for HMO licences are required to be set by the Local Authority. Such fees are to cover all costs incurred by the Council in carrying out their duties in respect of HMOs under the Act as well as the mandatory licensing scheme.

5.14.2 Licence fees were last reviewed in 2018 when Better Homes for All was introduced. In 2020, at the last review point, it was deemed inappropriate to increase HMO licence fees during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Local Authority has therefore been subsidising the HMO licensing scheme for the last 2 years, which is not in keeping with the direction of the Housing Act 2004.

5.14.3 In 2018 a landmark case (Peter Gaskin vs London Borough of Richmond), resulted in a decision that all Local Authorities are now required to review their current HMO licensing fees and introduce a two stage payment process.

**Stage 1** - covers the cost of processing an application and must be made alongside the submission of an HMO licence application.

**Stage 2** - covers the enforcement element of the scheme and the ongoing cost to administer its HMO service and is payable after the application has been processed and before a licence is issued.

5.14.4 HMO licence fees have now been reviewed and the following revised fees are proposed to come into effect from 1 June 2022:

Size of HMO	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Upto 5 bedrooms	£831.68	£335.88	£1,167.56
6-10 bedrooms	£956.55	£335.88	£1,292.44
11+ bedrooms	£1,048.30	£335.88	£1,384.18

5.14.5 A **10% discount** is proposed for all complete applications received before renewal date. The Tenant & Landlord Coordinator will also provide assistance for new landlords with the application process to ensure they have every opportunity to avail this discount.

5.14.6 The proposed fees are comparable with other Local Authorities in the West Midlands as below:

Local Authority	Total Licence Fee
Birmingham	£1150.00
Wolverhampton	£1,306 – £1,534
Walsall	£1,110 - £2,810

All the above authorities, with the exception of Wolverhampton, offer a range of similar discounts on their fees. However, they also apply an additional penalty for incomplete applications.

## 5.15 Empty Properties

- 5.15.1 With a national and local shortage of affordable properties, the Council recognises that empty properties are a wasted resource and opportunity.
- 5.15.2 T&W launched a long term empty property strategy 2021-2026. We have set ourselves a **challenging target of bringing 375 long term empty properties back into use over the life of the strategy.**
- 5.15.3 Our empty property officer is working to engage with owners of long term empties, to encourage and support reoccupation or sale of empty properties. The focus is on the longest empty, affordable properties in council tax bandings A-C and in areas high in anti-social behaviour and crime, such as safer streets and safer stronger areas where empty properties are most likely to cause detrimental environmental impacts.
- 5.15.4 Where informal action is not successful, legal options such as compulsory purchase are also being taken.
- 5.15.5 To date as a result of this work
- **51 long term empty properties have been brought back into use** since the adoption of the strategy.
  - **8 problematic properties have been sold with a view to renovation**, this includes one property which had been empty for over 20 years.
  - 14 are undergoing extensive renovation works.
  - **7 properties have been identified for compulsory purchase action, and as a consequence 6 have been actioned by the owners to avoid this.** Action is continuing in relation to the other property and others are being reviewed.
- 5.15.6 With the Council Tax Premium scheme working to disincentivise long term empty properties, we are focussing on facilitating owner occupiers/first time buyers to be able to purchase these properties to live in them.
- 5.15.7 While long term empties that may have fallen into disrepair may become more affordable to purchase, they also come with the issue that owner occupiers find it difficult to secure a mortgage against these properties.
- 5.15.8 We are currently looking into packages of support for this cohort. These include:
- Council Tax premium rebate for owner occupiers purchasing long term empty properties to renovate and live in them themselves.
  - Financial assistance such as loans and grants
  - Additional options appraisals are underway looking into the Council using its Registered Provider status and or NuPlace to support groups such as first time buyers, key workers etc. to purchase long time empty homes. These include:
    - Shared Ownership
    - Equity Loans
    - Equity Share
    - Rent to Buy/Own
    - Starter Homes Initiatives
- 5.15.9 More details will be set out in our Annual Empty Property Update Report.

## 5.16 Affordable Warmth

5.16.1 The Council has seen a huge increase in demand for this service area in the last year, with the rise in energy costs hitting households from April. This is set to increase the priority and demand for support. Our Affordable Warmth Strategy has set us clear targets to make homes with an energy performance rating of D and below within our borough more energy efficient, taking our most deprived households out of fuel poverty, while working towards our carbon net zero target. Homes currently account for around 20% of all emissions in the borough

To date we have:-

- Brought in over **£3m of capital funding** to provide energy efficiency measures to our most vulnerable citizens in fuel poverty resulting in a minimum of **900 measures** being delivered in people's homes.
- **Targeted work in our Safer Stronger Community areas** with **61 households** alone benefitting to date **in the Sutton Hill area**. 100 insulation measures are being installed at an average cost of £10,000.
- **TWC Top-up Grant** – Following the launch of the Council's £50k Top-up Grant 19 vulnerable households have received heating measures. The investment has leveraged a further £25k of energy company obligation funding for these households.
- **Telford Energy Advice (TEA)** who operate the Borough information hot line and advice service, have connected **500 households**, providing light touch measures and invaluable support during the energy crisis
- **ECO Flex** - since the Council published its ECO Flex statement in December 2020, an investment by energy providers of £360,000 has benefited vulnerable households by funding heating and insulation measures. January 2022 was our best month to date with £55,000 being invested into 20 homes.
- **LAD3/HUG** – The Council has recently been awarded c. £1.6m for the next phase of LAD (Local Authority Delivery) – and HUG which benefits off grid properties. This includes £650k directly and circa £1m through a joint delivery programme with Shropshire Council the lead delivery partner. Delivery will run until March 2023 and will continue to target households in our Safer and Stronger Communities with a focus on Donnington. plus a borough wide offer for basic insulation measures
- **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund** – targeting social housing the Council has successfully worked with the Wrekin Housing Group and Sanctuary Housing to attract c. £690k to improve just under 100 properties in the Borough. .

5.16.2 With the recent energy price rise, increasing the average household fuel bill by 50% and another one expected in October, the numbers of households in fuel poverty are expected to rise drastically. Telford and Wrekin Council are proactively facing these challenges head on for our vulnerable households by firstly, increasing resource in this service area to ensure we can provide advice and support to all households affected.

5.16.3 £500,000 of Council Climate Change Capital Funding has also been committed for the financial year April 2022 – March 2023, to deliver Affordable Warmth schemes.

5.16.4 The fund will be targeted to plug gaps in what the Government funded schemes cover and to provide support to vulnerable residents and in our Safer, Stronger Communities. Projects must also contribute to the council's ambition for the borough to be carbon neutral by 2030. Full details of the scheme will be set out on our website but the funding will be used in the following ways:

- To provide renewable heating and insulation measures to properties to support directly Government funded programmes.
- Top-up Grant to support Central Government's Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS) for heat pumps.
- Small amount for fossil fuel heating where no other option is viable.

5.16.5 A further allocation of £170k of capital funding, from Climate Action Investment, will be utilised to fit energy efficiency measures to 12 units of the Council's Temporary accommodation, showing an intent to lead by example in improving our own stock for vulnerable people.

5.16.6 We will continue to work with neighbouring authorities and energy efficiency bodies to bring maximum grant funding to our residents, for instance our successful bid with Shropshire Council as well as our work with West Midlands Combined Authority on social housing stock through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Grant funding often favours a partnership approach, therefore, we continue to grow strong relationships with our neighbours.

5.16.7 We will continually work to increase communication with residents in the Borough to help with the complexities involved in the grant funding landscape for households to navigate. We have recently improved our web-site information to include an embedded form and have started a new schools programme, which we intend to continue into this financial year. We will also support and advise residents on the reputability of contractors offering energy efficiency measures, ensuring rogue or unqualified traders cannot cash in on the opportunities this crisis provides. We also offer, in partnership with TEA, bespoke training for front-line staff, including health professionals.

5.16.8 Using data from a number of sources such as specialist software and stock condition survey data, we will work with landlords to comply with their legal obligations to improve the energy performance ratings of their properties by 2025. Where education and advice do not have the desired effect, we will enforce these standards under the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards.

**6. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION - None**

**7. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

15 February 2018 – Cabinet, Better Homes for All  
14 March 2019 – Cabinet, Better Homes for All Update  
9 July 2020 – Cabinet, Better Homes for All  
22 April 2021 – Cabinet, Draft Affordable Warmth Strategy  
4 November 2021 – Cabinet, Long Term Empty Property Strategy

**8. BACKGROUND PAPERS - None**

Report prepared by Ravi Phull, Service Delivery Manager – Strategic Housing & Regeneration - [ravi.phull@telford.gov.uk](mailto:ravi.phull@telford.gov.uk). Telephone: 01952 381731