

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview & Scrutiny Committee **DATE:** 7th February 2008

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PART I FOR CONSIDERATION & COMMENT

CONSIDERATION FOR THE FUNDING OF A HOUSE CONDITION STOCK AND HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION SURVEY OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to advise members of the costs for a House condition Survey and a Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) survey to enable determination of what resources and priorities will be for Private sector housing in Slough from 2009 onwards.

2 Recommendation

Members consider the report and make comments to cabinet.

3 Key Priorities – Taking Pride in Slough and Making a Difference to Communities and our Environment

Priority 1 – Creating safe, environmentally friendly and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Aims

- 1.1 *Deliver cleaner and safer neighbourhoods.*
- 1.2 *Protect and enhance public health and well being*

Priority 2 – Improving lives for those in need and creating thriving communities.

Aims

- 2.1 *Focus on vulnerable people and those living in poverty*
- 2.2 *Provide affordable, decent and safe homes.*
- 2.3 *Strengthen community activity through collaborative working in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.*

Priority 3 – Improving life chance for children and young people

Aims

- 3.1 *Improve outcomes for vulnerable children.*

Priority 4 – Ensuring excellence in customer services

Aims

- 4.1 *Deliver excellent customer focused services in an excellent customer environment*
- 4.2 *Deliver excellent internal and external relations.*

Priority 5 – Maintaining excellent governance within the council to ensure it is efficient, effective and economic in everything it does.

Aims

- 5.1 *Improve financial and asset planning, monitoring and stewardship.*
- 5.2 *Improve project, performance and major project management.*
- 5.3 *Gain efficiencies and ensure effective procurement.*
- 5.4 *Ensure compliance with the law.*

4 Other Implications

4.1 Financial

4.1.1 In order to establish the current position regarding HMOs in Slough it is necessary to carry out a full HMO survey in addition to a house condition survey. A full house condition survey (HCS) costs in the region of £48,000 to £52,000 typically for up to 1,000 properties. A full HMO survey would cost £50,000 for up to 1,000 properties. If a HMO survey were to be done at the same time there would obviously be some economies arising from the surveyors already being on site.

4.1.2 The total cost for both HCS and HMO survey running at the same time would be between £80-£100,000. These are approximate costs; the final amount would depend on the detail required from the survey and the timescales in which the council wanted it completed. This is a one-off cost and not included within the current budget and therefore will need to be met from balances.

4.1.3 The combination of surveys will establish key data to enable the development of a long term HMO programmed inspection programme targeted at risk. Even spread over several years the cost of this has been estimated to be in excess of £500k per year. However, this excludes the impact and costs on other services such as planning, planning enforcement, building control, homelessness, legal and the fire service. These are estimated to be in the region of £400k per year. The funding implications will need to be considered as part of future budget setting processes. However, the detailed research will help strengthen the case to lobby for additional Government funding.

(a) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The are no direct Human rights implications that result from the actions recommended in this report

5 Supporting Information

5.1 At the Cabinet meeting on 21st January 2008 the Cabinet considered a motion relating to HMOs that was referred from the Council meeting on 11th December 2007. The Cabinet resolved that costed options for a full house

condition survey and a HMO survey be reported back to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

- 5.2 A full survey of housing conditions in the private sector was last done in 1998 and a survey of houses in multiple occupation in 1997. The last surveys were done under previous legislation. In April 2006 the Housing Act 2004 was implemented. This replaced the Housing fitness standard with the Health and Housing rating system and also introduced a licensing scheme for HMOs of three or more storeys, with 5 or more people and an element of sharing facilities.
- 5.3 Since 2002 local authorities have been working towards PSA7, to ensure that at least 70% of vulnerable households in the private sector are in decent accommodation by 2010, rising to 75% by 2020. However, Slough Borough Council does not currently have any accurate baseline data to evidence any improvements.
- 5.4 Since the last surveys both housing legislation and the reporting that is required from the council has changed significantly and the council needs to do the surveys in order to demonstrate that its commitment to improving housing conditions in the private sector and the way that it sets policies and priorities is based on up to date information.
- 5.5 The data on which the Private Sector Housing Service is based is also one of the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) for private sector housing. This KLOE requires that the council has data on private sector stock condition, updated within the last 5 years which is of sufficient sample size to provide reliable estimates on key indicators e.g. cost of private sector repair, energy efficiency levels, hazards under the new rating system, nature, concentration and size of the private rented stock, number of empty homes and the proportion of vulnerable households in the private sector living in decent homes. Once the survey has been carried out we will be able to keep our private sector house condition survey up to date through updated information available via the grants system, planning, building control and partners.
- It will also give us a wide range of contextual data e.g. on household statistics, demographics, health and incomes.
- 5.6 Due to the problems of overcrowded HMOs in Slough officers consider that we need to carry out a full HMO survey in addition to a house condition survey. This survey will assist in correctly identify problematic areas, understand where resources need to be targeted and help strengthen the case if opportunities for additional funding arise. It will be more cost effective to have both the House Condition Survey and HMO survey running at the same time. Costs of between £80 -£100k have been estimated
- 5.7 If funding for these surveys is approved the research project will need to be procured, the fieldwork carried out, the data evaluated and reported. This will take 9-12 months to complete, but initial findings are likely to be available in October.

6 **Conclusion**

It is essential for Slough Borough Council to have access to current up to date information within its private sector stock to enable the council to assess the situation effectively and formulate an effective private sector strategy

7 **Background Papers**

- '1' Housing Act 2004 The Council Policy for Implementation March 2006-
- '2' Housing act 2004
- '3' PSA Target 7 - Decent Homes Department of Communities and Local Government