

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 6
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Report of the Executive Director of Operations

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HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION – Housing at the Heart of Communities

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update to the Homelessness Prevention report brought to Scrutiny on the 9th March 2011 and to update members on the work being carried out by the Strategic Housing Service and Housing Enforcement Officers in preventing homelessness in Peterborough.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to scrutinise the approaches taken and the progress and achievements made in relation to the homelessness prevention activity across the Strategic Housing Services and by Housing Enforcement Officers in Neighbourhood Enforcement Teams. Members are asked to provide challenge where necessary and to suggest ideas and initiatives to support further improvements
- 2.2 That the draft Homelessness Strategy, Housing Allocations Policy and Empty Homes Strategy be brought back to the committee for Scrutiny at an agreed future date.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 Providing affordable, warm, safe and secure housing is the cornerstone of a strong society, and so the services described within this report are fundamental to the success of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

The purpose of the Strategic Housing Service is to lead and provide an excellent, holistic and seamless strategic housing service for the residents of the City to create opportunities and tackle inequalities and to deliver truly sustainable growth.

The work of the teams to promote energy efficiency of the housing stock through financial assistance, through enforcement of private sector landlords and through signposting to external funding opportunities significantly contributes to carbon savings in domestic dwellings and supports the Council's aspiration to become the UK's Environmental Capital.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Strategic Housing Service is fully committed to delivering the five key elements which comprise the strategic housing role within the local authority, and works closely with colleagues across Neighbourhood Enforcement, Planning and other Council departments to prevent homelessness by:
- Assessing and planning for current and future housing needs of the residents of Peterborough across all tenures
 - Making best use of the existing housing stock

- Planning and facilitating new supply
- Planning and commissioning housing support services which link homes and housing support services, and
- Working in partnership to secure effective housing and neighbourhood management on an on-going basis

The services and provisions that are now put in place for housing will impact on all the residents of the City for years to come and the Strategic Housing Service will lead on addressing all housing needs of all residents across all tenures in the City. It is acknowledged that access to safe, warm and affordable housing will significantly contribute to residents of the City being able to achieve good health, good employment prospects and good educational attainment for their children.

This report updates members on the work being carried out across all of the housing teams to prevent homelessness within the City. A series of case studies (attached as appendices) illustrate typical issues faced by housing officers and demonstrates how close partnership working across individual housing teams and with external partner organisations resolves the often complex housing issues of some of the most vulnerable residents of the City.

The updated Empty Homes Strategy is currently being developed, along with the draft Homelessness Strategy and draft Housing Allocations Policy, and it is proposed that these return to Committee for scrutiny at a date to be agreed.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY – An Update

5.1.1 Homelessness in Peterborough:

In June this year the Housing Needs service transformed the way it delivered its front line operations. Faced with the challenge of a potential increase in homeless presentations due to the current economic climate it was decided to focus the teams attention on utilising their time, knowledge and skills on tackling this expected increase. As a result of this review, Housing Needs no longer operates the drop-in service at Bayard Place, however, all clients are able to access housing advice through our improved telephone service.

The number of telephones available for public use in Bayard Place was increased and the change in service was publicised on the council website and in the Your Peterborough publication. This service re-design has significantly improved the customer experience when visiting the Customer Service Centre at Bayard Place and has reduced customer waiting times from what was, in some cases, in excess of 2 hours down to an average of 5 minutes.

This change to the Housing Needs service has proved successful in enabling officers to prioritise clients who are threatened with homelessness and work to assist householders who are at real risk of losing their homes.

At the time of the report in the last year 12/12/2010 to 12/12/2011:

- We have received 1079 homelessness presentations
- Of the 1079 presentations, a full housing duty was accepted to 198 households

Compared to the same period over previous years:

12/12/2009 to 12/12/2010:

- We received 1100 homelessness presentations
- Of the 1100 presentations, a full housing duty was accepted to 235 households

12/12/2008 to 12/12/2009:

- We received 1356 homelessness presentations
- Of the 1356 presentations, a full housing duty was accepted to 401 households

This financial year to date (01/04/2011 to 12/12/2011) the housing needs team have been successful in preventing homelessness in 180 cases through early intervention and effective housing advice and support.

Although these statistics show a fall in the number of homelessness presentations and acceptances for this year compared to the same period last year, in recent months there has been a marked rise in both presentations and the use of hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation. This trend is expected to continue to increase, particularly when the changes to the Local Housing Allowance, explained in detail later in this report, are implemented in the New Year.

5.1.2 **Rough Sleeping in Peterborough**

As we reported at the March 2011 Scrutiny Committee, in early 2010 it was highlighted that Peterborough had an increased problem with rough sleeping in the city, in particular among EEA Nationals who were unable to access public funds. The level of rough sleeping in the city had increased to the third highest in the country behind Westminster and the City of London.

The Housing Needs service continues to work closely with the UK Border Agency and the police in monitoring rough sleeper numbers in the city. The reconnections service is still in operation and the UKBA will still undertake administrative removals of Eastern European Nationals who are not exercising their treaty rights.

The Housing Needs service has worked hard to improve relationships with our voluntary sector stakeholders and have recently undertaken training sessions to improve their awareness of the services available to rough sleepers. These relationships have proved valuable as a large number of rough sleepers are identified following contact with a voluntary sector organisation.

We have recently submitted our rough sleeper estimate to the Department of Communities and Local Government and current intelligence tells us we have 17 individuals rough sleeping in Peterborough.

Please refer to Appendix 1 for a case study involving a rough sleeper

5.1.3 **Repossessions in Peterborough**

In early 2010, Peterborough was highlighted as a mortgage repossession hotspot. An officer was seconded to focus solely on assisting households who were at risk of homelessness due to mortgage repossession. The Mortgage Rescue Scheme freezes repossession action through negotiation with mortgage lenders while agreements can be made with our partner housing associations to purchase their properties and rent them back to them, thus preventing homelessness and increasing the housing stock in the area.

Unfortunately the Mortgage Rescue Scheme was modified earlier this year and the level of funding we had access to significantly restricted how effective we could be. It was decided on a regional basis that the reduced level of funding allocated would be evenly distributed between all of the authorities in the regional cluster. This meant that the level of funding Peterborough City Council initially had access to limited us to just two potential clients where we could make use of the Mortgage Rescue Scheme funding.

Fortunately the decision to split the funding evenly between the authorities in the region has recently been changed and now we are able to access the funding on a 'first come first served' basis. We are currently working with four families who we hope to prevent from having to leave their homes. We are hoping that the scheme will continue in its current format next year so we can assist more families at risk because of mortgage difficulties as the difficult economic climate continues and if the potential rise in mortgage interest rates becomes a reality.

5.1.4 **The Rent Deposit Scheme**

The Housing Needs service still operates the Rent Deposit Scheme. To date, this year, we have assisted 141 households with rent deposits to be used for tenancies in the private rented sector, preventing homelessness for clients who would not be able to fund the necessary deposit themselves resulting in the requirement for them to find accommodation in the social rented sector. The deposit is made direct to the landlord which is more effective than paying it to the tenant and further enhances the relationship with that landlord. This is an effective and efficient service to prevent homelessness and to re-cycle funding.

5.1.5 **Single Person Homelessness**

In recent months the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) offered local authorities a funding opportunity to improve the work they currently undertake to assist single people faced with homelessness, who would not normally be owed a duty under the homelessness legislation.

The Housing Needs team was successful in securing £40,000 of funding, which has been used to fund a part-time post who is working with local landlords in the private sector to increase the number of properties which are made available to clients. These clients would normally find it difficult to access such accommodation because landlords would normally be reluctant to take clients in receipt of benefits.

After obtaining a level of stock accommodation the role of the officer will then be to offer on-going support to those clients assisted in finding accommodation to sustain it effectively so the risk of them becoming homeless in the future is greatly reduced.

5.2 **FUTURE CHANGES AND THE IMPACT ON PETERBOROUGH**

There are many challenges facing the residents of the City which will have a significant impact on their housing situation and for which they will inevitably seek assistance from the City Council's Strategic Housing Team. It is anticipated that the number of people in the city becoming homeless in the next year will increase dramatically. The most significant impact is likely to be changes to Local Housing Allowance and Welfare Benefit Reforms.

5.2.1 **Changes to Local Housing Allowance & Welfare Benefit Reform**

As we reported earlier in the year, on the 1st April 2011 Local Housing Allowance rates were reduced for all households renting in the private sector. These changes immediately affected households who were seeking accommodation in the private sector as it was made unaffordable to rent accommodation in some of the higher rent areas of the city.

For people who were already in receipt of Local Housing Allowance these changes were introduced in April 2011 but were covered by a 9 month transitional protection. This 9 months protection will no longer apply after January 2012 and we will start to see an increasing number of households who have their benefits reduced. Unless they are able to negotiate their rent down with their landlord they will accrue arrears and will be faced with the potential of becoming homeless. We are expecting to see an increase in numbers of people approaching the Housing Needs Team for advice and assistance in securing alternative accommodation in this sector or to assist them in discussions with their landlord. We will be working closely with our colleagues at Serco to forecast the impact for Peterborough and where possible we will contact and work with affected households to manage the impacts and prevent families losing their accommodation.

As well as the reduction in the Local Housing Allowance Rates for families there is also going to be a change to the age for single person room rate which will put additional single persons at risk of losing their homes.

Current regulations state that any single person who rents in the private sector would normally be awarded Local Housing Allowance at the 1 **bedroom** rate, which is currently £88.85 per week. The exception to this rule is if the single person is aged below 25. In these cases it is felt that they could share accommodation and would be awarded the much lower single person

room rate which is currently £54.00 per week.

On the 1st January 2012 the regulations changed. DCLG have now ruled that anyone aged below 35 could share and will only be awarded the single person room rate. There is no transitional protection for cases of this type and anyone who is renting accommodation priced higher than the shared room rate will see an immediate reduction in their benefit award on the anniversary of their claim. Again, this change has the potential for single individuals to lose their current accommodation and will also increase the demand for accommodation in Houses in Multiple Occupation.

5.2.2 **The Peterborough Homes Allocations Policy**

The Housing Needs Team continues to work in partnership with the 10 Registered Providers of social housing who have significant numbers of housing stock in the city to allocate their properties through the Peterborough Homes Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

In line with our commitments in the Housing Strategy the Peterborough Homes Allocations Policy will be updated this year. One of the key areas that will be reviewed in the refresh of this policy will be the impact of operating a proposed closed housing register, a key element in the Government's Social Housing Reforms. There are currently in excess of 8500 live applications on the Housing Register. Around 40% of these applications are from people who are living in accommodation which they own and/or which has been assessed as being adequate to meet their needs.

In addition to a possible restricted register we are also looking at best practice examples across the country to see if we can structure our policy to prioritise those with the strongest local connections to the City through previous residence and family associations.

Please refer to Appendix 2 for a case study illustrating Peterborough's Housing Register and the Choice Based Letting scheme.

5.3 **OTHER IMPACTS ON HOMELESSNESS IN PETERBOROUGH**

There is a significant contribution to the prevention of homelessness in the City from housing enforcement activity, empty homes activity, the work of the Care & Repair Home Improvement Agency and from funding provided by the Supporting People programme.

5.3.1 **The Housing Enforcement Role in Preventing Homelessness**

Housing Enforcement Officers situated within Neighbourhood Enforcement Team work with and enforce against landlords within the private rented sector to ensure they provide safe, hazard free and energy efficient housing in accordance with Housing Act 2004 and other relevant legislation. This service helps tenants within the private rented sector to remain in their accommodation and ensure it is brought up to a decent standard rather than abandoning it and presenting as homeless to the Housing Needs service.

The aim of housing enforcement is to improve housing standards within the private rented sector mainly housing those tenants who have no access to social housing, have no means of securing decent housing through lack of funds and are living in the poorest housing sometimes owned and run by unscrupulous landlords. These are often vulnerable adults and young families. Housing Enforcement work closely with Housing Needs and the Tenancy Relations Officer to prevent illegal evictions whilst taking enforcement action against landlords and helping tenants into more suitable accommodation in the worst cases.

To date since 1st April 2011 the team have received 620 requests for service regarding poor conditions within the private rented sector. It is expected that there will be increased pressure on the service once the changes introduced through the Localism Bill come into force allowing the Council's homelessness duty to be discharged into the private rented sector without requiring the applicant's agreement.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for a case study illustrating poor housing condition in the private

rented sector.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) provide a much needed source of accommodation across the City and will become more valuable and sought after once the proposed changes to the local housing allowance and welfare benefit reforms are implemented as previously mentioned. A further increase in demand for this type of accommodation is likely as the student population of the city increases with the development of the university.

The Housing Enforcement team licence and regulate over 150 HMOs. All 3 storey 5 person HMO's are statutorily required to be licensed and controlled across the city and in addition 2 storey 3 person HMO's are required to be licensed and controlled within the Millfield and New England area of the city under the current Additional Licensing Scheme. Since the introduction of this scheme 40 properties have been licensed and 4 landlords prosecuted for failure to licence their property with fines being in the region of £15,000 per prosecution (money however that doesn't come into the local authority). It is estimated there are over 500 HMO's in the Millfield and New England area alone mainly housing the Eastern European communities who have little understanding of their tenants rights or the housing conditions they should expect which results in frequent illegal evictions, poor living conditions and overcrowding.

At the time of applying for the current Additional Licensing Scheme the Millfield and New England area was suffering from a large influx of migrant workers and concentrations of them in this area led to massive overcrowding and inappropriate housing, including the renting of outbuildings and garden sheds by some unscrupulous landlords. Alongside the ongoing problems already in the area including disrepair and poor tenancy management, the significant level of transient landlords and tenants makes raising standards especially problematic. Whilst the migration has now slowed and the amount of mass overcrowding has declined the other issues remain as significant today as they were when the original scheme was introduced.

Through licensing HMOs, the Council can raise the living standards within them, ensure fire safety controls are in place, limit the number of persons occupying them and ensure that management standards are adhered to, including waste management and anti social behaviour management. Licensing also requires the landlord to be a fit and proper person so therefore helps prevent exploitation of tenants.

However, the burden on the Housing Enforcement Officers to prove that a rented house is a HMO is extremely high. This must be proved before any enforcement action can be taken and is extremely resource intensive. The nature of HMOs is that they are transient and it often takes months of repeat visits to gather enough evidence to prosecute a landlord for not licensing a HMO, which is why only a handful of prosecutions have been taken over the 2 years the scheme has been in place.

An option currently being explored is to replace the existing Additional Licensing Scheme with a Selective Licensing Scheme. The main difference is that all rented properties within the designated area are required to be licensed whether HMO or single family let. This would give the Council greater control on all aspects of housing within the designated area being considered (initially Millfield and New England). Selective Licensing would also make the processes and investigations easier and less resource intensive which in turn would lead to increased prosecutions and improved compliance. With Selective Licensing all non owner-occupied domestic property would be subject to the scheme

The introduction of Selective Licensing would enable the Council to increase housing standards, placing tighter controls on landlords by imposing licence conditions to require them to provide tenancy agreements and rent books to give tenants a feeling of security and safety of tenure. It would also allow for landlords to take swift legal action on anti social behaviour and provide the tenants with a written agreement stating their responsibilities within their community to live in a tenant like manner and not behave anti socially.

As well as improving the physical condition and management of all rented property in this area, it could contribute to improving the community as a whole by removing the 'underground' culture that currently exists and also contribute to regenerating the area ensuring

accommodation is managed effectively and is of good quality without reducing the supply of available rented accommodation.

Councils can set their own fees for licensing and schemes should be self financing. Manchester City Council have a staged approach with the fee being reduced for all properties applying to licence within the first three months of the scheme starting, increasing between 3 and 6 months and being quite heavily penalised for applications 6 months after the introduction of the scheme. A 'prosecution amnesty' for the first 6 months could be introduced with a zero tolerance approach taken thereafter to encourage voluntary licensing.

In addition, discounts could be awarded to landlords who hand over their property to the Council for a period of time enabling them to be used to accommodate people on the Housing Register. Selective Licensing could be instrumental in ensuring high standards of property condition and management are achieved in the private rented sector. This would increase supply and allow the Council to effectively discharge its homelessness duty into good quality private accommodation.

5.3.2 **Empty Homes – Increasing Housing Supply**

The current population of Peterborough is estimated to be 173,100 (ONS, 2010) with an expected increase to 199,800 by 2026. The sub-regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment conducted in 2010 estimated that at the current rate of household formation and housing supply, an average of 1,008 households will fall into housing need each year in Peterborough. The Government has developed a new delivery model for affordable housing and have announced a target to deliver 150,000 new affordable homes through the Homes & Communities Agency's (HCAs) Affordable Homes Programme Framework 2011-2015. However, with overall reduced funding it is unlikely that delivery of new build, affordable properties will meet the future housing need of the City.

At the same time a significant number of homes in the city remain empty for varying reasons and for varying lengths of time. Whilst the reoccupation of empty homes is not the whole answer to the current shortage of homes in the City, they are recognised as a valuable resource with huge potential to be turned into homes and thereby increasing the supply and reducing demand. The majority of empty properties in the city are privately owned. Often owners do not know how to get their property back into use and sometimes they simply don't seem to care.

Problematic or long term empty properties which are empty for more than six months are targeted under the City Council's Empty Homes Strategy which is currently under review. As at the 1st April 2011 there were an estimated 2000 empty properties across the City, 595 of which had been empty for more than six months and an estimated 112 empty for more than two years.

A dedicated full time Empty Homes Officer has now been appointed and commenced duties in August 2011. This post is situated in the Housing Programmes Team within the Strategic Housing Service of Neighbourhoods. This appointment will increase the Council's capacity to deal effectively with empty properties across the city.

A systematic three stage approach, adopted by many local authorities has been implemented. The starting point for this approach will always be to work with the property owner wherever possible. There are many reasons why a property becomes empty. Some of those reasons may be sensitive and it is important to be understanding of the full range of different situations that may occur. However, it is also important not to lose sight of the fact that an empty home is a wasted resource and potentially a blight on any neighbourhood. Owners are made aware that although we would prefer to work with them, non-action is not an option. As owner of a property, they must take responsibility for it.

The three stage approach is:

1. Identification
 - Identify properties for action based on length of time they have been empty, the level of nuisance being caused, and the condition of the building.
 - Establish ownership and make contact
 - Decide on proportionate action
2. Encouragement
 - Work with the owner offering advice and assistance
 - The aim is to bring the property back into use through voluntary action of the owner
3. Enforcement
 - When all other negotiation and persuasion has failed, take appropriate enforcement action to ensure the property is in habitable condition and free from high risk hazards in order that it can be brought back into occupation

Please refer to Appendix 4 for a case study illustrating the negotiation with an owner to bring a long term, problematic empty property back into use. Please also refer to Appendix 5 for a case study illustrating the use of appropriate enforcement action to bring a long term, problematic property back into use.

DCLG introduced the New Homes Bonus in February 2011 which is designed to create an effective fiscal incentive to encourage local authorities to facilitate housing growth. As well as providing this bonus for new affordable homes being built the policy recognises that empty properties returned to use also provides additional accommodation. An empty property returned to use is rewarded in the same way as a new home via a “bonus” equivalent to the council tax income to the local authority for six financial years following the date it was brought back into use.

The £100 million Empty Homes Fund, administered by the HCA aims to finance returning to use 3,300 homes for affordable housing over three years commencing April 2012 covering both short-term leasing and purchasing of empty properties. Negotiations are currently in progress with a large registered provider in the City to submit a bid for this funding.

Initially this funding was only open to registered providers of housing but the Government announced at the end of September 2011 that community groups and voluntary organisations will now be able to bid for part of the £100 million funding (between £10 and £30million in total) to tackle empty properties and provide affordable housing. We will be interested in linking up with any community led organisation that may be in a position to make a bid for some of this funding.

The Council have successfully run a private Sector Leasing Scheme since April 2006 making properties available for rent through Choice Based Letting and housing families in need on the housing register. The leasing scheme guaranteed the rental income to the owner for a period of three to five years with no void losses between lettings. In recent months, the current leasing arrangements have faltered due to our partner feeling unable to guarantee the rent to new cases particularly in light of the proposed changes to local housing allowance and the welfare benefit reforms, including the proposed move to a Universal Credit.

We are currently exploring ways to modify the current private sector leasing scheme to compensate for these changes and we are also exploring the options of working with a registered provider to deliver a leasing scheme and running an “in-house” local letting agency where we can offer a fully managed property service.

This service could not only be used for empty properties but could also be used to ensure acceptable standards of accommodation are met to enable the Housing Needs Service to discharge its homelessness duty into the private rented sector and could also be used if selective licensing were introduced in areas of the city to control poor standards of HMO and single occupancy dwellings in the private rented sector with associated high levels of anti-social behaviour.

5.3.3 **The work of the Care & Repair Home Improvement Agency in Preventing Homelessness**

The Care & Repair Home Improvement Agency continues to be the main delivery mechanism for Repairs Assistance and Disabled Facility Grants to vulnerable elderly, disabled (adults & children) and low income families in the City. The services of the Agency are becoming more important as demographic research shows that the UK population is ageing – people are living longer often with long term conditions. The costs of caring for an ageing society are increasing at an alarming rate. To prevent Health and Social Care services being swamped it is essential to support older and vulnerable people to continue to live independently in their own homes and ensure those homes are warm and safe. Furthermore, the Agency contributes to reducing homelessness by adaptation and improving housing conditions ensuring independent living can continue.

The Care & Repair Agency has faced several challenges during 2011. Structural changes within Strategic Housing has resulted in an increased workload for surveyors and caseworkers delivering Repairs Assistance grants aimed at reducing high risk hazards within the homes of vulnerable owner occupied households. The Agency now carries out the full assessment and delivery function of this vital area of work which drastically improves the living conditions and quality of life for vulnerable residents allowing them to continue living in their own homes.

Please refer to Appendix 6 for a Case Study illustrating poor housing condition in a property occupied by a vulnerable owner.

The Handyperson Scheme continues to be one of the most effective preventative services offered by the Agency. However the service has had to be redesigned with more stringent criteria for eligibility being imposed because of financial pressures.

In the current economic climate, benefit entitlement checks carried out by the caseworkers and the subsequent income maximisation has become very important. There have been numerous cases over the last year where the weekly income of householders in this vulnerable client group has been significantly enhanced by the provision of this service.

The impact of the Agency's work can be split into the physical and mental health improvements and improved quality of life experienced by its clients. A further impact is the significant savings that can be achieved in Health and Social Care as demonstrated in the table below.

Care & Repair Intervention	Saving to Health & Social Care
Postponing Entry into residential care by just one year through an adaptation, repair or handyperson work or a combination of these.	£28,080 per person per year. (Reference: Lang & Buisson (2008) Annual costs of Care Homes)
The average cost of a major housing disabled adaptation is £6,396 and has an average life of at least 5 years.	Savings above could be multiplied by 5. (Reference: Foundations (2010) Adapting for Life)
Preventing a fall at home that leads to a hip fracture by a minor aids or adaptation, handyperson job, repairs or disabled adaptation.	Cost to the NHS & Social Services £28,665 per incident. This is 4.5 the costs of an average adaptation and more than 100 times the cost of a grab rail or handyperson job. (Reference: Hayward & Turner (2007) Better Outcomes Lower Costs)
Housing adaptations reduce the need for daily visits and reduce or remove the costs of home care.	This can lead to savings for Social Services of between £1,200 and £29,000 per year. (Reference: Hayward & Turner (2007) Better Outcomes Lower Costs)
A hospital discharge service speeds up a patients release for example by installing a key safe (Aids & Adapts) and securing looses carpets to prevent a falls (handyperson).	This equates to a saving of £120 per day – the amount charged to a local authority when patients block beds in hospital. (Reference: Personal Social Sciences Research Unit Dept of Health 2010)
Handy person jobs preventing accidents & falls, anxiety, installing security measures, installing smoke alarms, undertaking minor maintenance and repairs.	Depending on the scheme for every £1 spent savings can be made which vary between £1 and £100s of thousands per case. A visit to casualty following a fall costs are estimated at £1,000. An avoidable crime costs the Police £100's per incident. One death or serious injury avoided due to the fitting of a smoke alarm could save £100,000s for the Police, Fire and NH services. (Reference: Foundations Handyperson Reports 2010).

The Care and Repair Home Improvement Agency continues to deliver:

- Disabled Facility Grants for adults and children. Adapting homes to keep them living independently. This funding covers all housing tenures of housing across the city.
- Repair Assistance grants for owner occupied properties. Reducing Category 1 hazards in properties to an acceptable level.
- The Minor Aids and Adaptations programme on behalf of Adult Social Care which is for small works such as key clamps, ramps and hand rails to assist with hospital discharge, hospital at home and maintain independent living. These works are done where possible within 24 hours of the referral (from the Occupational Therapist), if urgent. All other works are completed within 7 days of the referral. On average 1200 of these are completed per year. This service has increase by over 15% in 2011/2012
- The fitting, testing and servicing of items of Assisted Technology to enable very vulnerable mentally and physically disabled people to remain living at home
- Handyperson Services where vulnerable clients can access reliable contractors to carry out small jobs, such as replacing tap washers, where they pay only for the materials, thus giving them peace of mind and negating the likelihood of them being taken advantage of by bogus contractors.
- Private work for disabled clients that wish to fund all or part fund adaptations.

- Holistic checks of the person/property to identify what assistance is required and refer on or take action as appropriate.
- Provide advice, assist or actually raise funds for building/adaptation works on the client's behalf including accessing charitable funding.
- Provide State Benefit entitlement checks in order to maximise household income.
- Undertake Fuel Poverty checks and complete SAP energy efficiency ratings of the client's property.
- Assist with relocation and relocation grants for disabled adults/children for clients whose homes cannot be adapted to meet their needs.
- Fitting of smoke alarms and carrying out fire safety audits, on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Service, for each client visited who does not have a smoke detector fitted to their property, including all clients who receive the Handyman service.
- Providing timely independent building advice, arranging and overseeing works required under the Sanctuary Scheme ensuring that clients exposed to Domestic Violence are safe in their own homes and not at risk of homelessness

Please refer to Appendix 7 for a case study illustrating the Choice Based Letting system, relocation and adaptation. Please also refer to Appendix 8 for a further case study illustrating adaptation.

5.3.4 **Supporting People to Maintain Their Accommodation**

The aim of the Supporting People programme is to provide flexible housing related support services which are innovative, cost effective, high quality and fully integrated to enable people to live as independently as possible and maximise their potential in the community

Whilst the ring fenced Supporting People programme has ended, the importance of the programme in meeting the housing related support needs of vulnerable people has been recognised by the Greater Peterborough Partnership and NHS Peterborough. Peterborough City Council also recognises the important contribution housing related support makes to the preventative and re-enablement agenda by moving vulnerable people either from a position of dependence to independence or maintaining their successful independent living. The longer term financial benefits of investment of low level housing related support compared to alternatives for meeting the client groups' needs is also recognised as is the importance of this funding programme in supporting people to maintain their accommodation and prevent them becoming homeless.

The Peterborough Supporting People programme continues to provide a variety of housing related services through **accommodation based** and **floating support** services to some of the most vulnerable groups of residents in the City. The current arrangements for floating support are due to expire in March 2012. In preparation for this the Council will approach the market place with a view to establishing a framework agreement which was considered to be the most appropriate commissioning solution for floating support.

Accommodation based housing related support services that are due to expire in March 2012 will be funded by way of a grant award from the Council as the Supporting People programme contributes to the funding of a post(s) employed directly by the accommodation owner where the support service is being provided.

5.3.5 **Taking Households Out of Fuel Poverty – Providing Affordable Warmth for Vulnerable Householders**

The most prevalent hazard found in privately owned and rented property in the City is Excess Cold. The Peterborough Private Sector Stock Condition Survey carried out in 2009 estimated that the total cost to remedy excess cold in both owner occupied and privately rented properties would be £17.3 million. The Survey also estimated that 13.4% of households in the private sector were in fuel poverty.

The latest projections show that up to 4.1 million households are in fuel poverty in England in 2011. Fuel poverty can damage quality of life and health as well as impose wider costs on

society. The likelihood of ill health is increased by cold homes, with illnesses such as influenza, respiratory problems, heart disease and strokes all considered to be exacerbated by the cold. The latest fuel poverty statistics for England also show that 81% of the fuel poor live in private housing tenures. Among the fuel poor in private tenures, 63% are owner occupiers and 18% are private rented housing. Ensuring vulnerable householders are able to achieve affordable warmth is an important objective for the Council to ensure they can maintain living in their existing accommodation and prevent them becoming homeless.

The Government will introduce the Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) in Autumn 2012 which replaces the Government's Warm Front programme and schemes delivered under the Community Energy Savings Programme (CESP) and Carbon Emission Reduction Target (CERT) obligations on energy suppliers. The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) released the consultation document on the Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation on the 23rd November and the consultation closes on the 18th January 2012. It is envisaged that the first Green Deal and ECO finance packages will be available from October 2012.

The Green Deal finance mechanism will comprise a market based "Pay as You Save" model enabling the householder to receive a package of energy efficiency measures, identified by an accredited assessor, at no up front capital cost. The repayment is associated with the property and not the householder; consequently if the occupants of the property change the obligation to repay the Green Deal charge will pass to the new occupier. The Green Deal has a "golden rule" – that the repayments will be less than the savings achieved from the energy efficiency measures installed.

The Energy Company Obligation is a new obligation and will underpin the Green Deal where the "Golden Rule" cannot be met. This may be in cases where the property is hard to treat and requires significant energy efficiency measures, including solid wall insulation, or where the household is vulnerable and on low income (and most likely to be in fuel poverty).

Local Authorities can act as Green Deal providers and fund energy efficiency measures. However, it is envisaged that Peterborough City Council's role will be in a partnership capacity with Green Deal providers who come forward to work in the City with finance in place. The Council can lend its "trusted brand" to these schemes and provide valuable information on the stock condition in the city in terms of energy efficiency and to work in partnership to target vulnerable household in fuel poverty living in neighbourhoods containing the most energy inefficient housing.

The Energy Act 2011 also highlighted how the Government aims to regulate to ensure the take up of cost effective energy efficiency improvements in the private rented sector in the future. From April 2016 landlords will not be able to unreasonably refuse requests from their tenants to consent to energy efficiency improvements where financial support (such as the Green Deal or ECO is available). Following this in April 2018, private rented properties must be brought up to a minimum energy efficiency rating of "E". This provision will make it unlawful to rent out a house that does not meet this minimum standard. It is envisaged that Local Authorities will enforce the domestic minimum standard regulations, with the ability to impose a civil fine of up to £5,000.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Homelessness prevention has implications for all sections of society and all wards and parishes of the local authority area.

The current economic climate which looks set to continue this year means that more people may fall into the vulnerable category or face risk of homelessness. There is a higher risk of losing their home irrespective of tenure.

We have also already seen an increase in hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless clients. Cold weather payments for rough sleepers may also increase.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Full consultation will take place on the Homelessness Strategy, the Housing Allocations Policy and the Empty Homes Strategy.

There will also be a series of Housing Solution Clinics in 2012, initially targeted at the Operation CAN-do area, but it is envisaged that relevant outcomes will be rolled out city wide.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 Following scrutiny of current actions and interventions to prevent homelessness, and after consideration of all comments made by the committee, officers will develop the Homelessness Strategy, the Housing Allocations Policy and the Empty Homes Strategy in order to return to committee with those draft reports for further scrutiny.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 Fuel Poverty Statistics can be found on the DECC website at:
http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/statistics/fuelpov_stats/fuelpov_stats.aspx

The Green Deal & Energy Company Obligation Consultation Document can be found on the DECC website at:

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/green_deal/green_deal.aspx

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix 1 – Case Study – A rough sleeper
Appendix 2 – Case Study – The Housing Register and the Choice Based Letting scheme
Appendix 3 – Case Study- Conditions in the Private Rented Sector
Appendix 4 - Case Study – Negotiation with an owner to bring a long term empty property back into use
Appendix 5 – Case Study – Using enforcement action to bring a long term empty property back into use
Appendix 6 – Case Study – Poor housing conditions in a property occupied by a vulnerable owner
Appendix 7 – Case Study – CBL, relocation and adaptation
Appendix 8 – Case Study - Adaptation

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