



1ST JANUARY 2025

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY.



served by One Team

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY.

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FOREWORD.



Foreword by our 3 Portfolio Holders responsible for Private Sector Housing across the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership.



Councillor John Baxter
Portfolio Holder for Housing
Boston Borough Council



Councillor William Gray
Portfolio Holder for Communities and Better Ageing
East Lindsey District Council



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Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Operational Housing
South Holland District Council

It has long been established that good quality housing is important to individual health and wellbeing and is also an essential component of a safe and vibrant community. The quality of the homes we live in can have a significant impact on every aspect of our lives and poor housing conditions, overcrowding and lack of affordability will all have an adverse effect on public health and wellbeing and can exacerbate health inequalities.

This strategy sets out the key priorities to review housing conditions, improve standards, tackle rogue landlords and outline the approach the service will take to overcome these challenges. It reflects and helps to deliver the Councils ambitions for housing in the Annual Delivery Plan and further supports the broader strategic aims of health and wellbeing across the sub-region, recognising the impact housing quality has on people's physical and mental health and principally seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.

This strategy sets out the strategic direction for Private Sector Housing as delivered by the Housing Standards Team within the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership sub region. Its purpose is to set the context as to how we intend to meet the challenges and opportunities confronting the service and to set out the key priorities for action and delivery.

Whilst housing conditions in the private sector are generally good, there are still a number of properties present serious hazards within the private sector.

Our priorities will focus on raising standards in the private sector, paying particular attention to ensuring fire safety in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) and removing or reducing serious hazards across both single and multiple occupancy households. We will work with private landlords to encourage and support them to improve standards and increase the supply of affordable accommodation, taking robust action against landlords who fail to remedy hazards, licence HMOs or comply with property management regulations. We will consider using various means of enforcement under housing legislation to tackle rogue landlords with financial penalties being considered as an alternative to prosecution. .

As housing supply continues to be a challenge with numerous empty homes, a priority will be to maximise existing housing stock by focused interventions to return empty homes to use with the development of an Empty Homes Policy.

INTRODUCTION.

The following sections of the strategy identify the key challenges facing the sub region in the pursuit of improving housing conditions within the private and public sector. Our vision is:

“WORKING TOGETHER WITH LANDLORDS, RESIDENTS AND PARTNERS TO PROVIDE GOOD QUALITY, SAFE AND HAZARD FREE HOMES FOR EVERYONE”.

In order to realise this vision the Council has agreed on the following 4 strategic priorities:

- Raising standards in the private sector
- Maximising use of existing private sector stock
- Regulating the private sector
- Collaborative working

STANDARD OF PRIVATE STOCK.

Nationally there has been an increase in the percentage of households in privately rented accommodation over the past decade. With this increasing trend it is important for the Council to understand the condition of the private sector accommodation within the area in order to plan effective resourcing. The most effective way of collating this information is to undertake a periodic stock condition survey, historically on a 10-year rolling programme, which the Council has been conducting for several decades. The current housing stock data for the sub-region shows the following breakdown of dwelling tenure:

Local authority	No. of dwellings			
	Private sector stock		Social	Total
	Owner occupied	Private rented		
Boston	16,770	7,200	5,790	29,760
East Lindsey	45,762	14,119	7,402	67,283
South Holland	28,082	6,971	4,952	40,005

Local Authority	% of dwellings in disrepair				
	Private sector stock			% of social housing	% of all stock
	% of private sector	% of owner occupied	% of private rented		
Boston	5%	4%	7%	2%	5%
East Lindsey	5%	4%	7%	2%	4%
South Holland	4%	3%	6%	2%	4%

DECENT HOMES

For a dwelling to be considered 'decent' under the Decent Homes Standard it must:

- meet the statutory minimum standard for housing (the Housing Health and Safety System (HHSRS) since April 2006), homes which contain a Category 1 hazard under the HHSRS are considered non-decent
- provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort
- be in a reasonable state of repair
- have reasonably modern facilities and services

In 2022, 15% or 3.7 million dwellings in England failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard. Private rented dwellings had the highest proportion of non-decent homes (21%) while the social rented sector had the lowest (10%). Among owner occupied homes, 14% failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard. The disrepair data for the sub-region is shown below:

HOUSING HEALTH AND SAFETY RATING SYSTEM (HHSRS)

The HHSRS is a risk-based assessment that identifies hazards in dwellings and evaluates their potential effects on the health and safety of occupants and their visitors, particularly vulnerable people. The most serious hazards are called Category 1 hazards and where these exist in a home it fails to meet the statutory minimum standard for housing in England.

In 2022, 8% or 2.1 million dwellings in England had a HHSRS Category 1 hazard, less than in 2021 (9%). Such hazards were more prevalent in the private rented dwellings (12%) than owner occupied (9%) or social rented dwellings (4%) (Department for Levelling UP, Housing and Communities). The table below shows the current data on category 1 hazards:

Local Authority	% of dwellings with HHSRS category 1 hazards				
	Private sector stock			% of social housing	% of all stock
	% of private sector	% of owner occupied	% of private rented		
Boston	21%	20%	21%	10%	19%
East Lindsey	22%	22%	21%	10%	21%
South Holland	16%	15%	16%	12%	15%

DAMP

In the English Housing Survey, a home is considered to have damp or a problem with damp if the surveyor records damp which is significant enough to be taken into consideration when making their HHSRS assessments. Therefore, minor issues of damp are not recorded and, for consistency, would not be part of the modelled data.

In 2022, 4% or 1 million dwellings in England had a problem with damp. Between 1996 and 2011, there was a sizable reduction in the prevalence of all dwellings with any damp problems, however incidences of damp have increased since 2019 from 3%. While this goes against the general trend of improvement, it is not necessarily surprising - due to the COVID-19 national lockdowns the rate of maintenance and repairs could have slowed or stalled, making remediation of damp problems difficult (Department for Levelling UP, Housing and Communities).

The timing of this strategy document coincides with the recommissioning of the stock modelling data for the sub-region. Due to the age of the previous district level stock condition data, it has not been included in this strategy document. Work on collating the latest stock condition information is expected to be completed during 2024.



RAISING STANDARDS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR .

OFFERING INFORMATION, ADVICE AND SPECIALIST SUPPORT

The overriding aim of our Housing Standards Team is to secure the best possible standards in the private sector. The team's core function is to ensure that statutory standards are met using enforcement powers as and when necessary. However, its work goes beyond that, advising and intervening to help tenants, owner occupiers and landlords with a wide range of housing issues.

ENGAGING WITH LANDLORDS

As in many parts of the country, the privately rented sector makes a very valuable contribution to the supply of affordable housing. A well-managed, well maintained private rented sector can play a very valuable role in Lincolnshire by helping:

- to make more properties available to vulnerable households;
- help vulnerable households to find suitable accommodation;
- to reduce homelessness.

In recent years, officers in both the Housing Standards Team and the Homelessness/Housing Needs/Advice Team have worked to develop a positive working relationship with landlords who want to deliver good quality housing. Landlords Forums are run jointly with Decent and Safe Homes (DASH) as well as the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA). The Forums allow a positive exchange of information on housing issues and standards.

Accreditation schemes are increasingly used by local housing authorities. Here, advice and assistance are given to both landlords and tenants to promote satisfactory management standards. The South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership (SELCP) is part of the DASH Landlord Accreditation Scheme. Landlords participating in the scheme:

- attend a one-day development course to obtain or reinforce the knowledge/skills important in ensuring their business meets necessary standards;
- agree to follow a code of conduct and
- demonstrate they are a 'fit and proper person' to act as a residential landlord.



MAXIMISING USE OF EXISTING PRIVATE SECTOR STOCK.

Our vision is to bring long term empty homes back into use to improve the quality and supply of housing and to enable our residents to fulfil their potential.

Empty homes represent a wasted resource and a missed opportunity which can have a negative impact on local communities. The problems associated with empty homes include:

- Denying a home to those in housing need.
- Causing damage to neighbouring properties.
- Affecting neighbouring house prices.
- Becoming a potential focal point for illegal activities and anti-social behaviour.
- Attracting fly tipping and vermin.
- Presenting a strain on other public services, including the Police and Fire Service.
- Presenting a risk to the public through unsafe structures.

Bringing empty homes back in to use will support our communities by improving the local environment and the quality of life of local residents. It will provide much needed accommodation for the private sector, easing the pressure for local residents wishing to remain in the area. By removing boarded up and problematic empty properties it will improve the visual appearance of an area and reduce antisocial behaviour and crime and help to make our communities more sustainable. This will increase confidence in an area, encouraging investment in the repairs and renovation of properties, making our communities more sustainable.

In order to effectively tackle the issue of empty homes the Council will seek to develop an Empty Homes Policy to explore options available to reduce the number of empty homes in the area.



REGULATING THE PRIVATE SECTOR .

THE HOUSING HEALTH AND SAFETY RATING SYSTEM (HHSRS)

The means of assessing housing standards, as per section 9 of the Housing Act 2004, is the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Officers use it to risk rate the severity of a deficiency in a dwelling by determining how serious the health effect of that deficiency would be, on residents and potential visitors to the dwelling. Officers do all they can to educate, inform and encourage property owners and managing agents to fulfil their responsibilities. However, enforcement action to protect the health and safety of tenants, occupiers and others will sometimes be required. The initiation of formal enforcement action will only occur when other measures have failed to produce the necessary response or where there is an urgent need for action. Upon consideration of all available evidence, the Council has a number of options to resolve a housing issue with these ranging from; taking no action, offering informal advice, service of a statutory notice, issuing of a formal caution, carrying out works in default, service of a financial penalty (also known as a civil penalty) and in the most extreme cases, prosecution at a magistrates' court. These courses of action are not necessarily mutually exclusive and an act of enforcement could involve a number of these options. We have adopted an enforcement protocol to assist with consistent and proportional legal action. Housing Standards enforcement guidelines linked to this strategy have been established and are reproduced within the Corporate Enforcement Policy.

HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMOS - INCLUDING LICENSING)

Some privately rented houses are let to people from several different families, either as bedsits or as shared houses. Houses like this are known as houses in multiple occupation (HMOS). HMOS provide a valuable source of affordable rented housing to primarily single people in the area. However, this form of housing is traditionally focussed on deprived areas and can be problematic due to fire safety issues and poor standards such as dampness, lack of affordable heating etc.

HMOS represent higher risk accommodation particularly when considering fire safety. For that reason, larger HMOS (housing 5 or more people) require a licence. The table below details the number of licensed HMOS, in comparison to the estimated number of non-licensable HMOS for each Council area (data as of March 2024)



HMOs that fall below the 5-person threshold are not required to be licensed. As such the number of HMOs across the sub-region fluctuates on a regular basis. Throughout recent years there has been a growth in HMO accommodation. Officers are working proactively to identify HMOs in order to safeguard the occupiers.

	Number of Licensable HMOs	Estimated number of Non-Licensable HMOs
Boston Borough Council	132	200
East Lindsey District Council	56	20
South Holland District Council	114	150

In order to align the HMO licensing process across the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership sub-region, each Council will seek to adopt a shared HMO Licensing Policy.

CIVIL PENALTIES

Under the Housing and Planning Act 2016, financial penalties (also known as civil penalties) are able to be issued as an alternative to prosecution for relevant housing offences under section 249A of the Housing Act 2004. The maximum amount per offence is capped at £30,000. Officers will consider serving financial penalties where there is clear evidence of a relevant housing offence having been committed or with the conduct still occurring following the local housing authority's involvement. The Crown Prosecution Service Code for Crown Prosecutors shall be consulted in conjunction with all local policies as well as the Enforcement Concordat as it provides advice on the extent to which there is likely to be sufficient evidence to secure a conviction. The Code has two stages: (i) the evidential stage and (ii) the public interest stage. There are seven factors to which the local housing authority will take into consideration upon service of a civil penalty and these are outlined within the Private Sector Housing Policy Framework, available to view on the council's website.

Banning orders for the most serious offenders, as well as a database of rogue landlords/property agents against whom a banning order has been made, are available to each Council. The database may include persons convicted of a banning order offence or who received two or more financial penalties within a twelve-month calendar period.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING.



Due to the nature of the enforcement work carried out by the team, it is essential that the team works closely with colleagues from other internal services and external agencies, including:

Homelessness & Housing Options Teams play a crucial role in assisting residents who find themselves homeless or in need of alternative accommodation. Due to the nature of enforcement work there are occasions when residents may require assistance from the Homelessness / Housing Options Team, such as when Emergency Prohibition Orders are served.

Police / Home Office / Fire & Rescue will regularly gain intelligence of multi-occupied, overcrowded and sub- standard properties within the area. Through information sharing agreements officers from the Council share and receive intelligence with the emergency services in relation to private sector accommodation. Immigration inspections to verify that the accommodation being provided is suitable for those coming overseas. Also to verify tenure is lawful, having the right to reside and recourse to public funds to begin with.

Wellbeing Lincs is a countywide service, funded by Lincolnshire County Council supporting adults across Lincolnshire to achieve confident, fulfilled and independent living. Many of the residents who request assistance from the Housing Standards Team may also need a helping hand through life's changes, such as ill health, disability, changes to financial circumstances.

DASH Services is a Private Rented Sector service for Local Authorities, Landlords & Tenants and is hosted by Derby City Council on behalf of numerous Councils across England. The service has operated successfully across the East Midlands region for almost 20 years, providing a valuable, low cost, service for local authorities and a place for Landlords to gain useful information to aid their businesses. The Council has worked closely with DASH to provide Landlord Forums, Newsletters and guidance on housing standards to private sector landlords and agents. In addition to their work with landlords DASH has provided the Council with training for enforcement officers to ensure competence and consistency is achieved in the work that is being carried out.

Good Home Lincs provides a one-stop-shop for information and advice on all aspects of housing improvement, maintenance and repair to help people stay safe, warm and well at home. Funded by Lincolnshire Councils, the service provides information and signposting to residents of all tenures as well as targeted advice and support. Linking with a range of services across Lincolnshire who have direct contact with households and connecting with organisations, both statutory and voluntary, that provide housing, health and wellbeing related services. The goal is to ensure residents receive the advice and support they need to help them live in a good home.

OUR COMMITMENTS.



To develop this strategy we considered a number of key areas in the private housing sector, on both a national and local scale, as well as the needs of the service. By refreshing our housing stock condition survey data, we will shape this further by identifying dwellings in the private sector and allocating them into categories, likely tenure, condition and household vulnerability of the stock and the geographical distribution of properties, which helps to understand the issues by tenure type across the sub-region. This helps to; establish the extent of dwellings suffering from the presence of a HHSRS Category 1 hazard, Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating bands, the number of empty homes across the sub-region and a robust approach to mandatory HMO licensing.

From this we have developed four outcome-based commitments:

Commitment 1: We proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions across the private housing sector.

Commitment 2: We will continue to work with partners, Landlords and Registered Providers to ensure that homes meet required standards so that residents can thrive in a safe home.

Commitment 3: We will work effectively to reduce the number of empty homes across the sub-region.

Commitment 4: We will tackle unlicensed HMOs across the sub-region.

COMMITMENT 1: We proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions across the private housing sector.

This commitment focuses on the development of our approach to regulating and improving conditions in the private housing sector within the sub-region. It is important that we build a robust approach to tackling rogue landlords and strive to ensure that the private sector offers a safe and suitable housing option for our residents.

To achieve this, we will:

- Take appropriate enforcement action when required, following our enforcement policy, that sets out how we will tackle rogue landlords and sub-standard property conditions.
- Work with landlords to identify and appropriately license all Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) across the sub-region.
- Review our approach to supporting tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector.





COMMITMENT 2: We will continue to work with partners, Landlords and Registered Providers to ensure that homes meet required standards so that residents can thrive in a safe home.

It is important that we continue to build good relationships and education for tenants and landlords.

To achieve this, we will:

- Ensure the Landlords Forum meets the needs of the Landlords, by providing a wide range of advice, education from a variety of departments, agencies and local services.
- Continue to work with landlords to promote good housing management and to enable tenants to remain in their homes.
- Review the information provided on our website.
- Carry out consultation surveys with tenants & landlords to promote education and to ensure we are meeting customer satisfaction.

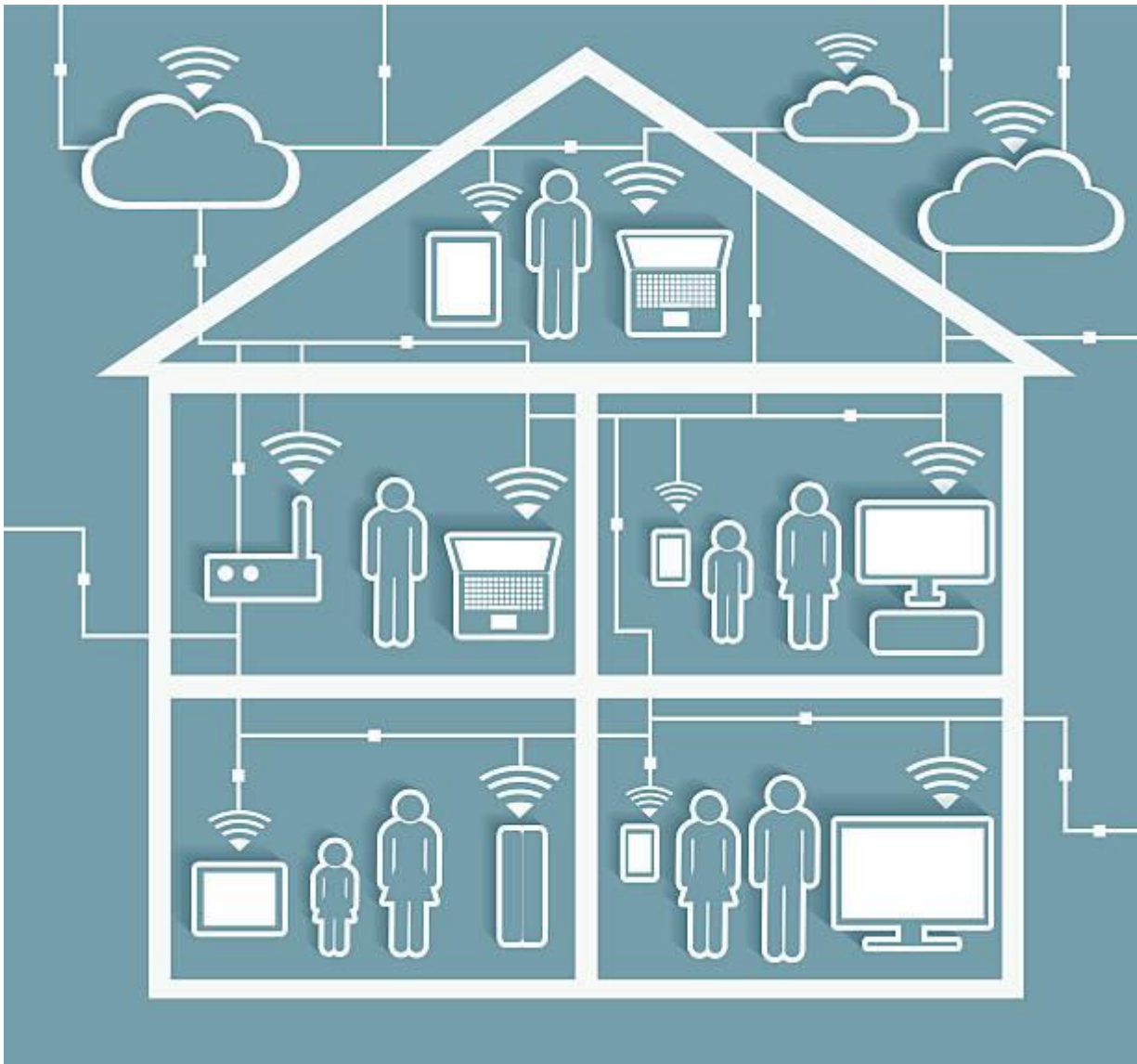
COMMITTMENT 3: We will work effectively to reduce the number of empty homes across the sub-region.

Working effectively to reduce the number of empty homes across the sub-region and bringing them back into use for the community will assist in addressing the local shortage of affordable residential properties. This will also reduce the detrimental impact that empty properties can have on the local area.

To achieve this, we will:

- Develop a strategic approach to identify and investigate empty homes throughout the sub-region both reactively and proactively.
- Engage with owners to encourage and support them in bringing empty homes back into use.
- Consider rent schemes, grant programmes and other available options to assist owners in bringing empty homes back into use.
- Take appropriate enforcement action when required.





COMMITMENT 4: We will tackle unlicensed HMOs across the sub-region.

Tackling unlicensed HMOs across the sub-region to proactively ensure landlords are meeting the minimum housing standards, fire safety and management standards will ensure that this type of housing is always a safe option for those needing an affordable home of their own.

To achieve this, we will:

- Carry out proactive project work, including partnership working with other departments across the Council and external partners, to identify and investigate all suspected HMOs across the sub-region.
- Target enforcement work towards non-compliant landlords.
- Encourage landlords to obtain accreditation to ensure good management standards and an understanding of legislation.

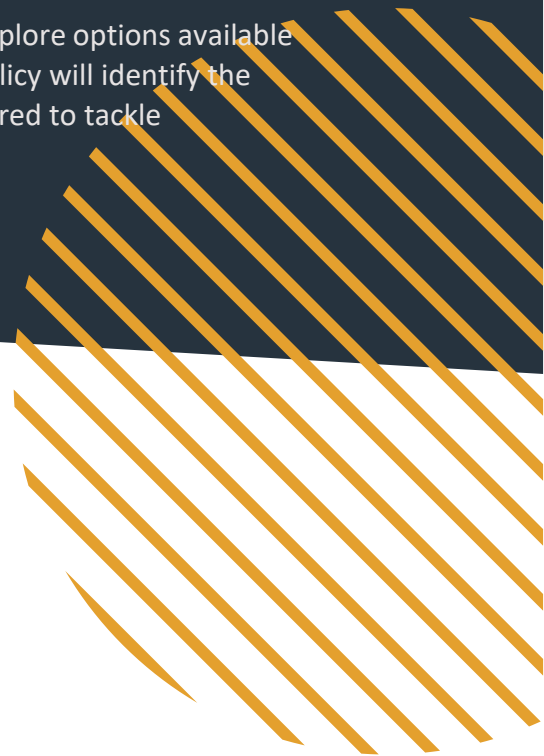


DELIVERY.

All 3 Councils within the Partnership will look to procure up to date stock condition data in order to shape the policies and procedures that will compliment this strategy.

The 3 Councils will aim to develop a shared Houses of Multiple Occupation Licensing Policy. The policy will cover how the Council will apply the relevant legislation to applications for licences for Houses of Multiple Occupation to ensure that all actions undertaken are fair, equitable and consistent.

The 3 Councils will aim to develop a shared Empty Homes Policy to explore options available to reduce the number of empty homes across the sub-region. The policy will identify the approaches available to all 3 Councils, along with the resources required to tackle the issue of empty homes.





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WORKING TOGETHER TO OFFER A CLEAR AND CONSISTENT EXPERIENCE.



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