

North Tyneside Council Report to Cabinet

Date: 18 March 2024

Title: Building a Better North Tyneside – Private Sector Housing Plan 2024–2028

Portfolio: Housing **Cabinet Member: Councillor John Harrison**

Report from Service

Area: Housing and Property Services

Responsible Officer: Peter Mennell, Director of Housing and Property Services **(Tel: (0191) 643 6395)**

Wards affected: All

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

The Our North Tyneside Plan was approved at full Council on 23 September 2021 and included a commitment to deliver 5,000 affordable homes, reduce the number of derelict properties and drive forward regeneration plans across the borough. To deliver these aims, Cabinet approved the 'Building a Better North Tyneside – The 2023–28 Housing Strategy' on 27 March 2023. This Strategy included a clear priority to improve standards in private rented housing.

The Authority has delivered significant outcomes against these priorities including the delivery of 2,300 affordable homes and reducing the number of long-term empty properties in the borough by nearly 35% since 2019. Changes to the Council Tax Empty Homes Premium were approved at a meeting of Full Council on the 23 November 2023 which provided further encouragement to owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use.

To continue building on the Authority's success to date, the Private Sector Housing Plan (PSHP) will deliver projects and improvements across four themes:

1. Improving our private rented sector

2. Tackling derelict and long-term empty properties
3. Enabling safe and independent living
4. 'A greener North Tyneside' – Improving energy efficiency in private sector homes

An annual Delivery Programme is included within the PSHP that outlines the actions that will be completed in 2024-25. It includes several new projects and initiatives including a new, innovative purchasing partnership between the Authority and North Tyneside Trading Company (Developments) Limited trading as Aurora Affordable Homes to target empty homes and support the regeneration of Wallsend Town Centre. The Delivery Programme also includes a range of support tools for private landlords and tenants to drive-up standards of accommodation, create safe, clean, and healthy communities, and support the borough's drive to net-zero across the borough.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet: -

- (1) Approve the Private Sector Housing Plan 2024-2025 and the Delivery Programme included in the Plan attached to this report as Appendix 1;
- (2) Authorise the Director of Housing and Property Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Director of Resources and Head of Law to undertake all necessary work to bring forward the proposals as identified in section 1.5 of this report.

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty-eight days' notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 15 February 2024.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report relates to the following priorities in the 2021-25 Our North Tyneside Plan:

A thriving North Tyneside:

- We will reduce the number of derelict properties across the borough
- Support the regeneration of the borough

A secure North Tyneside:

- Provide 5,000 affordable homes

A green North Tyneside:

- We will publish an action plan of the steps we will take and the national investment we will seek to make North Tyneside carbon net-zero by 2030.
- Deliver low carbon homes and secure funding for low-income households to achieve this.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

For most residents North Tyneside is a great place to live and work with a relatively low proportion of non-decent homes. The number of empty homes is below the regional average, and most private sector stock is maintained to a good standard. There are approximately 15,000 privately rented homes in the borough many of which are older properties with a predominance of Tyneside flats and terraced houses often concentrated in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

Sub-standard housing contributes to health inequalities and health risks – both physical and mental, and a poorly maintained home can lead to increased chances of trips and falls, especially among the elderly, can often be expensive to heat leading not only to fuel poverty but to excess cold and winter deaths.

1.5.2 Progress to date

The Authority has undertaken a proactive approach to tackling empty homes and delivering housing-led regeneration. An example of this is the purchasing of a portfolio of long-term derelict properties in Charlotte Street, Wallsend by the Authority. The derelict homes that were causing significant anti-social behaviour and were causing blight in the street. The intervention by the Authority allowed them to be refurbished and returned as affordable homes.

The Authority has a good track record of working with private landlords and has secured over 60 homes through the Repair and Lease scheme that provides landlords with the ability to give control of their property to the Authority to use as an affordable home for at least 10 years. The changes to the

Empty Homes Premium which were approved at Full Council on 23 November 2023 and come into effect on the 1 April 2024 have provided further opportunities for the Authority to support and encourage owners of empty properties to return them to use.

The Private Sector and Empty Homes Team, work in partnership with the Environmental Health team to target bad landlords. The Authority's approach to proactive intervention with private landlords has led to a 35% reduction in the number of long-term homes since 2019, and an increase of £0.025m in Council Tax.

The purpose of the PSHP is to continue to build on the success to date and deliver a range of new projects and innovations to continue to 'Build a better North Tyneside'.

1.5.3 Private Sector Housing Plan – Priority Themes

Theme 1 – Improving our private rented sector – The purpose of this theme is to build on the Authority's success to date by working with and supporting landlords to improve the private rented sector. The key priorities focus on improving the Authority's approach to supporting private landlords and tenants and driving up property standards. Partnership working will be crucial to delivering this theme. The Private Sector and Empty Homes Team will re-establish forums for private landlords to share best practice and highlight funding opportunities with an aim to reduce poor quality housing.

The team will also take a lead in coordinating partnership approaches to tackling sub-standard landlords. This will involve working closely with Environmental Health, Community and Public Space Protection Team and outside agencies such as the Police, Fire and Rescue and voluntary sector organisations.

Theme 2 – Tackling derelict and long-term empty properties – Properties that stand vacant for over 6 months are classed as a long-term empty dwelling. This is sometimes caused by a property not selling and is resolved once a purchase is completed. However, when properties stand empty for more than six months, they can start to generate complaints, especially if this vacancy is accompanied by deterioration in maintenance and anti-social behaviour. If left unchecked these properties can become derelict. It is therefore important that the Authority can support owners of empty homeowners who wish to return properties to use as soon as possible as well as tackling landlords who

wilfully allow properties to become derelict. The purpose of the scheme is to continue to reduce long term empty properties and use innovative solutions.

The Authority already offers a successful Repair and Lease scheme to help landlords who find themselves with a property that they are unable to bring up to a decent standard or cannot sell due to negative equity. Through this scheme, the Authority invests in the property to bring it up to a Decent Homes standard and lets it as an affordable home with all finance re-paid to the Authority.

To support the Authority's regeneration ambitions for Wallsend, a new, targeted purchasing scheme will be launched in 2024-25, that will see the Authority work in partnership with the Authority's wholly owned trading company, Aurora Affordable Homes, to act as an exemplar landlord within the Master Plan area. This is a new and innovative approach that will be targeted to a specific area within Wallsend in the first instance. It is expected that the model will then be rolled out across other areas of the borough.

Theme 3 – Enabling safe independent living – The Authority is aware that the number of people aged 65 and over will continue to increase in the borough. Those residents prefer to maintain their independence and would like to stay in their own homes for as long as safely possible with help and support when required. Enabling and supporting people to remain in their own home, reduces pressure on future care costs both for the individual, the Authority, and the NHS.

The Authority continues to support residents through its Safe and Healthy Homes team. This team helps around 250 households a year by providing access to a dedicated repair, support for fuel poverty and assist with grant application to support independent living.

The purpose of this theme is to continue to build on the Authority's work to date by reviewing the support mechanisms through the Disabled Facilities Grant and potential repairs scheme for those who require help to stay in their home.

Theme 4 – Improving the energy efficiency of homes – 22% of carbon emissions comes from the way homes are powered and heated and this plan will provide further support to the Authority on its drive to meet carbon net-zero. Nearly 60% of the private rented homes in North Tyneside have an efficiency rating of between D-G due often due to the age and condition of the properties.

The Authority has a strong track record of supporting homeowners and private rented tenants improve the energy efficiency of their homes. To date, over £9m of inward investment has been secured to help homeowners improve the energy efficiency of their homes and the Authority continues to lead the way by building new Council homes off-gas and to an energy efficiency rating of at least B.

This theme will focus on enhancing the support that the Authority is able to offer homeowners and private landlords to improve the energy efficiency of the homes. It will also focus on building strategic partnerships with regional colleagues to attract further investment into North Tyneside.

1.5.4 Delivery Programme 2024-25

An annual Delivery Programme has been prepared to deliver the priority themes within the PSHP. Highlights for 2024-25 include:

Theme 1 – Improving our private rented sector

- Re-establish a Landlord Forum to increase consultation and information sharing with private landlords.
- Introduce a landlord accreditation scheme focusing initially in Wallsend
- Work with colleagues across the Authority to target private rented properties for damp and mould.
- Introduce a private landlord leasing scheme that will allow the Authority to increase the number of affordable homes and provide stability in neighbourhoods.

Theme 2 – Tackling derelict and long-term empty properties

- Explore a range of targeted solutions to reduce the number of empty properties in a prolonged probate period.
- Review and update the Authority's enforcement toolkit to target poor quality landlords.
- Launch the targeted purchasing partnership with Aurora Affordable Homes in Wallsend.

Theme 3 – Enabling safe independent living

- Review and update the Authority's Disabled Facilities Grant policy and procedures and review the Authority's use of them to support residents.
- Explore the potential of introducing a handyman scheme in partnership with Age UK to support residents.

Theme 4 – Improving the energy efficiency of homes

- Work with regional colleagues to develop a 'One Stop Shop' to promote a fabric first approach and retrofit options for homeowners and landlords.
- Explore finance models to provide greener energy measures in homes and continue to review the Authority's framework for low carbon energy installers.

1.6 Decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet.

Option 1

To approve the recommendations at paragraph 1.2 of this report.

Option 2

Not to approve the recommendations at paragraph 1.2 of this report.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

- It will support the delivery of the Elected Mayor and Cabinet's commitment within the Our North Tyneside Plan to deliver more quality homes, reduce the number of derelict properties and support the ambition for North Tyneside to be carbon neutral by 2030.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix 1: Private Sector Housing Plan 2024-2028

1.9 Contact officers:

Robert Peach, Housing Strategy Programme Manager, tel. 07974576848

Richard Brook, Housing Growth Manager, tel. 07540 182 225

Robert Crumpton, Senior Accountant, tel. 07816 419441

1.10 Background information:

The following background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

- (1) [Full Council Paper 23 November 2023 ITEM Title: Council Tax Empty Property Premium](#)
- (2) [Cabinet Paper March 27 2023 ITEM Title: Building a Better North Tyneside: The 2023-28 Housing](#)
- (3) [Cabinet Paper 21 February 2022 ITEM title: "Delivering 5,000 Affordable Homes and Reducing Derelict Properties in North Tyneside"](#)

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

The delivery of this plan can be achieved utilising existing capital and revenue resources including HS051: Private Sector Empty Homes Programme and the Better Care Fund. In addition, the Authority will continue to explore opportunities to secure additional grant funding from sources such as Department of Energy Security and Net Zero. The financial implications associated with additional investment will be considered as part of any funding application to ensure these can be accommodated from within the Authority's financial plans.

2.2 Legal

The Authority must act within the scope of and limits of its legal powers and in accordance with its constitutional arrangements relevant to the intended actions to be taken pursuant to the various themes set out in the PSHP.

The legal implications of any legal action taken against private landlords, including selective licensing, will need to be considered against the relevant enforcement mechanisms engaged. Relevant powers exist under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Building Act 1984, Housing Acts 1985 and 2004 and Housing and Planning Act 2016. Any action should be considered by officers specialising in those areas with legal advice sought as required.

The purchasing or leasing of properties by the Authority will be undertaken in accordance with legal advice and the Authority's constitutional and financial arrangements relevant to such transactions.

The provision of support through disabled facilities grants must be made in accordance with legal requirements under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, subordinate legislation and relevant government guidance. The Authority must also act in accordance with its duties under the Care Act 2014.

If support to homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their homes will involve grant funding from central government or a regional Combined Authority, such support will need to be administered in accordance with the requirements of those grant schemes and the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

The activities envisaged under the PSHP fall within powers already available to the Authority. . However, should any major implications arise because of the actions and projects detailed, they will be presented to Cabinet in a future report.

The exercise of any authority given to the Director of Housing and Property Services in relation to the matters included in section 1.5 of this report will need to be properly recorded and published and exercised in accordance with the decision-making principles set out in Article 13 of the Authority's Constitution.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

2.3.1 Internal Consultation

Internal consultation has taken place with the Cabinet Member for Housing and with other Elected Members through attendance at the Secure Sub Committee on 20 September 2022 as part of the discussions on the development of a Housing Strategy.

The Strategic Property Group which comprises of the Elected Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Cabinet Members for Finance and Resources, Housing, and Regeneration as well as the Directors for Housing and Property, Regeneration and Economic Development and the Environment are regularly updated as part of the Affordable Homes Programme quarterly updates.

A Health Impact Assessment screening session was held on both the Housing and Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategies in February 2023. These sessions were attended by both Housing and Public Health officers to support the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) 'Equally Well' in its aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the population.

Following the initial screening, further Health Impact Assessment was conducted on empty properties which identified that there is a clear correlation between areas that have higher levels of private rented properties and poor health. The findings of the

Health Impact Assessment have been considered when developing the Themes within the PSHP and the annual Delivery Programme.

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

The PSHP was formulated to support the ambitions of the 2023–2028 Housing Strategy and informed by the comprehensive programme of consultation that was undertaken to support the development of the final strategy.

A public online consultation ran from the 15 December 2022 until 2 February 2023 offering residents and stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the Housing Strategy with 74 responses received in total.

The PSHP has also been informed by the Residents Survey that was conducted in 2021. 39% of respondents felt that affordable, decent housing was an important factor in making a place somewhere good to live, which represents an increase of 8% on 2019. This supports the theme within the strategy to deliver more affordable homes. 64% of residents indicated they were satisfied with the choice and quality of housing available in North Tyneside, however satisfaction with the choice and quality of private rented homes is significantly lower. Continuing to improve the private rented sector in the borough remains a key priority within our Housing Strategy.

2.4 Human rights

The commitment by Cabinet to deliver 5,000 affordable homes and the steps taken to achieve that target promotes Article 8 of Schedule 1 of the Human Rights Act 1988 and an individual's right to respect for their private and family life and their home. Article 1 of the First Protocol is also promoted because that right relates to the protection of property and a person's entitlement to the peaceful enjoyment of their possessions, which includes property.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

This PSHP brings together several delivery themes outlined in the North Tyneside Housing Strategy 2023–28, Building a Better North Tyneside, approved by Cabinet on 27th March 2023 and considers the implications of the equality impact assessment undertaken at that time. The majority of the actions contained within the plan will be delivered by bringing to bear existing Authority powers and resources. This plan seeks to be inclusive in line with its overall aim to improve housing conditions within the boroughs existing private sector housing stock, improve access to services and

widen the housing options available to residents in the borough. The likelihood of negative impacts on protected groups is therefore low while the positive impacts will vary depending on the specific projects within the plan as they are developed. Where new projects within the plan involve a change to Authority policy or how the Authority delivers services a specific Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken. Further consultation has been commissioned in the form of a Specialist Housing Market Position Statement, the findings of which will inform the ongoing implementation of this plan.

2.6 Risk management

There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.

2.7 Crime and disorder

The PSHP supports the delivery of high-quality homes and improving communities and the built environment. This includes designing homes and communities that consider the impact of crime and disorder through planning requirements and ensuring that homes are sustainable and safe.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

The Authority declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and the PSHP 2024-2028 includes a theme around improving the energy efficiency of homes to support the drive to carbon zero by 2030. The delivery of this Plan will positively impact the carbon footprint of the borough by working with private landlords, accessing grant funding to improve Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) ratings of homes and therefore reduce the overall carbon footprint within the borough. The return of long-term empty homes to occupation will reduce the potential impact upon the environment of new housing development.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive

X

- Director(s) of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Assistant Chief Executive