



Chartered
Institute of
Environmental
Health

Local Authority Private Sector Housing Services

Delivering Housing, Health and Social
Care Priorities, Helping Vulnerable
People and Local Communities

January 2011

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health is contacting key decision makers in local government to highlight the value of **private sector housing services**. Whether these services currently sit together in one section or department or are organised in separate units, they can make an important contribution across a broad range of policy areas, delivering **real benefits for vulnerable people and local communities**.

Private sector housing services can make an important contribution to:

- Preventing Homelessness
- Tackling Fuel Poverty
- Older People’s Social Care
- Health Protection and Improvement
- Carbon Reduction
- Sustainable Neighbourhoods
- Increasing Housing Supply and Widening Choice

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The Private Rented Sector (PRS)

- Reliance on the PRS is growing because of limitations in social housing supply, and because first time buyers cannot afford owner occupation until much later now. Research shows growth in the PRS of one million households between 2005 and 2009
- The PRS is increasingly important in preventing homelessness and widening choice through Choice Based Lettings. Property and management standards need to be assured before using PRS properties. Demand for homelessness services is predicted to grow. See NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL GOOD PRACTICE, page 14
- Forty percent of PRS homes are over 90 years old, and nearly 30 percent have serious health and safety hazards compared to 13 percent in the social rented sector. Forty five percent of PRS homes also fail the Decent Homes Standard
- Many private landlords are inexperienced – an estimated three quarters of landlords are individuals or couples, the majority of whom don't let properties as their main profession
- Local authorities with voluntary accreditation schemes can help landlords to self-regulate - an extremely cost effective way to improve standards in the sector in preference to more expensive enforcement action. The Government has said that they are 'keen to encourage responsible letting through the use of voluntary accreditation schemes for landlords and letting agents'
- Authorities must also retain the capability to take action against any landlords who continue to offer sub-standard property and exploit their tenants. The Housing Act 2004 for instance places a statutory duty upon local authorities to deal with high risk hazards and to implement licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation
- The National Landlords Association has recently called on local authorities to 'deal firmly with rogue landlords through enforcement action'
- £3.5 billion is paid in housing benefit to neglectful landlords. Local authorities can use their powers to ensure that public money does not keep bad landlords in business
- Grant Shapps, the Minister for Housing and Local Government, has said, 'I am putting councils on alert to use the range of powers already at their disposal to make sure tenants are properly protected.'

Housing – a key determinant of health

- It costs the NHS in England an estimated £600m per year to treat the health impacts of poor housing. Over four and a quarter million private homes have hazards that can lead to serious health risks
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) need to recognise the positive impact housing interventions have upon local health issues
- JSNAs have been required since 2008 and are renewed every 3 years – they inform the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement and influence health service commissioning decisions. Department of Health guidance says that JSNAs should examine all factors affecting health and wellbeing, including housing
- The Government’s Public Health White Paper will set out the lead role for authorities on health and wellbeing and the public health budget that will be available for this. Some authorities are ahead of the game and have already drawn down health funding for housing projects through partnership working with health colleagues. (See LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL GOOD PRACTICE, page 11)
- The CIEH’s *‘Good Housing Leads to Good Health Toolkit’*¹ includes a cost calculator that allows the health costs of poor housing to be weighed against repair and improvement costs.
- The programme *‘New Horizons – a shared vision for mental health’*², recognised that, “good mental health is linked to good physical health” and stressed, “the importance of safe, secure permanent accommodation.”
- One of the *‘Five Steps to Wellbeing’* (a report presented to the Foresight Project on communicating the evidence base for improving people’s well-being) identifies the home as a key component for connecting with people

1 www.cieh.org/policy/Good_Housing_Leads_to_Good_Health.html

2 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Mentalhealth/NewHorizons/index.htm>

Enabling older and disabled people to live independently at home for longer

- 75 percent of people over retirement age are owner occupiers, around half of them are living on low incomes. At retirement older people on low incomes face a likely struggle for twenty years or more to repair and maintain their homes
- The Government has said that it will “help elderly people live at home for longer through solutions such as home adaptations and community support programmes”. The primary need for low cost, high benefit practical housing help is in the owner occupied sector. One in three low income home owners live in homes that do not meet their needs in terms of accessibility or adaptations
- Small repairs and minor adaptations, or ‘handyperson’ schemes offer a highly cost effective means of enabling older people to continue to live independently. Low cost work can make homes safe, secure and convenient to use and help reduce the strain on NHS and social care budgets. Just £35,000 can provide help with minor adaptations for 200 older people – it costs approximately the same amount for one older person to live in a care home for a year. (See GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE, page 16)
- Disabled Facilities Grants provide adaptations and facilities to enable disabled people to continue to live at home. They are a mandatory entitlement for qualifying people and authorities need to make adequate provision for this. Social Services also have a responsibility to fund low cost minor adaptations and equipment for eligible people under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970
- Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) play an important role in assisting vulnerable private sector residents who are older, disabled or on a low income to repair, improve or adapt their homes and to remain living independently and safely in their own home for longer

Empty properties

- Homes that stand empty are a wasted resource and have a detrimental effect on neighbourhoods
- The Government has said that they will ‘explore a range of measures to bring empty homes into use’
- Most empty homes are privately owned. Measures available to authorities to bring them back into use range from informal advice and encouragement through practical measures such as private sector leasing schemes to the use of enforcement powers. (See GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE, page 9)
- If only 5 percent of empty homes in England could be brought back into use, councils could cut annual homelessness costs by £500m

Energy efficiency

- Only 5 percent of private homes are top rated for energy performance compared with 21 percent of social rented homes and 2.1m private sector homes are a health hazard because of excess cold
- Poor energy efficiency is a major contributory factor in causing fuel poverty and two thirds of all households in fuel poverty are owner occupiers or private tenants. Older people are more likely to experience fuel poverty than other age groups with those over 75 most likely
- Substantial resources are available nationally to improve energy efficiency. Local authorities have an important part to play in raising awareness and facilitating access to energy efficiency grants, offers and advice from external agencies

Carbon reduction

- The UK has to achieve legally binding carbon emission reduction targets, the first of which is to reduce its carbon footprint by 34 percent by 2020. Twenty seven percent of carbon emissions come from the housing sector, and older private sector housing accounts for a substantial part of this
- Existing energy efficiency schemes make some contribution to carbon reduction, but a step change is required in the types and numbers of measures installed to hit the target
- Area-based whole house retrofit schemes are already being launched through initiatives such as the Government's Community Energy Saving Programme, and the Government's Green Deal will make loans available to householders to be re-paid through energy savings
- Research has shown that householders have a much higher level of trust in schemes led and co-ordinated by local authorities in preference to utilities and other commercial interests

Low cost loans and equity release

- Low cost loans and equity share products provide a cost effective means of delivering assistance to low income households. One in six low income home owners live in a home which is considered to be 'non-decent'. Advice and assistance for home owners is commonly provided by HIAs
- Equity share loans, repaid at the point of sale, are by far the most popular
- Well established equity share schemes have accumulated loan portfolios that are capable of generating an income stream through loan repayments and redemptions - this can be recycled to provide further assistance

Further information on private sector housing services can be obtained from:

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

www.cieh.org/policy

Care and Repair England

www.careandrepair-england.org.uk/mission.htm

LG Regulation

www.lacors.gov.uk/lacors/home.aspx

Pattison, B. et al (2010) Tenure Trends in the UK Housing System. Building and Social Housing Foundation.

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Communities and Local Government news release 10.6.10. Shapps Promise to Landlords: No more red tape.

Davison, M. et al (2010) The Real Cost of Poor Housing. BRE.

Wilcox, S. (2010) UK Housing Review. CIH/CML.

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Communities and Local Government (2007) English House Condition Survey.

Laing and Buisson (2008 survey) and Care and Repair Cymru (2006) RRAP Cardiff.

HM Government. The Coalition: Our programme for government.

Audit Commission (2009) Building Better Lives – Getting the Best from Strategic Housing. English House Condition Survey.

Help the Aged (2006) Decent Homes and Fuel Poverty: An analysis based on the English House Condition Survey.

Communities and Local Government (2007) English House Condition Survey.

Examples of good practice

Leeds City Council – April 2010	
Subject	Reducing empty homes and improving housing markets
Issues addressed	Turnover of vacant homes and the number of long-term empty properties can lead to an adverse effect for communities who live in these areas. The market value and desirability of the stock are affected: and the falling number of residents can impact on business viability leading to a downward spiral.
Aims	Reduce the level of long term empty properties and ensure the housing market is buoyant.
Actions taken	<p>Utilising accurate Council Tax data to detect any shifts or emerging problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take action early – letters to owner • Followed up with enforcement, if necessary, such as Compulsory Purchase Orders or Enforced Sale etc. • Charge 100 percent Council Tax on all long-term empty properties • Supported by Leeds Private Sector Letting Scheme • Offer potential tenants to landlords from Leeds Housing Register upon their properties meeting exacting standards • Scheme includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Damage Liability Provision – up to four weeks rent paid by the Council if the fabric of the property fixtures/fittings is damaged by the tenant - Support Service – free, regular support to tenants around paying their rent on time - Direct Housing Benefit payments to the landlord in appropriate circumstances - Contact through a dedicated Private Sector Link Officer
Results or outputs	<p>Between April 2009 and March 2010 Leeds brought back into occupation 3,519 long-term empty properties including: 243 as a consequence of the Empty Property Enforcement Team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 422 empty properties were reoccupied through the Leeds Private Sector Letting Scheme of which 218 had previously been empty for more than 6 months • Total number of properties let through the scheme from April 2009 to end of March 2010 = 780 people / families from Leeds Housing Register • All of these properties are now free from Category 1 hazards

Leeds City Council – April 2010		(Continued)
Outcomes and achievements	<p>Timely intervention prevents further dilapidation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the wasted resource of empty homes • Greater involvement and engagement with private sector landlords which leads to improving the quality/health and safety standard of properties within the private rented sector • Significantly reduced the need for temporary/emergency accommodation and thereby making substantial cost savings to the Council • Increasing the supply of affordable homes • Reduce the waiting list of people on the Leeds Housing Register and provide a viable alternative housing option for people who require affordable housing, thereby releasing pressure on the social housing sector • Helped to change the nature of occupancy patterns and the economic diversity of communities 	
<p>Contact Jon Hough, Principal Housing Strategy Officer, Leeds City Council Email: Jon.hough@leeds.gov.uk Tel: 0113 2476104</p>		

Liverpool City Council – October 2010	
Subject	Liverpool's Healthy Homes Programme – tackling health inequalities caused by poor housing conditions and lifestyle, through an innovative advocacy approach and strategic use of enforcement powers on a large scale.
Issues addressed	<p>Tackling private rented housing disrepair and reducing health inequalities through direct intervention for vulnerable and hard to reach residents through a Healthy Homes Programme launched jointly by Liverpool Primary Care Trust and Liverpool City Council.</p> <p>Through the removal of hazard exposure, the programme is designed to reduce premature deaths by up to 100 when fully implemented, and reduce GP consultations and hospital admissions by over 1000 cases.</p>
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce health inequalities caused by poor quality housing conditions primarily in the private rented sector • To reduce the burden on NHS secondary care by targeting housing deficiencies that cause or exacerbate preventable chronic disease and premature death • To increase engagement and regulation with private sector housing providers in order to develop long-term private sector investment • To introduce innovative interventions with stakeholder partners and increase access to health and wellbeing related services • To raise awareness of the health impacts of poor housing conditions and accidents within the home
Actions taken	<p>Operational Details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation and utilisation of 'Healthy Homes Index' to prioritise Super Output Areas on basis of health and housing deprivation across Liverpool • Community engagement and promotion to maximise effectiveness of team in areas carried out prior to Advocates' street by street visits • Sixteen Advocates use a bespoke Single Assessment Process to ascertain specific needs linked to health and wellbeing of targeted residents, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvement in housing conditions - Access to medical practitioners - Benefit maximisation and employment access advice - Support mechanisms for residents with young children - Support mechanisms for the elderly - Energy efficiency measures - Access to health and drug support agencies - Exercise and fitness regimes

Liverpool City Council – October 2010		(Continued)																				
Actions taken continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Healthy eating and nutrition programmes - Other individual needs • Issues of poor housing are referred to ten in-house Environmental Health Officers for inspection and improvement action using Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to address hazards using statutory powers Improvement costs are obtained from private rented sector where possible • Direct referrals of health issues are made to a wide range of partner agencies. Referrals can be extended to other, new partners where necessary • Inbound mechanisms to accept referrals from GPs, health centres, hospitals and health professionals • Most vulnerable residents allocated Case Support workers for more intensive and tailored support • Re-contact is made with residents by Advocates after 28 days to ensure referrals have been acted upon • As a result of partnership working and robust improvement action against landlords where necessary, homes are safer, warmer, more secure and less expensive to run • Residents are provided with pathways to improve health and wellbeing • Programme supported by social marketing/health promotion around winter survival, carbon monoxide awareness, accidents in the home etc. • Feedback and comment is obtained from service users, landlords and partners to improve service delivery 																					
Results or outputs	<p>Results from April 2009 to September 2010:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11,625 properties visited • 8,886 surveys completed • 11,825 referrals to partners • 2,067 HHSRS inspections carried out • 1434 category 1 hazards identified using HHSRS • £2.2M Private sector leverage • 51 Health promotion events <p>Breakdown of referrals:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td>EHO Referrals 1967</td> <td>Dentist 1741</td> <td>Fuel Poverty 424</td> <td>Nutrition</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1458</td> <td>Fire Service 1318</td> <td>Employment 671</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Exercise 791</td> <td>Doctor 228</td> <td>Energy Efficiency 913</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stop Smoking 488</td> <td>Benefit advice 388</td> <td>Age Concern 311</td> <td>Mental</td> </tr> <tr> <td>wellbeing 751</td> <td>Sure Start 232</td> <td>Alcohol and drugs 78</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>The programme has engaged with 20,193 occupiers including 1842 persons with a disability. 18.7 percent of service users from BME communities compared with 8.1 percent of population.</p>		EHO Referrals 1967	Dentist 1741	Fuel Poverty 424	Nutrition	1458	Fire Service 1318	Employment 671		Exercise 791	Doctor 228	Energy Efficiency 913		Stop Smoking 488	Benefit advice 388	Age Concern 311	Mental	wellbeing 751	Sure Start 232	Alcohol and drugs 78	
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Liverpool City Council – October 2010		(Continued)
Outcomes and achievements	<p>Successful outcomes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1434 category 1 hazards removed or being removed • £2.2 million of improvement works secured or being secured • Reduction in number of deaths and illnesses needing medical attention caused by poor housing conditions • Reduction in the number of excess winter deaths • Embedding programme into mainstream services e.g. mental health, accident prevention, PCT Neighbourhood model etc. • Improvement in rates of compliance with Notices • Successful prosecutions for housing offences • Fire safety checks and fitting of smoke alarms • Residents joining local smoking cessation groups • Benefit maximisation of residents' entitlements. One tenant now receives £140 a week in extra benefits • Residents in contact with alcohol and drug support agencies • Sure Start liaison for residents with young children • Advice given on healthy eating and nutrition • Exercise programmes devised by PCT Health Trainers • Re-engagement of residents with Doctors, Dentists and other health practitioners • Access to fuel poverty, winter warmth and energy efficiency services • Health promotion events carried out in local communities across the city 	
<p>Contact: Ian Watson, Programme Co-ordinator, Healthy Homes Programme, Liverpool City Council Email: Ian.watson@liverpool.gov.uk Tel: 0151 225 4823</p>		

Northampton Borough Council – September 2010	
Subject	Enabling private rented sector properties to be offered through Choice Based Lettings - increasing housing choice, raising property and management standards, and bringing empty properties back into use.
Issues addressed	Tackling a shortfall in suitable accommodation for homeless persons and customers on housing need, raising standards in the private rented sector.
Aims	Preventing homelessness and supplementing housing choices in the social rented sector by making private rented sector properties available through choice based lettings.
Actions taken	<p>Scheme includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation of private rented sector landlords following landlord training and audit checks of properties • Advertisement of accredited landlords' properties on the Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme • Quarterly Private Landlord Forums and 6 monthly newsletters to engage with private landlords • Regular advertisements in the local cinema, local newspapers, on buses to attract private landlords to the scheme • Rent Bond Scheme provides damage liability provision – up to four weeks rent paid by the Council if the fabric of the property fixtures / fittings is damaged by the tenant (up to 8 weeks for vulnerable customers) • Support service – free, regular support to tenant around paying their rent on time • Direct Housing Benefit payments to the landlord in appropriate circumstances • Contact through a dedicated Private Sector Link Officer • Providing support through the Council's Gateway Support service for vulnerable households • Fast tracking of Housing Benefit payments • Decent Homes Grant provided to landlords to improve the quality of accommodation and thermal efficiency of the property
Results or outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between April 2009 and March 2010, 642 properties returned to occupation through the Landlord Accreditation/Rent Bond scheme • Between April 2010 and September 2010, 257 long term empty properties brought back into use using the Landlord Accreditation/Rent Bond Scheme • Over 150 private landlords accredited in 18 month period, over 700 privately rented properties made available through Choice Based Lettings Scheme

Northampton Borough Council – September 2010		(Continued)
Results or outputs continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of homeless households living in temporary and inappropriate accommodation reduced from 195 to 25 in the last 18 months • Private landlords in neighbouring local authority areas of Wellingborough, South Northamptonshire, and Daventry have now joined the scheme. Northampton Borough Council can now advertise private rented properties in this sub regional area on the Choice Based Lettings Scheme, further increasing the supply of accommodation and choices to customers 	
Outcomes and achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced statutory overcrowding in social rented accommodation by giving tenants access to private rented sector accommodation • Property and management standards raised through the Landlord Accreditation scheme • 12 percent of the private rented market now operates within the Rent Bond/Landlord Accreditation scheme • 91percent of customers satisfied with the quality of accommodation and the efficiency of the Choice Based Lettings scheme • Empty homes brought back into use • Greater involvement and engagement with private sector landlords which leads to improving the quality of housing management within the private rented sector • Need for temporary/emergency accommodation and costs incurred significantly reduced • Supply of affordable homes increased • Waiting list of people on the housing register reduced and alternative housing solutions made available to customers who require re-housing, reducing pressure on the social rented sector 	
<p>Contact: Ian Swift Housing Solutions Manager, Northampton BC Email: i.swift@northampton.gov.uk Tel: 01604 837225</p>		

In touch Home Improvement Agencies Handyperson Services in Kent – October 2010	
Subject	Enabling older and disabled people to live independently at home for longer
Issues addressed	<p>Addressing the need for low cost, high impact practical housing help for older, disabled and vulnerable people in their homes.</p> <p>The Mid and West Kent Home Improvement Agency provides Handypersons services that cover home safety and security, falls and accident prevention, fire safety, access difficulties, tackling bogus and cowboy builders, energy efficiency and fuel poverty, minor adaptations, youth unemployment, hospital discharge and rapid response, decorating and gardening, reducing incidents of domestic abuse, reducing social exclusion, and completing small scale repairs and maintenance at an affordable price.</p>
Aims	Helping older, disabled and vulnerable home owners, private tenants and other tenures to remain living independently in their own homes with increased safety, comfort, security and warmth.
Actions taken	<p>Service profile of Handypersons services provided by the Home Improvement Agency includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding secured from Supporting People and some District and Borough Councils in Kent to subsidise the in touch HomeSafe Handyperson service • Partnership working with Kent Fire & Rescue and Kent Police to identify vulnerable households and supply and fit fire safety equipment and home security equipment • Emergency response to referrals from the Police delivered by Handypersons to install increased security and protection where there is a risk of domestic violence • Partnership working with Kent County Council to recruit three Assistant Handypersons under the Future Jobs Fund providing six month work experience training for younger people • Free home security check and the supply and fitting of equipment such as window and door locks • Partnership working with Primary Care Trusts offering a Hospital Discharge and Rapid Response Service to alleviate the problem of bed blocking. Handypersons address hazards in the home and undertake minor adaptations to facilitate discharge from hospital • Free supply and installation of safety equipment including smoke alarms, home security equipment, replacement electric blankets, night lights, letterbox cages and carbon monoxide detectors • Cost to customers are kept to minimum – no call out charges are made and where services are chargeable, cost is either £5 or £10 per hour, plus the cost of materials subject to eligibility for relevant means tested benefits • Wide range of general Handyperson jobs undertaken including – basic plumbing repairs, putting up shelves, carpentry works, changing light bulbs, fixing down loose carpets, fencing repairs, loft clearance, basic decorating and gardening and other DIY type works

In touch Home Improvement Agencies Handyperson Services in Kent – October 2010 (Continued)	
Actions taken continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handypersons are trained as Community Equipment Assessors (Trusted Assessor) and supply and fit minor adaptations equipment • Handypersons also trained to identify significant health and safety hazards and offer help and advice on remedying these
Results or outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between April 2009 and March 2010, 11 handypersons completed in excess of 7,900 jobs across Kent • Customer satisfaction maintained at 98.2 percent • Over 80 percent of customers reported that they could not have had the work completed without the Handyperson service, and 75 percent reported an increased sense of well-being and improved independence • Over 70 percent of customers reported improved safety in their home and felt at a reduced risk of falls or personal injury • 68 percent of customers reported a reduced fear of crime • Over 1,200 services users were enabled to remain living independently in their own homes • 198 service users were able to be discharged from hospital as a direct result of HIA intervention • 168 service users were prevented from being admitted to hospital as a result of HIA intervention • 141 service users were prevented from having to move into a residential or care home as result of the HIA intervention • 100 percent of customers would recommend the service to others
Outcomes and achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced risk of death and injury from fire or accident • Reduced risk of death or injury from domestic abuse • Reduced need for customers to enter residential care homes • Improved quality of life and reduced risk of crime, anti-social behaviour and burglary • Access to signposting for other services such as major adaptations or home repairs and access to grants and financial assistance including increased welfare benefit procurement for customers • Identification of non-decent homes and category 1 hazards and signposting to effect repairs • Meeting local targets for the reduction of NHS bed blocking by assisting patients to return home sooner • One of the Future Jobs Fund placements has gone on to secure permanent work as result of the HIA's intervention and training programmes • The scheme has attracted the attention of the BBC and is due to feature in the "Saints and Scroungers" series to be aired in the early part of 2011
Contact: David Eaton Service Manager, In touch Home Improvement Agency Email: david.eaton@intouchsupport.co.uk Tel: 01732 525520	



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