



<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Environment and Performance Committee
<b>DATE:</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> December 2021
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Protecting the health and wellbeing of residents living in Houses in Multiple Occupation
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	To provide an update report in respect of the empowering healthy communities programme
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	No
<b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	Cllr Martin Griggs – Portfolio Holder Housing and Communities
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Jonathan Challen – Safer Communities Service Manager
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	Jonathan Challen – Safer Communities Service Manager
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	All
<b>EXEMPT REPORT?</b>	No

#### **SUMMARY**

This report details the work being carried out by the Council's Housing Standards Team to ensure the safety of residents living in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) within the Borough.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To continue with the initiatives and resources currently being utilised to deliver the work being carried out, as detailed in paragraphs 2.2 – 2.8

Consider the formation of a Task and Finish Group to investigate opportunities that are available to the Council to assist with tackling issues relating to HMOs.

## REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure the safety of residents living in HMOs

## OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. During a recent update report in respect of the empowering healthy communities programme members expressed a wish that the ongoing overcrowding and living standards of many HMOs in Boston be accorded the same attention and consideration as the holiday caravans in ELDC.
- 1.2. HMOs present the highest risk properties within the Borough and are often occupied by some of the most vulnerable residents.
- 1.3. The Cabinet last discussed the approach to HMOs in 2014. The conclusions were:
  - To not currently proceed with any discretionary licensing model for the private rented sector within the Borough.
  - That the Council work with landlord associations to increase engagement with landlords, promote good practice and explore appropriate voluntary accreditation schemes.
  - That a further report be taken to the Overview and Scrutiny – Corporate and Community Committee and to Cabinet presenting the initial findings from the rogue landlord work, which considered a longer-term sustainable model for effectively addressing the issues present within Boston’s private rented sector.
  - That the Council actively sought a continuation of the rogue landlord funding which expired during 2014/15. Boston BC was successful with submitting bids for continued funding (Rogue Landlord Funding and then Controlling Migration Funding) which helped provide additional staff until 2020, but it was reliant on expensive contractors which were difficult to find of any quality, and retain, however all this funding has now run out.

## 2. REPORT

- 2.1. In order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents living in HMO’s the Council’s Housing Standards Team has been carrying out the following work:
- 2.2. The Housing Standards Team is responsible the investigation of complaints in relation to housing conditions across the private sector, which includes HMOs. Certain types of HMOs are also required to be licensed by the Council. A HMO will require a licence if all 3 of the following criteria are met.
  - The property meets the standard test, the self-contained flat test, or the converted building test (Section 254 of the Housing Act 2004).

- The property is occupied by 5 or more people.
- The property is occupied by persons living in two or more separate households.

2.3. Boston BC's Housing Standards Team works closely with Lincolnshire Police and Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue to carry out joint visits to HMOs. The team also receive referrals from these partner agencies when visits are carried out to properties for other purposes, where intelligence subsequently suggests that the property is being occupied as a HMO.

2.4. Over the last year the Council's Housing Health and Wellbeing Officer has been carrying out a broad spectrum of work across the Borough. This officer has been engaging with the local landlords and letting agents of HMOs to discuss ways in which we can work together to promote a whole range of housing, health, and wellbeing initiatives / issues. An action plan has been agreed with 7 local letting agents who are well established lettings companies who cover approximately 1,500 residential properties and across 90 HMOs, totalling approximately 700 rooms. Information provided to the lettings agent includes:

- Covid-19 how to stay safe and help prevent the spread leaflets provided with a request to display the information within the properties on their weekly/monthly inspections.
- Translated (7 languages) leaflets provided with the information about the EU Settlement Scheme, the importance of registering with GP, Promoting the PRSA Vaccination Centre and refuse issues including fly-tipping.
- Right Thing Right Bin Leaflets translated in different languages and displayed in HMO's.
- Bin collection calendar and all relevant information regarding the presenting rubbish and rubbish separation has been provided to the lettings agent with a request to include this in new tenants moving packs.
- The leaflets (translated) have been delivered to the agent for them to distribute to their tenants while carrying the inspections.
- Fly-tipping posters designed and distributed

2.5. Officers meet on a monthly basis through a working group that was established to discuss the themes and priorities raised in paragraph 2.4.

2.6. Following the resignation of a Senior Housing Standards Officer earlier in the year the service has acted swiftly to advertise and reappoint to this role in order to reduce the impact of the vacancy. A Senior Housing Standards Officer has now been appointed, starting on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021.

2.7. Following a service review of the housing function being delivered across Boston BC and East Lindsey DC, work has started on aligning the 2 Housing Standards Teams that provide these services to each Council. In addition to aligning / streamlining processes, this amalgamation will provide greater resilience to both Councils. The benefit of this piece of work is already being realised with officers from East Lindsey DC assisting with cases within the Boston Borough during the period of staff vacancies.

2.8. Officers will be attending and facilitating at the Joint Lincolnshire Online Landlord Forum on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

- 3.1.** The engagement of landlords, letting agents and residents of HMOs is of paramount importance to the Council's Housing Standards Team. Resources are active deployed to ensure that the relevant standards for these properties are being met in order to protect some of the most vulnerable residents within the Borough.

#### **EXPECTED BENEFITS TO THE PARTNERSHIP**

It is anticipated that elements of the work being carried out by the Boston BC Housing Standards Team, such as the initiatives being led by the Housing, Health and Wellbeing Officer listed in paragraph 2.4, could be replicated across East Lindsey and South Holland areas of the Partnership.

#### **IMPLICATIONS**

##### **SOUTH AND EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL'S PARTNERSHIP**

None

##### **CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

None

##### **STAFFING**

There are no vacant posts or requests for additional resources as part of this report.

##### **CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

##### **DATA PROTECTION**

None

##### **FINANCIAL**

None

##### **RISK MANAGEMENT**

None

##### **STAKEHOLDER / CONSULTATION / TIMESCALES**

No consultation undertaken

**REPUTATION**

None

**CONTRACTS**

None

**CRIME AND DISORDER**

None

**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY/ HUMAN RIGHTS/ SAFEGUARDING**

None

**HEALTH AND WELL BEING**

Detailed within paragraph 2.4

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

**ACRONYMS**

HMO – House in Multiple Occupation

PRSA – Princess Royal Sports Arena

**APPENDICES**

None

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers as defined in Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the production of this report.

**CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THIS REPORT**

A report on this item has not been previously considered by a Council

**REPORT APPROVAL**

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