

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

12 SEPTEMBER 2019

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Leader of the Council– Councillor Bob Cook

TARGETED ACTION AREAS UPDATE

SUMMARY

As members may recall, approval was granted in November 2017 to implement an area based, targeted intervention approach which would provide a visible, neighbourhood management presence to some of the boroughs more vulnerable local communities in the central Stockton and the Victoria area in Thornaby. Both are areas which experience high concentrations of low value private rented housing, high numbers of empty properties and are hotspots for crime and anti-social behaviour.

This report updates Cabinet on a range of initiatives ongoing within the Targeted Action Areas and the positive discussions which have been ongoing with a group of private sector landlords 'PLuSS' (Private Landlords Supporting Stockton) to work collaboratively to drive up property and management standards within the private rental sector. Cabinet are asked to approve the establishment of a new landlord led membership scheme and note the robust approach the Council will take with landlords operating within the two Targeted Action Areas who chose not to become members of this new scheme and who fail to manage and maintain their properties in accordance with statutory regulations.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

To work collectively with local communities, private sector landlords and wider stakeholders to deliver a range of initiatives and projects which will support the central Stockton and the Victoria area in Thornaby.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet are asked to:

1. Note the impact of a range of initiatives that have been delivered to date (with the support of local communicates and partner agencies) which have had a positive and successful impact in both central Stockton and the Victoria area of Thornaby.
2. Approve the Council's approach to working collaboratively with PLuSS (Private Landlords Supporting Stockton) to deliver a landlord led membership scheme within the Targeted Action Areas together with the robust enforcement approach for those private sector landlords who choose to remain outside of the new scheme. A review of outcomes will be presented back to Cabinet.

DETAIL

Examples of recent initiatives

1. Partnership activities have continued in both localities with ongoing engagement with registered housing providers, police, fire service, the voluntary sector, community members and more recently local businesses.
2. Whilst clean-up operations have continued in both Stockton and Thornaby, the emphasis has changed from Council led service delivery to a supportive approach following initiation from communities and local housing providers. In addition engagement has taken place with the business sector who have also supported recent clean up sessions, for example five volunteers from Santander assisted with a street clean up in Thornaby.
3. Following these clean-up operations unkempt alleyways were highlighted as a particular problematic issue within some local communities. A pilot project was undertaken in Central Stockton to enable the community to reclaim these valuable urban spaces. The work was completed by residents and volunteers and has completely transformed the alleyway into an environment which is now a safe place to play, grow and socialise, whilst reducing the commitment from the authority in terms of maintenance, cleaning and enforcement (**Appendix A** provides images of 'before' and 'after' improvement works). Building upon this initial pilot, further test alleys are in development in both Stockton and Thornaby. Positive agreements with local third sector partners has also taken place to support further initiatives and local businesses have also expressed an interest in supporting/engaging in these projects for example Wilmot Dixon have offered both materials and 'people' support.
4. Two Facebook groups have been established (crossing both localities) and are proving to be valuable mechanism for communication with residents and other groups/outlets. The Central Stockton Community Partnership Facebook group now has 244 members and the North Thornaby group has 161 members. Facebook posts are being regularly shared with other groups improving the effectiveness of this form of communication. A recent BBC Tees Facebook post which gave details of the initial alleyway project achieved:
 - A reach of more than 1,371,165 people
 - 101,476 engagements (people who interacted in some way)
 - 22,000 likes
 - More than 2,100 positive comments

Collaborative engagement with private sector landlords – establishment of a new landlord led membership scheme

5. As reported previously to Cabinet (12th July 2018) one of the proposals to be explored as part of the Targeted Action Area project was potential introduction of a Selective Licensing Scheme. A Selective Licensing Scheme was being explored as it would allow the Council to impose licence conditions on private rented properties within designated areas, with the aim of driving up property standards and management. By way of an example some authorities have included the following licence conditions within their Selective Licensing schemes:
 - The requirement to 'reference' tenants
 - To inform the council when the property becomes vacant
 - The licence holder must take reasonable and practical steps to prevent and/or reduce ASB by persons occupying or visiting the properties
6. As part of the selective licensing proposal Cabinet granted approval to proceed to public consultation. This consultation was concluded on the 8th October 2018 and one of the responses received was from PLuSS, a group of private sector landlords. PLuSS approached the Council requesting we consider an alternative approach to Selective Licensing. To allow time for this

approach to be explored Cabinet (19th January 2019) agreed to postpone the implementation of a selective licensing scheme to facilitate a period of active engagement with PLuSS.

7. PLuSS are now a constituted group of 100+ professional landlords who own/manage approximately 66% of the private sector housing stock within the two Target Action Areas. PLuSS and Council representatives have worked together to explore alternative options to selective licensing. The proposed new approach which Cabinet are asked to support is the introduction of a new **landlord led membership scheme**. In developing the scheme both parties have actively sought to ensure similar outcomes to those which the Council was seeking to achieve through Selective Licensing.

The proposed Landlord Led Membership Scheme will:

- Be a partnership between the Council and PLuSS.
- Deliver a collaborative approach to responding and resolving complaints received from tenants in properties owned or managed by PLuSS members.
- Allow professional landlords to share good practice with less experienced landlords to ensure knowledge of current legislation and standards through training opportunities.
- Deliver (via PLuSS) a self-funding tenant referencing system.
- Encourage PLuSS members to engage with the authority in the ongoing training of its members through peer pressure and effective advertising of opportunities

How the scheme will work:

8. To be accepted as a PLuSS member, landlords will sign and agree to comply with a robust 'Code of Conduct'. The Code of Conduct has been drafted by the Private Sector Housing team in conjunction with PLuSS and includes a number of key discretionary conditions which were proposed for inclusion within the Councils Selective Licensing proposal (for example investigation of reports of anti-social behaviour and ensuring residents have up to date information regarding the correct presentation of waste).
9. In addition, landlords will agree to share details of all properties they own and/or manage with the Council.
10. To ensure the scheme remains effective, it has been agreed that the Council will:
 - Inspect a random percentage of properties owned by each member of the PLuSS landlord scheme.
 - Work alongside PLuSS to ensure a collaborative approach to responding/resolving tenant complaints in timely manner.
 - Work jointly with PLuSS to promote their landlord led membership scheme and encourage all private landlords from within the Targeted Action Areas to join.
11. To support the delivery of the scheme additional fixed term staffing capacity will be brought into both the Private Sector Housing and Community Enforcement Teams. This additional staffing will provide increased capacity to **introduce a robust inspection regime for those landlords who decide not to join the new scheme**. Taking immediate enforcement action against non-member landlords who flout their responsibilities.

12. The options for private sector tenants (or local residents) to continue to report any concerns regarding property dis-repair etc. directly to the Councils Private Sector Housing Team will remain (and be encouraged), this includes the option to raise concerns in a confidential manner.
13. Members are asked to note that the Council will continue to run and manage its own current Landlord Accreditation Scheme for landlords who own properties in areas outside of the two Targeted Action Areas. Providing advice and assistance to help landlords improve and maintain property and management standards in privately rented properties.

Next steps

14. Subject to securing Cabinet approval the table below provides an indicative timeline for the implementation of the proposed new approach:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Invite applications for new scheme | Late September 2019 |
| Marketing and promotion of new scheme | Late September 2019 / ongoing |
| PLuSS Website live | Late September 2019 |
| <i>Scheme operational</i> | <i>Early October 2019</i> |
| 6 Month review of scheme operation | April 2020 |

15. Prior formal commencement of the new landlord-led membership scheme, the Council will determine a range of outcomes which this scheme will be evaluated against and evaluation report will be presented back Cabinet. Should this new landlord led scheme not deliver its anticipated outcomes (i.e. landlords choose not to join / conditions of property condition and management are not improved etc.) then the option of exploring a selective licensing scheme may again be considered by the Council.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

16. As noted within the body of this report the Targeted Action Area project is aimed at supporting two of the more vulnerable areas of the borough Central Stockton (covering the Stockton Town Centre and the Parkfield and Oxbridge wards) and Victoria area of Mandale.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

17. None

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

18. Additional staffing capacity to support the introduction of the Landlord Led Landlord Accreditation Scheme (as detailed in para 8) to ensure swift and robust enforcement actively will be funded within the existing Targeted Action Area budget.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

19. None

RISK ASSESSMENT

20. A detailed risk assessment has been undertaken to inform the TAA proposal. At this stage the project is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

21. Consultation briefings have taken place with the Leader of the Council and ward councillors within the following wards; Stockton Town Centre Ward (Councillors, Councillor Kirton and Councillor Beall), Parkfield and Oxbridge Ward Councillors (Councillors Baldock and Javed) and Mandale and Victoria Ward (Councillors, Walmsley, Frost and Large).

BACKGROUND PAPERS

22. Code of Conduct (Private Landlords within the Targeted Action Area).

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