

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

12 NOVEMBER 2020

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Leader of the Council – Councillor Bob Cook

TARGETED ACTION AREA REVIEW AND NEXT STEPS

SUMMARY

The Targeted Action Area (TAA) initiative was established following Cabinet approval in November 2017. At that time, two areas of the borough 'North Thornaby' (the Victoria area within the Mandale and Victoria ward) and 'Central Stockton' were identified as areas which would benefit from a localised and targeted approach to tackling issues related to private rented housing and crime/anti-social behaviour. Central to TAA project have been attempts to work collaboratively with local communities and in partnership with agencies such as the police, fire brigade and Registered Housing providers. Given the project has been operating for almost three years this report highlights what has been also achieved to date, why it is now timely to cease the project in its current standalone form and that key work areas (as detailed in para 2) will be incorporated into day-to-day service activity.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

To update Cabinet on what has been achieved since the introduction of the TAA project. This includes an update on the Private Landlord Led Membership Scheme (aimed at driving up standards, property and management of private rented housing) and to seek Cabinet approval to extend the formal evaluation of this scheme. It is proposed that a scheme evaluation be undertaken 18 months after implementation (as detailed in para 4).

In response to the COVID pandemic, council-wide proposals are currently being explored which will focus on more fundamental and long-term actions to support recovery and to mitigate its negative impact. This will require a re-appraisal of the Councils approach to some of the long-term issues facing the borough; including additional work on reducing inequalities that have widened during the pandemic and a focus on the specific role area-based approaches can play in helping to reduce spatial inequalities. An update will be presented to Cabinet as part of the December 2020 'Council Plan Update' report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet are asked to:

1. Support the extension of the Private Landlord Led Membership scheme review until 18 months after the scheme was initially launched (review to be take place post March 2021).
2. Note that key TAA work areas (as detailed in para 2) will continue to be maintained and delivered through existing council service teams and community engagement activities will be organised

via Catalyst. Key work areas will also be considered as part of the Councils planned response to COVID.

DETAIL

Overview of the TAA scheme

1. As noted previously the TAA project has been in operation for several years and during this time a number of initiatives have been successfully delivered. **Appendix A** provides an overview of activity which is summarised below:
 - *Partnership working* with registered housing providers, police, fire service, the voluntary sector, community members and more recently local businesses to address local priorities has been both developed and strengthened.
 - *Environmental improvements*: have over time successfully moved from council-led delivery to the Council supporting communities and housing providers deliver localised projects.
 - *Community engagement*: has been enhanced through a range of mechanisms including community pop-up events in community facilities and engagement via Facebook.
 - *Enforcement activity*: The project funded an additional Case Management (Community Safety) Officer and Private Sector Housing Officer. This additional capacity has enabled a more proactive, rather than reactive response to issues related to anti-social behaviour/crime and poor private rented property (property condition and management).

Future working

2. In terms of 'what next' whilst the TAA scheme as a standalone project will cease, there is an ongoing commitment to supporting these 2 localities and this will continue through:
 - The additional Private Sector Officer and Case Management (Community Enforcement) Officer roles will continue. This will enable both services to continue to deliver a proactive enforcement approach to issues related to both poor private sector housing and crime/anti-social behaviour.
 - Partnership working with the police and local housing providers (including information exchange and joint problem solving) is now well-established and will continue through established forums.
 - Community Engagement activities (including community communication) will be organised via Catalyst. Catalyst are best placed to organise the delivery of such activities via the established VCSE network.
 - The Private Landlord Led Membership (as detailed below) will continue. A formal review will be presented back to Cabinet after the scheme has been in operation for 18-months. Representatives from the Councils Private Sector Housing Team will continue to represent the Council on the scheme Steering Group.

Collaborative engagement with private sector landlords (Landlord Led Membership Scheme)

3. As Cabinet will recall, consideration has previously been given to the introduction of Selective Licensing Schemes within both TAA's. However, following a period of consultation an alternative proposal was received from PLS. PLS ('Private Sector Landlords Supporting Stockton') are a constituted group of 100+ professional landlords who own/manage properties within the borough. In summary this alternative approach was a **Landlord Led Membership Scheme** which would:

- Be a partnership between the Council and P LuSS.
 - Deliver a collaborative approach to responding and resolving complaints received from tenants in properties owned or managed by P LuSS members (within the TAA's).
 - Allow professional landlords to share good practice with less experienced landlords to ensure knowledge of current legislation and standards through training opportunities.
 - Deliver (via P LuSS) a self-funding tenant referencing system.
 - Encourage P LuSS members to engage with the authority in the ongoing training of its members through peer pressure and effective advertising of opportunities
4. This collaborative approach was supported by Cabinet (September 2019) and the scheme was formally launched in October 2019. Originally it was agreed to undertake a formal review of the scheme 6-months after its launch and present back to Cabinet. As a result of the COVID pandemic which has resulted in restrictions on the activities of private landlords (i.e. property lettings were temporarily ceased) and the need for them (like the Council) to find new ways of working, it is considered that a review undertaken at this stage will not provide an accurate reflection of the success (or not) of the scheme and the impact (or not), it is having on improving property conditions and management in the private rented sector. As such Cabinet is asked to extend the evaluation period until 18 months after scheme implementation.
5. Following the conclusion of this review should it be determined that this scheme is not delivering against agreed 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 is one which will remain open to the Council.
6. Members can be assured that engagement with P LuSS landlords has continued during the pandemic and will continue through a Steering Group (made up of representatives from both landlords and the Council). The role of the Steering Group is to consider how the scheme is progressing and explore ongoing scheme improvements.
7. The table below provides an overview of progress to date:

- Scheme website established <https://www.pluss.me.uk/>
- A suite of documents and templates have been developed and promoted for use (including a Landlord 'Code of Conduct')
- Social media has been used to share information
- Tenant referencing system has been implemented
- Training for P LuSS members has commenced
- An advice line for P LuSS members has been established
- 147 membership applications were received / 126 progressed to scheme members
- 82 members have properties in the Target Action Areas (= own/or manage 551 properties)
- 12 membership applications have been rejected

- 38 member properties have been inspected / 7 referrals made back to members to carry out improvements / 33 Non PLuSS member properties (within the TAA have been inspected) / 3 Improvement Notices have been served.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

8. A noted within the body of the report the communities within the within the North Thornaby and Central Stockton areas will continue to be supported. On this basis a CIA has not been completed.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

9. None.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10. The provision of an additional Case Management (Enforcement) Officer and Private Sector Housing Officer are budgeted commitments within the TAA allocated budget previously agreed by Cabinet. The services of Catalyst will also be funded through this financial resource.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11. None

RISK ASSESSMENT

12. The actions detailed within this report are 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

13. Stockton Town Centre Ward (Councillors, Councillor Kirton and Councillor Beall)
Parkfield and Oxbridge Ward Councillors (Councillors Baldock and Javed)
Mandale and Victoria Ward (Councillors, Walmsley, Frost and Large)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

14. Cabinet Report: Targeted Action Area Update – 12.09.19
Cabinet Report: Selective Licensing of Private Rented Accommodation – 12.07.18
Cabinet Report: Targeted Action Areas (Older Housing Stock) – 16.11.2017

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

Name of Contact Officer: Jane Edmends
Post Title: Housing Services Manager
Telephone No. 01642 526682
Email Address: jane.edmends@stockton.gov.uk