

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

9 MARCH 2010

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY PANEL - PROGRESS REPORT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) with an update on the work of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel.

BACKGROUND

2. The Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny panel last met on 15 February 2010, where it received further evidence in respect of its current review of the Older Housing Areas.
3. At that meeting the panel held a discussion with the Private Sector Housing Manager and Urban Renewal Team Leader from Stockton Borough Council to find out what actions Stockton had taken to better engage with Private Sector Landlords and address issues of concern in the Private Rented Sector (PRS).
4. Information on Stockton's housing stock, the strategic approach adopted, the financial resources available and the types of enforcement action taken were provided.
5. The panel heard that although significant levels of funding have in recent years been awarded to Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) to bring properties up to the decent homes standard very little funding is available to bring homes in the private sector up to that same standard. The panel was informed that in Stockton it would require an investment of £16m to address all category 1 hazards and £160m to bring all homes up to the decent homes standard. The level of funding available, however, is approximately £1m a year in Stockton and £5m for the Tees Valley.

6. Reference was made to the importance of the issue of energy efficiency and fuel poverty and the fact that there are high levels of fuel poverty across the Tees Valley. It was noted that efforts are being made to work in closer partnership with the PCT to get housing on the health agenda in an attempt to address the issues of energy efficiency / fuel poverty in private sector properties.
7. In terms of the incentives introduced to encourage Private Sector Landlords to work in partnership with the local authority the Panel heard that Stockton Borough Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme offers landlords who join the scheme a number of benefits. These benefits include access to the bond guarantee scheme, discounted business services (energy performance certificates / home insurance), reduced labour costs for minor works undertaken by the Home Improvement Agency and free advertising via the Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
8. With regard to the more general level of support offered to private sector landlords Stockton Borough Council provides a dedicated private sector landlords' webpage, a landlords forum, regular newsletters and access to tenancy support services.
9. The meeting on the 15 February 2010 also provided the panel with the opportunity to consider the 'Preventing Repossessions' Campaign and the actions currently being undertaken by Middlesbrough Partnership's Financial Inclusion Group. The panel heard that Middlesbrough Council had been allocated £47,500 by the department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) to help prevent repossessions and it was agreed that a further update be received by the panel in six months time.
10. At the panel's next meeting, which is scheduled for 8 March 2010 the panel will consider the recently introduced Residents Parking Scheme in University Ward, as requested by OSB. In addition, the panel will examine the draft Rights of Way Improvement Strategy, prior to it being considered by the Executive Member for Transport. Finally, the meeting will provide Members with the opportunity to visit the older housings areas and key housing regeneration sites, as part of its current review of the older housing areas.

RECOMMENDATION

11. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes the content of the report and the updated position.

COUNCILLOR JOHN COLE

**CHAIR OF THE ECONOMIC REGENERATION
AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY PANEL**

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