

# Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2022 - 2025

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. This document sets out Dartford Borough Council's ('the Council's') Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy for 2022-2025. This Strategy aims to address the need for housing renewal in the Dartford Borough and explains how we intend to meet this need. It builds upon the work already carried out in the implementation of the previous renewal strategy, developed in 2009, and sets out the Council's aims for private sector housing renewal for the next three years.
- 1.2. Housing renewal is about improving and maintaining housing standards in the private housing sector. This is achieved through targeting available resources at those most in need in order to remove or reduce housing defects that are detrimental to a person's health and wellbeing.
- 1.3. The Strategy looks at the condition of the housing stock in the Dartford Borough and the need for any improvements. This is informed by the results of a private sector stock modelling report, which has been used to help set our priorities for private sector housing renewal in Dartford.
- 1.4. The Strategy details the assistance that is and will be made available by the Council for housing renewal in the private sector and how this will be prioritised and targeted. Current government legislation and guidance has been taken into account in the development of this Strategy. Details can be found in Appendix B.
- 1.5. Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gave local housing authorities wide ranging powers to provide assistance for housing renewal. Article 4 of the Order prevents local housing authorities from exercising their article 3 power unless they have adopted a policy for the provision of assistance under that article and given publicity to the policy and act in accordance with it.
- 1.6. The Order provides local authorities with a general permissive power to assist households with the improvement of living conditions. It enables local authorities to develop a means of providing assistance to any resident so they can address local needs and priorities. The Order gives authorities a general power to introduce local policies for assisting individuals with renewals, repairs and adaptations in their homes through grants or loans.

## **2. DEMOGRAPHICS**

- 2.1. Across the country the demographics are changing. The population is increasing nationally and locally, with the main reason due to migration. The proportion of older people is also growing at an increased rate.
- 2.2. **Population profile**
- 2.3. Dartford is situated in northwest Kent in the South East of England. The population of Dartford has grown significantly since the last Renewal Strategy (2009-2014) when the borough was the smallest district in Kent with a population of around 91,300. It now has a population of around 114,100 and is the third smallest local

authority in Kent in terms of population but is Kent's most densely populated local authority with 15.7 people per hectare. (Source: ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates).

- 2.4. The population is made up of 87.4% people from a White Ethnic Group and 12.6% people from a Black Minority Ethnic Group. 49.3% of the population are male and 50.7% are female. 17.2% of the population have a long term health problem or disability (Source: ONS, 2011 Census and ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates).
- 2.5. 15.1% of the population have a health problem or disability which limits their day-to-day activities (Source: 2011 Census). 6.5% of the population are claiming a disability benefit as at February 2020 (Source: DWP, Longitudinal Study). By far those aged 65 and above are more likely to claim a disability benefit than those aged under 65. This may be due in part not only to the increase of disability due to health conditions related to aging but also to lower levels of income once people are no longer working and finding themselves unable to meet the additional cost relating to a disability.
- 2.6. The population of Dartford is projected to rise steadily in the coming years to 145,700 in 2034, a 29.4% increase from 2019. There were around 15,800 people aged 65 or over living in Dartford in 2019 and the growth in population will be concentrated in the older age groups with the number of 45 to 64 year olds increasing by 37.7% and those over 65 also by 37.9%. This reflects the national trend towards an ageing population.

Age group	2019	2024	2029	2034	Change 2019-34
0-14	24,000	27,500	28,800	28,900	+4,900
15-24	11,400	13,400	15,900	17,200	+5,800
25-44	33,900	39,600	40,600	40,200	+6,300
45-64	27,300	30,600	34,100	37,600	+10,300
65+	15,800	17,300	19,500	21,800	+6,000
Total	112,600	128,200	138,900	145,700	+33,100
% Change		+13.8	+8.3	+4.9	+29.4

Source: KCC Housing Led Forecast (Nov 2020), Kent Analytics, Kent County Council

All figures have been individually rounded to the nearest one hundred and therefore may not sum

- 2.7. The increase in the number of older residents is likely to have an impact upon the ability of homeowners to afford to maintain their homes and on the future demand for adaptations needed to enable independent living.
- 2.8. **Economic situation**
- 2.9. There has been a significant impact on the economy due to the coronavirus pandemic. Gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to have grown by 0.6% in September 2021 but remains 0.6% below its pre-coronavirus pandemic level (February 2020). Although there are some signs of a recovery underway, there is still uncertainty over how strong and sustained this will be.

- 2.10. During the pandemic, Dartford saw a significant downturn in employment. Dartford's economy is based around some of the sectors, which are most vulnerable to the impact of closures due to lockdowns such as retail, hotels, restaurants and the arts and entertainment. The unemployment rate in Dartford in January 2020 stood at 2.2%. In May 2020, the rate increased to 6.0%, and as at December 2021 it stands at 3.5%.
- 2.11. In terms of energy prices, based on fixed consumption levels of 13,600 kWh for gas and 3,600 kWh for standard electricity, the provisional average combined domestic energy bill for 2021 was £1,339. This is an estimated increase of 6.0% compared to the average of £1,264 in 2020 (Source: Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, Quarterly Energy Prices December 2021). On the 3 February 2022, Ofgem announced that the energy price cap will increase by almost £700 from April 2022. Prices are also likely to increase again in October 2022 following a further rate review planned for August 2022. Driven by a record rise in global gas prices, the increase in energy prices will inevitably exacerbate the number of households in fuel poverty.
- 2.12. Under the Indices of Multiple Deprivation for 2019, the average rank for Dartford out of 317 local authorities is 145 and the average score for Dartford is 154 (1 being the most deprived). These are improved lower rankings compared to 2015 (-22 average rank and -14 average score). Out of the twelve districts in Kent (excluding Medway), Dartford is the sixth most deprived borough in Kent. Dartford has one ward within the 10% most deprived in 2019, this being Temple Hill. This has improved since 2015 where there were three wards within the 10% most deprived.
- 2.13. **Housing**
- 2.14. Tenure
- 2.15. The 2020 Stock Modelling Report estimated there are 46,983 dwellings in Dartford. 63% are owner occupied, 23% private rented and 14% social rented.

Summary of results of the estimated tenure distribution based on the sample analysis and other evidence of tenure at ward level

Ward	Sample size	Owner Occupied	Percent Private Rented	Social
Bean & Village Park	548	77%	13%	11%
Brent	564	76%	19%	6%
Bridge	527	75%	22%	3%
Burnham	534	55%	42%	3%
Darenth	562	58%	14%	27%
Ebbsfleet	536	64%	35%	1%
Greenhithe & Knockhall	575	59%	30%	11%
Heath	577	88%	12%	0%
Joydens Wood	569	87%	11%	2%
Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet	515	78%	14%	7%
Maypole & Leyton Cross	563	75%	17%	8%
Newtown	562	65%	31%	4%
Princes	586	45%	15%	40%
Stone Castle	562	56%	35%	10%
Stone House	569	54%	23%	23%
Swanscombe	594	43%	27%	31%
Temple Hill	599	42%	18%	40%
Town	551	50%	37%	13%
West Hill	544	74%	24%	3%
Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	546	76%	13%	11%

2.16. There has been significant growth in the private rented sector in Dartford from 6% of the total stock in 2001 to 17% in 2017. This is 2% higher than the change of 9% seen in England as a whole. The stock model report estimates the rate in 2020 to be 23%. This is likely to reflect the fact that Dartford is on the edge of London with good transport links, but the cost of private renting is still less expensive than outer London boroughs.

#### 2.17. Types of housing

2.18. Terraced houses are the predominant property type in Dartford, accounting for 34.28% of all dwellings followed by flats and maisonettes at 25.47% and semi-detached houses at 23.96%. Detached houses account for 8.94% and then bungalows at 6.58% (0.77% are other or unknown). Three bedroom dwellings account for the largest proportion of all dwellings in Dartford at 44.31% followed by two bedroom dwellings at 31.17%, 1 bedroom dwellings at 12.45% and four plus bedroom dwellings at 11.28% and 0.20% not known (Source: Valuation Office Agency).

#### 2.19. Property prices and the housing market

2.20. The average property price in Dartford during 2020 was £340,858. This is higher than the national average of £323,868 but lower than the South East average of £411,466.

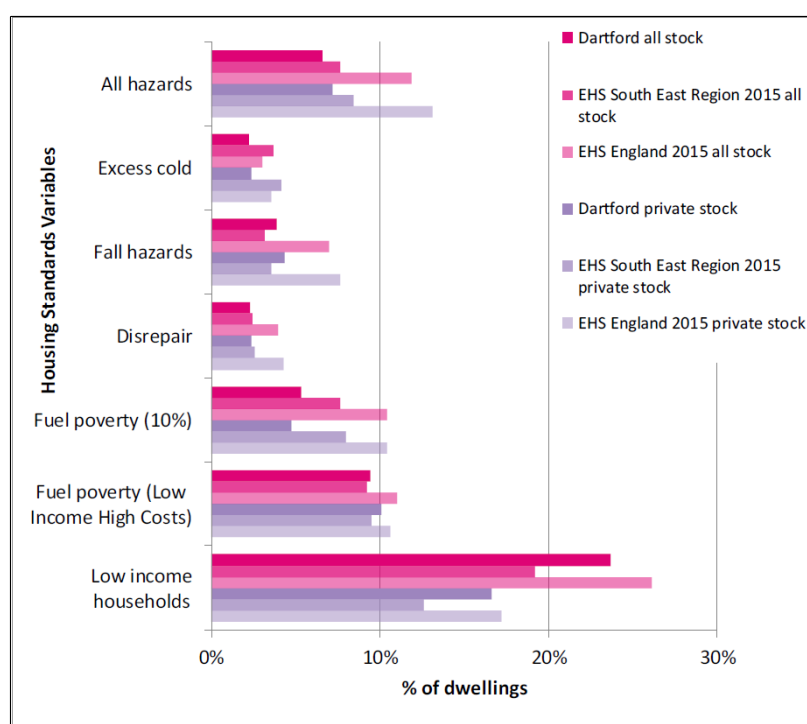
- 2.21. The average price for a detached property was £561,960, followed by £387,493 for a semi-detached property, £322,402 for a terraced property, and £212,881 for a flat or maisonette.
- 2.22. House prices in Dartford rose in 2020 compared to the previous year by 1.3%. Between 2019 and 2020. The growth in average prices in the South East was 7.3% and in England & Wales the figure was 7.9%. This is relatively low growth compared to the national average.
- 2.23. Since 2009, sales have generally increased up to 2016 but there has been an annual decrease in property sales nationally, regionally and in Kent since 2017. In Dartford, the percentage change in sales between 2019 and 2020 was -29.8% (Source: Land Registry).
- 2.24. Rents
- 2.25. The average monthly private rental market rent in Dartford is £997.00 (Source: Valuation Office Agency). The average rent for Council housing stock is £402.60 per month, and the average Private Registered Provider rent in Dartford is £468.00 per month (Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government).

### **3. LOCAL HOUSING CONDITIONS**

- 3.1. In order to develop the Council's priorities for private sector renewal, it is essential that the condition of the private rented stock in the area is understood. In order to do this, the Council commissioned consultants to carry out a Housing Stock Modelling Report in 2020 to assist with gathering intelligence on the housing stock in the Borough. The results of the survey have been used to inform the development of this Strategy and the recommendations arising from the report have been incorporated into the Strategy's action plan. The survey provided detailed information on the likely tenure, condition and household vulnerability of the stock and the geographical distribution of properties of interest. The information covers the whole of the housing stock providing necessary context to the private rented sector information.
- 3.2. The Council were also provided with access to the resulting model via an online system known as the Housing Stock Condition Database (HSCD), enabling the council to obtain specific information whenever required.
- 3.3. The detailed housing stock information in the stock modelling report and in the HSCD provides the Council with a resource for querying and collating information relating to the housing stock. This resource can be used to support the development of strategies and inform housing-related decisions for the area, enabling a targeted intervention approach to improving housing.
- 3.4. The key findings of the 2020 report were:
- 2,908 dwellings in the private sector have Category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards. This equates to 7% of private sector properties. Of these 2% or 951 premises have an excess cold hazard and 4 % or 1,758 properties have a fall hazard within.

- 719 dwellings in the private rented sector have Category 1 HHSRS hazards. This equates to 7% of properties in the private rented sector. In comparison, only 25, (0.006%) of council owned properties have a Category 1 HHSRS hazard. (These mainly relate to hot surfaces where tenants have refused new kitchens and signed disclaimers).
- 1,092 or 2% of all stock is in disrepair with 3% of this overall figure being in the private rented sector. A dwelling is in disrepair under the Decent Homes criteria if:
  - a) One or more key building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair; or
  - b) Two or more other building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacement or major repair.
- The highest levels of disrepair overall are in the wards of Newtown, Swanscombe and Heath.

3.5. The following graph shows the housing standard variables assessed by the Housing Stock Models and HSCD for all stock and private sector stock in Dartford compared to the South East and England (EHS 2015). Definitions of HHSRS and disrepair are outlined in Appendix C.





- 3.6. The table below shows the estimates of the percentage of dwellings with the presence of each of the Housing Standards.

Stock level	Percent HHSRS (%)	Percent Excess Cold (%)	Percent HHSRS Falls (%)	Percent Disrepair (%)	Percent Fuel Poverty 10% (%)	Percent Fuel Poverty LIHC (%)	Percent Low Income Households (%)
All Stock	7	2	4	2	5	9	24
Owner Occupied	7	2	4	2	5	9	14
Private Rented	7	2	5	3	4	14	30
Social	3	2	1	2	9	6	65

- The highest concentrations of all HHSRS hazards in the private rented sector are found in the wards of Newtown, Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet and Swanscombe.
- The highest concentrations of fuel poverty (Low Income High Costs definition - LIHC) in the private rented sector are found in the wards of Swanscombe, Princes and Darenth and for excess cold the highest concentrations are in Longfield, New Barn & Southfleet, Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley and Newtown.
- The highest levels of fuel poverty (LIHC) are within the private rented sector (14%).
- The highest level of low income within the private sector is in the private rented sector (31%).
- The average Simple SAP rating for all private sector dwellings in Dartford is 62, which is better than both England (60) and the South East (60). For owner occupied stock the figure is 61 and for private rented stock it is 65. This is considerably lower than Dartford's housing stock which has a SAP rating of 71.97.
- The total cost of mitigating Category 1 hazards in Dartford's private sector stock is estimated to be £10 million – with £7.5 million in the owner occupied sector, and £2.5 million in the private rented sector.
- There are an estimated 784 HMOs in Dartford, of which approximately 141 fall under the mandatory licensing scheme. 41 HMOs are currently licenced in Dartford.
- 3.8% (1,533) of private sector dwellings and 2.6% (283) of private rented dwellings in Dartford are estimated to have an EPC rating below band E.
- In the private sector stock, there are an estimated 6,357 dwellings with uninsulated cavity walls and 6,204 dwellings with less than 100mm of loft insulation.

### 3.7. Empty Homes

- 3.8. There were a total of 1,307 vacant dwellings in Dartford as of February 2022. This figure includes all tenures, although the majority of empty homes are privately owned. Vacant dwellings account for 2.7% of the total dwelling stock in Dartford based on a current total of 48,385 domestic properties registered within the

Borough. Of the vacant dwellings, 704 are long-term vacant (empty for 6 months or more) and 165 of those are classed as second homes. (Source: Data held by the local authority).

- 3.9. The need to bring empty private sector dwellings back into use is a key government objective that is part of a wider strategy to tackle housing affordability. It is generally accepted that in a time of housing shortage, empty dwellings represent a wasted resource.
- 3.10. Empty properties and derelict land have an adverse effect on the community socially, economically, and environmentally. To counter these costs the Council employs an Empty Property Officer whose role is:
- To return previously empty properties and derelict land back into productive use
  - To stop empty properties attracting crime, anti-social behaviour, vandalism, rubbish dumping, rodents and pests
  - To stop empty properties depreciating neighbouring property values
  - To fully utilise the available housing and reduce the need for new development particularly on green field land, so minimising the carbon footprint involved
- 3.11. The following methods are used by the Council to achieve these aims:
- Ensure the availability and effective use of information on empty homes
  - Develop effective partnership working within the Council and with external partners
  - Raise awareness of empty properties in Dartford
  - Encourage reuse through the supply of information, advice, and support to empty property owners
  - Take enforcement action where appropriate using the tools provided by relevant legislation, for example the Housing Act 2004 and the Council's Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Licencing Policy (see 7.4.). Options for enforcement range from securing open empty properties against unauthorised access to using closing or demolition orders, forced sales and the use of Empty Dwelling Management Orders.
- 3.12. The Council brought back into use 100 properties in 2018/19, 102 properties in 2019/20 and 82 properties in 2020/21. The target for 2022/23 is 80 properties. The target has been reduced slightly as the effects of the pandemic have negatively impacted on our ability to return empty properties back to use.
- 3.13. **Energy Efficiency Measures**
- 3.14. In addition to relevant regional strategies, outlined in Appendix B, the Council recognises that the Borough and its people have a part to play in securing a sustainable future and is actively delivering measures that will help achieve the governments set 2030 and 2050 net zero target. In addition, the creation of a Climate Change Team and a comprehensive climate change action plan are in development (as at February 2022).

3.15. The Council works independently and in partnership with other agencies to advise, educate and promote a range of energy efficiency schemes, decarbonisation schemes, grants and discounts to residents in the Borough. The Council makes full use of any funding opportunities available to support this work and current schemes/initiatives and funding sources.

3.16. Current initiatives include:

- Kent and Medway Warm Homes Scheme – Room in Roof/Loft and Cavity Wall Insulation
- Energy Deal - a collective switching campaign
- Solar Together Kent
- Energy Company Contribution (ECO)
- First Time Central Heating Fund (Warm Homes Fund)
- Local Authority Delivery Scheme for Solid wall insulation and lower cost measures in owner occupied properties

3.17. Funding is often for a limited time period or sum, so ongoing bids for monies, target functions and availability will vary during the lifetime of this Strategy.

## **4. OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

4.1. In order to tackle the issues highlighted in this Strategy, the Council has identified two key priorities for action:

**1. To enable residents to live independently in safe and healthy homes. The key areas associated with this priority are:**

- Elimination of Category 1 HHSRS hazards and reduction of disrepair
- Promotion of safe independent living for those residents who wish it

**2. To decrease the numbers of households who are in fuel poverty and/or suffering from 'excess cold' and improve the overall energy efficiency of the private sector stock in Dartford. The key areas associated with this priority are:**

- Elimination of Category 1 HHSRS Excess Cold Hazard
- Wall and loft insulation measures
- Efficient heating methods
- Improved EPC and SAP ratings for properties

## **5. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL**

- 5.1. Housing conditions have a major impact upon the health and wellbeing of individuals, households and communities and, by tackling poor housing conditions, we are not only improving the condition of the stock, but also the health and wellbeing of our residents and the community as a whole.
- 5.2. The links between housing and poor health have been well documented. There is evidence to suggest that there are specific elements relating to housing that can affect health outcomes although the relationship is a complex one as poor housing conditions often go hand in hand with unemployment, poor education and ill health etc. However, there appears to be several factors that correlate to housing conditions such as the quality of the indoor environment, cold and damp, overcrowding, housing design and layout, infestation, hazardous internal structures or fittings and noise levels.
- 5.3. As with most areas in the south east, Dartford has a high demand for affordable housing which outstrips supply and in the current economic climate, this has worsened as more people are approaching the Council as homeless. House prices have risen by 221.10% since 2000 and are high enough to be out of the reach of many first time buyers, and, although there are a number of Government funded schemes to enable people to get a foot onto the housing ladder, e.g. Help to Buy, it has become increasingly difficult for people to obtain a mortgage due to stricter lending criteria. It is therefore important that the Borough's private sector housing stock is utilised fully as it will have a key role in meeting overall housing need.
- 5.4. We will work in partnership with a number of key partners to deliver this Strategy and to ensure its success, these include:
  - Home Improvement Agency
  - Private sector landlords
  - Landlord Groups
  - Other Local Authorities
  - Clinical Commissioning Group
  - Kent Fire and Rescue Service
  - Kent County Council including Public Health, Social Services and Trading Standards
  - Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- 5.5. **Our approach to housing renewal**
- 5.6. The Council's Private Sector Housing Team will be responsible for delivering the services and actions contained in this Strategy. The service concentrates on offering advice and assistance to all private sector residents in the Borough and to landlords of privately rented properties. The service's principle aims are to:
  - Enable people to live in good quality, safe accommodation including the offer of financial assistance where applicable
  - Educate people in maintaining their homes and how to improve accommodation standards

- Enforce action against those people whose unwillingness to maintain their properties impacts on others, including landlords.
  - Bring empty properties back into use
- 5.7. The Council's approach to targeting housing renewal accords with the regional priorities identified by the Government and to the outcomes of the Stock Modelling Report 2020.
- 5.8. In considering the targeting of public investment, the Council has considered the dynamics of the housing market. For example the effects of the pandemic and the level of empty properties, the strategic resource options available within its housing investment programme and other available funding sources.
- 5.9. **Financial resources available for assistance**
- 5.10. The Council has funding available to provide assistance from the Regional Housing Board and from recycled, repayable grants and loans.
- 5.11. The Better Care Fund (BCF) creates a local single pooled budget to incentivise the NHS and local government to work more closely together around people, placing their wellbeing at the focus of health and care services. The BCF has widened the funding remit not only funding mandatory DFG applications but funding discretionary assistances too to ensure that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.
- 5.12. DFG funding via BCF in 2015/16 was £259,000 and this has increased to its highest level in 2019/20 to £521,576 with the same allocation being received in 2020/21 and 2021/22. Allocation for 2022/23 has not yet been confirmed but in December 2021 the government confirmed funding at its current national level of £570m through to 2025.
- 5.13. **Owner occupiers and owners of mobile/park homes**
- 5.14. It is primarily the responsibility of homeowners to maintain the housing they own to a satisfactory standard of repair. Nevertheless, it is recognised that the private housing stock is a major public asset and can have an important effect on the occupier's health and independence. The Council is aware that some property owners, including the disabled and the vulnerable, will have difficulty in maintaining their property without assistance. The Council will target its limited resources to those requiring assistance, where no other means are available. The Council considers that this is an appropriate way forward given the limited resources available.
- 5.15. **Tackling disrepair and Category 1 Hazards**
- 5.16. The report made a number of recommendations including interventions to tackle disrepair and the elimination of Category 1 hazards in geographically focussed areas and to implement home improvement and renewal schemes where appropriate. These findings will be combined with local intelligence to help identify areas for targeting assistance for physical improvements to private sector stock and the environment. The Council will use a number of approaches to tackle identified issues. These are set out below:

**5.17. Geographical area based approach**

5.18. Specific wards have higher concentrations of Category 1 hazards in the private sector and will be targeted. These are:

- West Hill
- Swanscombe
- Heath
- Brent
- Newtown

5.19. The highest levels of disrepair have been found in the wards of:

- Newtown
- Swanscombe
- Burnham
- West Hill
- Princes
- Heath

5.20. The highest concentrations of fuel poverty (Low Income High Costs definition) have been found in the wards of:

- Swanscombe
- Princes

5.21. For excess cold the highest concentrations have been found in:

- Longfield
- New Barn
- Southfleet
- Wilmington
- Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley
- Newtown.

**5.22. Sector based approach**

5.23. The Council will also use a sector based approach to tackling disrepair and Category 1 hazards in the owner occupied and private rented sector. Although the private sector as a whole has significantly higher levels of Category 1 hazards and disrepair than the social sector, disrepair is higher in the private rented sector; as is fuel poverty (see Appendix C for definition) and falls associated with hazards in the home.

**5.24. Client based approach**

5.25. As the population of Dartford Borough is growing with growth being concentrated in the older age groups, this is likely to have an impact upon the ability of homeowners to afford to maintain their homes and on the future demand for adaptations needed to enable independent living. This approach will help to ensure that older persons have access to help and assistance if required and to help people remain independent in their own homes.

## 6. HOUSING RENEWAL ASSISTANCE

- 6.1. The Council has a budget to offer assistance for private sector renewal (see paragraph 5.9). Some types of assistance are already in place and form part of the Council's [Discretionary Assistance Policy \(DAP\)](#). This includes assistance for disabled facilities and assistance to prevent admissions and readmissions to hospital.
- 6.2. As a result of the information gained from the stock modelling report, the DAP will be updated to include two new grants to assist with housing renewal. These are:

### a) **Net Zero Grant** - The maximum grant is £1500

Eligibility Criteria:

The premises must have a low energy rating; EPC rating of E, F or G

**AND**

The applicant must be over 18 years old, either in receipt of certain benefits or on a low income with a vulnerability to living in a cold home ([as outlined in the current Dartford Borough Council's LA Flex Statement of Intent](#)).

**Eligible Works** relate to:

- Heating
- Insulation
- Ventilation
- Other technologies

### b) **Repairs Grant** - The maximum grant is £1500

Eligibility Criteria

The applicant must be:

- a private freeholder or leaseholder with more than 3 years unexpired on a lease
- a private tenant with a full repairing obligation
- 18 years or over
- be in receipt of or be eligible for certain benefits ([outlined in Dartford Borough Council's current LA Flex Statement of Intent](#))

Eligible Works are defined as those required to eradicate a Housing Act 2004 HHSRS Category 1 Hazard (confirmed by a Private Sector Housing Officer).

**Or**

Works to eradicate a disrepair issue as defined in Appendix C.

The terms & conditions for both these assistances are set out in the Council's [DAP](#) sections 11 and 17.

### 6.3. **Empty Property Loan Assistance – ‘No Use Empty’ Initiative**

- 6.4. This discretionary assistance is a key part of a partnership agreement with Kent County Council, through their ‘No Use Empty’ initiative. The Council is able to assist empty property owners secure interest free loans from Kent County Council. The loans are to assist owners of properties, which have been empty for over six months, to help to meet the cost of repairs and improvements to bring their property back into use so that the property is available for immediate occupation, whether by selling or letting. Empty property owners or potential empty property buyers can apply for a loan of up to £25,000 per unit to a maximum of £175,000. The Council will supervise and monitor the expenditure of the loans locally. The loan scheme will help create new, quality and sustainable accommodation across Kent. The assistance given to empty property owners is discretionary. Kent County Council centrally operate and manage the loan scheme

## 7. **OTHER ASSISTANCE**

### 7.1. **Home Improvement Agency**

- 7.2. The Council provides annual funding to the [Home Improvement Agency \(HIA\)](#) managed by Town & Country for Dartford. The HIA provides support to residents and works closely with the Private Sector Housing Team in delivering services to older, vulnerable and disabled people who are private homeowners or tenants of private landlords. Services offered include help and advice on home improvements, repairs and adaptations. Technical assistance is available and services that focus on home safety, benefit advice and a gardening/decorating service. The service is sensitive to the needs of minority ethnic communities and has a Punjabi speaking caseworker.

- 7.3. In addition, the funding provides for:

- A Health & Housing Co-ordinator at Darent Valley Hospital to assist persons leaving hospital as well as offering a service to help residents retain safe and independent living in their own home. It is a tenure neutral service provided free of charge.
- A Home Straight Officer in conjunction with Gravesham Borough Council, who has a mental health specialism to assist with hoarding issues.
- A subsidised Handyperson Service & Handyperson Enablement scheme

### 7.4. **Private Sector Housing Enforcement & Licensing Policy**

- 7.5. The [Private Sector Housing & Enforcement Licensing Policy](#) sets out legislation and guidance on enforcement action taken by the Council in respect of private housing in the borough. It also covers Licensing of HMOs and Caravan Sites. While private rented tenants are not eligible for the full range of renewal assistance available, unless they have a repairing tenancy (where the tenant is responsible for repairs), the Council’s work with private rented tenants is mainly focused on taking enforcement action against landlords in order to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector.



## **8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

- 8.1. The Council is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity and tackling unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. The Council, in delivering this Private Sector Renewal Strategy, will have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that no individual is discriminated against based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age.
- 8.2. The Public Sector Equality Duty is a duty on the Council and that responsibility cannot be delegated to a contractor/service provider and is a continuing duty.
- 8.3. This Private Sector Renewal Strategy has been subject to a Customer Access Review to assess the impact it will have on equality. The review concluded that the Strategy is generally targeted towards assisting older, disabled, vulnerable and low income households living in private sector housing in need of renewal. The Strategy aims to remove or minimise disadvantages in the housing conditions experienced by such households, and to take steps to meet their needs. As such, this assistance should have a positive impact on the health, safety and quality of life of these households.

## **9. REVIEW**

- 9.1. The Strategy and Action Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis and updated accordingly.

## APPENDIX A – ACTION PLAN

Strategic Priority 1: We will aim to ensure that residents are able to live independently in safe and healthy homes					
Aim	Action	Target Date	DBC Lead	Partner Agencies/Teams	Outcomes
<b>Improve the condition of private rented homes in the Borough</b>	Support tenants in correcting defects through informal and formal enforcement action	Ongoing work	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer, Private Sector Housing Officer	HIA, Housing Solutions Team, KCC Trading Standards, Kent Fire and Rescue Service	Improvement in housing conditions for private sector tenants
	Actively seek funding opportunities	Ongoing work	Housing Solutions & Private Sector Housing Manager Senior Private Sector Housing Officer	Central government KCC, Other LAs HIA Utility Companies	Improvement in housing conditions for private sector tenants
	Review our communication and publicity with a particular focus on digital engagement, and improve information available on the website for private tenants and landlords	2022/2023	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer	Communications Team	Improvement in housing conditions for private sector tenants
<b>Improve partnership working with private sector landlords</b>	Establish closer working relationships with private sector landlords.	2022-2025	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer, Private Sector Housing Officer	Private sector landlords, Housing Solutions Team	Improvement in the management and maintenance of the private rented housing stock

	Improved working with all private landlords via a regular Landlords' Forum		Senior Private Sector Housing Officer (Housing Solutions) , Senior Private Sector Housing Officer  Private Sector Housing Officer	Private sector landlords, Housing Solutions Team	Improvement in the management and maintenance of the private rented housing stock
	Improved website information for private landlords	2022/23	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer (Housing Solutions) , Senior Private Sector Housing Officer  Private Sector Housing Officer	N/A	
<b>Make the best use of enforcement powers to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector</b>	Prepare for targeted enforcement using findings of the Housing Stock Modelling Report and HSCD including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HMO Licensing</li> <li>• Category 1 hazards in the West Hill, Swanscombe, Heath, Brent and Newtown.</li> <li>• Disrepair highest levels in the wards of Newtown, Swanscombe, Burnham, West Hill ,Princes and Heath</li> </ul>	2022-2025	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer, Private Sector Housing Officer	N/A	Improvement in housing conditions for private sector tenants
<b>Maintain and improve the overall condition of owner-occupied dwellings in the</b>	Improve the promotion and information on the availability of pre-existing and new discretionary assistance	2022/23	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer	HIA, Communications Team	Improvement in housing conditions for

<b>Borough, with particular focus on residents who are older, disabled, vulnerable or on low incomes</b>	packages to encourage greater take-up				owner occupiers
	Actively seek funding opportunities to improve housing conditions	Ongoing work	Housing Solutions & Private Sector Housing Manager Senior Private Sector Housing Officer	Central government KCC Other LAs HIA Utility Companies	
<b>Eradicate barriers to households carrying out their own remedial work</b>	Provide information on how to find reliable and suitable contractors via the website	2022/23	Private Sector Housing Officer	N/A	Improvement in housing conditions
	Review, update and further publicise the DIY Handbook to assist residents in carrying out repairs to their properties. DIY handbook to be available on the website	2022/23	Private Sector Housing Officer	Communications Team	Prevents disrepair
<b>Reduce the incidences of older people having falls in their homes</b>	Continue to provide financial support to the One You Team for falls prevention classes	Ongoing work	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer	One You Team KCC CCG	10 falls prevented per annum
	Continue funding projects with the Home Improvement Agency. Subject to ongoing Better Care Fund allocation	Ongoing work	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer	Home Improvement Agency	Reduction in falls in the home
<b>Enable residents to stay in their own homes as comfortably and safely as possible and for as long as possible</b>	Publicise energy efficiency measures, DFG's and existing and new discretionary assistance in the Private Sector Renewal Strategy	2022/23	Dartford Council's Climate change team, Senior Private Sector Housing Officer,	HIA, CCG, CAB, KCC, Communications Team, KFRS	Improved access to assistance

			Private Sector Housing Officer		
	Actively seek funding opportunities	Ongoing	Housing Solutions & Private Sector Housing Manager Senior Private Sector Housing Officer	Central government KCC Other LAs HIA Utility Companies	Improved outcomes for residents
<b>Ensure that those who need adaptations to help them remain in or return to their accommodation receive the appropriate level of advice, support and assistance</b>	Monitor and aim to reduce waiting times for DFGs and discretionary assistances between application date and grant approval	2022/23	Private Sector Housing Officer	KCC, HIA, Private Agents	Reduced waiting times for adaptations <b>Target TBC</b>
	For DFG and discretionary assistance cases, monitor waiting times from referral to KCC OTB to receipt of final recommendation to ensure waiting times are kept to a minimum	2022/23	Private Sector Housing Officer	N/A	Reduced waiting times <b>Target TBC</b>
<b>Bring empty properties back into use through enforcement work and make use of the 'No Use Empty Initiative'</b>	Use the principles and enforcement tools set out in the Private Sector Housing Enforcement & Licensing Policy	Ongoing work	Private Sector Housing Officer	KCC KCC funding	Bring 80 empty properties back into use in 2022/23 and beyond
<b>Improve joint working between agencies to improve housing and the environment for all groups</b>	Promote improved lines of communication and knowledge of PSH services/assistances with relevant agencies via our partnership forums	2022/23	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer Private Sector Housing Officer	KCC, CCG, CAB, KFRS	Improved awareness and access to funding opportunities for local residents
	Establish an internal private sector housing renewal strategy	2022/23	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer	As required	Improvement in private rented

	steering/implementation group to oversee and monitor the Strategy				housing standards
<b>Maintain a high level of customer satisfaction with the Grants/ Assistance processing service</b>	Seek feedback from customers on a monthly basis on the grants process using customer satisfaction ratings	July 2022	Private Sector Housing Officer	HIA, Private Agents	Improved customer satisfaction
<b>Strategic Priority 2. We will aim to decrease the numbers of households who are in fuel poverty and/or suffering from 'excess cold' and improve the overall energy efficiency of the private sector stock in Dartford</b>					
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>DBC Lead</b>	<b>Partner Agencies/Teams</b>	<b>Desired outcomes</b>
<b>Maintain and increase the average energy efficiency of homes in the borough, and target the worst performing areas</b>	Encourage and, if necessary, enforce elimination of Category 1 Excess Cold Hazards in the private rented sector	Ongoing work	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer , Private Sector Housing Officer, Dartford Council's Climate Change team	N/A	Improved energy efficiency
	Enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards	Ongoing work	Senior Private Sector Housing Officer Private Sector Housing Officer, Dartford Council's Climate Change team	N/A	Improvement in EPC standards
	Target households, tenures and geographical areas to provide advice/assistance by use of the Stock Model Report and HSCD findings	2022/23	Private Sector Housing team, Dartford Council's Climate Change team	N/A	Increase in energy efficiency measures

	Promote availability of energy efficiency measures and assistances to older, vulnerable and low income households	Ongoing work	Private Sector Housing team, Dartford Council's Climate Change team	Utility Companies, Other LAs, CCG, KCC, KFRS, CAB, Communications Team	Improved energy efficiency
<b>Reduce the number of households in fuel poverty, particularly in the worst performing areas and amongst the most vulnerable households</b>	Continue supporting the Fuel Poverty Strategy Action Plan.	Ongoing work	Private Sector Housing team, Dartford Council's Climate Change team	SGN, Utility companies, Contractors, fuel bank foundation	A reduction in fuel poverty
<b>Carbon Reduction/Net Zero</b>	Continue supporting the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy: Implementation Plan. This will also form part of the Council's Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan.	Ongoing work	Private Sector Housing team, Dartford Council's Climate Change team	SGN, Utility companies, Contractors, fuel bank foundation	A reduction in domestic carbon emissions, greenhouse gases and fuel poverty
<b>Increase public awareness of the range of energy efficiency services available to encourage and support owner occupiers</b>	Promote the availability of assistances via website, digital communications etc.	2022/23	Private Sector Housing team, Dartford Council's Climate Change team	PSH team, Communications Team	Greater public awareness of key services, especially in target areas and households

## **APPENDIX B – NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT**

The duties, powers and funding available to local authorities to address housing conditions in the private housing sector are contained in a wide range of legislation/guidance and funding streams as below. Please follow the links for more detailed information.

### **National context**

[Regulatory Reform \(Housing Assistance\) \(England and Wales\) Order 2002](#)

[Housing Act 2004](#)

[Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#)

[Housing and Planning Act 2016](#)

[Home Energy Conservation Act 1995](#)

[Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000](#)

[Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm \(England\) Regulations 2015](#)

[Energy Efficiency \(Private Rented Property\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations 2015](#)

[Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector \(England\) Regulations 2020](#)

[Public Health Outcomes Framework](#)

[Better Care Fund Policy Framework 2021 to 2022](#)

[Integrated Care: Our Shared Commitment, Department of Health 2013](#)

[Levelling Up the UK - White Paper February 2022](#)

### **Regional and Local context**

This Strategy has been developed having regard to a number of existing plans, policies and strategies. For further information, the following plans, policies and strategies can be found by following the links:

[Kent & Medway Housing Strategy 2020-25 - A place people want to call home](#)

[Kent Fuel Poverty Strategy – Delivering Affordable Warmth 2016](#)

[Kent & Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy 2020](#)

[Corporate Plan](#)

[Equality & Diversity Document Framework](#)

[Private Sector Housing Enforcement & Licensing Policy](#)

[Disabled Facilities Grant Policy](#)

[Private Sector Housing Discretionary Assistance Policy](#)

[Energy efficiency and conservation](#)



## **APPENDIX C – DEFINITIONS**

1. The Housing Act 2004 introduced the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) for private sector accommodation. HHSRS is an evidence based risk assessment system utilising statistical data on the impact of housing conditions on health and safety. The system assesses the likelihood of an occurrence that could cause harm and the probable severity of the outcome of such an occurrence within a 12-month period. The first part of the process involves the inspection of a dwelling and identifying whether there are any of 29 hazards present. Each identified hazard is then scored and this score (the hazard rating) places the hazard in one of 10 bands A to J. Any hazards scoring within a band A, B or C are classed as Category 1 hazards, whilst those falling in bands D to J are known as Category 2 hazards. 6.2. In the case of a Category 1 hazard, the Council has a duty to act. For hazards classed as Category 2, the Council has discretion to act. The Act provides enforcement tools to address hazards found.

**a. The presence of a Category 1 hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) – reflecting both condition and thermal efficiency**

Homes posing a Category 1 hazard under the HHSRS – the system includes 29 hazards in the home categorised into Category 1 – band A to C (serious) or category 2 – band D onwards (other) based on a weighted evaluation tool.

The 29 hazards are:

1. Damp and mould growth	16. Food safety
2. Excess cold	17. Personal hygiene, Sanitation and Drainage
3. Excess heat	18. Water supply
4. Asbestos	19. Falls associated with baths etc.
5. Biocides	20. Falling on level surfaces etc.
6. Carbon Monoxide and fuel combustion products	21. Falling on stairs etc.
7. Lead	22. Falling between levels
8. Radiation	23. Electrical hazards
9. Uncombusted fuel gas	24. Fire
10. Volatile Organic Compounds	25. Flames, hot surfaces etc.
11. Crowding and space	26. Collision and entrapment
12. Entry by intruders	27. Explosions
13. Lighting	28. Position and operability of amenities etc.
14. Noise	29. Structural collapse and falling elements
15. Domestic hygiene, Pests and Refuse	

**b. The presence of a Category 1 hazard for falls (includes “falls associated with baths”, “falling on the level” and “falling on stairs”)**

The HHSRS Falls Model includes the 3 different falls hazards where the vulnerable person is over 60 as listed above.

## **2. Dwellings in disrepair (based on the former Decent Homes Standard criteria for Disrepair)**

A dwelling fails the disrepair component if:

- One or more key building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair; or
- Two or more other building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacement or major repair.

Key building components are those which, if in poor condition, could have an immediate impact on the integrity of the building and cause further deterioration in other components. They are the external components plus internal components that have potential safety implications and include external walls, roof structure and covering, windows/doors, chimneys, central heating boilers and electrics. If any of these components are old, and need replacing or require major repair, then the dwelling is not in a reasonable state of repair.