

Briefing Note

Title

Areas of Action

Context

The purpose of this briefing note is to update members on the Areas of Action proposed in the wards of Sidney Sussex and Heneage. The areas were selected due to concerns around low housing demand, poor quality housing and high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Progress

The update provided in May 2025 set out the opportunities to deliver a voluntary scheme for landlords and tenants in two proposed areas. The voluntary scheme focussed on engagement and providing information and guidance in respect of housing and tenancy matters.

There was an acknowledgement that the voluntary scheme will only be effective if landlords and the community are prepared to work with the Council. The proposal was also subject to the allocation of appropriate funding to provide additional staffing resources, contrary to Selective Licensing which operates on a cost recovery basis.

Following the decision to insource Equans services the Council is working on a transformation delivery plan for the new Environmental Health & Housing Team. The team will incorporate the existing Environmental Enforcement team and the Housing Enforcement team transferring from Equans in July. We have now received the workforce data which sets out the resources that will transfer to deliver future housing enforcement services as well as actual salary levels and cost of terms and conditions such as pensions. It is apparent that the existing resources, including management capacity consist of a re-active private sector housing function to discharge the Council's statutory duty in respect to housing standards, together with a very limited proactive officer resource, currently focused on home energy grants and bringing empty properties back into use.

The initial transformation plan for Environmental Health and Housing was presented to the Equans Cabinet Working Group on 20 June 2025. The Equans CWG has noted a keen interest in improving the service in several areas including increasing resources dedicated to bringing empty homes back into use.

The Equans CWG requested that the transformation plan for Environmental Health and Housing was presented in full at a future meeting to set out the strategic direction, resources and progress against the plan.

The Housing Cabinet Working Group is also intending to consider Houses in Multiple Occupation and may consequently wish to make further recommendations to Cabinet, on the use of additional discretionary or regulatory powers, which may or may not require additional budget to deliver.

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With no unallocated resource identified in the transferring staff group, as well as an expected increase in staffing and management costs, compared to estimates presented in May 2025, the proposed areas of action would need a separate budget allocation, which is currently not part of the 2025/26 agreed Council budget.

Next Steps

It is proposed that the Council take the opportunity now that there is clarity regarding the current staffing resources within the Housing Enforcement team, to create a broader service transformation plan for housing enforcement. The plan will consider the resources required and the technical and regulatory competency to address a range of housing issues. The fully costed plan, including any further recommendations from the Cabinet Working Group can then be considered by a joint meeting of the Equans and Selective Licensing and HMO Cabinet Working Groups. The business case will need to be considered by the Business Development Group (BDG) as part of routine governance and to enable the proposal to be considered as part of the budget setting process for 26/27.