

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING REGENERATION POLICY

1 Purpose

- 1.1 Under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 Local Authorities can adopt policies that enable local discretionary spend of disabled facilities grants (DFG) budgets (in addition to the provision of the mandatory DFG scheme outlined in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996), as well as discretionary grant and loan schemes to regenerate private sector housing stock in their area.
- 1.2 This policy sets out the existing private sector housing grant and loan schemes currently offered by AVDC and suggests additional and alternative schemes that should be adopted to better enable regeneration of the private sector housing stock in the Vale. The policy focuses particularly on assisting target groups of residents including older people, disabled people, vulnerable groups (e.g. those on low incomes living in poor quality housing). It also suggests the provision of a landlord loan scheme to help improve conditions in rented private sector housing stock.

2 Recommendations

That members:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the Private Sector Housing Regeneration Policy
- 2.2 Agree a discretionary approach to the spend of DFG budget to widen the grant schemes that are available from solely Mandatory DFG to Mandatory DFG, Relocation Grants, Discretionary DFG top-up and Urgent Hospital Discharge Adaptations Grants
- 2.3 Agree the reallocation of £100,000 underspent capital budget to set up a landlord loan scheme in the Vale
- 2.4 Agree the set up of an Essential Repairs Grant (to replace Minor Works Grants) and the reallocation of £50,000 of capital budget spend towards this scheme.

3 Supporting information

- 3.1 National, regional and local policies and objectives provide AVDC and its partners with a broad strategic framework to work within. These include a focus on growth and investment in the private housing sector as key to increased choice, access and better standards.
- 3.2 Government advise that it is important that the private rented sector is seen as an attractive alternative to owner occupation and have recommended a number of measures to improve and develop the sector. These include simplifying the regulatory framework, raising standards by providing Councils with increased flexibility to enforce housing law, regulating agencies, longer tenancies and increased housing supply.
- 3.3 This policy focuses on the provision of grants and loans to support private sector housing regeneration. It is important to note that alongside this AVDC use enforcement powers under the Housing Act 2004 to raise standards in the private rented sector and deal with rogue landlords. AVDC also operates mandatory and additional licensing schemes for houses in multiple

occupation which aim to improve standards and protect vulnerable tenants living in this type of housing stock.

- 3.4 The Private Sector Housing Regeneration Policy sits below, and contributes to the objectives outlined within the AVDC Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2014-17. Private sector housing stock includes houses in private ownership and occupation as well as privately rented properties.

4 Housing Profile

The private sector housing sector plays a valuable role in the housing market in the Vale comprising of 61,500 of the 77,000 total dwellings in the Vale. At the time of the last stock condition survey in 2007 16.8% of private sector housing stock did not meet a 'decent' standard.

- 4.1 Poor housing conditions in the Vale are associated with households in social and economic disadvantage. This affects the ability of households to repair and improve their dwellings. At the time of the Survey 25.6% of all households living in non-decent housing were elderly. Economically vulnerable households accounted for 33.8% of all households living in non-decent housing. In the private rented sector 39% of vulnerable households were living in non-decent housing.
- 4.2 Aylesbury Vale has an aging population with increasing numbers of people living with a limiting long term illness or disability. At the last census in 2011 68,000 people in Buckinghamshire reported having a limiting long term illness or disability (an increase of 12.4% from the previous census).
- 4.3 There is a significant link between housing quality and health. Factors such as damp and mould, overcrowding and excess cold are associated with long term conditions such as heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and mental illness as well as an increased risk of mortality.

5 Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

- 5.1 To use these powers the Local Authority must adopt and publish a policy setting out how the powers will be used. The Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2014-17 and the Private Sector Housing Regeneration Policy fulfil this obligation. The Order contains important protections relating to the giving of assistance, whether it is given as a grant, loan or another form of help.
- 5.2 Currently AVDC offer the following private sector grant and loan assistance (these are outlined in more detail within the report at section 6):
- Minor works grant up to £2500
 - Mandatory disabled facilities grant up to £30,000
 - Empty Homes loan
 - Flexible Home Improvement Loan (FHIL)

It is recommended that the Minor works Grant is replaced with an Essential Repairs Grant of up to £10,000. In addition the following grants and loans will be offered alongside the mandatory DFG, Empty Homes Loan and FHIL:

- Discretionary DFG top-up of up to £20,000
- Relocation Grant up to £30,000
- Urgent Hospital Discharge Adaptations Grant up to £10,000

- Landlord Loan Scheme up to £10,000

6 Resource implications

- 6.1 The policy sets out the financial resources required. In summary DFG funding is provided jointly via the Better Care Fund at Buckinghamshire County Council and AVDC capital spend budgets.
- 6.2 Since 2011/12 there has been a year on year underspend of AVDC capital funds on mandatory DFGs. The reasons for this are not due to decreased demand (in fact there is an increasing demand for DFGs) and are in part due to the lack of flexibility AVDC currently has available to meet the differing needs of applicants and facilitate the spend of the budget.
- 6.3 In future years it is imperative that AVDC have flexibility and discretion within the grants process to facilitate budget spend and ensure that vulnerable tenants in private sector housing are able to access support. The policy sets out an increased range of discretionary grant and loan proposals to better meet the needs of those in relevant target groups. This will require the reallocation of some capital funding.
- 6.4 The introduction of additional discretionary grants alongside the mandatory DFG will increase the range of grant options available and allow AVDC to better tailor grant support to meet individual needs. It is proposed that mandatory DFG funds and AVDC capital funds allocated for DFG spend are maintained in one budget stream, funding mandatory DFGs, Discretionary DFG top-up, Relocation Grants and Hospital Discharge Urgent Adaptation Grants.
- 6.5 In order to provide a reasonable level of funding for the new Essential Repairs Grants it is proposed that in addition to the £30,000 budget previously allocated to Minor Repairs Works, £50,000 of the capital funding allocated to DFGs is reassigned to Essential Repairs Grants, increasing the total grant funding available to £80,000.
- 6.6 In addition it is proposed that the historical £100,000 capital fund underspend is used to establish a landlord's loan scheme.

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Background Documents	None