

## UPDATE TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING REGENERATION POLICY

### 1 Purpose

- 1.1 To update the Private Sector Housing Regeneration Policy to launch a new 'Healthy Homes on Prescription Grant' and refine our Discretionary DFG offering to align the housing assistance measures with those provided by all District Councils in Buckinghamshire.

### 2 Recommendations

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| 2.1 That the Environment and Living Scrutiny note the contents of the report and comment accordingly prior to approval by the relevant Cabinet Member. |
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### 3 Supporting Information

- 3.1 Aylesbury Vale, along with the rest of Buckinghamshire, has an aging population. 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). The number of people with long term health conditions is likely to continue to increase with the aging population in Buckinghamshire (Director of Public Health for Buckinghamshire Annual Report 2012/13). 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. People living in poor quality housing are more likely to suffer with poor health than those people living in good quality housing. Overcrowded households can encourage the spread of certain medical conditions, such as tuberculosis. Households without central, or other adequate heating, can suffer from damp and mould growth, which can lead to respiratory problems. Poorly heated households can suffer from excess cold, which in turn can increase the likelihood of premature mortality.
- 3.2 Both health and housing professionals recognise that addressing the hazards found in poor housing is better for the patient and more cost effective for the NHS than simply treating the symptoms of health without addressing the actual cause.
- 3.3 By aligning the housing assistance measures offered by AVDC with the other Buckinghamshire District Local Authorities we will create a fairer system with equality of access whereby Buckinghamshire residents have broadly similar assistance measures available to them, regardless of where they live.
- 3.4 Aligning the assistance measures will also help facilitate referrals from health and social care professionals no matter where they are discharging or referring a client from. Under the current arrangements it is difficult for health providers to interpret the various housing assistance offerings available in different Buckinghamshire Local Authority areas. This proposal should simplify the referral process and enable more residents to benefit.

### 4 Implications

- 4.1 Enforcement Officers are already trained to inspect houses and identify hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. It is expected that most referrals for the 'Healthy Homes on Prescription Grant' will require an officer to visit the clients home to identify hazards present and the measures required to address them.

- 4.2 The current policy already allows Officers flexibility with regard to the use of discretionary grant funding where it meets the aims of the Policy and benefits the required target groups and this will be sustained.

## **5 Housing assistance measures proposed**

- 5.1 The housing assistance measures proposed are detailed in Appendix 1.  
5.2 The amended private sector housing regeneration policy is attached in Appendix 2.

## **6 Next Steps**

- 6.1 If these recommendations are approved, Officers will engage with Health providers in the District to promote the scheme and provide the necessary instruction on how to make referrals. This will include local GP surgeries and Clinics, Citizens Advice Bureau and other partners.
- 6.2 The scheme will also be promoted to the community through our website and social media accounts. Information to be provided will include:
- The process for applying for assistance
  - Eligibility criteria
  - Conditions applying to the provision of assistance,
  - How conditions will be enforced and in what circumstances they can be waived
- 6.3 We will continue to work with the other District Councils and Buckinghamshire County Council to refine the Safer Homes Scheme and establish a service level agreement with a provider that can undertake the home visits and complete the minor adaptations.
- 6.4 Spend against budget allocation is monitored on a regular basis. The new grants will be reviewed to determine effectiveness, uptake and spend and if necessary will be adjusted following consultation with the Group Manager - Regulatory Services.
- 6.5 We will update and publish the Private Sector Housing Regeneration Policy on the website.
- 6.6 We will discontinue the Essential Repairs Grant currently promoted.

## **7 Reasons for Recommendation**

- 7.1 To allow the Environment and Living Scrutiny the opportunity to consider the new assistance measures proposed and report their views.

Contact Officer: Neil Green, Principal Enforcement Officer (Private Sector Housing)  
01296 585160

Background Documents: N/A