

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY

Cabinet Member: Councillor Mrs Julia Langley

Wards Affected: All

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PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

That the March 2015 Cabinet approved Private Sector Housing Renewal policy covering all forms of mandatory and discretionary financial assistance, be adopted by the Council.

That delegation authority be given to the Head of Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to make minor amendments to the policy.

Reason for Decision

Local Authorities have statutory duties to develop appropriate policies to deal with deficiencies in the condition of housing stock in the area. This policy sets out formally in one policy document, how the Council will use the powers available to meet these duties.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy has been refreshed following a collaborative project involving the four district Councils with the intention of aligning discretionary financial assistance available across Buckinghamshire.

Corporate Implications

1. This Policy sets out how Wycombe District Council will use the various powers available, including the provision of financial assistance.
2. The Council is required by law to offer mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants as required by the Housing, Grants, Construction & Regeneration Act 1996. As there is a mandatory requirement to make the payments the Council may have to fund the grants without the receipt of funding from the Better Care Fund. The payment of any grants and the funding required will be reviewed on an annual basis and any impact included within the budget setting process. In addition the Act gives Local Authorities powers to offer discretionary funding. This policy enables the Council to offer discretionary funding, where appropriate.
3. All discretionary funds are subject to available funding. A registered charge will be placed on the property on payment of the assistance. The cost of this, where applicable, will be added to the loan or grant.
4. Each application for discretionary funding will be considered on an individual basis by the Grants panel, with a maximum grant of £15,000 being available in addition to the mandatory element.
5. Repayment of any assistance will be pursued where any of the loan or grant conditions, which are applicable following the satisfactory completion of works,

have been breached or when the recipient disposes of the dwelling (whether by sale, assignment, transfer or otherwise).

Executive Summary

6. A Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy has been developed and adopted by the Council, this policy statement aims to update the policy and provide options available to assist residents in accordance with local health priorities.
7. This policy applies to all forms of mandatory and discretionary financial assistance provided by the Council for the purposes of private sector housing renewal. It has regard to the powers and duties set out in the Housing Act 2004, the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and Government guidance issued under this legislation.
8. The four district Councils in Buckinghamshire have consulted to broadly align discretionary assistance available across the county to reduce variations across Buckinghamshire, whilst maintaining the ability to adapt to local variations and individual cases where necessary.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications

9. The Council's Corporate Plan 2015-2020 sets four priorities –
 - Place
 - People
 - Prosperity
 - Progress

As reflected in the Corporate Plan, housing has formed a key priority area and will continue to form a key activity locally and countywide in the future, as one of the wider determinants of health and well-being. This Policy feeds directly into this priority enabling the Council to assist the most vulnerable residents, to keep them safe and well in their own home.

Within this Policy the Council reserves the right to adjust the levels of discretionary funding available. Any changes will be made in consultation with the Head of Environment and Cabinet Member.

Financial Resources

10. The Council has an annual budget for adaptations including Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), with funds transferred directly from Government to Bucks

County Council and passed to the district Council through the Better Care Fund.

11. In the current financial year, the Council has a budget of £1,085,703 from the Better Care Fund to spend on financial assistance to enable adaptations with £840,071 spent within the first 11 months and a further £554,719 committed. As a rolling programme, some of this commitment will roll-over into the 2018/19 financial year.
12. Whilst the Council has sufficient budget at present to be able to fulfil the discretionary elements of this policy, in the event of budgetary pressures in future years, we will continue to have statutory duties to carry out mandatory disabled facilities grants and as such there is a commitment to complete these works.

Background and Issues

13. The Healthy Communities theme within the Sustainable Community Strategy 2013-2031 includes a number of aims which will impact on the district's housing issues, including:
 - More older people living independently
 - High quality homes in both existing and new properties
 - More homes in the district to meet local needs with affordable housing in all new housing developments
 - Enough local homes for people working in the district so they do not have to commute long distances
 - Increased social inclusion and better life chances for all
12. The key priorities from the most recent Private Sector Stock Condition Survey are as follows:
 - Giving priority to sub-standard housing
 - Supporting initiatives that help the disabled and elderly to remain in their homes
 - Encouraging the improvement of the privately rented sector, particularly Houses in Multiple Occupation
 - Encouraging the repair and return to use of empty properties
 - Improving the energy efficiency of the privately rented stock
 - Working with NHS partners to improve health through housing related initiatives
 - Investigating the potential for renewal regeneration
13. The report identifies that the quality of housing has the following impacts on health:
 - The demand for social housing significantly exceeds availability.
 - increasing pressures on homelessness services
 - More than a tenth of households are in fuel poverty

14. The limit for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) funding as set by legislation has remained at £30,000 since 2006 and does not allow for increases in inflation in building costs, thus putting pressure on the successful delivery of larger adaptations. The introduction of a discretionary grant, subject to certain conditions, should alleviate this pressure
15. In delivering its Mandatory DFGs, the Council works closely with Buckinghamshire Community Occupational Therapists and other relevant partners, in drawing up strategies and policies affecting the delivery of DFGs.
16. The Council also works closely with other Local Authority partners and the National Energy Foundation as part of the Buckinghamshire Affordable Warmth Network, providing advice, support and access to funding to improve the energy efficiency of homes for the most vulnerable households and those in fuel poverty.
17. The policy aims to:
 - Assist disabled people to remain in their own home through Mandatory DFGs.
 - Review and align discretionary funding available to DFG applicants across the county.
 - Improve the energy efficiency of properties by enabling access to funding and providing top-up funding to government grants, where appropriate.
 - Support the reduction of Delayed Transfers of Care (DTC rates) from hospital and prevent hospital admissions
18. The provision of effective housing renewal assistance to residents, in the form of advice, support, grants and loans, is a key service of the Council with direct impact on:
 - Promoting and maintaining a quality and sustainable environment throughout the District
 - Promoting and helping to sustain the health and quality of life of the residents of the District, especially those most vulnerable
 - Providing value for money services
19. The detailed policy is contained in appendix A.

Consultation

20. The discretionary elements of the Policy have been formulated in collaboration with colleagues in each of the four district councils in Buckinghamshire.
21. In delivering its Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants the Council works closely with Buckinghamshire Community Occupational Therapists and other relevant partners, in drawing up strategies and policies affecting the delivery of DFGs.
22. We will continue to work with the Bucks authorities to ensure that the policy remains relevant and fit for purpose. In addition, the policy allows the Council

to change the level of financial assistance available to reflect available resources and local conditions. Any changes will be made by the Head of Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing.

Conclusions

23. Cabinet is requested to recommend this updated policy for adoption by Full Council.

Next Steps

24. If adopted by the Council, the policy will come into immediate effect.
25. The policy will be kept under review to allow flexibility as government funding and local needs change.

Background Papers

See appendices for full policy document.