

CABINET

18 April 2017

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY

Report of the Director for Places (Development & Economy)

Strategic Aim:	Sustainable Growth and Safeguarding	
Key Decision: Yes	Forward Plan Reference: FP/170117/01	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Mr O Hemsley, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Growth, Trading Services and Resources (except Finance)	
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Ward Councillors	All	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet authorises the publication and adoption the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy attached at Appendix A.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report asks Cabinet to approve a new Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy. This includes a revised consideration of stock condition and a more flexible approach regarding disabled adaptations for properties of all tenures (ownership types), reflecting the opportunities of the Better Care Fund (BCF) and helping to meet the Council's responsibilities under the Care Act 2014.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council's current Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy was adopted in 2009. This document now needs replacement, due to the need to consider current housing conditions in Rutland and to reflect the current funding and policy position, which puts more emphasis on maintaining the health and wellbeing of those at risk, by taking a preventative approach.
- 2.2 The new policy is more focused than the 2009 policy, with less overlap with other housing policies and more detail regarding grant administration. It takes advantage of new opportunities for adaptations arising from BCF, in accordance

with the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-22. It highlights where assistance can be obtained to address fuel poverty (including the remaining Government Warm Homes funding held by the Council) and links to the Council's Home Energy Conservation Act Progress Report 2017.

- 2.3 The new policy does not otherwise include grants for minor repairs, which have not been included in the Medium Term Financial Plan for some time. It is envisaged that the scope of the home improvement agency (HIA) service will be broadened over the next year as part of Rutland's Unified Prevention Offer, which will include a housing checklist. This can provide greater assistance regarding the home environment (repairs, dealing with hoarding, suitability), home security, assistive technology and personal safety and accessibility.
- 2.4 This targeted and integrated approach to the HIA will help both to prevent crises and enable people to control their own lives, maintaining their independence in a home environment that is safe, warm and meets their needs. Community based low level housing related support is also available to assist with the transition from hospital to home; for example, to provide support with setting up new tenancies or managing within the existing home. These initiatives will form an important part of the recent BCF guidance requirement for local areas to produce an action plan to reduce delayed transfers of care from hospital.
- 2.5 The policy also does not include grants for minor adaptations or assistive technology, which are covered by other policies within the same overall strategic approach to prevention.

3 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

- 3.1 Statutory funding for major adaptations in the home is provided through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). Since 2015/16, the Government funding towards these has been a component within the BCF, which is a pooled budget operating between the NHS and the local upper tier council. The rationale for this change is to encourage areas to think strategically about the use of home adaptations and technologies and to take a joined up approach to improve outcomes across health, social care and housing. This is linked to an increase in the funding received for DFGs, to £186,000 in 2016/17 and with a similar level forecast for 2017/18. This enables the Council to increase the grants it provides to support health, wellbeing and prevention whilst remaining within the approved budget.
- 3.2 The Council is required to award mandatory DFGs to households that meet the national criteria. The maximum mandatory grant possible is £30,000. The vast majority of DFGs are below this level; but in a few cases where (for instance) extensions are required to properties, the required work can sometimes exceed this. The new policy includes clear provision for discretionary top-ups of up to £20,000 to mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants where these are required.
- 3.3 The policy also includes provision for discretionary grants to support health, wellbeing and prevention policy priorities, up to £10,000 dependent on needs and available funding.
- 3.4 The Council will continue to offer relocation grants for cases where the person's existing home would require adaptation, but where a move to a more suitable property which could be more easily adapted would be more appropriate.

3.5 Under national rules, Disabled Facilities Grants and relocation grants are not means-tested where they are awarded for the needs of children. Otherwise, this assistance is means-tested, with the exception of the discretionary grants to support health, wellbeing and prevention policy priorities that are proposed in Appendix A, where means-testing can be applied dependent on the availability of funding.

4 CONSULTATION

4.1 During the development of this policy, the Council has liaised with the HIA and the Peterborough City Council Public Protection shared service, which both deliver different elements of the Disabled Facility Grant service. While we have not undertaken a dedicated consultation exercise, a number of recent engagement events variously involving providers, community and voluntary organisations, service users and practitioners have included consideration of the impact of the home environment on health and independence and reflection on the design and operation of schemes to prolong independence:

- Better Care Fund Falls Summit, 5 June 2015
- Rutland Housing Conference, 30 November 2015
- Adult Social Care Strategy launch workshop, 7 March 2016
- Better Care Fund evaluation and new projects workshops, Nov 2015 to Mar 2016
- Healthwatch workshop re encouraging householders to plan ahead, 11 March 2016
- Carers event, 2 December 2016
- Better Care Fund evaluation and planning event, 5 January 2017
- Healthwatch engagement study with people who have experienced transfers of care out of hospital, Oct 2016 to Mar 2017.

4.2 This has included consideration of the contribution of assistive technology, telecare and equipment as complementary to physical adaptations in the home.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1 The Council does not have to offer discretionary grants but failure to do so could leave people potentially at risk from unsuitable properties, increasing hospital admissions and delaying transfers of care from hospital.

5.2 The maximum levels of discretionary assistance could be increased, but this could lead to unrealistic expectations and insufficient resources to meet the need for mandatory grants.

5.3 The maximum levels of discretionary grant could be decreased, but this may mean that some households with more complex needs do not receive the adaptations they may need. The policy does allow expenditure on discretionary grants to be managed within the available budget.

- 5.4 The draft policy could have provided for the Council to make loans of various types to meet non-mandatory needs, but these are already available to some people through the private market. If the Council did provide loans, the Council would still need to provide grants for those who could not afford a loan or who had insufficient equity in their properties. The potential for any loan system will be kept under review as part of the future evaluation of this policy.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The report does not amend any approved budgets and has no direct financial implications. However, this proactive, targeted approach will assist those that need support earlier and will help to delay or avoid potential crises. It will also help to make best use of the Council's allocation within the BCF for DFGs.

7 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The Council has a duty under section 3 of the Housing Act 2004 to keep the housing conditions in its area under review, with a view to identifying whether statutory action is required. This requirement is fulfilled by the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy, in conjunction with the Homelessness Review, the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

- 7.2 The Private Section Housing Renewal Policy fulfils the requirements of article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002, for the Council to publish a policy regarding the types of grants it will award and their criteria, amounts and the circumstances under which they might have to be repaid. The approach proposed will also help to meet the requirements of the Care Act 2014.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 An equality screening template has been completed. This found that the policy particularly assisted older people and people with disabilities and that any differential impact was positive and justified.

9 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The report includes measures to address hoarding.

10 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Housing is one of the 'Wider Determinants of Health'. People with chronic long term conditions may have physical needs which require adaptation of existing properties. Cold or damp homes can pose a threat to vulnerable people, through depression, stroke, heart disease and pneumonia. These can contribute to excess winter deaths.

- 10.2 This policy will help local residents to have the choice and control to manage their independence in a home environment that is safe, warm and meets their needs.

11 ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 **Environmental implications**

- 11.2 Local housing conditions in Rutland do not require the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy to drive environmental regeneration. This issue is addressed by the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-22.
- 11.3 The Council's policies assist with the reduction of energy consumption, to help residents save money and reduce carbon emissions. The report complements the Home Energy Conservation Act Progress Report 2017.
- 11.4 Human Resource implications**
- 11.5 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.
- 11.6 Procurement Implications**
- 11.7 There are no direct procurement implications arising from this report. The home improvement agency's contract expires in October 2017. It is envisaged that a report on its re-procurement will be considered by Cabinet on 16 May 2017.
- 12 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**
- 12.1 The revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy provides a more up-to-date assessment of the condition of private sector housing assistance, together with with the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2017-22, the Homelessness Review 2016, the Home Energy Conservation Act Progress Report 2017 and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2014 and 2015 update.
- 12.2 The policy for discretionary grants for adaptations will allow the best use to be made of the available resources within the existing budget, to promote independent living and to support timely discharges from hospital.
- 13 BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 13.1 Rutland Housing Conference 30 November 2015 – final event notes.
- 14 APPENDICES**
- 14.1 Appendix A. Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2017-21.

A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.