

## CABINET

12<sup>th</sup> January 2020

### PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY (INCLUDING DISABLED ADAPTATIONS)

#### Report of the Strategic Director - Places

|                                   |  |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Strategic Aim:                    | Vibrant Communities<br>Protecting the vulnerable   |  |
| Key Decision: Yes                 | Forward Plan Reference: FP/250920  |  |
| Exempt Information                | No   |  |
| Cabinet Member(s)<br>Responsible: | Mr G Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Finance<br><br>Mrs L Stephenson: Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure, Environment, Highways & Transportation & Road Safety<br><br>Mr A Walters: Safeguarding – Adults, Public Health, Health Commissioning & Community Safety |  |
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| Ward Councillors                  | All  |  |

#### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet approves the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy attached at Appendix A.

## **1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report asks Cabinet to approve a revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy for the period 2021-25, to replace the previous document which covered 2017-21 and was due for review in 2020. The review provided the opportunity for the Policy to be updated to reflect the in-house delivery of some elements and other operational changes.

## **2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 2.1 The current Policy was introduced on 6 December 2017 and considers private stock condition in Rutland as well as disabled adaptations for all tenures. It reflects the opportunities of the Better Care Fund and helps to meet the Council's responsibilities under the Care Act 2014. It sits alongside the Council's Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy.
- 2.2 Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gives local authorities the power to provide assistance (either directly or indirectly) to any person for the purpose of improving living conditions in the local authority area. The clause allows this assistance to be provided in any form, but also contains certain restrictions.
- 2.3 The current policy introduced HaP (Health and Prevention) Grants which provided a more flexible way of dealing with adaptations such as stair-lifts. It is proposed that this form of grant be continued, albeit with a reduced maximum size of grant from £10,000 to £5,000 (exceptionally, £6,000). Grants larger than this would generally be means-tested through the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) route.
- 2.4 The Policy does not include grants for minor adaptations or assistive technology, which are covered by other policies within the same overall strategic approach to prevention. These include a £43,500 budget for Minor Adaptation Services and £38,381 for Assistive Technology Services, both of which are delivered by the Longhurst Group and commissioned by the Council.
- 2.5 The Policy also does not include grants for repairs, which have not been included in the Council's budgets for some time due to limited resources. The exception to this is an £8,300 budget for equipment repair, which does not apply to recent installations as service users are now responsible for many repairs.
- 2.6 The Housing MOT is a home check service delivered across Rutland by the Longhurst Group (regardless of property tenure) which provides information, advice and support to help people to maintain their independence and live as safely as possible in their own home for as long as they choose. At the home visit, an assessment of the property and individual needs will be carried out. 255 Housing MOT visits were completed in the year 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020.
- 2.7 The Council funds a range of organisations which can provide advice on welfare rights and options to service users, including Citizens' Advice Rutland and specialist advocacy and support groups. Measuring the effectiveness of this funding is wide and varied. It is about having clear monitoring systems to extract data for analysis, to ensure the outcomes for people and communities are being delivered and that money is used wisely and to the best effect. Regulatory Reform

Order funding is referenced within the Policy to ensure that all relevant Council staff are aware. Staff can seek further advice with regard to use of this funding through the Principal Occupational Therapists. The latter are in regular consultation with Foundations which is a Government-backed advisory group on grant funding.

### **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 Better Care Fund (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 £238,000 in 2020/21 and with the same level forecast for 2021/22. This enables the Council to operate HaP Grants 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 revised policy includes clear provision for discretionary top-ups of up to a maximum of £20,000 for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants where these are required.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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 HaP Grants where means-testing can be applied dependent on the availability of funding.

### **4 CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 There was a partner event 'Putting Rutland into Place' on 28 February 2020, where place-based approaches to health and care were discussed, including preventative measures. The aim of the session was to explore how partners could work together towards the future development of Rutland's health, care and wellbeing services and to agree on the main key areas for further development. While immediate follow through was delayed by the pandemic, some of the priorities discussed have been progressed as part of the pandemic response, including remote and digital delivery of care and social prescribing via the GP. Place planning has now restarted, with a virtual public engagement event held on 3 December 2020, led by the CCG. The Place plans would encompass the scope of the Better Care Fund programme, of which Disabled Facilities Grants and HaP Grants are a part.
- 4.2 User satisfaction surveys are used to monitor delivery of completed grant funded projects. In September, 88% of forms returned for the Housing MOT agreed that,

“It has reduced my risk of falling.”

## **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 the risk of 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 grants.
- 5.3 The maximum levels of discretionary grant could be decreased, but this may mean that some households 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 Council could provide grants addressing properties in poor condition, but this would not be the best use of available resources. The Council ensures the provision of the Housing MOT service and a proportionate private sector housing enforcement service. We also work with partners to help ensure affordable warmth.
- 5.5 The 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.
- 5.6 The HaP grant was introduced as Rutland residents were failing prohibitive means testing for adaptations. This left residents at risk who were not able to fund adaptations which RCC had assessed for. Consideration was given to applying a means test to this type of grant however we felt criteria with a focus of reducing care, minimising carer strain, maximising independence and preventing admission was more in accordance with our preventative agenda than applying a financial criterion. The HaP is successfully fulfilling this requirement and reintroducing a means test would impact on our preventative work. The policy does permit means-testing but for these reasons this is not undertaken at the moment.

## **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 continue to 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 Housing and Homelessness

Strategy 2017-22 and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Update 2019.

- 7.2 The Private Sector 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 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment has not been completed because there is no new data processing required by this report.

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 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.

## **10 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The report includes measures to address hoarding.

## **11 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 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.

## **12 ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 Environmental implications
- 12.2 Local housing conditions in Rutland do not require the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy to drive environmental regeneration. The Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy addresses environmental issues arising from individual properties. This includes addressing issues with some empty properties. The 'Help to Address Fuel Poverty' section of the policy outlines the Council's approach to tackling fuel poverty and household carbon emissions, including access to third party grants and assistance.
- 12.3 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 2019.

### **13 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 The revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy provides an up-to-date assessment of the condition of private sector housing and necessary assistance, together with the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-22, the Homelessness Review, the Home Energy Conservation Act Progress Report 2019 and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2019 Update.

### **14 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 There are no background papers to this report.

### **15 APPENDICES**

- 15.1 Appendix A. Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2021-25.

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