

Individual Executive Member Decision

Permission to Adopt the Housing Grants and Loans Policy Made under The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance - England and Wales) Order 2002

Committee considering report: Individual Executive Member Decision

Date ID to be signed: 8 August 2016

Portfolio Member: Councillor Hilary Cole

Forward Plan Ref: ID3149

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To seek permission from the Portfolio Holder to adopt the Council's Housing Grants and Loans Policy made under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance – England and Wales) Order 2002. This will supersede the current Private Sector Renewal Policy 2009.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Portfolio Holder gives approval to adopt the Housing Grants and Loans Policy.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Financial:** The Grants and Loans identified within this policy will be funded using current budget provision.
- 3.2 **Policy:** The Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy sets out the Council's policy in relation to private sector housing in West Berkshire. This includes disabled adaptations and other housing related grants and loans.
- 3.3 **Personnel:** N/A
- 3.4 **Legal:** Disabled facilities grants are mandatory, subject to criteria being met, under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 . The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) requires that the Council adopts a policy if it wishes to make use of the flexibilities offered (for example, offering discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants) under the Order.
- 3.5 **Risk Management:** N/A
- 3.6 **Property:** N/A

3.7 Other: N/A

4. Consultation Responses

- 4.1 The draft Housing Grants and Loans Policy was published for public consultation reaching out to members of the public and professionals involved in the grant process. The consultation commenced on the 9th May 2016 for a six week period, ending on the 19th June 2016.
- 4.2 Only one response was received to the Council's public consultation which was in relation to the Discretionary Home Repair Assistance Grant (HRA). This was an objection to an upper limit of £5,000 capital grant for facilitating works on an applicant's property, the responder requesting the limit should be set at £10,000.
- 4.3 In view of the fact that an eligible applicant can make an application every 3 years, plus the limited Budget available for many purposes is limited to £50,000, the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee Task Group reached a unanimous decision that the upper limit of £5,000 per capital grant was appropriate.
- 4.4 The feedback received from meetings with both Sovereign Housing and the Council's Occupational Therapists to the new policy changes was positive.

Members:

Leader of Council:	Councillor Roger Croft
Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman:	Councillor Emma Webster
Ward Members:	All Members
Opposition Spokesperson:	Councillor Alan Macro

Local Stakeholders: Noted above.

5. Other options considered

5.1 N/A

6. Introduction/Background

- 6.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that the private sector housing stock is safe and healthy. This policy sets out the criteria and conditions by which the Council will assist with essential repairs to improve living conditions in the private sector, complete mandatory and discretionary disabled adaptations and provide an overview of the assistance available to bring empty properties back into use.
- 6.2 The Housing Grants and Loans Policy made under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance – England and Wales) Order 2002 will replace the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2009.
- 6.3 As the most recent Private Sector Condition Survey did not identify any specific geographical areas or types of properties that present serious problems, the format of the new policy is client based, rather than theme based and focuses upon vulnerable people.
- 6.4 The following Grants and Loans form part of the policy:
- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (MDFG)
 - Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (DDFG)
 - Discretionary Home Repair Assistance Grant (HRA)
 - Flexible Home Improvement Loans (FHIL's)
 - Flexible Empty Homes Loans
 - Empty Home Private Sector Leasing Scheme
- 6.5 Vulnerability linked with age and disability can be a potential barrier to ensuring a property is in maintained in good repair. The policy is focused towards the qualifying criteria being linked to these vulnerabilities.

7. Supporting Information

- 7.1 The Housing Strategy 2010-2015 contains a priority around private sector renewal and associated targets for grant and loan delivery.

8. Options for Consideration

- 8.1 The Council could continue with the existing Policy, however, this is now out-of-date and does not make best use of the resources available for private sector renewal.

9. Proposals

- 9.1 This report is seeking permission from the Portfolio Holder for sign off of the new Grants and Loans policy.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder agrees to the Housing Grant and Loans policy being adopted on the 4th August 2016.

Background Papers:

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

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

Housing Strategy 2010-2015

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position

Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

Wards affected:

District wide Policy

Strategic Aims and Priorities Supported:

The proposals will help achieve the following Council Strategy aims:

X P&S – Protect and support those who need it

X HQL – Maintain a high quality of life within our communities

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Strategy priority:

X P&S1 – Good at safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Strategy aims and priority by supporting vulnerable households to maintain the condition of their property or seeking adaptations to make the home more suitable for their needs.

Officer details:

Name: Maureen Sheridan

Job Title: Private Sector Housing Officer

Tel No: 01635 519680

E-mail Address: Maureen.Sheridan@westberks.gov.uk

11. Executive Summary

- 11.1 The purpose of this policy is to explain the mandatory and discretionary housing grants and loans that are available to West Berkshire residents to assist them with the costs of adaptations, essential repairs and home improvements and to support the aims of the Housing Strategy to improve health and wellbeing by tackling poor housing conditions.
- 11.2 The EIA indicates that vulnerable older and disabled people should be able to access appropriate housing-related support and assistance to remain in their own homes in the private sector. This Policy sets out the criteria by which West Berkshire Council can assist these households and will aim to build services around this understanding to ensure that people receive services appropriate to their needs.
- 11.3 The Housing Grants and Loans Policy will supersede the expired Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2009.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 Appendix A – Draft Housing Grants and Loans Policy
- 12.2 Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment