

<b>REPORT TO</b>	<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>
<b>CABINET</b>	<b>10<sup>th</sup> September 2014</b>



<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>ITEM</b>
<b>Housing Assistance Policy 2014</b>	<b>Strategic Planning and Housing</b>	<b>Denise Johnson</b>	<b>7</b>

## **SUMMARY AND LINK TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

This report proposes the adoption of a new Housing Assistance Policy.

The proposed policy links with all of the Council's corporate priorities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That Cabinet recommend to Council that it adopt the Housing Assistance Policy 2014 (as appended to this report).
2. That the policy is published in accordance with the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and comes into effect after the date of publication
3. That the Council adopt the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996: Disabled Facilities Grant (Conditions Relating To Approval Or Payment Of Grant) General Consent Order 2008 ("the General Consent Order")
4. That the Council approve and adopt the grant conditions as outlined in the Appendix 1

## **Background**

The Council is the statutory Strategic Housing Authority. Although it has no stock of its own it has the responsibility for ensuring all housing in the Borough, irrespective of tenure, meets the requirements of the Housing Act 2004 and other relevant legislation. The Council needs to ensure it has the right policies in place to respond to changes in legislation, the changing housing stock and the changing needs of people and families living in their homes. There are currently over 45,000 properties in the Borough and this will increase with the proposals in the Local Development Framework.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 ("the RRO") gives Councils the power to provide assistance for the purpose of improving living conditions in the area. The Order allows assistance to be provided for improving property conditions.

This Housing Assistance Policy replaces the following existing documents.

Housing Improvement Policy 2004-2005	Approved 01.04.2005
Disabled Facilities Grant Policy April 2005	Approved 01.04.2005
Disabled Facilities Grant Policy May 2012	Approved 28.05.2012

## **Detail**

The Policy targets three areas:-

1. Properties that require improvements to energy efficiency
2. Properties that contain Category 1 hazards as defined in the Housing Act 2004
3. Properties that require adaptations (Disabled Facilities Grants)

This covering report outlines the changes to policy covering the three targeted areas above.

### **1 Properties that require improvements to energy efficiency.**

The Council has been successful in the past in tackling the problems faced by people living in homes that are not energy efficient. In 2012 the Department of Energy and Climate Change published national results of authorities recording levels of insulated housing stock in their Boroughs. South Ribble was recognised as 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the country. This brings health and wellbeing benefits to families and also environmental benefits overall.

This Policy sets out how the Council will continue to work on improving the energy efficiency of housing stock to the benefit of the families living there.

The Policy includes detailed information. In summary the Council will: -

- Produce its statutory Home Energy Conservation Act Action Plan to target those in most need. This is reported to Government every two years.
- The Council will continue to maximise external funding to deliver against this priority.
- The Council will continue to monitor energy efficiency standards in Housing Association properties
- The Council may take enforcement action when appropriate.

### **2 Properties that contain Category 1 hazards as defined in the Housing Act 2004.**

The Housing Act 2004 lists 29 hazards which may result in a Category 1 listing of a property. Category 1 is the most severe and is where the risk to the health of the people living there is substantial. Examples of what could result in a Category 1 hazard rating if the problem is severe enough are dampness, excess cold/heat: pollutants (eg asbestos, carbon monoxide), lack of space, security or lighting and poor hygiene facilities.

As the Strategic Housing Authority the Council has a statutory duty to act when it has knowledge of Category 1 hazards which could damage the health of the people living there. This duty covers all housing tenures. The action can range from advice to enforcement. The policy sets out what the Council will do to help protect these people by improvements to property.

- Advice to landlords on how to meet their statutory obligations for the maintenance and improvement of their property.
- Provision of advice for tenants of Housing Associations and private sector rented housing.
- Signposting to other advice and support services.
- Enforcement action may be taken.

### **3 Properties that require adaptations (Disabled Facilities Grants )**

#### Context

The Council has statutory responsibility for administering the delivery of the Disabled Facility Grant process. This is covered by legislation for which the Council receives a Government annual grant. The grant is for adaptations to the home to help people with disabilities remain in their homes. Although not confined to meeting requirements of older people, with an ageing population the demand for adaptations to properties will remain high.

Although the Council's responsibility for delivering the grant has not changed, there has been/will be changes to funding streams and partnership arrangements which this policy recognises. These changes are

- in 2015/16 the Government will give the funding to upper tier authorities as part of the Social Care legislative review.
- in March 2014 the partnership arrangement with Riverside Home Improvement Agency finished. This terminated as a result of the Home Improvement Service ceasing its contract with Lancashire County Council.

Discussions with the County Council are ongoing as to how the County will manage the funding given the legislation has not changed and the responsibility for delivery remains with the Borough Council. In the short term the County Council will transfer the grant across to the Borough Council. In the medium term this may change. The Social Care reforms aim to give the customer more of a choice in how they are supported. This Policy also gives the customer greater choice.

Overall the changes to the Policy aim to have the following outcomes:-

Managed "enquiry" and reduced "waiting" lists,  
Greater challenge and prioritisation,  
Improved communication to the customer,  
Improved transparency on who can and cannot get a grant,  
Clarification of statutory responsibility,  
A simplified and demystified process.

(A person gets on the "enquiry list " via an Occupational Therapists referral. An Occupational Therapist referral is the only way a person can get on the enquiry list. This is for both High priority and Standard priority referrals as defined by the Occupational Therapist. A person will only be accepted on the "waiting" list when the nationally set "test of resources" has been undertaken and the person meets the criteria and the policy requirements).

#### **The main changes**

- The service will be delivered in house.
- New arrangements have been introduced with joint visits with Occupational Therapists enabling challenge and appropriate targeting of limited resources.
- Within Council set parameters detailed in the policy, customers can choose how the grant work will be undertaken and by whom.
- Customers are given early information on eligibility to allow them to make choices.
- Information on the process has been reviewed and is more "customer friendly".
- Decision making is cut by half on the legal timetable. Legally decision making needs to be done in 6 months. This introduces a local timetable of 3 months.
- IT support has been improved
- Staff trained across services to give a greater resilience to the service provided to the customer.
- Improved reporting and monitoring procedures introduced.

<b>FINANCIAL</b>	<p>Disabled Facilities Grants expenditure is currently wholly funded from Disabled Facilities capital grant paid directly to local housing authorities.</p> <p>The contract with Riverside HIA ended in March 2014 and the Council are now administering the grants process. The agency costs were funded from Disabled Facilities capital grant and the in-house costs directly attributable to the provision of DFGs will also be funded from the grant.</p> <p>The funding allocation for 2014/15 is £249,715. In addition Governance Committee approved the carry forward of the balance of the 2013/14 allocation which wasn't committed in 2013/14 (£305,901) and therefore the total funding available for DFGs in 2014/15 is £555,616.</p> <p>From 2015/16 onwards, Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is to be included in the Better Care Fund which has been set up to support the integration of health and social care through pooled budget arrangements. DFG will be paid to upper-tier authorities in 2015/16 in the first instance. However the statutory duty on local housing authorities such as South Ribble to provide DFG to those who qualify for it will remain. Therefore under these new arrangements, each area will have to allocate this funding to their housing authorities from the pooled budget to enable them to continue to meet their statutory duty to provide adaptations.</p> <p>Special conditions will be added to the DFG Conditions of Grant Usage (under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003) which stipulate that, where relevant, upper-tier local authorities must ensure they cascade the DFG allocation to district council level in a timely manner such that it can be spent within year. Only indicative allocations for DFG funding in 2015/16 have been provided at this stage.</p>
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<b>LEGAL</b>	<p>The purpose of this report is to update our Housing Assistance policy to reflect changed working practices – in particular the fact that Riverside Home Improvement Agency are no longer involved in the delivery of disabled facilities grants.</p> <p>The policy is written to be fully compliant with all relevant legal duties and obligations.</p> <p>The policy will provide the framework in which we will operate.</p>
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<b>RISK</b>	<p>Risks have been mitigated through developing a scheme in accordance+with legislation, in consultation with partners and by imposing grant payment conditions.</p>
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<b>Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion</b>	<p>This policy aids some of the most vulnerable residents of our borough.</p>
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<i>Asset Management</i>	<i>Corporate Plans and Policies</i>	<i>Crime and Disorder</i>	<i>Efficiency Savings/Value for Money</i>
<i>Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion</i>	<i>Freedom of Information/ Data Protection</i>	<i>Health and Safety</i>	<i>Health Inequalities</i>
<i>Human Rights Act 1998</i>	<i>Implementing Electronic Government</i>	<i>Staffing, Training and Development</i>	<i>Sustainability</i>

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

South Ribble Borough Council Housing Assistance Policy 2014.