



**Policy, Finance
Development**

22 July 2014

For Approval

Title: **Private Sector Housing Renewals (Financial Assistance) Policy 2014/17**

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Introduction

The Regulatory Reform Order 2002 gave local authorities a discretionary power to provide assistance for housing renewal. However this power cannot be exercised unless a policy is in place.

The policy sets out how this Council provides mandatory and discretionary financial assistance to adapt or remove safety hazards from the homes of vulnerable residents. It also details how we can provide assistance to owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use providing much needed accommodation for our residents.

Although the aim is for vulnerable households to live in safe, warm and decent homes, this policy recognises that we can only provide discretionary assistance where we have available resources.

This policy is a revision of the former policy and will come into effect at 1st September 2014 and will apply to all enquiries made after 31st August 2014

Recommendations

Members are asked to approve the reviewed Private Sector Housing Renewals (Financial Assistance) Policy 2014/17 which has been recommended from Service Delivery Committee of 8 July 2014

Information

Disabilities Facility Grants (DFGs)

There is a general increase in the number of people living longer and with restricted mobility. It is also the case that children born with severe disabilities are surviving into later years and with the highly sophisticated equipment now available people are able to live independently in their own homes. Both of these factors generate more demand for DFG's.

DFGs are mandatory once a need has been identified; it is, therefore proposed that these grants take priority. The maximum grant is currently set at £30,000 and is means tested for adults but not for children. Adaptations costing more than the maximum of £30,000 are currently supplemented by a discretionary award.

Currently the Government allocate an amount for Local Authorities to provide the grants. This year, 2014/15, £143,000 was received which is less than what is required to fund the cases that are waiting to be approved. The Community Service area will submit a capital bid for additional funding to meet the current need. If this is not

available all urgent cases will be prioritised with the approval of Social Services, Occupational Health to be led by the Head of Community Service.

From 2015, DFG funding will be merged with the Better Care Fund which is part of an integrated fund following the merger of Public Health and Local Authority funds. The Community Service will ensure its bid for capital funding from this fund supports the aims of this policy and that it provides assistance to as many vulnerable people as possible.

In addition, the Health and Wellbeing Board is both monitoring and have contributed to the Leicester County Council submission to the Government on the Better Care Fund by linking the health and housing needs.

Hazard Removal Loans

The policy details financial assistance for property owners or occupiers in the private sector to remove significant health and safety hazards.

Many older people will have seen their retirement income reduced due to low interest rates since the financial crisis. These people are often asset rich but cash poor and can be living in unhealthy, cold and unsafe homes without the resources to carry out the repairs. The Local Authority can realise a significant return on investment by offering repayable grants to remove health and safety hazards in the homes of vulnerable people. Making homes safe can delay entry into the care system for several years. It can also prevent homelessness where the condition of their home is such that it is not safe for occupation. The grant will be secured against the property and is repayable within 20 years if the property is transferred or sold. The funds will have to be repaid so that it can be recycled to help other vulnerable people.

Empty Homes

Empty homes are a wasted resource that could provide much needed accommodation for our residents. The policy sets out how we would assist property owners to bring their empty property back into use if funding and assistance were available. Funding will be dependent on the Council being able to nominate appropriate and eligible tenants for a period of 5 years.

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Financial (PL)	CR5 Effective utilisation of resources/assets. In delivering the programme. Officers will seek to help the maximum number of households within the budget that is available.
Risk (APM)	CR6 Regulatory Governance. The Council is expected to determine the housing needs of its residents and to set a housing renewal policy in response to priorities within its private sector.
Equalities (KG)	An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and appropriate mitigation measures are being developed in respect of recognised identifiable vulnerable groups
Legal (KG)	Pursuant to appropriate legislation, a written policy is a requirement to ensure that Local Authorities are able to provide financial assistance to private sector owner occupiers and tenants