

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Housing and Major Projects Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel
MEETING DATE:	29 th May 2012
TITLE:	Home Health and Safety Policy 2012
WARD:	ALL
AN OPEN PUBLIC	
List of attachments to this report:	
Appendix 1: Proposed Home Health and Safety Policy 2012	

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Council is required to adopt and publish a housing renewal policy, referred to as The Home Health and Safety Policy in this report. This policy is periodically reviewed and revised as required. It sets out how Housing Services will provide assistance, including financial assistance, to help low-income, elderly, disabled and other vulnerable residents to undertake essential repairs and adaptations to their homes. The policy supports the aims of the Housing and Wellbeing Strategy 2012 – 2015, particularly around improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities within our communities.
- 1.2 The Council Cabinet adopted a revised policy on the 13th of July 2011 which takes into account the financial constraints caused by the withdrawal of Private Sector Renewal funding by Government. The Cabinet asked for the policy to be reviewed in 1 year.
- 1.3 This report to the Housing and Major Projects Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel proposes some changes to the Home Health and Safety Policy adopted last year.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Housing and Major Projects Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- 2.1 Note and comment on the proposed policy.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The funding for the proposed Home Health and Safety Policy 2012 is detailed in the Medium Term Financial Plan previously adopted by the Council. The total funding amounts to £165,000, comprising £45,000 from Housing Services efficiency savings and £120,000 from new monies for adult social care from the Department of Health. This does not include the empty property funding, the capital elements of which have provisionally been allowed for in the affordable housing funding agreed by Council.
- 3.2 In addition there is £900,000 of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding comprising £422,000 Government capital allocation and £478,000 revenue contribution. An agreement with Somer Housing also allows for an element of cost sharing on DFGs within their stock which is expected to contribute in excess of £100,000.

4 THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 provides local authorities with a general power to offer assistance to improve housing conditions. This assistance may take the form of financial grants, loans or any other type of help and support thought appropriate. Prior to making such assistance available it is a requirement that the Council must adopt and publish a housing renewal policy, referred to as the Home Health and Safety Policy in this document.
- 4.2 The recent, and at the time of writing still draft B&NES Housing Condition Survey 2011, identified some groups of residents experiencing poor housing conditions, including:
- Owner occupiers & private sector tenants over 65 years of age;
 - Lone parents with dependent children;
 - Owner occupiers on low income;
 - Residents with a disability; and
 - Vulnerable residents (as defined by being receipt of certain benefits).
- 4.3 The proposed Home Health and Safety Policy 2012 contained in Appendix 1 details a number of schemes aimed at the improvement of homes occupied by low-income, disabled, elderly and otherwise vulnerable households. The policy includes an urgent repairs service which responds to national evidence that targeted, small scale works, promptly delivered can have significant positive health benefits for older and vulnerable people.
- 4.4 The schemes of assistance are summarised below together with the proposed changes to the current policy:
- **advice and home visits** – to help vulnerable people decide what work is required to remedy serious hazards and property defects. There are no proposals for change;

- **mandatory disabled facilities grants (separately funded)** – adaptations to ensure the homes of disabled people are suitable for their needs. There are no proposals for change;
- **urgent repairs grants** – to fast track urgent and small repairs for vulnerable people to reduce illness and accident. The proposal for change is to describe eligible works as those that prevent accident or ill health instead of those that remedy Housing Health & Safety Rating System Category 1 hazard;
- **home improvement loans** – to help vulnerable residents undertake essential repairs and safety improvements for improved health and wellbeing. The proposals for change are: new eligibility for families with dependent children under 16 years of age; reducing length of home ownership required before being eligible for assistance from 2 years to 1 year; new Park Homes Loan product; and new capital loan product suitable for those with a faith which prevents the taking up of traditional loan products;
- **energy efficiency improvement** - home insulation and top up heating/insulation grants to help households with low income keep their homes warm and energy efficient. The proposals for change are to flag that assistance may change when Green Deal begins and also a new Wessex Energy Loan product;
- **community alarms grant** – to help vulnerable people feel safer in their homes by providing community alarms and key safes. There are no changes proposed; and
- **bringing empty homes back into use** – new section of policy covering assistance to encourage empty home owners to bring these homes back into use.

4.5 In summary these changes are driven by the views of stakeholders on service improvement and to respond to changes in legislation and other priorities. For the purposes of this policy a household is defined as vulnerable if the household is a low income household and, aged 60 or over or with a limiting long term illness or disability or has dependent children aged 16 years of age or less.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

6 EQUALITIES

The policy will assist vulnerable households in B&NES access financial assistance to carry out essential repairs and safety improvements and adapt their homes to meet their needs. It is proposed that resources will be aimed at low income residents that are 60 years of age or over or have a relevant disability affecting their ability to work or have dependent children of 16 years of age or less. An equalities impact assessment has been completed. The age related adverse impact is justified below.

6.1 Evidence available nationally and locally shows that the group described in 6 above are more vulnerable to many of the common housing health and safety hazards. Individuals under 60 and able bodied are more likely to be able to obtain work and fund the improvement themselves. Therefore resources are aimed at low income households and, aged 60 or over or with a limiting long term illness or disability or have dependent children of 16 years or age or less.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Cabinet Member; Overview & Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Service Users; Local Residents; Community Interest Groups; Stakeholders/Partners; Other Public Sector Bodies; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer

7.2 The consultation was carried out through circulation of a draft policy and questionnaire, face to face interviews, telephone interviews, emails and discussion at meetings.

8 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

8.1 Social Inclusion: Good quality, suitable housing increases social inclusion, particularly for children and older people on low income. It also assists with the maintenance of good health and comfort, reducing social exclusion caused by poor health and poor living conditions. These factors should reduce the demands on NHS B&NES.

8.2 Sustainability: Relatively small scale targeted intervention can prevent housing falling into excessive disrepair. Also energy efficiency improvements reduce carbon dioxide emissions and the likelihood of fuel poverty.

8.3 Young People: Good quality suitable housing improves the health and educational outcomes for children and young people.

8.4 Customer focus: This policy aims to help meet the needs of vulnerable residents in B&NES living in private sector homes with concerns about their housing conditions.

8.5 Health & Safety: The policy is underpinned by actions in the Housing and Wellbeing Strategy to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of vulnerable households in B&NES.

8.6 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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Background papers	
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