

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	<b>Cabinet</b>	
MEETING DATE:	<b>11th July 2012</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		<b>E 2402</b>
TITLE:	<b>Home Health and Safety Policy 2012</b>	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b>		
<b>Appendix 1 – Home Health and Safety Policy 2012</b>		

### **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 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 existing policy, agreed by Cabinet on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2011, has been reviewed. This was a requirement of the original decision. This report proposes some enhancements to the policy.

### **2 RECOMMENDATION**

The Cabinet agrees that:

- 2.1 The proposed Home Health and Safety Policy 2012 attached to this report is adopted as the Council's Housing Renewal 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 adult social care.
- 3.2 There is £900,000 of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding comprising £422,000 Government capital allocation and £478,000 revenue contribution. In addition an agreement with Somer Housing provides for an element of cost sharing on DFG funded adaptations within their own stock. This will mean that actual DFG expenditure is likely to be around £1m.

### **4 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone*

The policy aims to improve the housing conditions of the most vulnerable residents in our community. It deals with Council assistance to remove serious housing health and safety hazards such as problems keeping homes warm, dangerous stairs and steps and fire safety issues. The policy also deals with the administration of the Disabled Facilities Grant which provides assistance to install adaptations and equipment to help maintain independent living. Assistance to install certain energy efficiency measures is also included in the policy. The assistance is subject to eligibility criteria which are related to low income and vulnerability.

### **5 THE REPORT**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 In 2011/12 Housing Services helped 1079 people to remain independent and safe in their own homes. This comprises of: 262 DFG's; 734 energy efficiency measures; and 83 home repair & safety measures.
- 5.3 Disabled facility grants help people remain independent and safe in their own homes rather than move to supported housing or residential care. In a recent case a gentleman who was paralysed in a traffic accident and had become a permanent wheelchair user was provided with an external lift, ceiling track hoist and alterations to the ground floor so that he could get into his house and move between rooms. The external lift was installed before the gentleman's hospital discharge date to enable him to return home.
- 5.4 The policy also provides for loans to allow low-income and vulnerable owner occupiers to undertake essential safety repairs. For example, an elderly gentleman was living in a property without heating and without a usable kitchen.

Being unable to afford the repairs he was forced to move in with his sister and her family, which in turn created stress for the sister. Housing Services worked with the gentleman and his sister to provide a low-interest loan for the repair works. This meant the gentleman could move back home and continue to live at home and his sister and her family were able to resume normal living. Based upon national research<sup>1</sup> the £165,000 of home repair & safety investment is estimated to save B&NES PCT and social services around £600,000 p.a. by reducing hospital admissions, visits to GPs & social care interventions.

5.5 The existing 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 and make it explicit that repairs to mechanical adaptations, such as stair lifts, can be included;
- **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

5.6 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 terminal illness or disability or has dependent children aged 16 years of age or less.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chartered Institute Environmental Health - Good Housing Leads to Good Health (2008)  
*Printed on recycled paper*

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

## **7 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 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed. Adverse impacts were identified and have been justified below.

- 7.1 Evidence available nationally and locally shows that the vulnerable group described 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 normally aimed at low income households and, aged 60 or over or with a limiting long term illness or terminal illness or disability or have dependent children of 16 years or age or less.

## **8 RATIONALE**

- 8.1 The Council is required to adopt and publish a housing renewal policy, referred to as The Home Health and Safety Policy in this report. The implementation of the policy will enable financial assistance to be allocated according to Council priorities and current housing need.

## **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 None.

## **10 CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 Cabinet members; Overview & Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Service Users; Local Residents; Community Interest Groups; Stakeholders/Partners; Section 151 Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer.

The consultation was carried out though a mixture of questionnaires, telephone conversations, email and meetings with staff, partners and community interest groups. This consultation informed the policy including a range of technical

changes and wording clarifications. These included references to terminal illness, mental health within the family rather than just applicant.

## **11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION**

11.1 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 health care funders and providers.

11.2 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.

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

11.4 Customer focus. This policy aims to help meet the housing needs of residents in B&NES.

11.5 Health and 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.

## **12 ADVICE SOUGHT**

12.1 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.

<b>Contact person</b>	Chris Mordaunt (01225 396282)
<b>Sponsoring Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Tim Ball
<b>Background papers</b>	None
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	