

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Housing and Major Projects Policy Development & Overview Panel	
MEETING DATE:	2 nd August 2011	AGENDA ITEM NUMBER
TITLE:	Housing Renewal Policy	
WARD:	ALL	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Home Health and Safety Policy		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Council is required to adopt and publish a Housing Renewal Policy. 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. The policy as written supports the aims of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Housing and Wellbeing Strategy 2010-2015, particularly around improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities within our communities.
- 1.2 Due to budgetary constraints, caused by the Government withdrawing a key funding stream, Cabinet was asked to adopt this revised policy as a matter of priority on the 13th July 2011. This was agreed. It was further agreed that the policy would be reviewed in 1 year.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Housing and Major Projects Panel is asked to:

- 2.1 Note and comment on the adopted policy.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The funding for the Home Health and Safety Policy 2011 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.
- 3.2 In addition there is £1m of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant funding comprising £422,000 Government capital allocation and £578,000 revenue contribution.

4 THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & 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. All applications for housing grants, loans and other forms of housing assistance will be judged against this policy.
- 4.2 It is important to remember that the worst housing conditions are found in the private sector. Indeed the Bath & North East Somerset House Condition Survey (2004), which is currently being updated, indicated that almost 1 in 4 owner-occupied properties do not meet the Government Decent Homes standard, often due to poor thermal efficiency. This compares to the current figure for social tenancies of around 1 in 20. The survey also confirmed that poorer housing conditions were associated with older households. National evidence also suggests that almost 1 in 5 of all households now live in fuel poverty.
- 4.3 For over 20 years the Government has funded this area of work using a number of funding mechanisms, most recently through the Regional Housing Pot allocation. During the last few years our allocation has remained around £580,000 p.a., though in 2010/11, and following a successful additional bid, we were allocated £689,000. However, the new coalition government have now withdrawn this funding stream. Given that this programme is targeted towards the most vulnerable in our community we have secured, through efficiency savings and social services funding, a much reduced funding allocation to protect some of the most vulnerable residents in our community.
- 4.4 The proposed Home Health and Safety Policy 2011, contained in the appendix, is therefore a significantly revised and trimmed version of the existing Housing Renewal Policy. The principle changes have been to further restrict both client eligibility and eligible works. However, we have attempted to be creative, and based upon national evidence which suggests that highly targeted, small scale works, promptly delivered can have significant positive health benefits for elderly and vulnerable clients, have created and commissioned an "urgent repairs" service.
- 4.5 The policy now comprises six schemes aimed at the improvement of unsuitable homes occupied by low-income, disabled, elderly and otherwise vulnerable households. These are:

- advice and home visits – to help vulnerable people decide what work is required to remedy serious hazards and property defects;
- Mandatory Disabled Facilities grants (separately funded) – adaptations to ensure the homes are disabled people are suitable for their access needs;
- urgent repairs grants - to fast track urgent and small repairs for vulnerable people thus reducing negative health impacts through illness or accident;
- home improvement loans – to help vulnerable residents undertake essential repairs and safety improvements that help to keep them safe and well at home;
- home insulation and top up heating/insulation grants to help households with low income keep their homes warm and energy efficient;
- community alarms grant – to help vulnerable people feel safer in their homes by providing community alarms and key safes.

4.6 In summary these changes driven by an increased focus on the health and wellbeing of B&NES residents, the loss of the capital grant from Government for Housing Renewal, together with the views of staff and service users on improvements to the service. For the purposes of this policy a household is defined as vulnerable if the household is a low income household and, aged over 60 or with a limiting long term illness or disability.

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

6.1 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 for essential repairs and safety improvements will be aimed at low income residents that are over 60 years of age or a have a relevant disability affecting their ability to work. An equalities impact assessment has been carried out.

6.2 Evidence shows that older and disabled householders 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 over 60 or with a limiting long term illness or disability.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Cabinet Member; Parish Council; Councillors; 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 were consulted during the development of this policy.

7.2 The consultation was carried out using meetings, a questionnaire and the circulation of draft policy.

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 housing needs of residents in B&NES.

8.5 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.

9 ADVICE SOUGHT

9.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Council Solicitor) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input into the single member decision report on which this report has been based.

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Background papers	
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