



Report Reference Number: PR/21/10

To: Policy Review Committee
Date: 11 January 2022
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Lead Executive Member: Councillor Mark Crane, Leader of the Council and
Lead Executive Member for Housing, Leisure,
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Lead Officer: June Rothwell, Head of Operational Services

Title: Draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021-23

Summary:

This report has come to Committee to allow Members to review the draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021-23 and provide feedback as part of the consultation process. Whilst responsibility for maintaining privately owned homes rests primarily with their owners, the policy recognises that some owners (particularly the elderly and vulnerable) do not always have the necessary resources to repair or improve their homes. The powers afforded under Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gives the Council greater freedoms to provide financial assistance in these cases, for adaptations, essential home repairs or to improve housing conditions to benefit an individual's health and wellbeing.

Recommendation:

That the Policy Review Committee note the draft policy and provide any and all relevant feedback as part of the consultation process, before the draft is returned to Executive, expected in March 2022.

Reasons for recommendation:

To allow the Committee to consider current service provision and the ways in which the new policy could improve services for residents, helping to encourage improvement in private housing choice and quality across the district and enable independent living wherever possible.

1 Introduction and background

1.1 Stock condition work completed in the district in 2017 showed that there are 39,423 dwellings in Selby. Notably, almost 6000 of those in the private sector were categorised as having a Category 1 safety hazard (equating to 17% of total private stock). The total cost of mitigating these hazards was estimated to be £20.9 million, whilst the cost to the NHS and wider society of treating accidents and ill-health caused by such hazards was estimated to be £14.4 million per year.

1.2 However, it is often the case that removing Category 1 hazards requires relatively inexpensive housing solutions which can save organisations thousands if it prevents an accident or further health issues. The table below shows the total cost of mitigating Category 1 hazards by tenure in the Selby district and the average cost per private dwelling:

Housing Type	Hazard	Cost of Mitigating Hazards				Avg. cost per dwelling
		Total Private Stock	Owner Occupied	Private Rented	IMD Lowest 20%	
Damp and mould growth		£380,823	£276,754	£104,069	£6,862	£7,016
Excess cold		£17,019,878	£14,400,326	£2,619,552	£38,452	£4,807
Crowding and space		£24,687	£17,940	£6,746	£445	£16,646
Entry by intruders		£43,723	£31,774	£11,948	£788	£1,137
Domestic hygiene, pests, refuse		£16,010	£11,635	£4,375	£288	£895
Food safety		£31,451	£22,857	£8,595	£567	£2,948
Personal hygiene, sanitation, drainage		£19,332	£14,049	£5,283	£348	£1,185
Falls associated with baths etc.		£0	£0	£0	£0	£531
Falling on level surfaces etc.		£571,221	£448,961	£122,261	£9,853	£972
Falling on stairs etc.		£2,114,161	£1,661,660	£452,502	£36,465	£1,029
Falling between levels		£80,390	£58,421	£21,968	£1,448	£924
Electrical hazards		£11,332	£8,228	£3,094	£204	£1,646
Fire		£400,433	£291,005	£109,428	£7,215	£4,748
Flames, hot surfaces etc.		£189,222	£137,513	£51,709	£3,409	£2,049
Collision and entrapment		£21,037	£15,288	£5,749	£379	£597
TOTAL		£20,923,690	£17,396,411	£3,527,279	£106,724	

1.3 With this in mind, the aim of this policy is to encourage improvement in private sector housing choice and quality across the district, primarily through support and assistance. The Council will seek to:

- help owner-occupiers maintain and repair their homes;
- remove or reduce housing related defects that are detrimental to health;

- assist people whose independence may be at risk, to remain in or return to their homes;
- boost domestic energy efficiency to reduce the number of households in fuel poverty, improve heating and reduce carbon dioxide levels;
- encourage and enable private landlords to provide good quality and well managed properties for their tenants;
- maximise the use of existing housing stock to increase housing choice across the district; and
- increase the number of empty properties brought back into use, particularly where this can be used to relieve homelessness.

2 Policy Headlines

2.1 Selby District Council will provide information and advice to assist any person to improve, repair, adapt or rebuild residential premises. However, we also recognise that there may be occasions where it is both necessary and appropriate to provide financial assistance to support this work. The policy details the various types of assistance available to applicants, along with information relating to eligibility criteria, typical works, maximum grant amount, the application process, and any conditions relating to the assistance. The policy details both the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) as well as other forms of discretionary assistance afforded under the Regulatory Reform Order.

2.2 The policy does contain new as well as modified forms of assistance compared with the previous policy. For example, 'Discretionary Adaptations Assistance' has always existed and includes works under a DFG that may otherwise not be eligible for assistance via the traditional route. However, budgets have increased, as well as now offering relocation assistance to an applicant where adaptation is not suitable in their current property for whatever reason. Healthy Homes Assistance is then a new initiative, generally relating to the removal of, or help to remedy, defects or deficiencies within the home that impact on health. The hope is this will ultimately prevent applicants from having to require additional health and social care provisions which would no doubt cost both the Council and its partners considerably more.

Funding information

2.3 The table below shows the amount of funding made available to the Council each year via the Better Care Fund, which in turn will fund the various assistance schemes detailed in the policy:

Year	Grant Allocation	Total Budget Available	Total budget spent
2016/17	£196,000	£ 358,870	£ 276,600
2017/18	£346,958	£ 448,206	£ 179,173
2018/19	£411,094	£ 668,203	£ 440,093
2019/20	£443,595	£ 630,445	£ 347,397
2020/21	£443,595	£ 726,643	£ 302,624
2021/22	£503,327	£ 816,977	

2.4 Discretionary assistance will only be awarded to households where a disabled or vulnerable person is resident, ensuring the Council targets residents (and properties) most in need. Availability is also subject to the Council's annual budget setting procedure and the availability of sufficient levels of external funding. All payments are at the Council's discretion and will be removed once available funds are exhausted.

3 Consultation

3.1 Approval to consult on the draft policy was provided via Executive Members on 2 December 2021. The policy has subsequently been provided to key operational and strategic NYCC staff, important equalities groups based in the district and front-line staff who will be expected to support customers through the new process. An online questionnaire is also available on the Council's website.

3.2 As part of the consultation process, we have been asked to submit both the Adaptations (DFG) Policy 2021 and Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy to Policy Review Committee for additional feedback.

3.3 A timetable for consultation and reapproval is detailed below:

Dates	Events
02/12/2021	Draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021 at Executive for consultation approval.
06/12/2021 – 31/12/2021	Consultation with residents and stakeholders – including Policy Review.
13/01/2022 – 17/01/2022	Time taken to consider feedback and make changes.
28/01/2022	Final policy to be discussed at Leadership Team
17/02/2022	Final policy at Executive Briefing.
03/03/2022	Policy taken back to Executive for final approval.

4 Alternative Options Considered

None.

5 Implications

5.1 Legal Implications

Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 requires local housing authorities to consider housing conditions in their area, having regard to the needs of chronically sick and disabled persons, including the adaptation of existing accommodation.

This policy is made under Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 Statutory Instrument No.1860. This gives local authorities a general power to provide 'assistance' 'in any form'

to 'any person' through the introduction of policies relating to renewals, repairs and adaptations in private homes, through grants or loans.

5.2 Financial Implications

The financial assistance included within the policy is largely discretionary (other than the mandatory DFG award). The policy makes it clear that, at times of high demand, assistance schemes may be amended, suspended, or removed entirely, to ensure that the Council can meet its statutory responsibilities.

5.3 Policy and Risk Implications

N/A

5.4 Corporate Plan Implications

N/A

5.5 Resource Implications

Under our previous policy, much of the work was undertaken by the Council's Private Sector Officer (1 FTE). However, it is expected that assistance will also be provided via the Council's Empty Homes Officer, Technical Officer and DFG Co-Ordinator. No further additional resource is expected to be required.

5.6 Other Implications

N/A

5.7 Equalities Impact Assessment

Under the Equality Act 2010, local authorities must demonstrate 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty, working to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

An Equality, Diversity, and Community Impact Screening was completed on 22/06/2021. It notes that local authorities have an important role to play in providing assistance in relevant cases where residents are particularly vulnerable; this could be due to age, ill health or low income, for example. The policy is an updated document which provides additional forms of assistance for such people. This could be through an advice service or through financial assistance, in the hope of positively impacting upon an applicant's health and wellbeing and/or the condition of the property they live in.

6 Conclusion

Poor quality housing has both negative impacts on the health of occupants as well as on the quality of life in an area. Whilst responsibility for maintaining privately owned homes rests primarily with their owners, particularly elderly and vulnerable residents do not always have the necessary resources to repair or improve their homes. This can lead to poor health, dangerous properties and a limited private stock. However, through the use of this policy and the various advice and assistance schemes it offers, we aim to:

- improve housing conditions across the Selby district;
- increase the number of residents who are able to live independently and safely at home; and
- improve the health and wellbeing of people living within the Selby district.

7 Background Documents

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2018-2020

8 Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021-23

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