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To:	Policy Review
Date:	16 December 2019
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Lead Executive Member:	Cllr Chris Pearson, Lead Member for Housing Health and Culture
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Title: Private Housing Assistance Policy

Summary:

The Private Housing Assistance Policy 2018-2023 was approved by Executive on 12 April 2018. The aim of the policy was to improve housing conditions across the Selby District and to help people manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently for as long as possible. To support this aim a number of new discretionary grants and loans were introduced and this report focuses on the implementation of this new financial support.

Recommendations:

That Policy Review consider and comment on the report.

Reasons for recommendation:

To provide the Policy Review Committee with performance information relating to the implementation of the Private Housing Assistance Policy.

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1** The Selby District Council Private Housing Assistance Policy 2018-2023 (the Policy) is made under Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 Statutory Instrument No.1860 (the RRO). The RRO radically changed the way in which government sought to encourage private home improvement in England and Wales.

The RRO swept away much of the prescriptive nature of previous legislation (The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996) and replaced it with a general power allowing local authorities to provide “assistance” “in

any form” “to any person”, to improve, repair, adapt or rebuild residential premises.

The RRO reflects the view that it is primarily the responsibility of private owners to maintain their own property but it recognises that some owners, particularly the elderly and most vulnerable, do not have the necessary resources to repair or improve their homes. Local authorities therefore have an important role to play in providing assistance in these cases.

1.2 Through a mix of support, financial assistance and enforcement, the Policy seeks to:

- Help owner-occupiers to maintain and repair their homes
- Assist people whose independence may be at risk to remain in or return to their homes
- Boost domestic energy efficiency and reduce the number of households in fuel poverty
- Encourage private landlords to provide good quality and well managed properties for their tenants
- Maximise the use of the existing housing stock to increase housing choice across the district.

1.3 The award of any financial assistance under this Policy is subject to the availability of funding having regard to the capacity of the approved budget and this may vary on an annual basis. All financial assistance (excluding Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant) is provided at the discretion of the Council.

1.4 The current policy was approved and adopted in April 2018 and it introduced some discretionary grants and loans to help deliver the policy aims.

2. Private Housing Assistance

2.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)

How the grant works

2.1.1 This grant is available to help private sector owner occupiers and tenants adapt their home to help meet the needs of a disabled occupant. Typical work might include the provision of a stair-lift, the replacement of a bath with a level access shower or provision of ramps to entrance doors. Eligibility of the grant is based on an assessment of the disabled person’s need carried out by an Occupational Therapist.

2.1.2 The DFG funding allocation is currently contained within the Better Care Fund which is paid to upper tier local authorities. Within two tier areas the housing authority (i.e. Selby District Council) and the social care authority (North Yorkshire County Council) have established new working relationships to manage the DFG funding as the legal responsibility for provision of DFG remains with the local housing authority.

- 2.1.3 DFG is a mandatory entitlement and the Council cannot refuse an application which fulfils the eligibility criteria. They are, however, subject to a legal maximum grant limit of £30,000 and to a mandatory Test of Resources to determine the level of any financial contribution to be made by the applicant.
- 2.1.4 Whilst the Mandatory DFG is subject to a test of resources, the Council is now using discretionary powers to provide a Discretionary DFG without a test of resources for all works costing under £5,000. Eligibility for the grant is still based on an assessment of the disabled person's needs carried out by the Occupational Therapist but overall the time taken to process the application is reduced.
- 2.1.5 In addition, we may offer further financial assistance where the cost of eligible works exceeds the legal maximum DFG limit of £30,000.

Administration

- 2.1.6 Since April 2018 the full administration including the means testing, design and procuring of the contractors to complete works transferred back in house and is delivered directly by Selby District Council. The staff members who transferred were incorporated into the Lifeline Service in August 2018 to maximise efficiency and promote both services.

Key results

- 2.1.7 The introduction of the Discretionary DFG and the move to bring the service in house has reduced the time taken to process the grants and improved results for the customer.
- **44** individuals and their families have directly benefited from the discretionary policy removing the test of resources up to £5,000
 - The average cost of the Discretionary DFG (no means test) DFG is £4,150
 - The process from approval to completion significantly improved and is down from 127 to 79 days (*adaptation completed in an average of 15.8 weeks, 7 weeks sooner than previous years*)
 - Completions up by 137% - *up from 24 to 57 in the year (taking into account the additional approvals in 2018/19 to total completions for the year will be 68, 183% increase)*

Year	Total budget Available	Total budget spent	Applications approved in the year	DFGs completed in year	Under 5k approved in year	Working days from application to completion
2016/17	£358,870	£276,600	N/A	42	N/A	129
2017/18	£448,206	£179,173	N/A	24	N/A	127
2018/19	£668,203	£440,093	68	57	48	79
2019 -YTD	£644,629	£221,347	32	26	18	65

The projected spend for 2019/2020 is **£477,000**

2.2 Repair Assistance Scheme (RAS) Loan

How the loan works

2.2.1 The Repair Assistance Scheme is a discretionary loan available to homeowners to provide urgent or emergency repairs to alleviate imminent health and safety hazards. Loans are available up to **£6,000**.

2.2.2 The loan is available to those unable to afford monthly repayments and is repayable upon sale of the property. The loan amount is subject to a Test of Resources to determine the level of any financial contribution to be made by the applicant.

Administration

2.2.3 Following completion of the works a charge is added to the property and it is repaid on sale. Any loans repaid are recycled.

Key results

2.2.4 In **19/20** the available budget is **£30,000** and in the first half of the year **6** RAS Loans have completed and have been used to repair defective boilers, improve inadequate kitchen facilities and rectify damp.

2.2.5 Actual spend

Year	Budget	Actual	Repayments	Total spend
2018/19	£30,000	£10,322	£12,407	-£2,085
2019 -YTD	£30,000	£28,841	£8,251	£20,591

2.3 Empty Home Grant/Loan

How the grants and loans work

2.3.1 The Empty Homes Loan is available to help home-owners bring their long-term empty properties back into use. The property must be in a location and be of a type and size that the Council deem to be appropriate to the housing

needs of the district. Any property owner can apply for a grant or a loan but the conditions attached differ depending on which product they choose.

2.3.2 Owners can borrow up to £15,000 per property interest free, with no repayments during the loan period, no interest charges and no charges for early repayment. Loans are available if the relevant person is the freeholder of the empty property or a leaseholder with at least 50 years remaining on the lease. A charge is added to the property and repaid at point of sale.

2.3.3 An Empty Homes Grant of up to £15,000 per property is available to owners who agree to let the property throughout a five year period. It must be let at an affordable rent to tenants with a local connection on a minimum twelve month fixed-term, assured shorthold tenancy. A charge is added to the property.

Key results

2.3.4 Empty Homes Grants and loans are proving a successful financial tool to bring long term empty homes back into use. The grant also offers wider benefits and in addition to directly increasing the availability of affordable housing, it is proving the most successful way of discharging homeless duties into the private sector.

2.3.5 18/19

The new Empty Homes grants and loans were introduced with the Policy in April 2018 and take up was initially slow but in 2018/19 **3** properties were brought back in to use through a grant or a loan and total spend was **£27,020**.

2.3.6 19/20

Following promotion of the Empty Homes Programme and our Housing Options Tenant Find service we have had increased interest in Empty Homes Grants and Loans.

In 2019/20 we have already brought **3** properties back into use through the use of grants and loans and a further grant is approved and in progress.

To date we have spent **£27,461** and a further **£15,000** is approved and committed therefore the total committed spend is **£37,461**.

2.3.7 Actual spend

Year	Loans (Total spend)	Grants (Total spend)	Total number of Empty Homes brought back into use	Total Spend
2018/19	£8,225.67	£18,794.33	3	£27,020
2019 - YTD	£6,000	£21,461	3	£27,461

2.3.8 At this stage we have not received any repayments for any Loans paid. Grants are not usually repayable but are subject to conditions.

2.3.9 We are currently considering further grant and loan applications that would bring another 5 units into use and therefore the total projected spend for 19/20 is **£77,461.**

3. Implications

3.1 Legal Implications

This report provides information on the implementation of the Private Assistance Policy therefore there are no specific legal implications associated with this report.

3.2 Financial Implications

Although there are no specific financial implications associated with this report it should be noted that any discretionary grants and loans are subject to the approved budget and availability of funding.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The aim of the Private Housing Assistance Policy was to improve housing conditions across the Selby District and to help people manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently for as long as possible.

Through the use of Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants we have reduced the time taken to process the grant and have thereby improved the service our customers have received and helped meet their needs quicker.

The Repair Assistance Loans and Empty Homes Grants and Loans have directly improved housing conditions in private sector and brought previously empty properties back into use.

6. Appendices

Appendix A - Private Housing Assistance Policy 2018/23

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