

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy  Introduced by the Executive member for Partnerships and Planning	Executive Cabinet	23 February 2012

## **REVIEW OF EXISTING PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY 2010 - 2012**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The above policy is scheduled to be reviewed this year and the purpose of this report is two fold. Firstly, the report outlines and seeks approval from Members to the proposed changes to the policy to reflect new schemes which have been set up since the policy was last approved, for example, the Handy Person service and changes in relation to Energy Efficiency measures. Secondly, the report updates members on the current position regarding Disabled Facilities Grants (which forms part of the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy) and the proposed way forward.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. The Executive Cabinet are asked to:
  - (i) Approve the proposed changes to the policy detailed in section 11 of this report and note that the section on Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) is still to be completed;
  - (ii) Approve the start of negotiations with Registered Providers (RPs), previously known as Housing Associations, to develop a 'local agreement' whereby the Council and RPs share the cost of major adaptations (those costing over £1000) on a 50/50 basis funded from the DFG budget.
  - (iii) Note that a further report on DFGs and the associated policy will be presented to the Cabinet meeting in March outlining progress on the local agreement and options in relation to the prioritisation of DFG cases and funding options.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT**

3. The report outlines the proposed changes to the existing Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy in the light of changes and improvements to the energy efficiency grants and handy person scheme. The report also sets out some of the changes which could impact on the Council's policy and funding relating to Disabled facilities Grants and, seeks endorsement from members to pursue a local agreement with RPs to jointly fund major adaptations in their social rented housing stock.

<b>Confidential report</b>	Yes	No
<b>Key Decision?</b>	Yes	No

<b>Reason</b>	1, a change in service provision that impacts upon the service revenue budget by £100,000 or more	2, a contract worth £100,000 or more
	3, a new or un-programmed capital scheme of £100,000 or more	<b>4, Significant impact in environmental, social or physical terms in two or more wards</b>

### REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

4. To update the policy to reflect the changes and improvements made in relation to Energy Efficiency grants and the new Handy Person Scheme.

To enable the Council to develop an effective policy regarding the provision of DFG's in the light of unexpected increase in demand.

### ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

5. None.

### CORPORATE PRIORITIES

6. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Strong Family Support		Education and Jobs	
Being Healthy		Pride in Quality Homes and Clean Neighbourhoods	<b>X</b>
Safe Respectful Communities		Quality Community Services and Spaces	
Vibrant Local Economy		Thriving Town Centre, Local Attractions and Villages	
A Council that is a consistently Top Performing Organisation and Delivers Excellent Value for Money			<b>X</b>

### BACKGROUND

7. The Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy outlines Chorley Council's policy in relation to the provision of information, advice and support to homeowners, tenants of private rented properties and private landlords regarding the repair, improvement and adaptation of their property. There are four main strands of activity namely, Disabled Facilities Grants; Minor Repairs Assistance; Energy Efficiency Assistance and the Handy Person Scheme. The Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is reviewed every two years and as a consequence, the current policy is due for review this year.
8. Members may recall that the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) was previously run by Anchor. However, in April 2010 the Council brought the Agency back in-house within the Strategic Housing Service. In August 2011 the Agency was accredited by Foundations which is the national body for HIAs. Accreditation is evidence of the effectiveness of the Agency. Following an internal audit last year the Agency was also awarded a finding of 'substantial assurance'.
9. Since the Council has taken over responsibility the service has continued to develop. In particular, the Council has negotiated with the insulation provider Rheingold, to extend the availability of free insulation for home owners and in August 2011, the Council launched a

handy person service in partnership with Preston Care and Repair. To date the service is carrying out more than 40 repairs per month and customer satisfaction levels are high.

10. More recently, in partnership with LCC, the Council successfully bid for Warm Homes/Healthy People funding to enable Preston Care & Repair to carry out a warm homes check, draught proofing work and heating system maintenance.

## **POLICY UPDATE**

11. The Policy attached at Appendix 1 updates the demographic profile and makes reference to the recent Private Sector Stock Condition Survey and has been revised to reflect in the main, the changes and improvements to the services outlined above. In particular, the proposed revised policy:
  - Updates the information in relation to the Energy Efficiency grants available, namely that the Council is now able to offer free cavity wall and loft insulation to any home owner and private sector tenant as a result of the energy companies seeking to reduce their Carbon Emission Reduction Targets. Previously free insulation was targeted at the elderly and those families on low incomes;
  - Provides details on the Handy Person Scheme which was set up in August last year.
  - Proposes replacing the current Appeals process with the Council's complaints procedure. Currently appeals would require a panel of members to be brought together to consider the appeal. Replacing this approach with the normal complaints procedure would provide a consistent approach across the Council and is also less daunting for complainants than the appeal process.

## **DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS**

12. As stated earlier in the report the Private Sector Assistance Policy will also cover the Council's approach to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). However, the detail on DFGs i.e. eligibility, service standards, etc is still to be included in the policy as further work is required before proposed revisions to the current policy can be made. The reasons for this position are set out below.
13. Members may be aware that the Council has a Statutory Duty under Part 1 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to provide specialist adaptations to meet the care and mobility needs of people with disabilities to help them live independently. The funding of such adaptations is via the Disabled Facilities Grant Funding pot which we receive from the Government (circa £250k per annum). In recent years this fund has been increased by the Council by using Regional Housing Pot monies (in the region of £100k p.a). This has allowed us in the main to meet demand from the private sector.
14. Historically, it has been custom and practice locally, that the registered providers of social housing, of which there are several in Chorley, have themselves, despite it being a legal duty of the Council, funded the cost of adaptation within their housing stock. For example, CCH committed to providing £250k p.a. for the first five years of the contract to funding adaptations for the transferred properties. This approach is recognised as good practice and encouraged by the Tenant Services Authority who oversee the Registered Providers. However, there is no requirement for RPs to do so or any sanctions if they do not.
15. In recent months the Council has seen a noticeable increase in the number of enquiries from tenants of social rented properties regarding adaptations needs, who in some instances have been sign posted by their RP to contact the Council directly to fund works at the RP's property. From preliminary discussions with RPs we are also aware that some RPs have a considerable waiting list for adaptations. Based on this shift in approach and

given that the ageing population is expected to increase in coming years coupled with the general view that where possible people should be supported to stay in their own home as long as possible, it is anticipated that demand for DFGs from the social rented sector in particular, is likely to increase.

16. In order seek to accommodate this potential demand and ensure that the limited funds available are maximised, it is recognised as good practice for Councils to set up local agreements with RPs whereby the costs of major adaptations are shared between the two organisations. With this in mind members are asked to endorse that the Council commences negotiations with the RPs to establish a local agreement to fund DFGs in social rented stock, whereby the Council and RPs share the cost of major adaptations (those costing over £1000k) on a 50/50 basis. Adaptations below £1000 would be funded by the RP.
17. In addition to the anticipated increase in demand for adaptations in social rented stock, there have also been changes in approach at Lancashire County Council (LCC) who act as the gateway for assessing and referring customers for disabled adaptations. Previously, all customers accessing adult social care services (which includes DFGs) and assessed with 'critical', 'substantial' and 'moderate' needs who required an adaptation would be referred to Chorley Council to fund the works and LCC would be involved in all the relevant stages until the works were completed. Under the raised eligibility criteria LCC By raising the eligibility threshold for accessing adult social care services to only 'substantial' and 'critical'
18. During 2011, in response to an increasing demand from across the county on their respective adult social care budgets, LCC raised the eligibility threshold for accessing adult social care services to only 'substantial' and 'critical' This means that they will continue to refer through and be involved at the relevant stages with those eligible customers who requiring Disabled Facilities Grant assistance. However, whilst LCC have stated that they will still refer customers with moderate needs when identified, they will not provide the follow up support and involvement. Given this change in eligibility criteria it is currently unclear what impact this will have in terms of the number of referrals from LCC.
19. In the light of the potential changes in demand for DFGs from both LCC and the RPs we are currently in the process of gathering further information on current and predicted demand for adaptations from both areas. Once all of this information is considered a further report will be presented to Members, together with options in terms of policy, prioritisation and funding requirements.

## IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

20. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance	X	Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	X	Integrated Impact Assessment required?	X
No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	

## COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

21. The updated policy items all have budget attached which allow delivery. The policy to work with RSL's over the cost allocation of DFG's will ultimately mean less pressure on the Council's resources.

## COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

22. There are no comments.

## COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF POLICY

23. An Integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken which showed that in respect of the Handy Person service consideration needs to be given as to how people with hearing difficulties access the service. This issue was discussed at the Equalities Forum in January when it was suggested that the service should extend the methods by which service requests can be made beyond telephone to include email, text and fax. Preston Care and Repair who run the service on behalf of the Council have confirmed that emails can be accepted and the email address is on the information leaflet. The implications of the two other suggested communication channels – text and fax – are currently under consideration. This outcome will be reported back to the Equalities Forum in April.

LESLEY-ANN FENTON

DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS, PLANNING & POLICY

<b>Background Papers</b>			
<b>Document</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>File</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>
Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2010 - 2012	01.02.12		The Loop - My Place/Corporate Policies

  

<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Ext</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Doc ID</b>
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# Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

2012 - 2014



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## INTRODUCTION

This document outlines Chorley Council's policy in relation to the provision of information, advice and support to homeowners, tenants of private rented properties and private landlords regarding the repair, improvement and adaptation of their property.

The policy reflects current legislation and guidance as set out in documents such as "Delivering Housing Adaptations for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide" (CLG 2006) and "Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society" (CLG 2008).

Chorley Council takes the view that the prime responsibility for maintaining and improving housing rests with home owners, and endorses the view that the greater proportion of funding for repairs and improvements should come from the private sector, rather than relying on grant assistance provided by the Council.

However, the Council is committed to improving the quality of housing across all tenures, including owner occupation and private renting. In addition it is acknowledged that there are some vulnerable homeowners who cannot afford to repair or improve their homes and who may not be able to obtain loans from commercial lenders. There are also people who need support in carrying out repairs.

In April 2010 the Council set up the Chorley Home Improvement Agency. The agency delivers advice and assistance described in this document.

A key theme throughout the policy is of 'Decent Homes' in terms of increasing the proportion of the local population living in 'Decent Homes'. Under the previous government all local authorities were required to bring homes in their area up to the \*Decent Homes Standard (DHS), with targets of 70% by 2010 and 75% by 2020. This latter target has since been scrapped but the DHS remains one of the few standards by which housing standards can be measured. Chorley's progress against the target for Decent Homes is detailed in the Private Sector House Condition Survey 2010. This survey showed that 75.6% of all private dwellings in Chorley met the Decent Homes Standard.

A key element of the DHS is the thermal comfort criteria which specifies the energy efficiency standards which a property should meet to comply with the DHS. Energy efficiency improvements are the most cost-effective means of raising housing standards to ensure compliance. The government has estimated that an energy rating of SAP 55 is an acceptable rating for affordable warmth. Research suggests that around 22% or 4.7 million dwellings in England meet this standard.

### **Local Context**

The Council's drive to improve housing is taking place against the backdrop of demographic changes that are likely to see a marked increase in the number of older people living in the borough over the next 20 years. The total population of Chorley is projected to rise to 114,700 by 2020. It is predicted that there will be a significant increase in people aged 60 or over. Population estimates indicate that by 2015 18.9% of Chorley's population will be over 65, compared with a Lancashire wide estimate of 19.7% and a North West estimate of 18.2%. By 2020 these proportions are set to rise further, with 20.6% of the Chorley population being over 65 compared with 20.8% across Lancashire and 19.2% in the North West region.

The evidence base and strategic approach for this policy is taken from the private sector stock condition survey which was carried out in 2010. Some of the key statistics from the headline findings report include:

- 38,236 private sector households, with household population of 91,542 people



- 96.6% properties are occupied
- 75.6% properties meet the Decent Homes Standard, which compares favourably with the national average for England (64.2%)
- 24.4% properties fail the Decent Homes Standard; the majority of the reasons for failure are concerned with disrepair
- Costs to address Non-Decent homes are estimated at £42m net
- 71% of the stock is of post 1945 construction
- 29% households are economically retired
- 10% of homes in the private sector are privately rented
- 20% of households are economically vulnerable
- 10% households experience Fuel Poverty, which was strongly influenced by income rather than energy efficiency

*\*See Appendix 1 for a definition of the Decent Homes Standard*

## **POLICY AIMS**

The aims of the Private Sector Housing Assistance policy are as follows:

- To provide advice, information and support on repair, maintenance and adaptation of properties.
- To offer a framework of assistance to vulnerable groups/households.
- To increase the number of households able to heat their homes at reasonable cost thereby reducing fuel poverty and helping households to achieve affordable warmth.
- To reduce carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions in the borough's private housing stock.
- To increase the number of households taking up the Government's Warm Front scheme to improve the thermal efficiency of their homes.
- To help to improve the physical conditions of both homes and neighbourhoods.
- To assist disabled people with adaptations to facilitate their movement in and around their home thereby improving their quality of life.
- In offering assistance the Council is seeking to enable people to help themselves and advise customers of services offered by other organisations.
- To treat individuals fairly regardless of age, sex, gender, disability and sexual orientation and to ensure that individual's rights under Data Protection and human rights legislation are protected.

### **How the Policy links to the Council's Corporate Strategy**

#### ***You and Chorley – Vibrant local economy***

- ***Ensure families and communities reach their full economic potential***  
In taking steps to help to improve the living conditions of our communities we are contributing to the provision of warmer, safer, more energy efficient homes that in turn help the life chances for families and communities.

#### ***You and your family – Strong family support***

- ***Support the ageing population to be healthy and independent***  
The policy seeks to establish a set of measures that can assist the most vulnerable members of society. Older people are the main beneficiaries of Disabled Facilities Grants and the policy sets out to ensure that the Council's resources are used effectively to help those in greatest need.

#### ***You and your family - Being healthy***

- ***Families enabled to make healthy lifestyle choices***  
Poor housing can have a detrimental effect on the health, safety and well being of the occupants, particularly those in vulnerable groups. Concerns include aspects such as excess

winter deaths due to hypothermia, the impact of cold and damp housing on the incidence of childhood asthma and the effects on mental and emotional health for people on low incomes who need substantial repairs to their homes. The existence of a clear policy is intended to help to address these problems.

## **HOUSING ASSISTANCE COVERED BY THIS POLICY**

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gives Councils the power to provide assistance for the purpose of improving living conditions in the area.

The Order allows assistance to be provided to any person for the purpose of enabling that person to:

- Acquire living accommodation
- Adapt or improve living accommodation
- Repair living accommodation

In Chorley the Order is applied through four main strands of activity, namely:

- Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)
- Minor Repairs Assistance (MRA)
- Energy Efficiency Assistance (EEA)
- Handyperson Service

***The award of any financial assistance by the Council in accordance with this policy is discretionary (with the exception of Disabled Facilities Grant) and is subject to the availability of adequate financial resources.***

## **DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFGS)**

*(policy undergoing further development)*

Under Part 1 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 the Council has a legal duty to provide specialist adaptations to meet the care and mobility needs of people with disabilities to enable them to live independently with privacy and dignity. The need for the adaptation is determined by an Occupational Therapist from the Lancashire County Council's Adult and Community Services Department. The Council will only act on recommendations made by an Occupational Therapist.

Grant assistance under this policy will be limited to the maximum grant in accordance with the legislation which is currently £30,000. Adaptations in private sector housing and costing less than £1000 are undertaken by Adult and Community Services. Assistance from the Council will depend on DFG funding being available and the priority given to the application by the Occupational Therapist.

*N.B. The above represents the framework against which DFGs are processed. Further work is being done on the process, eligibility and service standards for DFGs. Details to follow at the next meeting.*

## **MINOR REPAIRS ASSISTANCE (MRA)**

The purpose of Minor Repairs Assistance, which is a discretionary rather than mandatory form of assistance, is to help vulnerable households on low incomes carry out repairs and improvements to their home to enable them to bring the property up to the 'Decent Homes Standard'. Due to its discretionary nature and limited availability of funds there may be times when the Council is not able to offer these grants.

MRA grants are provided to eligible applicants to provide a decent, safe, secure and warm home not involving major repair or renovation.

### **Eligibility**

- To qualify for a MRA the applicant must be an owner occupier.
- Applicants must be at least 18 years old, have an owner's interest in the property and either be currently resident or have a close family member resident within the property.
- Applicants are required to have lived in or owned the property for at least 3 years prior to the date of application.
- The dwelling subject to the request for assistance must be at least 10 years old and fail the DHS or be assessed as requiring safety or security measures.
- An application cannot be made if a grant has been awarded on the dwelling within the last five years.
- Tenants of housing associations are not eligible to apply. However, all households who are resident in 'Intermediate' housing and who have a repairing obligation to their homes i.e. those living in Shared Ownership/Low Cost Home Ownership properties are classed as "private" occupiers for the purpose of MRA applications and such customers are eligible to apply.

### **Conditions**

There will be no financial test for applicants whose household contains a person in receipt of at least one of the welfare benefits below:

- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit
- Income based Jobseekers Allowance
- Guarantee Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit with disability element and income of no more than £\*16,190 (as at April 2011). Child Tax Credit with income of no more than £\*16,190 (as at April 2011)
- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- War Disablement Pension
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

\* These figures are reviewed annually in April. Owner occupiers and tenants not in receipt of the above benefits or Working Tax Credit will be assessed using the Government's test of financial resources to determine the level of income and any contribution which the applicant may be required to make. These applicants will be subject to the same financial test as for the mandatory DFGs.

The Council will monitor the proposed introduction of the 'Universal Credit' commencing in 2013 and will assess the implications of these in terms of eligibility for MRA.

- Where the applicant is required to make a financial contribution towards the cost of the works, the Council will normally require payment of the amount before the commencement of works.
- Applications for grant assistance will not be considered where works have already been completed. Applications for grants where works have started but not completed will only be considered where the applicant can demonstrate exceptional circumstances as to why they did not apply and seek approval prior to the start of the work. In this situation any work already completed will be excluded from the application.
- Grants will only be approved where the requested work will contribute towards the attainment of the DHS.

- Where a grant is received for a dwelling which is a listed building and/or is situated in a Conservation Area, the scheme shall be undertaken with regard to the requirements of the Council's Building Control section and of the Conservation Officer.

### **Eligible Works**

- Examples of eligible works include dealing with unsafe or dangerous electrical wiring or gas fittings; small scale works such as providing security measures or repairing leaking pipes; providing a damp proof course; replacing rotten windows, doors, roofs, water main replacement where the mains supply is carried via lead pipes. It also includes heating works where the existing heating system is uneconomical to repair (and client is not able to access the Warm Front scheme).
- The Council will not use an MRA grant to "top up" Warmfront energy grants, nor to fund ancillary works relating to DFG works, such as when a stair lift is installed if it is discovered that the wiring is inadequate and it may be necessary to rewire at the same time. The MRA could not be used for this purpose.
- The maximum value of grant assistance is £3,000 exclusive of VAT, However, in exceptional circumstances up to an additional £2,000 may be awarded at the discretion of the Head of Housing.
- The Council will charge the customer an administration fee of 10% of the total cost of the work for each MRA grant that it processes, up to a maximum of £300 plus VAT.

### **Service Standards**

- The Council will determine all applications for assistance under this policy within 6 months from receipt of the application.
- The Council will aim to process applications efficiently, courteously and promptly.
- The Council will provide successful applicants with help and support to commission repairs and improvements if required. A fee may be charged for this work.
- All work undertaken by contractors will be:
  - a) in accordance with Health and Safety regulations
  - b) in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations and best practice
  - c) in accordance with current legislation
  - d) to the satisfaction of the Council. On completion of the work a final inspection will be undertaken by a Council officer
  - e) completed within 16 weeks of the grant being determined

## **ENERGY EFFICIENCY ASSISTANCE (EEA)**

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requires Councils to improve the energy efficiency of homes in their area, i.e. to reduce energy usage and carbon dioxide emissions within the housing stock. The energy efficiency of homes is measured in a number of ways, perhaps the most common method being the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP rating).

Energy (gas and electricity) used in residential properties is responsible for approximately 25% of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions. Carbon dioxide which is a gas produced when electricity is generated or gas is burned is a major contributor to climate change or "global warming"

The Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) requires all domestic energy suppliers with a customer base in excess of 50,000 customers to make savings in the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted by householders. Suppliers meet this target by promoting the uptake of low carbon energy solutions to household energy consumers, thereby assisting them to reduce the carbon footprint of their homes.

The primary aim of CERT is to make a contribution to the UK's legally binding target under the Kyoto protocol and the Climate Change Act 2008 requirement to cut emissions of green house gas emissions by 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.

CERT, the third supplier obligation phase, was introduced in 2008. On 30th July 2010, CERT was extended from March 2011 to December 2012 with a new higher target and significantly refocused around supporting insulation:

Energy suppliers are now required to deliver measures that will provide overall lifetime carbon dioxide savings of 293 MtCO<sub>2</sub> by December 2012, superseding the target of 185 MtCO<sub>2</sub> by March 2011. At least two thirds of the increase in target (68%) must be delivered through professionally installed insulation measures. This will refocus the scheme around supporting insulation measures that can help deliver deep and long lived carbon and energy savings.

The Council has a well established programme of offering cavity wall and loft insulation to owner occupiers and those renting from a private landlord. The programme has been available as part of the CERT obligation which is due to end in December 2012, to be replaced by the 'Green Deal', which is a key part of the Energy Act 2011

([http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/legislation/energy\\_act2011/energy\\_act2011.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/legislation/energy_act2011/energy_act2011.aspx))

It is unclear at the time of writing the role that Councils will play in the provision of the Green Deal, but for the calendar year 2012 the council has secured a commitment from its existing partner contractor to provide free cavity wall and loft insulation to owner occupier and private renting households across the borough, regardless of age of the head of the household or benefit entitlement.

### **Fuel Poverty**

A household which spends more than 10% of its household income on domestic energy in order to achieve a warm and healthy indoor environment is said to be in 'fuel poverty'.

Fuel poverty results from a combination of low household income, high energy prices, and poor heating and insulation standards. The definition of fuel poverty does not take account of the amount that a household *actually* spends on fuel, nor the amount available for the household to spend on fuel after other costs have been met. The interim findings of the Hills review into Fuel Poverty "Fuel Poverty – the problem and its measurement" were published in October 2011. The final report is due to be published in Spring of 2012.

Since 2003 the level of fuel poverty nationally has substantially increased. This is mainly attributable to the sustained increase in energy prices in recent years. In 2003, the number of households in fuel poverty stood at 1.2 million, representing 5.9 per cent of all households in England. In 2009, this figure rose to 4 million, which represented 18.4 per cent of all English households. Using figures from the Retail Prices Index (as compiled by the Office for National Statistics), domestic electricity prices increased by almost 90 per cent between 2003 and 2009, while gas prices increased by almost 140 per cent over the same period.

The department of Energy and Climate Change's (DECC) annual analysis of Fuel Poverty "Annual Report on Fuel Poverty Statistics 2011", which carries information up to and including 2009, shows 23% households in North West England being in Fuel Poverty. This is higher than the figure for England (18%) and is the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest region in England (West Midlands being the highest at 26% & North East second at 24%). The full report is available at:

<http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/Statistics/fuelpoverty/2181-annual-report-fuel-poverty-stats-2011.pdf>

The government's Warm Front scheme ([www.warmfront.co.uk](http://www.warmfront.co.uk)) provides a package of insulation and/or heating measures up to a maximum value of £3,500 with effect from 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009.

Under the Warm Front scheme householders can receive a combination of the following:

- Loft insulation
- Draught proofing
- Cavity wall insulation

- Hot water tank insulation.

*For full details of the eligibility for Warm Front assistance see Appendix 3*

The purpose of Energy Efficiency Assistance (EEA), which is a discretionary rather than mandatory form of assistance, is to help vulnerable households on low incomes achieve affordable warmth.

### **Eligibility**

- To qualify applicants must be either owner occupiers or renting from a private landlord (whose consent must be obtained before any insulation works are authorised).
- Households who are resident in 'Intermediate' housing and have a repairing obligation to their homes i.e. those living in Shared Ownership/Low Cost Home Ownership properties are classed as 'private' occupiers for the purpose of EEA applications and such customers would therefore be eligible.

### **Eligible Works**

- Loft insulation
- Cavity wall insulation

### **Service Standards**

- The Council will aim to process applications efficiently, courteously and promptly.
- The Council will refer all applicants to the nominated contractor(s) within 3 working days
- All work undertaken by contractors shall be:
  - a) in accordance with Health and Safety regulations
  - b) in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations and best practice
  - c) in accordance with current legislation
  - d) to the satisfaction of the Council. A percentage of the works completed will be inspected by Council officers.

All grants are subject to availability of funding. In the event that funding is no longer available, customers will be advised accordingly and provided with information appropriate to their circumstances.

## **HANDYPERSON SERVICE**

In August 2011 the Council teamed up with Preston Care and Repair to provide a handyman service. The service is funded by Lancashire County Council through its Supporting People budget and provided by Preston Care and Repair on behalf of the Council. The service is funded until March 2013.

### **Eligibility**

The service is available to disabled homeowners and home owners who are aged over 60.

### **Eligible Works and Cost**

For a fee of £10 per hour plus the cost of materials a team of qualified tradespeople will carry out a variety of minor repairs such as, putting up curtain rails, stair rails and replacing gates. The team will also do gardening and decorating work. Each job should take no more than two hours but there is no limit on the number of jobs that can be done in any property. The fee is paid direct to the Handyman attending the property at the time of the visit.

Anyone interested in this service should contact Preston Care and Repair direct on 01772 204096.

## COMPLAINTS/COMMENTS

Complaints and comments provide important feedback on our services. Information from complaints and comments helps us to improve our services and dealing effectively with them shows our commitment to customer care and continuous improvement

### Procedure

Complaints and comments may be made in writing, by email or text or verbally.

Complaints are logged and referred to the Home Improvement Agency manager and where possible put right immediately.

If it is not possible to resolve the complaint immediately the complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt .The acknowledgment will detail the procedure and the name of the person dealing with the complaint.

A full response will be sent within 10 working days. If the response is likely to take longer than 10 working days the customer will be informed accordingly and told when they can expect to receive a full reply.

If the customer is not happy with the response the complaint will be escalated to the Chief Executive. Some complaints, depending on the degree of seriousness, may go directly to the Chief Executive. In such cases a full response will be sent from the Chief Executive within 10 working days of receipt.

If the customer is still not satisfied they may refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Local Government Ombudsman

The Ombudsman will normally only deal with complaints when the Council's own complaints procedure has been exhausted

Contact details:

Local Government Ombudsman  
PO Box 4771  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH  
Telephone number 0845 602 1983  
Email:advice@lgo.org.uk

## MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Strategic Housing Unit is responsible for ensuring that this policy is adhered to and is effective. The Head of Housing monitors the take-up of the various strands of housing assistance and will monitor the budget on a monthly basis.

This policy is reviewed on an annual basis. It may be reviewed earlier if there are relevant changes in legislation, statutory guidance, local priorities or capital funding.

This policy was last reviewed in January 2012

### DEFINITION OF THE DECENT HOMES STANDARD (DHS)

The summary of the definition of a 'Decent Homes' is contained in the DCLG document '*A Decent Home – the definition and guidance for implementation*' (June 2006) and states that a property should:

- meet the current minimum standard for housing
- is in a reasonable state of repair
- has reasonably modern services and facilities
- provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

#### **Current minimum standard for housing**

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) was introduced as part of the Housing Act 2004. It came into force in April 2006. HHSRS replaced the Housing Fitness Standard as the first criterion of the DHS. As a minimum, a dwelling should be free from category 1 hazards. The existence of such hazards should be a trigger for remedial action unless practical steps cannot be taken without disproportionate expense or disruption.

#### **Reasonable state of repair**

A dwelling satisfies this criterion unless:

- 1) One or more key building components (i.e. external walls, lintels, roof structure, roof covering, chimney, windows, external doors, gas central heating boiler, electrics) are old and, because of their condition need replacing or major repair or
- 2) Two or more other building components are old and, because of their condition, need replacing or major repair

A building component must be old and requiring replacement or major repair to satisfy this criterion.

#### **Reasonably modern services and facilities**

A property is considered not to meet this criterion if it lacks three or more of the following:

1. A reasonably modern kitchen (20 years old or less)
2. A kitchen with adequate space and layout
3. A reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less)
4. An appropriately located bathroom and WC
5. Adequate external noise insulation (where external noise is a problem)
6. Adequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats

#### **Provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort**

A property should have both efficient heating and effective insulation which are defined as:

- Any gas or oil programmable central heating; or Electric storage heaters; or
- Warm air systems; or
- Underfloor systems; or
- Programmable LPG/solid fuel central heating; or
- Similarly efficient heating systems that are developed in the future



**HOUSING HEALTH AND SAFETY RATING SYSTEM (HHSRS)**

The HHSRS is a method of risk assessing hazards that may be found in residential accommodation. Homes should be free of any avoidable or unnecessary hazards as listed in the table below.

<b>Physiological</b>	<b>Psychological</b>	<b>Infection</b>	<b>Accidents</b>
Damp and Mould Growth	Crowding and space	Domestic hygiene, pests and refuse	Falling between levels
Excess Cold	Lighting	Personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage	Falls associated with baths etc.
Excess Heat	Noise	Food supply	Falling on level surfaces
Volatile Organic Compounds	Entry by intruders	Water supply	Falling on stairs
Biocides			Electrical hazards
Lead			Flames, hot surfaces
Asbestos and manufactured mineral fibres			Structural collapse and falling elements
Carbon monoxide and fuel combustion products			Position and operability of amenities
Uncombusted fuelled gas			Fire
Radiation			Explosions
			Collision and entrapment

### WARM FRONT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Warm Front is a Government funded initiative which reports to the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

To qualify for Warm Front a person must live in their own home or rent privately and be in receipt of one of the benefits listed below.

The property must have a SAP rating of 55 or under.

The SAP rating will be assessed at the beginning of the Technical Survey.

A householder or their spouse must be in receipt of one of the following:

Pension Credit:

- Guaranteed Credit or
- Savings Credit

Income Support or Income-based Job Seekers Allowance and have any of the following:

- Parental responsibility for a child under 5 who ordinarily resides with that person
- Child Tax Credit (which must include a disability or severe disability element for a child or young person)
- Disabled Child Premium
- Disability Premium (enhanced disability or severe disability element premium)
- Pensioner Premium (higher pensioner premium or enhanced pensioner premium)

Income related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA IR) that includes a work related activity or support component.