

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy (Introduced by the Executive Member for Homes and Business)	Executive Cabinet	13 February 2014

PERMISSION TO CONSULT ON THE REFRESHED PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To gain permission from the Executive Cabinet to consult on the refreshed draft Private Sector Assistance Policy which applies to the financial year 2014-15 becoming applicable on 1st April 2014. The current policy covers from 2012-14, and due to national and local policy changes significant amendments have become necessary.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That Executive Cabinet approves the draft Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy for consultation 28th February to 19th March 2014 so it may be adopted in time for the 2014/15 financial year.
3. That any minor changes to the draft policy following the consultation can be approved by the delegated authority of the Executive Member for Homes and Business in consultation with the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy. Any significant changes will be brought back to the Executive Cabinet.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

4. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) remain a statutory duty of Chorley Council to provide for qualifying customers to enable them to live independently in their current homes. The refreshed policy now also looks at how applications from all tenures are prioritised, the relationship with Registered Providers, and has more detail on the role of Lancashire County Council. Service standards, conditions and eligibility for DFGs are also covered.
5. Following the withdrawal of Regional Housing Pot money, Chorley Council is no longer able to offer the Energy Efficiency Assistance scheme or the Minor Repairs Assistance grant. However, Chorley Council carries out an enabling, assistance and signposting role to connect customers up to new and existing schemes both nationally and locally which could improve the energy efficiency or general condition of their homes.
6. The Home Improvement Agency (HIA), part of the Strategic Housing service, facilitates DFGs and carries out an important function to ensure vulnerable people can remain in their own home, or a home of their choosing, by enabling them to access any assistance available. The HIA will deliver the Private Sector Assistance Policy, and the extensive and holistic role of the HIA is now detailed in the refreshed policy.

7. The refreshed policy is planned to last for a year, April 2014 to March 2015, after which it will be reviewed. National and local policy and budgets are currently subject to change beyond March 2015. Chorley Council is monitoring these impending changes, seeking to influence where possible, to ensure Chorley is not disadvantaged.

Confidential report Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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Key Decision? Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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Reason Please bold as appropriate	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 unprogrammed capital scheme of £100,000 or more	4, Significant impact in environmental, social or physical terms in two or more wards

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

8. Due to national and local policy changes it has become necessary to have a renewed strategy and the document requires to be consulted on before it can be adopted. The refreshed draft policy reflects the current services on offer which have changed since the 2012-14 version due to national legislation and funding changes.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

9. Due to changes in national and local policy not refreshing the policy was considered inappropriate.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

10. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all	X	A strong local economy	
Clean, safe and healthy communities	X	An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	X

BACKGROUND

11. The Private Sector Assistance Policy outlines Chorley Council's policy in relation to the provision of information, advice and enabling home owners and tenants requiring adaptations, energy efficiency measures and other support relating to their home. Whilst this document is principally for the private sector owners, tenants and landlords, the adaptations section is also relevant to tenants occupying social housing.
12. The existing policy expires after 31st March 2014 and the refreshed policy is in draft form for the 2014-15 financial year.

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFGs)

13. The provision of DFGs remain a statutory duty of Chorley Council under Part 1 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, and the maximum grant assistance available for an eligible household remains at £30,000.
14. For a customer to receive a DFG they must first have an assessment from an Occupational Therapist (from Lancashire County Council) who will determine the need for and priority of the adaptation and then make a referral to the council. All applications are means tested unless they are on behalf of a child or young adult under the age of 20. Applications will be treated in priority and then date order, with all 'high priority' cases being started before 'standard priority' cases.
15. Applications are treated on a tenure blind basis, however Chorley Council works closely in partnership with Registered Providers when facilitating DFGs for their tenants. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) exists with the majority of Registered Providers in the borough. Under the MoU Registered Providers agree to facilitate all adaptations under the value of £1,000, and costs are shared 50/50 between Chorley Council and the Registered Provider for adaptations costing £1,000 or more. For adaptations in non-Registered Provider properties (both home owners and private tenants) costing under £500, Lancashire County Council will facilitate this work themselves and not refer it to Chorley Council.
16. From April 2015 DFG money will be allocated differently through the Better Care Fund via the health and social care pooled budget rather than direct to Chorley Council from the Department of Communities and the Local Government. The DFG money will be allocated through a plan developed jointly by Clinical Commissioning Groups and Lancashire County Council, and is required to be signed off by the Lancashire Health and Well Being Board.

THE HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY

17. The Home Improvement Agency (HIA) is a team within Chorley Council's Strategic Housing service whose aim is to ensure that vulnerable people can remain living as independently as possible in their own homes, or home of their choosing, whilst also maintaining their health and wellbeing. The main 'client groups' assisted by the HIA are older people and people with disabilities.
18. As well as administering and facilitating DFGs the HIA plays an important role enabling residents to access services and funding which improve the energy efficiency, condition, and safety of their homes. Key aims of the HIA are to reduce fuel poverty and also helping prevent the need for residential or domiciliary care.
19. The section on the role of the HIA is new to the policy, however the role and purpose of the HIA has not been changed, but it was considered necessary to add some detail on the function of this important service. Signposting, enabling and linking to other services are key to the role of the HIA, as well as the services it directly provides.
20. The HIA receives funding from Lancashire County Council's Supporting People budget to carry out its function as well as commissioning a Handy Person Service which carries out a variety of minor repairs for qualifying home owners at a subsidised rate. The Handy Person's scheme is available to home owners with a disability or over 60 years of age. The Handy Person Service is being retendered for 2014-15 so the contractor and terms in the policy are subject to change.

MINOR REPAIRS ASSISTANCE

21. The HIA is no longer able to provide grants for Minor Repairs Assistance as Regional Housing Pot money was discontinued, however the Handy Person Service is available to help assist home owners with a variety of minor repairs.
22. The HIA will assist customers to access any applicable funding or assistance available to improve the condition of their home through signposting and advocating where appropriate. This enabling role of the HIA is emphasised in the draft policy.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

23. The Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) 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, as well as producing a biennial progress report. Chorley Council no longer has the loft and cavity wall insulation scheme known as Energy Efficiency Assistance due to changes in national funding. The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) has replaced the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target and the Community Energy Savings Programme, and the introduction of ECO and Green Deal have greatly changed the energy efficiency landscape.
24. The Council meets its HECA requirements by performing an enabling role by linking Chorley residents to available schemes such as those funded through the Energy Company Obligation and Green Deal, and this approach is key to reducing fuel poverty which is a priority both nationally and locally. Green Deal is a national loan based scheme where energy efficiency improvement measures are paid for from future savings in bills; whilst ECO obliges energy companies to assist low income and vulnerable households with energy efficiency measures, as well as hard to treat properties which can't be completely funded by Green Deal.
25. Assistance available through ECO is constantly changing with initiatives lasting as short as 3 months. Due to the changes in the energy efficiency offer the relevant section in the policy emphasises the increasing signposting, informing and enabling role the HIA now undertakes.

CONSULTATION

26. A targeted consultation period has been proposed to run from 28th February to 19th March 2014. Registered Providers and other relevant stakeholders will be made aware of the consultation directly, and the draft policy along with information on the consultation will be accessible via the Chorley Council website throughout the consultation period.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

27. 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

28. The updated policy is reflective of the current arrangements for providing private sector assistance. The update does not add any new burdens, and as such, the policy will be delivered within the current budgetary framework.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

29. Refreshing the policy is necessary in light of the referred to national and local policy changes. The proposed refresh reflects these changes and continues to meet the council's obligations under the legislation.

LESLEY-ANN FENTON
DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS, PLANNING AND POLICY

Background Papers			
Document	Date	File	Place of Inspection
Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy Consultation Draft 2014-15	22.01.14		Appendix A
Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2012-14	01.02.12		CBC Website
Review of Existing Private Sector Housing Sector Assistance Policy 2010-12	01.02.12		CBC Mod Gov Website

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Mick Coogan	5552	22.01.14	