

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

24 May 2010

Subject: Private Sector Housing Renewal Insulation Schemes

Cabinet Member: John Brady - Economic Development, Planning and Housing

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek cabinet approval for 4 new schemes to improve the energy efficiency of homes in Wiltshire. The schemes widen the financial help available to householder and will contribute to reducing fuel poverty and carbon emissions.

Proposal

That Cabinet:

1. Approve an amendment to the Private Sector Housing Renewal Interim Strategy and Policy April 2009-2010, adding three new schemes to those already detailed in the Strategy and Policy under Section 10: Financial Assistance:
 - Cavity Wall and Loft insulation Grants for cavity wall and loft insulation for lower income households and those that have been hit by the recession, and do not qualify for other grants.
 - Mobile home sites insulation and heating improvements grants.
 - Cavity wall insulation for flats grants.
2. That the Cabinet member for Economic Development, Planning and Housing is provided with delegated powers to agree suitable schemes under part B of the *Mobile Home Site Energy Efficiency Improvements* grant.

Reason for Proposal

Following a successful bid to the Government Office of the South West we have been given £543,608 from the Regional Housing Pot to assist in improving the private housing stock in Wiltshire with a focus on helping vulnerable households and to help tackle fuel poverty and climate change.

Graham Hogg, Service Director, Housing

Wiltshire Council

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Subject: Private Sector Housing Renewal Insulation Schemes

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Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet for minor amendments to the Private Sector Housing Renewal Interim Strategy and Policy 2009-2010, to include three new insulation, energy efficiency and heating grant schemes.

Background

2. The council submitted a bid for £570,000 of capital grant from the Government Office South West (GOSW). In September 2009 the GOSW encouraged bids that improve private sector housing stock particularly for vulnerable households and was keen that any schemes promoted initiatives which tackle fuel poverty and climate change, and encouraged partnership working. On April 10 it was confirmed we were successful and was awarded a grant of £543,608 which came from the Regional Housing Pot Capital Grant 2010/11.

Main Considerations for the Council

3. To be able to make use of the funding from GOSW to help improve the private housing stock in Wiltshire we would like to introduce three new schemes to form part of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Interim Strategy and Policy 2009-2010 :-

Summary of the schemes

1. 'Cavity wall and loft insulation grants'

Aimed at improving the housing of lower income households and those that have been hit by the recession and do not currently qualify for free insulation, with particular focus on those in Private Rented Housing. To include: Households where a member has been made redundant/lost overtime/taken lower paid work/with an unemployed relative in the household; those who earn less than £16,000 pa income; families with children with an income below £22,000 pa; and those between the ages of 60-70.

Applicants will be required to self-certify with a proportion of the applicants being checked. The maximum grant per measure to be £200. Currently after the energy providers reductions, typical costs for a 3 bedroom semi for cavity wall insulation are £135, and £149 for loft insulation.

Selection of a suitable supplier will be in accordance with Wiltshire Council's contract regulations.

As part of Wiltshire Council's commitment to the government's Future Jobs Fund scheme, designed to provide training places for young unemployed, insulation companies submitting tenders will be asked to include proposals for taking on at least 2 Future Jobs trainees. This scheme will enable over 1,000 loft and cavity walls to be insulated. Total expenditure: £250,000.

2. Mobile Home Site Energy Efficiency Improvements:-

Part A: These properties are not covered by other insulation grants, yet are often lived in by older, more vulnerable households. Their construction means that they are poorly insulated and heating is often by electric or LPG heating which means that they are expensive to heat. In many cases it is impossible to maintain a reasonable winter temperature. The scheme would initially allow 15 homes to be improved with insulation and cladding. Expenditure: £125,000.

Part B: It is proposed that an improved heating scheme for a mobile home site be set up, for example community heating scheme, provision of mains gas and/or renewable energy generation by e.g. heat pumps. Since a detailed scheme has yet to be decided upon, it is requested that powers be delegated to the Portfolio holder to agree to such a scheme at a later date. Expenditure £125,000.

3. Cavity Wall insulation for flats:

Full grants provided for blocks of flats. Blocks of flats need to be treated at the same time and if one or more residents object due to cost, the work may be impeded. Access can also be expensive. These factors often present a barrier to improvements being made. It is intended to provide a grant to all residents and also use funds available from Energy Producers. Expenditure: £70,000 to improve around 110 flats.

Eligibility criteria for Insulation Grants can be found in Appendix A

The aims of these new grant schemes is in keeping with :

- Private Sector Housing Renewal Interim Strategy and Policy 2009-2010:
'To improve the levels of energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty in the private sector'

'To investigate ways in which the Council can support and raise standards for those living in mobile homes'

- Wiltshire Council Action for Wiltshire programme, set up to assist Wiltshire residents to cope with the recession
- Wiltshire Council Corporate Action Plan: to reduce carbon emissions across the county
- The Local Area Agreement for Wiltshire

The Comprehensive Area Assessment highlighted that the previous four district councils were not proactive in managing the quality of private sector housing. Mention was also made that the energy efficiency level of homes in the county is low. Although the recent Stock Condition Survey suggests that energy efficiency of the private sector is above the observation made by the CAA it does none the less suggest that the work undertaken in Wiltshire has been less well documented. These schemes, as well as addressing the need for home energy efficiency improvements amongst vulnerable households, also provides a measurable method to show the work that Wiltshire is undertaking.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

4. The net effect of the insulation schemes will be to reduce fuel consumption in the homes treated, thus reducing domestic carbon emissions, and helping Wiltshire Council to meet its carbon reduction targets and prepare Wiltshire for the consequences of unavoidable climate change.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

5. The policy detailed herein aims to deliver quality services without prejudice and discrimination to meet the needs of a specific vulnerable group, regardless of age, cultural or ethnic background, disability, gender, marital status, religious or political persuasion or sexual orientation and will adhere to the equality and diversity policy developed by Wiltshire Council.

An equality impact assessment has been carried out during the development of this policy (see attached appendix B) and recommendations from that assessment have been incorporated into the policy amendments

Risk Assessment

6. Risks if proposal is accepted:
A successful and popular grant scheme may raise expectations that cannot be met by the limited funding available.

Managing risk: Re-apply for extra funding for following financial year, to enable schemes to continue.

Risks if proposal is turned down:

The Council will fail to meet its aims of reducing fuel poverty caused by vulnerable households living in poorly insulated and hard to heat homes. The Council will fail to meet carbon reduction targets.

Financial Implications

7. Funding of £543,608 to come from the bid and £26,392 to be made up from the Regional Housing Pot under the formulae evaluation award, giving a total of £570,000.

Legal Implications

8. The council can only provide discretionary assistance in accordance with the Regulatory Reform [Housing Assistance] Order 2002, following the adoption and publication of a Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. This policy was adopted by full council on 11 November 2009 and this grant scheme represents a minor amendment to the policy, a decision for which can be made by Cabinet.

Graham Hogg, Service Director, Housing

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Date of report: 27 April 2010

Appendices

Appendix A: Eligibility criteria for Insulation Grants

Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment
