

Draft Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy/Policy 2006-2009

1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 To seek approval of the reviewed Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy 2006-2009 and to agree the fee structure for agents involved in assisting applicants through the grants process.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy for the years 2006 – 2009 as detailed in appendix1 be adopted.**
- 2.2 **That the agent fee structure for the relevant forms of Housing Renewal Assistance as detailed in Appendix 3 be agreed.**

3. Links to Corporate and Business Area Objectives

- 3.1 Housing is a Corporate Priority

4. Background Information

- 4.1 **The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO)** was the first in a series of measures, culminating in the Housing Act 2004 which changed the way government sought to improve housing conditions in the private sector.

- 4.2 The RRO provides Councils with a general power to provide 'assistance' in 'any form' to 'any person' for the purposes of repairing, improving adapting and acquiring accommodation. It provides Councils with an enabling role to deal with poor quality housing both in terms of the policy tools available to them and their ability to work in partnership with others. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants must continue to be provided by Councils. The 'Order' offers Councils the opportunity to continue to provide direct support via a discretionary grant system and to offer alternatives to people to enable them to maintain and/ or improve their own homes.

4.3 The Housing Act 2004 received Royal Assent on 18th November 2004

The main thrust of the act is to create a fairer and better housing market for all those who own, rent or let residential property while protecting those most vulnerable. Some of the key provisions of the Act were to:

- Establish a new Licensing regime for Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Replace the Minimum standard of housing (formally the 'Fitness Standard' with the Housing Health & Safety Rating System.
- Introduce Empty Dwelling Management Orders.
- Extend the eligibility for Disabled Facilities to include occupants of caravans.

- 4.4 A key part of developing the new Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy 2006-2009 included consultation with Council Members, Partner Organisations members of the Public and relevant Council Departments.

4.5 **The 'Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and Housing Renewal Policy 2006-2009** reflects national and local priorities and sets out a comprehensive approach to improving housing conditions in the private sector as afforded by the RRO 2002 and Housing Act 2004. The Strategy focuses on a pro-active rather than re-active approach to Private Sector Renewal. It acknowledges that a balanced approach between the provision of financial assistance, advice and education, enforcement and partnership working will be necessary to achieve its objectives in this area. Appendix 2 sets out a summary of the proposed changes.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The draft policy sets out repayment conditions for all forms of discretionary financial assistance (repayment within 5 years for amounts up to £5,000 and within ten years for amounts between £5000 and £10,000). The aim is to recycle funds for future housing improvements and help reduce the grant dependency culture. However the draft policy also makes provision to waive repayments in certain circumstances which will be decided on a case by case basis by the Community and Environmental Strategic Manager in consultation with the Council's Section151 Officer.

6. Community and Environmental Implications

6.1 The Housing Renewal Strategy & Policy represents a positive step towards improving the quality of housing across all tenures in the District, and seeks to enable the most vulnerable households to live in decent and accessible homes.

7. Human Resource Implications

7.1 Currently the Private Sector Team are recruiting two new members of staff . Once recruited there is likely to be a settling in period, including training time on the new forms of assistance. This may have implications in terms of achieving targets in the first year of the new Strategy.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 The Policy outlines the provision of financial assistance in accordance with the relevant legislation, Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and the Housing Act 2004.

9. Equality & Diversity Implications

9.1 The Housing Renewal Strategy and Policy 2006-2009 addresses housing standards and will help to target resources to the most vulnerable households in North Wiltshire. An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed on the draft Strategy and Policy and is available upon request.

Papers Used to Prepare this Report

- The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002
- Housing Act 2004

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT STRATEGIC MANAGER TO THE EXECUTIVE – 15th JUNE 2006

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