

REPORT TO CABINET

REPORT OF: **Operations Director**

REPORT NO: **ENV588**

DATE: **5 August 2013**

TITLE:	Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2013-2018	
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	Key Decision – the policy has the potential to affect all wards of the district	
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Cllr Terl Bryant Portfolio holder for Good Housing	
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INITIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS: Equality and Diversity	Carried out and Referred to in paragraph (7) below Completed 12 June 2013	Full impact assessment Required: No
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT:	This report is publicly available via the Your Council and Democracy link on the Council’s website: www.southkesteven.gov.uk	
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Equality Analysis http://moderngovsvr/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=12020	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet;

1. Note the outcomes of the consultation process
2. Approve the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy for 2013-2018

2. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

2.1 To present the draft private sector housing renewal policy for approval.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

The draft private sector housing renewal policy covers a range of services and financial assistance to homeowners, landlords and private sector tenants. The proposed policy is intended to encompass assistance for the most vulnerable, encourage empty homes back into use and ensure that standards are maintained in private rented and registered social landlord accommodation through advice and enforcement.

3.1 Development of the policy

The private sector housing renewal policy supports the delivery of the priorities in the councils Housing Strategy. These are;

- Priority 1: High quality new affordable homes available to buy or rent
- Priority 2: Improved housing standards across the district and for all tenures
- Priority 3: Access to housing and wellbeing services
- Priority 4: Promotion of sustainable neighbourhoods and communities

The policy has been developed to align with priorities 2, 3 and 4, and will support the delivery of the following relevant outcomes contained in the Housing Strategy:

- ✓ Improvements to the quality of housing and environment in our neighbourhoods
- ✓ Improvements to the quality of private sector housing
- ✓ Households being assisted to remain safely in their homes
- ✓ An increased supply of good quality private rented accommodation
- ✓ Increasing proportions of houses reaching affordable warmth standards
- ✓ Well managed neighbourhoods in which citizens enjoy the best possible quality of life in homes which are affordable in use and meet their housing needs and where crime and antisocial behaviour do not adversely impact on the quality of life.

The Government believes that everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home. Poor quality housing can have an impact on the health of the occupants and on the quality of life in an area. The draft policy reflects the Government's view that it is primarily the responsibility of private sector owners to maintain their own property but recognises that some owners, particularly the elderly and most vulnerable, do not have the necessary resources to repair or

improve their homes. As a consequence the council has an important role to play in providing assistance in these cases. The draft policy focuses on delivering the outcomes through a proportionate approach by encouraging the co-operation of individuals in keeping their homes in good repair to ensure long term sustainability, but also includes a clear policy relating to enforcement action when properties fall below acceptable standards.

The resulting draft policy sets out how the service will intervene in the private housing sector, including the approach to enforcement, and also contains the financial assistance which is proposed to assist vulnerable residents and encourage empty homes back into use.

3.2 Consultation

The Communities PDG has influenced the content of the policy, and wider consultation has taken place with the Community Focus Forum, via e-mail with landlords, and the wider public through our website.

A précis of the comments received are included in appendix two, along with a response to each of these for consideration.

As a result, the draft policy focuses on the following key elements:

Advice and enforcement

- Advice and information will be provided to homeowners, landlords and private sector tenants to encourage repair and maintenance of properties.
- Advice will be provided on energy efficiency measures with signposting to the Energy Saving Advice Service or partner agencies for assistance with helping to reduce fuel poverty.
- Where private sector landlords are not meeting their responsibilities and informal action has been unsuccessful formal action will be taken where appropriate.

Financial assistance

- The draft policy proposes replacing the decent homes grant with essential home repair assistance. This will be available to vulnerable owner occupiers to remove serious non thermal hazards (category 1 hazards) that could not be resolved through other assistance.
- Assistance for energy measures will be provided through other partner agencies such as Responders to Warmth or the Green Deal.
- Mandatory disabled facilities grants (DFG's) continue to be available to provide assistance to disabled persons to help adapt their homes to meet their needs.
- The areas where discretionary disabled facilities financial assistance may be provided have been expanded and are now proposed to include; relocation assistance; top up of the mandatory £30,000 grant; assistance where the applicant is unable to meet their contribution to a mandatory grant ; to undertake small scale adaptations to fulfil needs not covered by

a mandatory DFG; or in exceptional cases to deliver a speedy remedy for very urgent adaptations where the procedural complexities associated with the mandatory grant process would cause delays.

- Empty homes funding is proposed to be increased up to £5,000 per property where the property has been empty for more than 6 months. It must be bought back into use for the rental market at an affordable rate (80% of market rate) for 3 years.

4. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None: Authorities have a general power to provide financial assistance. In accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 authorities are required to give assistance in accordance with a published policy. Government guidance suggests that they would consider that an authority was failing in its duty as a housing enabler and in its responsibility to consider the condition of the local private sector stock if it did not make some provision for assistance. It states that “a blanket ‘no assistance policy’, whether for grants, loans or both, would therefore be unacceptable”.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Government ended funding for private sector renewal work on 2011, however, there are still legacy funds available from our allocation. £368,000 remains to deliver empty homes and the essential home repair grant. Funding for mandatory disabled facilities grants continues to be supported by Government with a total budget for this of £500,000. For 2013/14 this is made up of £289,717 from Government and £210,283 from SKDC.

The Government announced in the recent spending review that the national government budget for Disabled Facilities Grants will increase to £220m in 2015-16 (allocation in 13-14 is £180m). This should result in an increased grant for that year.

6. RISK AND MITIGATION

Risk has been considered as part of this report and any specific high risks are included in the table below:

Category Risk	Action / Controls
<p><i>Financial</i> – inadequate Capital available for financial assistance</p> <p>Inability to meet demand for service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget in place 2013/14 • Government grant provided for mandatory disabled facilities grants • Budget monitoring in place • Replacement of decent homes grant with essential repair grant with reduced scope
<p><i>Strategic</i> - Deterioration in private sector stock condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial assistance available to the most vulnerable • Undertake enforcement of

Vulnerable residents at risk from poor quality housing	minimum standards in the private rented sector
<i>Regulatory</i> – Unable to provide financial assistance without a policy in place. Reduction in financial assistance could result in increased enforcement activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New policy to be in place • Review of enforcement capability within private sector housing team necessary if financial assistance reduced.

7. ISSUES ARISING FROM IMPACT ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The equality impact assessment was completed on 12 June 2013. There were no issues arising from the assessment.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The policy will have a positive impact on local communities by maximising the number of empty properties that are bought back into use, so helping to mitigate the blight and antisocial behaviour that can be associated with them.

9. COMMENTS OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

- 9.1 Taking into account the year end position for 2012/13, the updated 2013/14 budget allocation for Essential Home Repairs (previously better homes grants) will be £248k and there will also be a budget allocation of £120 for Empty Homes grant. In addition to this for DFG's there will be a total of £500k budget allocation including any government grants awarded to support this programme.

10. COMMENTS OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

- 10.1 A Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy is required under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002.

There is no delegated authority to officers to determine discretionary disabled facilities grants. Officers can put forward applications for the discretionary element for member decision.

Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes) (England) Order 2008 requires the imposition of a charge on properties for 10 years in all owner occupation grants where the grant exceeds £5000 up to a charge limit of £10,000

11. COMMENTS OF OTHER RELEVANT SERVICES

- 11.1 None

12. APPENDICES:

- 12.1 Appendix 1 – Draft Private Sector Housing Policy
Appendix 2 – Summary of consultation responses