

## Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2013-2018

### 1.0 Introduction

South Kesteven's Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy supports the objectives in the district's Housing Strategy within the context of the corporate priority of creating the environment to support good housing for all.

This policy sets out how we will support local residents, and work with other agencies to provide a range of assistance for housing renewal.

The council has supported improvements in the private sector for many years with over £682,000 being invested in improving homes in the private sector since 2009 through grant funding. However, there continue to be homes in a poor state of repair and people living in homes which are of poor quality. Through our housing assistance policy we aim to focus our resources to encourage home owners to improve their homes while providing financial support for those most in need.

### 2.0 Strategic context

In 2010 the Government released Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing which contains the key housing policy goal "to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live".

The majority of housing both nationally and locally is in the private sector, being either owner occupied or privately rented. South Kesteven's 2009 stock condition survey shows that private sector housing within the district is in a worse condition than housing in the public sector and privately rented homes have the worst conditions.

The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Lincolnshire 2013-2018 is based on the five priorities identified in Lincolnshire's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

Under priority 5, tackling the social determinants of health, the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Lincolnshire has the outcome of:

*People's health and wellbeing is improved through addressing wider determining factors of health that affect the whole community.*

To meet this outcome, a priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board is to:

*Ensure that people have access to good quality, energy efficient housing that is both affordable and meets their needs.*

We aim to help achieve this outcome by taking action to promote, encourage and where necessary enforce standards, help vulnerable home owners and tenants to remain living independently in their homes where it is appropriate, encourage the best use of private housing and target assistance toward the most vulnerable.

### 3.0 Understanding South Kesteven's Private Sector

South Kesteven covers an area of 943 square kilometres making it the 31<sup>st</sup> largest in England with the administrative centre in Grantham and three further market towns of Stamford, Bourne and The Deepings. Two thirds of the population live in one of the four market towns and the remaining third live in one of the over 80 villages in the area (South Kesteven State of the District Report 2011)

There are approximately 133,788 people living in 57,344 households in the district with Grantham being the largest settlement. There are 142 people per square kilometre, this compares with an overall Lincolnshire Average of 121 people per square kilometre (2011 Census).

Between 2001 and 2011 the population increased by 7.2% (9,010 people). The proportion of the population made up of older people (aged 65+) in South Kesteven has increased by 3% to 19% over the same period. (2011 Census)

A Private Sector Stock Condition Survey was carried out in 2009 with some of the main findings highlighted below:

- A high proportion of the housing stock was built after 1964, with higher proportions of bungalows and detached houses.
- 60.2% of privately rented homes were built pre 1919.
- The highest rates of non decency were found in the private rented sector.
- The mean SAP rating is 53 EPC band E .
- 24.5% of households with a disabled resident have a household income below £10,000.

Property tenure in South Kesteven is shown below

Tenure	Dwellings	Percentage
Owner Occupied	41,343	72%
Privately Rented	8,935	15%
<b>Private Sector Stock</b>	<b>50,010</b>	<b>87%</b>
Local Authority	5,980	10%
Registered Social Landlords	1,783	3%
<b>Social Housing</b>	<b>7763</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>All Tenures</b>	<b>57,773</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2011 Census

The South Kesteven private sector house condition survey 2009 estimates that 11,700 private sector dwellings across the district have a Category 1 hazard, with the main reasons for failure being “excess cold” and “falls on the level”. The survey estimated that in 2009 the average cost to remedy a Category 1 hazard in the district was £4,900.

#### **4.0 Housing and Health**

The quality of the home has a significant impact on health; a warm, dry and secure home is associated with better health. Housing-related hazards that increase the risk of illness include damp, mould, excess cold and structural defects that increase the risk of an accident (such as poor lighting, or lack of stair handrails).

In addition to basic housing requirements, other factors that help to improve well-being include the neighbourhood, security of tenure and modifications for those with disabilities. The Building Research Establishment (BRE) has calculated that nationally poor housing costs the NHS at least £600 million per year.

In South Kesteven the highest significant hazard in the private sector is for excess cold.

#### **5.0 Strategic Links**

There are close links with a range of legislation, national and local strategies and policy. These include;

- Housing Act 2004
- Energy Act 2011
- Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002
- Decent Homes Standard
- Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England
- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2018
- Lincolnshire Affordable Warmth Strategy 2010-2016
- Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy 2012-2016
- Lincolnshire Housing Strategy 2009-2014
- South Kesteven Housing Strategy 2013-2018

#### **6.0 Policy Priorities and Aims**

Our Housing Strategy sets out four strategic housing priorities:

- Priority 1: High quality new affordable homes available to rent or buy
- 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

To act on these priorities we need to ensure that we target our resources as effectively as possible. This policy sets out the structure of assistance and support that the Council provides to support home owners and private tenants alongside the enforcement options which are available. The aim is to raise housing standards, support and enable independent living and improve the supply and quality of housing in the private sector.

## **7.0 Empty homes**

Empty homes represent a wasted housing resource and can also be unsightly for residents, and attract crime and antisocial behaviour which contributes to the decline of an area.

In South Kesteven there are approximately 465 long term empty properties (over 6 months) Of these, approximately 50% have been empty for over 2 years. Some of these properties can give cause for concern for residents due to overgrown gardens and neglect, others deteriorate from being empty for so long and become uninhabitable unless major work is carried out.

From April 2013 changes to our Council Tax discounts now mean that owners of properties which have been empty for more than 2 years will pay a charge of 150% of the liability.

Maximising the number of homes bought back into use is a feature of our Housing Strategy 2013-18. Within this context is the need to provide an increased supply of good quality private rented accommodation. One way of doing this is by ensuring that we maximise the number of empty properties bought back into use. The Government has also identified returning empty homes back into use as a priority, and with the introduction of the New Homes Bonus there is financial reward equivalent to 6 years council tax. We also actively seek out external funding opportunities which may assist in this area.

In the first instance we aim to provide advice to the owners of empty properties to encourage them to bring them back into use. Financial assistance is also available to owners of empty homes (see section 10) to help them bring them back into use for the rental market. Further support in the way of a financial loan may be available in the future as we await the results of the National Empty Homes Loan pilot schemes.

Where these approaches fail and where an empty property is causing a specific problem to a neighbourhood, if an extensive evidence base relating to the property has been established the following enforcement options are available on a case by case basis;

- Empty Dwelling Management Orders
- Enforced Sale
- Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)

Other alternative enforcement options are available to take action on land which is unsightly or attracting vermin and to secure empty properties against unauthorised entry.

## **8.0 Landlord accreditation**

We recognise that strong relationships with professional private landlords are necessary to ensure that there is a good supply of high quality, professionally managed accommodation that is affordable to a wide range of households and are considering the options available to us in relation to landlord accreditation within the district.

## **9.0 Improving housing standards - enforcement**

The enforcement of housing standards is a duty placed upon the Council which is delivered by the Private Sector Housing Team within Environmental Health Services.

Under the Housing Act 2004, local authorities have a duty to deal with Category 1 hazards (that being those hazards which present the most risk of harm to health). Private rented properties are of greatest concern due to the high numbers of vulnerable people who live in poor housing conditions in this sector.

Although this is an enforcement service, the focus is also on helping responsible landlords to achieve high standards in their property by providing advice and guidance to assist them.

Our response to complaints about housing standards will be in accordance with our Private Sector Enforcement Policy which is attached as Annex A. Enforcement will be carried out in accordance with the Council's overarching Enforcement Policy and the Enforcement Concordat.

## **10.0 Improving housing standards – financial assistance**

Authorities have a general power to give financial assistance for home repair, improvement and adaptation. In accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 authorities are required to give assistance under these powers in accordance with a published policy.

Our financial assistance policy promotes the property owners responsibility to repair and improve their homes while providing support to vulnerable homeowners, the disabled and those who are committed to bring an empty property back into use for the private rental market.

Our Essential Home Repair Assistance recognises that there is financial support available through the Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation to deal with thermal efficiency and ensures that our funds are focused on other (non thermal) serious hazards in the home. A summary of the available financial assistance is below with full conditions in Annex B.

<b>Name of Assistance</b>	<b>Property Criteria</b>	<b>Who Can Apply</b>	<b>Type of Work for Which Assistance is Given</b>	<b>Amount of Assistance</b>	<b>Re Payment Conditions</b>
<b>Essential Repair Assistance</b>	Property must have a category 1 hazard.	Owner occupiers or long leaseholders in occupation, subject to a means test. 3 year prior occupation period.	Works of repair or improvement to remove a Category 1 hazard.	Maximum eligible expense is £5,000.	To be re-paid on sliding scale if property is sold within 5 years.
<b>Empty Homes Assistance</b>	Residential property must have been empty for at least 6 months.	Owner of the empty property or people representing the owners' interest.	Capital repair costs to bring the property up to Decent Homes Standard.	Maximum eligible expense is £5,000.	To be repaid in full if the property is sold within 5 years.
<b>Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)</b>	A permanent legal residence which is the primary or sole residence of the occupier.	Any disabled person who is the owner occupier or tenant with a qualifying referral from the Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapy Service. Subject to a means test.	Essential work to provide access to facilities for personal care, including bedroom and kitchen facilities, and works to improve safety.	Maximum eligible expense is £30,000.	For grants of a value greater than or equal to £10,000 and where additional floor space is created a land charge of a maximum of £10,000 will be attached. This must be repaid in full if the property is sold within 10 years.
<b>Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance</b>	A permanent legal residence which is the primary or sole residence of the occupier.	Any disabled person who is the owner occupier or tenant with a qualifying referral from the Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapy Service. Subject to a means test.	To provide a top up to a mandatory grant where; The works exceed the mandatory limit or the applicant cannot afford the required contribution Where works are not eligible for a mandatory DFG, or To assist people in moving to more suitable accommodation.	Maximum eligible expense is £10,000.	To be repaid in full if the property is sold within 10 years.

## **11.0 Other forms of assistance**

Where we are unable to provide financial assistance to occupiers and where there is no imminent risk to the health and safety of the individual we will inform them of other agencies who may be able to provide support or assistance.

## **12.0 Conditions of assistance**

12.1. In this section the term 'assistance' means any form of financial assistance approved for the purpose of housing renewal, maintenance, improvement or adaptation. This may include a grant, an improvement scheme in which people are invited to participate, a loan, or any other form of financial assistance, whether provided directly or indirectly. 'Condition' means any condition attached to any such assistance.

12.2 Where stated, any financial assistance and related conditions will be secured as a legal charge against the property, where breach of the condition would require the repayment of all or part of the assistance. This charge will not be removed until either the conditions expire or until the assistance is repaid, together with any interest or additional charges that may apply. In some cases, it may be specified that only part of the assistance has to be repaid if the conditions are broken and, in these cases, the charge will be removed upon payment of the specified part of the assistance.

12.3 A charge against the property is binding on any person who is for the time being an owner of the premises concerned. Where a condition is broken, the Council has all the usual powers and remedies in law to enforce the charge and secure payment of any amount due.

12.4 Where any condition is in force, the Council may require the person responsible to provide any information to satisfy the Council that the condition is being complied with. The Council can require this information in writing or in any other reasonable form. It is a condition that this information be provided, in the form required and within the reasonable time period specified by the Council, and as fully, accurately and honestly as reasonably possible. Failure to comply with this requirement is a breach of conditions in itself and the assistance, or part of the assistance where this is specified, must then be repaid to the Council.

12.5 It is the responsibility of the person responsible for any condition to demonstrate to the Council's satisfaction that the condition is being complied with. Failure to do so will be treated as failure to comply with the condition. The council does not have the burden of having to prove that the condition is not being complied with.

12.6 Conditions will generally be enforced in all cases. Money repaid or recovered will be recycled into the Council's capital programme for private sector housing renewal.

12.7 No retrospective application or request for financial assistance will be considered where the relevant work has already been started or completed.

12.8. The approval of assistance does not give or imply the Council's approval of any other consents that may be required, such as planning permission or Building Regulation consent. It is the responsibility of the applicant to obtain any such consents that are required.

12.9 Appeals about how the policy is operated should be referred to the Environmental Health Services Manager in the first instance. Appeals must be made in writing and detail the specific grounds on which the appeal is based.

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## **Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy**

### **Introduction**

The supply of good quality, affordable private rented accommodation is essential to meet our local housing need and is linked to the economic success of the district.

In South Kesteven the majority of landlords are small portfolio holders, along with approximately 30 social landlords. The service aims to provide clear guidance and advice to landlords to give them the opportunity to put problems right before taking enforcement action. The private sector housing team will usually become involved where there is a clear case for intervention. There may be circumstances where legislation requires that formal action has to be taken immediately where there is an imminent risk to health.

Following a complaint about poor housing standards in a private rented home, the Council will take appropriate action to investigate the complaint. Initial investigations may result in advice or assistance being given or where necessary an inspection of the property will be undertaken.

Inspections can take place in response to a complaint or request for service, or proactively in accordance with statutory requirements or risk based assessment (such as mandatory licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation).

### **Principles of enforcement**

Inspections are made using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This is a risk based method of assessment used to identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings. Inspections are carried out by officers who are authorised and have received appropriate training to enable them to carry out their duties competently.

Where proactive work is undertaken we will concentrate our resources on the areas in most need. For example, the results of the most recent Private Sector Stock Condition Survey will be used to identify areas or type of accommodation in the district where housing conditions are worst.

When offering advice in relation to compliance, we will distinguish between statutory requirements and advice or guidance which is aimed at improvements above minimum standards. Any advice will be confirmed in writing if requested.

Enforcement activities will be carried out in accordance with the Council's overarching Enforcement Policy and the Enforcement Concordat.

## **Power of entry**

Section 239 of the Housing Act 2004 gives a local authority power of entry to properties in pursuance of its duties under Part 1 of the Act when certain conditions are met. This enables an inspection to be carried out to see whether or not a Category 1 or 2 hazard exists. 24 hours notice must be given to the owner and/or occupier of the premises in most circumstances. Where entry is refused, the property is empty or where prior warning would negate the purpose of access a warrant may be obtained.

## **Enforcement options**

Hazards are identified as either Category 1 or Category 2 Hazards in accordance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System Operating Guidance. The action taken in relation to the hazards will be the most appropriate, taking into account the score, whether there is a duty to act and both the actual and potential vulnerable occupiers.

To encourage consistency, officers will have regard to any “worked examples” provided by Local Government Regulation and the Housing Health and Safety Enforcement Guidance when considering the most appropriate course of action. Enforcement action must follow the principles of the Enforcement Concordat.

The Housing Act 2004 places authorities under a general duty to take appropriate action in relation to a category 1 hazard. The options available are:

- serve an improvement notice in accordance with section 11;
- make a prohibition order in accordance with section 20;
- serve a hazard awareness notice in accordance with section 28;
- take emergency remedial action under section 40 or make an emergency prohibition order under section 43;
- make a demolition order under section 265 of the Housing Act 1985 as amended;
- declare a clearance area by virtue of section 289 of the 1985 Act as amended.

Similar powers are available to deal with category 2 hazards. However, emergency measures cannot be used in respect of category 2 hazards, and authorities cannot make a demolition order, or declare a clearance area in response to a category 2 hazard.

In addition, prior to certain enforcement action the Council may be required to consult with Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, or may need to make an application to the Residential Property Tribunal. In certain circumstances it may also be necessary to undertake a Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment as part of an options appraisal process.

The Council has a duty under Section 5 of the Housing Act 2004 to take enforcement action where Category 1 hazards exist. Where the person in control of the property has not

voluntarily taken action and commenced work to remedy the hazard(s) within an agreed timescale a statutory notice will usually be served.

Under Section 7 of the Housing Act 2004, local authorities have a power rather than a duty to take enforcement action in respect of Category 2 hazards. Where there are Category 2 hazards and Category 1 hazards are present at the property action will normally be taken to remove or reduce all of the hazards to an acceptable level.

### **Charging for Enforcement Notices**

As permitted by Section 49, the Council may and do make a charge for enforcement notices served under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004. The charges will be reviewed and published annually.

### **Non compliance**

Where enforcement notices are not complied with or where there are serious breaches of legislation enforcement action can be carried out as follows;

- Simple Caution
- Prosecution

Decisions will take account of the principles of good enforcement as set out in the Enforcement Concordat, which we have signed.

### **Other enforcement Options**

There may be instances where other legislation may be more appropriate to achieve acceptable housing standards. Other legislation may include;

- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Public Health Act 1936
- Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949
- Building Act 1984
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990

### **Immigration Inspections**

In addition to enforcement inspections, the council is from time to time asked to inspect properties for immigration control purposes. The property will be assessed in accordance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and a report made to the relevant embassy or

UK Border Agency. A charge is made for this service. The charge will be reviewed and published annually.

## **Houses in Multiple Occupation**

Inspections of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) will be undertaken:

- When a new HMO is identified
- Following a complaint about standards
- Before issuing an HMO licence
- Periodically in accordance with a risk based inspection programme

Mandatory HMO licences will be valid for 5 years and will specify the number of occupiers and households. The occupancy number will depend on the size of rooms and the facilities available.

HMOs must meet certain standards to be licensed. These are set out in Schedule 4 of the Housing Act 2004. Additional local conditions may be used where appropriate.

Where a property does not meet the statutory requirements a number of courses of action are available;

- Apply conditions to the HMO licence
- Reduce the length of the licence from 5 years and apply conditions to the granting of the licence
- Restrict the occupation of the property until conditions are met
- Refuse to grant the licence

## **Assessment of Fit and Proper Person**

Where there is no reason to believe otherwise, a fit and proper person assessment will be carried out using a self assessment form. Where there is any suspicion regarding the accuracy of the information provided or the history of the potential licence holder or manager we reserve the right to request further information via a CRB check. Enquiries with other agencies to establish suitability may also be carried out.

## **Licence Fees**

Licence and renewal fees will be reviewed and published annually. The renewal fee is only applicable where the licence holder has submitted their application prior to the expiry of the licence and there are no changes in circumstances or to the property. Where the licence has expired or where there are changes to circumstances or the property the full licence fee is payable.

## **Breaches of licence conditions, revocations and variations.**

Where breaches of licence conditions are reported an officer will normally inspect the property and take appropriate action. This may include variation or revocation of the licence.

## **Appeals**

The licensee has a right to appeal to the Residential Property Tribunal against refusal to grant a licence, licensing conditions and the maximum number of occupiers or households specified on the licence.

## **Enforcement action**

Where a landlord fails to licence a HMO, the council may take a case to the Residential Property Tribunal. The Residential Property Tribunal may on conviction for failure to licence, make a Rent Repayment Order requiring up to 12 months rent to be repaid to the tenant or the Council where the tenant is in receipt of Housing Benefit.

## ANNEX B

### **Available financial Assistance**

#### **Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant – DFG**

These will be awarded according to Government Legislation (Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996) which determines the maximum amount of grant, the type of work which may be funded and the test of resources which must be made. The maximum amount of assistance is £30,000.

#### Purpose

To adapt the home of a disabled person to meet their needs in providing access to and from the dwelling; facilitating access to a room used as or usable as a principal family room; facilitating access to a room used or usable for sleeping; facilitating access to toilet and bathing facilities or for the preparation of food.

#### Eligible persons

To qualify for assistance an applicant must be the disabled person, owner occupier or tenant with a referral from the Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapy Team. The grant is available to help the home to be adapted to meet the needs of any disabled person living in the property and enable them to continue living there.

#### The Property

To qualify for assistance the property must be the primary or sole residence of the applicant and must be reasonably and practically capable of being adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person, having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling.

#### Details of the Assistance

- The owner's contribution will be determined by the "Test of Resources" (not required for applications made on behalf of children under 19 years old)
- The maximum grant will be £30,000 in any one application.
- The grant will pay for the works required to adapt the property to meet the needs of the disabled person as assessed and recommended by an Occupational Therapist from Lincolnshire County Council
- Where the Council provides a DFG of a value equal to or greater than £10,000 that funds the creation of additional floor space the Council will impose a local land charge.
- The maximum charge will be £10,000, repayable if the property is sold or otherwise disposed of within 10 years of the grant works being completed.
- If equipment e.g. portable ramps and stairlifts are no longer required, an assessment will be made to determine if it is possible to recycle them for another application.

## **Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance**

### Purpose

To provide additional discretionary assistance to a disabled person where appropriate. The maximum available assistance is £10,000.

### Eligible persons

To qualify for assistance an applicant must be the disabled person, owner occupier or tenant with a referral from the Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapy Team. The grant is available to help the home to be adapted to meet the needs of any disabled person living in the property and enable them to continue living there.

### The Property

To qualify for assistance the property must be the primary or sole residence of the applicant and must be reasonably and practically capable of being adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person, having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling.

### Details of the Discretionary Adaptations Assistance

- The assistance may be provided for small scale adaptations to either fulfil needs not covered by a mandatory DFG or to deliver a speedy remedy for very urgent adaptations.
- The assistance may contribute to the total cost of the works in excess of the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant or where the applicant cannot afford their required contribution.
- The assistance may contribute towards the cost of moving where more suitable accommodation has been identified and the applicant is unable to afford the cost of moving.
- The assistance will contribute toward the cost of works required to adapt the property to meet the needs of the disabled person as assessed and recommended by an Occupational Therapist from Lincolnshire County Council.
- The assistance will normally be up to a maximum of £10,000, although the council may use discretion to determine a reasonable amount in excess of this in exceptional circumstances.
- The amount of the assistance will be secured by attaching a land charge to the property for a period of 10 years from the completion of the property purchase (in the case of relocation) or from the completion of the grant aided work.
- The Council has the discretion to waive repayment of the assistance in cases where the owner can prove exceptional circumstances.
- This assistance is provided subject to funding availability and judged on a case by case basis.
- Approval of the discretionary assistance will be given by the Portfolio Holder for Good Housing

## **Discretionary Essential Home Repair Assistance**

### Purpose

To provide assistance to owner occupiers in receipt of certain means tested benefit to remove Category 1 hazards (as defined by the Housing Act 2004) which are not supported via other schemes e.g. Green Deal. The maximum grant funding is £5,000 per property.

### Eligible persons

Owner occupiers who have lived in the property for at least 3 years and are in receipt of one or more of the principal income related or disability benefits:

- Income support (Employment and Support Allowance)
- Working tax credit (annual income of no more than £16,090, subject to annual review)
- Housing Benefit
- Child tax credit (annual income of no more than £16,090, subject to annual review)
- Pension credit
- Income based job seekers allowance
- Attendance allowance
- Disability living allowance
- Industrial injuries disablement benefit
- War disablement pension
- Incapacity benefits (including Employment and Support Allowance)

Applications will only be considered from people who have not received a Decent Homes Grant or Essential Home Repair Grant within the 3 years prior to the application.

### The Property

- Privately owned properties built before 2000.
- Must have Category 1 hazards to the main living accommodation assessed as requiring attention which would not be rectified by alternative government assistance e.g. the Green Deal.

### Details of the Discretionary Essential Home Repair Assistance

- Eligible work does not include improvements which would be available through the Green Deal and Energy Company obligation e.g. insulation, heating system replacement, replacement glazing, heating controls and draught proofing.
- Reasonable and practicable works will be undertaken having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling.
- The maximum grant available is £5,000 per property. No more than one grant for the same property will be considered within a 3 year period.
- The council retains the discretion to apply means testing to determine the maximum amount a household is eligible to apply for.
- The applicant must be the owner occupier of the property.

- The property must be the sole residence of the applicant. The applicant must have lived in the property for at least 3 years prior to application.
- The amount of the assistance will be secured by attaching a land charge to the property for a period of 5 years from the completion of the grant funded work. If the property is sold within 5 years the grant must be repaid on a reducing scale (20% reduction per full year since completion).
- Contractors appointed by the council will be used and payment made directly to them. The council reserves the right to make payment directly to the applicant in certain circumstances.
- This grant is provided subject to funding availability.

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## **Discretionary Empty Homes Assistance**

### Purpose

To provide assistance to owners of long term empty residential properties to bring them back into occupation for the rental market at an affordable rent. The maximum grant available is £5,000 per property.

### Eligible persons

Applicants must be the owner of the empty property or represent the interests of the owner.

### The Property

The property must have been empty for a minimum of 6 months at the time of application (evidenced through Council Tax information).

The property will be subject to an inspection and assessment to determine suitability. Priority will be given to those properties which meet local housing need taking account of the size and location of the property.

### Details of the Discretionary Empty Homes Grant

- Eligible works are repair to the property e.g. materials and contractor's labour costs.
- Ineligible works include professional fees e.g. surveyor and architect fees, insurance costs and works to outbuildings or land drainage. Works which would normally be covered by standard building insurance are also excluded.
- The council retains the discretion to assess the eligibility of certain work in complex cases.
- Works must not have already commenced or been completed at the time of the application.
- The property must have been empty for at least 6 months at the time of application (as evidenced through council tax data).
- The maximum grant available is £5,000 per property. No more than one grant for the same property will be considered.
- The amount of the assistance will be secured by attaching a land charge to the property for a period of 5 years from the completion of the grant funded work. If the property is sold or transferred within 5 years the grant must be repaid in full.
- The property must be bought back into use within 12 months of payment of the grant. The grant must be re-paid in full if this is not satisfied.
- The property must be available for rental purposes at a rent not exceeding the Local Housing Allowance Rate relevant for the property for a period of 3 years. The grant must be re-paid in full if this is not satisfied.
- The property must not be rented to a member of the owners family during the 3 year period.
- Evidence of financial commitment to complete the project must be evidenced at the time of application.
- The property must be refurbished to the Decent Homes Standard.

- All works must comply with applicable planning, building control and housing standard requirements.
- This grant is discretionary and provided subject to funding availability.

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