

# Cabinet Meeting

## 13 September 2017

<b>Report title</b>	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Peter Bilson City Assets and Housing	
<b>Corporate Plan priority</b>	People - Stronger Communities	
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Lesley Roberts, Strategic Director - City Housing	
<b>Originating service</b>	City Housing	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Christopher Hale	Head of Housing
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Place Leadership Team	7 August 2017
	Strategic Executive Board	22 August 2017

### Recommendations for action or decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the proposed amendments to the Housing Assistance Policy and publishing as required by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 for the purposes of:-
  - i. to amend the policy to allow a wider range of adaptations to be undertaken including:-
    - All stairlifts, modular ramps and ceiling track hoists – up to £8,000, including the provision of stairlift maintenance contracts
    - Bathroom adaptations to enable safe access to bathing and toileting facilities – up to £5,000
  - ii. to provide a more comprehensive approach to assisting vulnerable households by considering “whole home” solutions rather than addressing issues on a piecemeal basis by enabling a single housing assistance proposal to be delivered under a streamlined grant/loan process.
2. Approve the delivery of the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy programmes through Wolverhampton Homes.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 To seek approval to amendments to the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy.
- 1.2 To seek approval for the delivery of the Council's Housing Assistance Policy programmes through Wolverhampton Homes.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 In order to provide assistance to private sector households, including finance in the form of grants or loans, the Council is required to published a housing assistance policy made under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO).
- 2.2 The latest version of the policy was approved by Cabinet on 10 April 2013 for all housing assistance except those relating to adaptations for persons with disabilities which form a separate strand of the policy. Further individual amendments to the policy have been made to ensure that matters such as qualifying criteria are in accordance with the Council's strategic objectives. These are referenced in the background papers.
- 2.3 Adaptations are delivered mainly through the approval of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). This type of grant is prescribed in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. As the application and administration of DFGs is lengthy and complex, even in respect of very straightforward adaptations, on 27 June 2006, Cabinet (Resources) Panel approved a strand of the Housing Assistance Policy to introduce Small Adaptations Grants (SAG) utilising the RRO powers. This enables small adaptation works to be subject to a shorter and quicker application process for DFG applicants where a recommendation has been received following assessment by Social Services for "qualifying works" and where the applicant is either over the age of 65 (not being subject to a financial test of resources or "means test") or aged between 18 and 64 years and in receipt of a means-tested benefit. Qualifying works are determined by the Council, but were initially limited to straight stairlifts and a maximum grant of £5000. An amendment to this policy by Individual Executive Decision extended the scope of works to include curved stairlifts and metal ramps and associated works to doorways and an increase in the maximum SAG to £6500 dependant on the type of works.
- 2.4 770 assessments were undertaken by Occupational Therapists in 2016/17 for private sector adaptations with 378 grants being awarded (figures for 2015/16 were 560 assessments with 330 grant awards). Whilst a number of schemes will be self-funded or otherwise resolved, it is likely that a number of customers do not achieve their best outcomes through not pursuing the completion of approved adaptation schemes.

## **3.0 Proposals**

- 3.1 Following the approval of the transfer of certain operational housing services from the City of Wolverhampton Council to Wolverhampton Homes, it is proposed that

Wolverhampton Homes will undertake the delivery of all schemes under the housing assistance policy including the delivery of adaptations for persons with disabilities.

- 3.2 To facilitate the most effective and timely delivery of scheme outcomes, it is proposed that where legally allowed, the ability to approve individual schemes of work under the current or amended Housing Assistance Policy in respect of all programmes is delegated to Wolverhampton Homes. This will apply to all programmes except the Mandatory DFG programmes which will require the Council to agree and approve the award of grant. Cases which are outside of the policy will continue to be submitted to the Council for consideration with any approval to exercise the Council's discretion to deviate from policy to be subject to either an Individual Executive Decision or report to Cabinet. Any change in policy will be subject to further reports to Cabinet for approval.
- 3.3 Whilst the existing SAG policy is currently restricted as outlined in section 2.3, it is intended to amend the policy to allow a wider range of adaptations to be undertaken including:
- All stairlifts, modular ramps and ceiling track hoists – up to £8,000, including the provision of stairlift maintenance contracts
  - Bathroom adaptations to enable safe access to bathing and toileting facilities – up to £5,000
- 3.4 It is also intended to provide a more comprehensive approach to assisting vulnerable households by considering “whole home” solutions rather than addressing issues on a piecemeal basis. For example, this will mean that where a property requiring an adaptation also has issues of low thermal performance, poor housing conditions generally and/or the householder is vulnerable in other ways, such as at risk of domestic violence, Wolverhampton Homes will be empowered to consider a more comprehensive approach to assisting the household by enabling a single housing assistance proposal to be delivered under a streamlined grant/loan process.
- 3.5 Emphasis will also be placed on both re-ablement and prevention agendas, with the Small Works Grants being targeted at facilitating effective and successful hospital discharge needs and specific prevention strategies such as falls prevention. This could also include facilitating more major works such as designing and feasibility for schemes of adaptation works or supporting a move to more suitable accommodation.

#### **4.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

- 4.1 The existing housing assistance policy could remain in place unamended, which would still enable some assistance to be targeted at vulnerable households to support the Council's strategic objectives. However, this would not be making best use of the flexibilities available to the Council to provide housing assistance in the most effective manner and would impede Wolverhampton Homes in delivering a cost effective comprehensive home improvement service.

## **5.0 Reasons for decision(s)**

- 5.1 This report proposes to utilise the Council's powers under the RRO to facilitate the delivery of assistance to vulnerable households in a more cost-effective way. Should these proposals not be approved the Council risks housing improvement programmes continuing to be delivered in a fragmented fashion leading to potential waste of resources and a less satisfactory customer experience and outcome.

## **6.0 Financial implications**

- 6.1 The approved City Housing Capital Programme has a budgetary provision for the delivery of all aspects of the Housing Assistance Policy. Currently in 2017-2018 there is £2.8 million to fund the Capital Provision for disabled adaptations, £400,000 to fund the Capital Provision for the Affordable Warmth programme and £700,000 to fund the Capital Provision for the Handy Person and Small Works programme of the Private Sector Housing Assistance Strategy. The proposed amendments to the Housing Assistance Policy will continue to be delivered within this budgetary provision.

[JM/17082017/L]

## **7.0 Legal implications**

- 7.1 The Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO) provides that local housing authorities may for the purpose of improving living conditions provide to its residents any form of assistance, including loans, to enable them to improve their homes. Further, local housing authorities may secure loans by a Legal Charge or mortgage on a property.
- 7.2 For local housing authorities to utilise these powers they must have adopted a policy detailing the assistance to be provided.

[TS/17082017/Q]

## **8.0 Equalities implications**

- 8.1 An equalities impact assessment will be undertaken and considered in the development of any amendments to this policy.

## **9.0 Environmental implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct environmental implications in this report.

## **10.0 Human resources implications**

- 10.1 There are no immediate human resource implications arising from the contents of this report.

## **11.0 Corporate Landlord implications**

11.1 There are no Corporate Landlord Implications

## **12.0 Schedule of background papers**

12.1 Report to Resources Panel 27 June 2016 Amendments to Housing Assistance Policies –  
Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002  
Report to Cabinet 10 April 2013 Revisions to the Housing Assistance Policy  
Report to Cabinet 19 July 2017 Change of Criteria to Affordable Warmth Grant  
Assistance