

Report title	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Peter Bilson City Assets and Housing	
Corporate Plan priority	Place - Stronger Economy	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Kate Martin, Service Director, City Housing	
Originating service	City Housing	
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Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board	28 August 2018

Recommendation for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

Approve the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The attached policy sets out the current position with regard to financial assistance provided by the Council to residents of the City under powers given by the Regulatory Reform Order 2002. It consolidates previous policy that has developed during the intervening years and presents it in one document.
- 1.2 The financial package on offer is varied and there are different eligibility criteria and other conditions attached to each form of assistance. It is the hope that the policy can be reviewed in the near future to harmonise conditions where possible, and to ensure that the financial assistance provided to residents is still relevant to wider Council strategy and objectives, and in line with other partner programmes in health and social care.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Until recently the delivery of financial assistance for repairs and adaptations in private sector housing has been delivered by the Council's in-house team. More recently this role has been delegated to Wolverhampton Homes along with other housing functions. At the same time there has been a change in national policy regarding the delivery of disabled adaptations alongside a significant uplift in funding.
- 2.2 The extra funding has come with increased flexibility with the aim of integrating housing with social care and health through the Better Care Fund. There is a requirement to publish a policy setting out how the Council will exercise its discretion. It is this that has prompted a review of existing policy in this area.
- 2.3 The current policy has developed over a period of ten years or more and has not previously been consolidated into one document. The attached paper seeks to present current policy as determined by earlier decisions in one place. It is necessarily detailed and complex.
- 2.4 In arriving at this point there has been input from Council Officers and representatives of Wolverhampton Homes who must practically deliver the policy on behalf of the Council. It is clear that the current policy has become somewhat disjointed at the detailed level of operation. An example of this would be the differing qualifying benefits for the range of financial assistance on offer.
- 2.5 The collective view of those involved is that the current policy is generally fit for purpose, but that further consideration is needed. However, the current pressure is to have a published policy to which the public can refer in order to comply with the terms of the increased central funding allocation.

3.0 Progress

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the current policy and to approve the publication of the document for public information purposes.
- 3.2 Cabinet is also requested to consider how they would like future policy review to be undertaken and the level of authority they might wish to delegate to Senior Officers in making alterations to policy particularly where there are related changes in other areas of public policy, e.g. welfare benefits and where underlying principles of existing policy on financial assistance are not affected.

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 Failure to consider this issue and to ensure that policy in this area is current would lead to weaker operation of the Better Care Fund and joint working between housing, health and social care.
- 4.2 It would also hamper the day to day delivery of the programme by our partners at Wolverhampton Homes.
- 4.3 It may also lead to the view that the Council is not delivering disabled adaptations effectively and prejudice any future central allocation of funds.

5.0 Reasons for decision:

- 5.1 The proposed policy is deemed to be the most effective and efficient method to deliver our statutory function under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The financial assistance for repairs and adaptations is made up of resources allocated from the Council's Housing Revenue Account plus a larger central allocation from government through the Better Care Fund subject to certain conditions.
- 6.2 The central allocation is provided for the purposes of delivering mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants as determined by the Housing Grants and Reconstruction Act 1996, and for other discretionary measures as agreed by partners through the BCF.
- 6.3 Adopting the policy document should make no material difference to finances as it is merely a statement of the current position and does not extend eligibility for assistance, etc, to new groups or for new purposes.

[JM/17082018/M]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 Council powers to provide financial assistance for home repairs and adaptations are governed by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, and the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO). The former provides for a prescribed mandatory disabled facilities grant, whilst the RRO allows for flexibility, variation, and innovation dependent upon prevailing local circumstances and available resources. If the Council wishes to use its powers under the RRO it must set out and publish a policy on how it will do so.

[DC/23082018/L]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 There are no implications for equalities as this is merely a re-statement of current policy.

9.0 Environmental implications

- 9.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

10.0 Human resources implications

- 10.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

11.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 11.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

12.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – City of Wolverhampton Council Housing Assistance Policy