

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

11 NOVEMBER 2014

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

AMENDMENT TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL AND DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval to amend the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy (**Appendix 1**); to provide information on a new Welsh Government (WG) National Home Improvement Loan (HIL) scheme and to seek, in principle approval for participation in the WG HIL scheme.

2.0 Connection to Corporate Plan/Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1 The implementation of this policy will help to address the Council's Corporate Plan priority of "Working together to help vulnerable people to stay independent" through enabling citizens to stay in their homes longer. It also accords with the Corporate Aim of "Working together to develop the local economy" and "Working together to make the best use of our resources" by encouraging the development of residential accommodation in Bridgend town centre to assist its future vitality and vibrancy. Finally, it will help to manage and meet demand for investment in housing by delivering elements of the Local Housing Strategy 2009-2014 approved by Council on 4th March 2009.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Council's current Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy together with the Bridgend Standard for Adaptations and Assistance was approved by Cabinet on 18th September 2012. This was developed having regard to the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. This legislation gave local authorities a wide ranging power to prescribe the type of assistance they provide and the terms and conditions associated with that assistance. Local authorities can provide grants, loans, equity release, labour or any form of assistance to maximise improvements in private sector housing to meet local circumstances. However, Councils cannot exercise these powers until the policy is approved and published.
- 3.2 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to adapt properties for people with disabilities are mandatory. All other types of assistance are discretionary.
- 3.3 As required under WG guidance, the existing policy is based on local evidence of need and aligns with wider local and national strategic objectives. The recently completed Local Housing Market Assessment, Stock Condition Survey and review of adaptation services have identified the need to provide a range of different grants and assistance to tackle identified problems in the County Borough, such as housing disrepair, empty properties, area regeneration, poor conditions in the

private rented sector and home energy efficiency, as well as targeting vulnerable clients, particularly older and disabled persons.

- 3.4 The need to update the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Adaptation Policy is in recognition of the WG initiative to encourage the regeneration of town centres through encouraging more investment in housing. In addition, the WG have stated their aim for the integration of health, housing and social services to support independent living which accords directly with the Council's corporate aim.

4.0 Current situation / proposal.

- 4.1 **Disabled Facilities Grant** – It is proposed that the wording of the Policy in regard to the repayment of DFG (Point 5.1.1 in the Policy) be updated and clarified as below:

- 4.1.1 “The Authority will require repayment of any grant, together with interest, if the recipient of the grant is subsequently found to be not entitled to it. The Authority may demand repayment of any grant in excess of £5,000 where the grant recipient disposes of the property in respect of which the grant was given, within 10 years of the certified date. ***Where the works are undertaken under the fast track bathing grant scheme, only any costs of work over £5,000 may be reclaimed. For example:***

Grant works awarded = £4,500, less Fees of £390 - Repayment required - £nil
Grant works awarded = £5,500, less Fees of £390 - Repayment required - £110”

- 4.2 **Homes In Towns Grant (HITS)** - The HITS grant was introduced in the November 2013 Policy and formed part of the Vibrant and Viable Places project, launched in September 2014. The grant seeks to encourage the development of residential accommodation in Bridgend town centre. Many properties within the town centre have vacant and redundant space, particularly above retail premises, and this grant seeks to assist owners to bring this redundant empty space back into use for residential purposes, thereby creating vibrancy in the town centre, whilst at the same time providing affordable housing for those who work in, or require to be close to, the town centre.

- 4.2.1 In order to maximise the impact of this grant and to further the Council's aims of regenerating the town centre, it is proposed that the Policy on HITS remain unchanged but the boundary for eligibility be widened to include Market Street, Wyndham Street and Derwen Road. The proposed new area for eligibility for the HITS grant is shown at Appendix B to the Policy.

4.3 National Home Improvement Loan (HIL)

- 4.3.1 The HIL Scheme is a WG initiative to offer interest free loans to help improve the quality and supply of housing. A total of £5m is available to homeowners across Wales in 2014/15 for the repair or conversion of properties to make them safe, warm and/or secure. The scheme will also consider applications for loans to convert commercial properties into residential accommodation.

- 4.3.2 BCBC's indicative allocation to be drawn down for 2014/15 is £228,320. The same amount will be made available to the Council in 2015/16, totalling £456,640 across

the two years. Initial WG guidance indicates that the loan fund is interest free and will be available to the Council to lend to loan applicants for a maximum of 15 years. The loan fund must be repaid by the Council to WG by 31st March 2030.

4.3.3 WG has stipulated that they wish to see consistency of approach in loan policy terms across regions. BCBC is part of the Western Bay Region for the purposes of this loan scheme and subject to Cabinet agreement in principle to participate in the HIL scheme, discussions will take place with City and County of Swansea, and Neath Port Talbot Borough Council.

4.3.4 Welsh Government aim to launch the scheme in January 2015 and a further report will be made to Cabinet to seek approval to participate in the scheme and incorporate it into the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy prior to implementation. In the meantime, WG has requested that the Council indicate, in principle, our intention to participate in the scheme, subject to further clarification on the terms and conditions of the loan, and the financial implications for the Council.

5.0 Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules.

5.1 The proposals described above will implement the Council's Local Housing Strategy and achieve a balance between meeting mandatory duties, providing services to vulnerable clients and contributing to Welsh Government and corporate objectives, within available resources.

6.0 Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken for the 2013 Policy to assess its relevance to the Authority's public equality duties and potential impact on protected equality characteristics. This policy has been assessed as relevant to the Authority's general and specific duties to promote equality and eliminate discrimination with regard to gender, disability, race, religion and belief and age. The policy has also been assessed as relevant to the Authority's duty to promote and protect human rights (specifically protection of property and right to respect for private and family life). The minor alterations made to the Policy have no effect on this EIA.

7.0 Financial Implications.

7.1 Funding for the Healthy Home Assistance and Homes in Town grants is identified in the Council's capital programme as Housing Renewal/Disabled Facilities Grants. Grants can only be awarded up to the level of available funding within any financial year.

8.0 Recommendation

Cabinet is recommended to:

8.1. Approve the Private Sector Renewal and Disabled Adaptation Policy, attached as **Appendix 1**;

- 8.2 Note the WG National Home Improvement Loan (HIL) scheme as set out in 4.3 of the report;
- 8.3 Approve in principle, the Council's participation in the HIL scheme subject to further clarification on the terms and conditions of the loan, and the financial implications for the Council as referred to in the report;
- 8.4 Note that a further report on the HIL scheme will be presented to Cabinet when more detailed information becomes available on the terms and conditions of the loan, and the financial implications for the Council.

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Background documents: Equality Impact Assessment for Private Sector Housing Renewal
and Disabled Adaptations Policy 2014