

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CABINET

1 SEPTEMBER 2015

### 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 amend two existing grants, and to include a new grant – the Home Security Grant to assist people suffering from domestic abuse.

##### **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 development in the Bridgend town centre to assist its future vitality and vibrancy.

##### **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 11th November 2014. 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 to adapt properties for people with disabilities are mandatory. All other types of assistance are discretionary.
- 3.3 As required under Welsh Government guidance, the existing policy is based on local evidence of need, and aligns with wider local and national strategic objectives. The Authority's 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 Authority's need to support the creation of single units of accommodation, work proactively to develop the private sector and meet our obligations under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Also, in recognition of the Authority's development of a holistic 'One Stop Service' approach to help address domestic abuse issues and presentations and provide a comprehensive service to victims of domestic abuse.

#### 4.0 Current situation / proposal.

- 4.1 **Empty Homes Grant** – It is proposed that the wording of the Policy in regard to this grant be expanded to reflect the potential re-development of properties into shared accommodation (Point 5.1.7 in the Policy) and also a distinction be given on the eligible funding levels for self-contained units and for these shared accommodation. It is proposed that the wording of the Policy be amended to:

#### 4.2 *Maximum Grant Amount*

*Where a property has been identified as being empty on the Authority's empty property register;*

- *£10,000 or 75% of eligible costs, whichever is the lesser amount, per unit for a like for like conversion, i.e. if a two bed house is brought back into use as a two bed house.*
- *£15,000 or 75% of eligible costs, whichever is the lesser amount, per unit for a conversion into more **self-contained** units, i.e. if a two bed house is brought back into use as two one bed flats.*
- **£9,000 or 75% of eligible costs, whichever is the lesser amount, per unit for a conversion into units that have shared facilities i.e. bedsit type units that share facilities, such as either a kitchen, bathroom or both.**

*For a commercial or non-residential empty property (which does not appear on the residential empty property register)*

- *£15,000 or 75% of eligible costs, whichever is the lesser amount, per **self-contained** unit where a non-residential property is converted into residential property, (subject to appropriate Planning Permission being obtained).*
- **£9,000 or 75% of eligible costs, whichever is the lesser amount, per unit for a conversion into units that have shared facilities i.e. bedsit type units that share facilities, such as a kitchen, bathroom or both.**

- 4.3 **Assistance to RSLs in Strategic Regeneration** – (Point 5.1.10 of the Policy). This grant assistance was introduced in the November 2013 Policy and is intended to assist RSLs in tackling buildings/developments of strategic relevance that without assistance will remain vacant/derelict as other financial assistance (such as Social Housing Grant) would be insufficient to bring them back into use without a 'top up' of funding. In addition, the grant is intended to complement in securing and developing accommodation in areas of wider regeneration, e.g. such as

complementing Vibrant and Viable Places in Bridgend Town and the Porthcawl Regeneration scheme.

- 4.4 There has been some interest in the grant from RSLs in tackling such properties, however the current level of £15,000 has not been sufficient to address the issues of some of these properties and they have remained unviable for the RSLs to purchase and convert into affordable housing. It is therefore, proposed to increase the level of grant funding assistance to a level of up to £25,000 per unit of accommodation.
- 4.5 **Domestic Abuse and Domestic Violence Security Grant** - The purpose of this grant is to assist in meeting the costs of 'target hardening' properties to enable a person experiencing domestic abuse and/or domestic violence to remain in their home whilst assisting to prevent the perpetrator accessing the property.
- 4.6 For many victims it is important to access a place of safety away from the perpetrator, such as refuge. However, for others 'target-hardening' their home can be a safe alternative to moving to refuge or another accommodation-based service. Target-hardening can be an effective way for victims and their children, who are able to remain in their homes, to stay safe and continue to receive support from their local network of family and friends. Children can continue to access local schools and health services, as well as reducing the stress associated with moving home.
- 4.7 BCBC has recently commissioned Calan DVS to provide a One Stop domestic abuse service that will provide a holistic service to people suffering from domestic abuse. This service includes a First contact advice and engagement service, floating housing related support to people in their own homes, temporary emergency housing (refuge), supported move-on accommodation, awareness training and target hardening identification and fitting – with the service being available 24/7. This grant would provide the 'hardware' required by the individual to enable them to feel secure in their own home
- 4.8 The grant will be available to any person who has experienced/is experiencing domestic abuse and has been referred for target hardening through the One Stop Domestic Abuse Service or the local Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Co-Ordinator. The grant will be applicable to any accommodation type and will apply to all tenures, though in particular owner occupiers and those living in private rented accommodation as RSLs will usually assist their tenants directly.
- 4.9 Eligible works will include anything that will assist in helping the security of the property and more importantly reduce the fear of reoccurrence for the victim of domestic abuse. Whilst each case will be individually assessed, examples of eligible works can include such things as Window locks, Door locks and chains, Security alarms, Security camera's, Security or enhanced lighting etc. In addition, cameras can help to deter perpetrators from attending the property and support evidence collection when a restraining or exclusion order has been breached. An application for assistance under the Domestic Abuse and Domestic Violence Security Grant will be for up to £350 per application.

## **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 2014 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 existing grants (Empty Homes Grant and Assistance to RSLs) together with the new proposed Home Security Grant is identified in the Council's capital programme as Housing Renewal / Disabled Facilities Grants. The revised capital budget including slippage £3.337 million was approved by Council in July. Grants can only be awarded up to the level of available funding within any financial year.

## **8.0 Recommendation**

- 8.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the Private Sector Renewal and Disabled Adaptation Policy, as appended at Appendix 1.

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