

## Report of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing

Council – 25 June 2015

### PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL AND DISABLED ADAPTATIONS: POLICY TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE 2012-17

<b>Purpose:</b>	To outline proposed amendments to the current Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations: Policy to Provide Assistance 2012-17
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	1. Local Housing Strategy 2. Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations: Policy to Provide Assistance 2012-2017 approved by Council on November 24 <sup>th</sup> 2011
<b>Reason for Decision:</b>	To make amendments to the Discretionary Disabled Facilities and Grants for Nominations schemes in accordance with the statutory requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002.
<b>Consultation:</b>	Legal, Finance, Access to Services.
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It is recommended that: 1. Council approves amendments to sections 3 and 5 of the document and publishes a revised Policy.
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#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations: Policy to Provide Assistance 2012-2017 details how the City and County of Swansea delivers assistance to help private owners and tenants to repair, maintain or adapt their homes.
- 1.2 This report outlines a proposed policy amendment relating to the maximum amount that can be awarded via a Discretionary Disabled

Facilities Grant (DDFG). An amendment to the maximum amount and nomination period for the Grants for Nominations scheme is also proposed.

## **2.0 Assistance for Home Adaptations**

- 2.1 Section 3 of the Policy describes the approach to offering assistance to vulnerable, older and disabled applicants needing help to adapt their homes. The principal aim is to promote independence at home.
- 2.2 The main form of assistance for home adaptations is the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). This is a means tested grant provided to help improve access into and around the property. The statutory maximum DFG is £36,000. Assistance to Council tenants is funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outside of the mandatory DFG framework but follows the same policy principles.
- 2.3 In addition to a mandatory DFG, the Policy allows for provision of a Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant of up to £4000. This is provided to meet the cost of unforeseen works that may arise during the course of the DFG. Fees such as Planning and Building Regulations can also be included in the DDFG where works cannot be completed within the statutory maximum. It is usually the most complex adaptations for applicants with the highest level of need that require both a DFG and a DDFG.
- 2.4 The DDFG limit of £4000 was set in 2010. Since this time the cost of building works and fees associated with the works have risen significantly. There have also been increases in VAT and costs relating to construction health and safety regulatory requirements. This means the most complex adaptations cannot always now be fully funded within the DFG and DDFG maximum.
- 2.5 The DFG limit is prescribed in law and cannot be changed. A review of the DDFG limit is therefore appropriate.

## **3.0 Assistance for Empty Properties**

- 3.1 The Council recognises that empty homes are a wasted resource and the need to encourage empty properties back into use. The Grants for Nominations scheme is available to the owners of long term empty homes to fund repair works. In return the landlord must allow the Council to nominate tenants to the reoccupied property from the Housing waiting list for a period of 3 years.
- 3.2 The maximum grant that can be awarded via the Grants for Nominations scheme is currently £20,000. The annual budget is £80,000 and allows only 4 properties per year to be brought back into use. This report proposes that the grant maximum be reduced to £5000. This increases the potential number of properties able to be brought back into use each

year to 16. The nomination period is proposed to be reduced to 1 year to reflect the reduced level of grant and to encourage participation in the scheme to provide much needed affordable private rented accommodation.

- 3.3 In 2012 the Welsh Government launched the Houses into Homes empty homes loans scheme. This provides loans to the owners of empty homes to allow the property to be renovated for sale or rent.
- 3.4 WG have provided funding of £1.5m for the Houses to Homes scheme to date with a further £0.86m being made available, depending on demand, in 2015-16. The loan fund is 'recyclable' in that monies paid back by applicants can then be loaned again to the owners of other empty homes. The maximum loan amount is £25,000 per property or unit, up to a total of £150,000 per applicant.
- 3.5 The proposed amendments to the Grants for Nominations scheme will allow Houses to Homes and Grants for Nominations to better complement one another and maximise the number of reused empty properties. Owners making a grant application will be signposted to the Houses to Homes loan scheme to finance the rest of the works required.

#### **4.0 Proposed Changes to Existing Policy**

- 4.1 Based on experience of costs of adaptations works encountered and to build in an element of future proofing, it is proposed that the DDFG limit be increased to from £4000 to £10,000. This will ensure the Council can continue to be able to fulfil its obligations and responsibilities to households who require assistance.
- 4.2 It is proposed that the Grants for Nominations limit be reduced from £20,000 to £5,000 and the nomination period be reduced from 3 years to 1 year.

#### **5.0 Equality and Engagement Implications**

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment (EIA) has been completed for the Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy 2012-17. The Access to Services Team has advised that an EIA is not required for the amendments proposed in this report.

#### **6.0 Financial Implications**

- 6.1 DFG, DDFG's and Grants for Nominations are funded via the Councils General Fund programme for disabled facilities and improvement grants. Council house adaptations are funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

1. For 2015/16 the DFG/DDFG budget is £5.2m.
2. The tenant adaptations budget for 2015/16 is £2.75m.

No additional funding is required to fund the proposed DDFG limit increase or the proposed reduced Grants for Nominations limit. This will be managed within existing budgets.

## **7.0 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 The Council is under a statutory duty to provide disabled facilities grants, in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 ("the HGCR").
- 7.2 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 ("the RRO") empowers local housing authorities to provide assistance to improve living conditions in their area, and requires them to adopt and publish a policy in accordance with which the power is to be exercised. The DDFG and Grants for Nominations are provided via the powers detailed in the RRO.
- 7.3 Under the RRO discretionary assistance may be provided in any form, and may be unconditional or subject to conditions, including conditions as to the repayment of the assistance or of its value (in whole or in part), or the making of a contribution towards the assisted work, and may require security, including a charge on the property. However, before such a condition is imposed, or steps are taken to enforce it, the authority must have regard to the ability of the person concerned to make such contribution or repay the assistance.

**Background Papers:** Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations: Policy to Provide Assistance 2012-2017 ([link](#)).

**Appendices:** None