



Report of the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation

Cabinet – 23 March 2023

National Empty Homes Scheme 2023 - 2025

Purpose:	To provide details of the Welsh Government National Empty Homes Grant scheme, to seek approval to participate in the scheme including match funding requirements and to include the scheme within the 2023/2024 and 2024/25 capital programmes to comply with Financial Procedure Rule No7 (Capital Programming and Appraisals)- to commit and authorise schemes as per the Capital Programme.
Policy Framework:	1. Local Housing Strategy. 2. Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations: Policy to Provide Assistance 2017-2022.
Consultation:	Legal, Finance, Access to Services.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that Cabinet:
1)	Approves the Council's participation in the National Empty Homes Grant scheme and approves the provision of the match funding requirements.
2)	Approves the inclusion of the National Empty Homes Grant scheme in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 capital programmes.
Report Author:	Darren Williams
Finance Officer:	Ben Smith
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Access to Services Officer:	Catherine Window

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide background regarding the Welsh Government National Empty Homes Grant scheme proposed for 2023-24 and 2024-25.
- 1.2 The National Empty Homes Grant scheme objective is to provide a financial incentive to assist longer term empty property homeowners to bring their property back into use by assisting with funding of repairs and energy efficiency measures. The intention is the scheme will increase the availability of much needed affordable housing in Wales and build on the success of the previous Valleys Taskforce Empty Property scheme.

2.0 The National Empty Homes Grant Scheme

- 2.1 The Council was asked on the 17th November 2022 to participate in the scheme by Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change, Julie James and agree to a match funding contribution of 10% towards the scheme in 2023-24 and 2024-25.
- 2.2 A maximum of £25,000 grant is available for owners of empty homes (empty for 12 months or more) to bring them back into use. The scheme provides grant funding for proposed owner- occupiers to appoint contractors to carry out repairs and energy efficiency measures to their home to make them suitable for occupation.
- 2.3 Applicants must live in the property as their main residence for 5 years following completion of the works and contribute 15% towards the cost of the works. Any other costs above the grant and contribution must be met by the applicant.
- 2.4 Welsh Government have appointed Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) County Borough Council to administer the scheme for all local authorities participating in Wales, with the technical surveying functions for the works being provided by officers from each local authority. The costs of undertaking the technical surveying functions for the scheme can be recovered by quarterly surveying fee claims to RCT Council.
- 2.5 Welsh Government funding for the scheme across all participating local authorities is £50 million, split equally across the next 2 years. Each local authority's funding is an indicative allocation that has been calculated based on annual empty property statistics. For Swansea, 1701 properties were reported as empty, providing a funding allocation of £3,841,464 over the 2 years, with a match funding contribution of £384,146. This is subject to having sufficient grant applications from Swansea households.

3.0 Local Connections – Gower

- 3.1 Due to the lack of affordable homes in a number of coastal local authorities in Wales for local residents, the scheme provides the flexibility for local

authorities to include local connections criteria for applicants that can include the whole authority boundary or selected areas. For grant applications within the Gower area of Swansea, local need criteria will apply.

3.2 A local need criteria will need to be met by prospective grant applicants. In this context the word 'local' in describing a resident will mean:

- Applicants who are resident within the Gower area who have been resident for a continuous period of at least 5 years immediately before making an application. Or
- Applicants who have been resident within the Gower area for any period of (or periods totalling) 10 years or more within the previous 10 years immediately before making an application. Or
- Applicants who were previously resident in the Gower area and who have an immediate family member(s) currently resident in the area and where the immediate family member(s) have been resident within the area for a continuous period of at least 10 years immediately before the housing application was made and intend to remain ('immediate family' means a parent or parents, a child or children, or a sibling or siblings). Or
- Applicants who currently live in the Gower area needing separate accommodation, for example married couple and people living in tied accommodation on retirement. Or
- Applicants who work either full time or part time within the Gower area (part time in this case is defined as being a minimum of 10 hours each week). Or
- Applicants who need to move into the Gower area to take up full or part time employment (a minimum of 10 hours per week) within the area. Or
- Applicants who need to move to the Gower area to enable them to either give or receive support to or from an immediate family member ('immediate family' means a parent or parents, a child or children, or a sibling or siblings or other relationships where a genuine need to give or receive support is demonstrated to the satisfaction of the City and County of Swansea).

In the event that none of the above can be met by the applicants, consideration will be given to individuals from surrounding areas and communities that border the area within the City and County of Swansea boundary. This will be defined on a case by case basis if necessary.

The Gower area includes the Gower, Pennard, Bishopston, Fairwood and Penclawdd electoral wards.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 Welsh Government funding for the scheme across all participating local authorities is £50 million, split equally across the next 2 years. Each local authority's funding is an indicative allocation that has been calculated based on annual empty property statistics.
- 4.2 For Swansea, 1701 properties were reported as empty in 2022/23, providing a funding allocation of £3,841,464 over the 2 years, with a match funding contribution of £384,146, a total scheme value of up to £4,226,000 . Further details on costs are included in the Financial Implications summary included in appendices.

The funding is split as follows :

Financial Year	Allocation	Match Funding Contribution	Total scheme funding
2023/24	£1,920,732	£192,073	£2,113,000
2024/25	£1,920,732	£192,073	£2,113,000
Totals	£3,841,464	£384,146	£4,226,000

- 4.3 It is proposed the Council's match funding provision of £384,146 is funded through the transfer of current Housing Renewal and Adaptations Homefix loan repayment funds.
- 4.4 Revenue running costs for the technical surveying functions within the National Empty Homes Grant scheme will be recovered from quarterly fees claims to the administrators of the scheme, RCT County Borough Council.

5.0 Integrated Assessment Implications

- 5.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

- 5.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.
- 5.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.
- 5.2 An IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report was not required. The scheme does not negatively impact on any protected characteristic groups, with a number benefitting from these schemes including :

Poverty & Social exclusion – bringing back into use wasted empty accommodation for creation of low affordable homes, often for local first time buyers. The local connection clauses for Gower housing applications will assist local residents struggling to obtain affordable housing in the locality.

Community cohesion – the scheme will see the re-use of often problematic long term empty properties in areas that have a negative impact on the locality and community, and often a haven for anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse. Local connections clauses will assist Gower residents to remain living in their communities.

Age and generations : the schemes offers locals the opportunity to enter the property ladder with the provision of additional affordable housing. Many applicants are expected to be first time buyers, giving local residents the opportunity to remain in the locality close to their extended families.

The Screening Form is included in the appendices as a background paper.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 The schemes detailed are in line with local authority powers to provide assistance, contained in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and the Council's published policy.
- 6.2 The Council will need to ensure that it complies with any terms and conditions attached to Welsh Government National Empty Homes scheme Service Level Agreement with administrators of the scheme and holders of the grant award RCT County Borough Council.

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix A - Financial Implications Summary.
Appendix B - IIA Screening Form.