

Public Document Pack

Mid Devon District Council

Homes Policy Development Group

Tuesday, 12 March 2019 at 2.15 pm
Exe Room, Phoenix House, Tiverton

Next meeting
Tuesday, 18 June 2019 at 2.15 pm

Those attending are advised that this meeting will be recorded

Membership

Cllr W J Daw (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs E M Andrews
Cllr Mrs H Bainbridge
Cllr D R Coren
Cllr Mrs G Doe
Cllr R J Dolley
Cllr P J Heal
Cllr F W Letch
Cllr J D Squire

A G E N D A

Members are reminded of the need to make declarations of interest prior to any discussion which may take place

- 1 **Apologies and Substitute Members**
To receive any apologies for absence and notice of appointment of substitutes.
- 2 **Declaration of Interests under the Code of Conduct**
Councillors are reminded of the requirement to declare any interest, including the type of interest, and reason for that interest, either at this stage of the meeting or as soon as they become aware of that interest.
- 3 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions relating to items on the Agenda from members of the public and replies thereto.
- 4 **Minutes (Pages 5 - 10)**
Members to consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 15 January 2019.
- 5 **Chairman's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chairman may wish to make.

- 6 **Performance & Risk Report for 2018-19** (*Pages 11 - 20*)
To receive a report from the Director of Operations providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2018/19 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.
- 7 **Financial Monitoring**
To receive a verbal update from the Principal Accountant presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.
- 8 **Devon Wide Housing Assistance Policy 2019-22 and Eco Flex 3**
(*Pages 21 - 60*)
To receive a report from the Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services presenting a revised Housing Assistance Policy under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 following the one year review of the existing policy that was agreed and adopted in February 2018 (Housing Assistance Policy 2018-19).
- 9 **Private Sector Housing Fees and Charges 2019/20 and Enforcement Update** (*Pages 61 - 68*)
To receive a report from the Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services providing Members with the revised fees and charges in addition to an enforcement update for the relevant statutory and discretionary Private Sector Housing functions within the Community Team of Public Health and Regulatory Services.
- 10 **Empty Homes Plan 2019-2022** (*Pages 69 - 86*)
To receive a report from the Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services providing Members with the revised Empty Homes Plan for 2019-2022.
- 11 **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**
During discussion of the following item(s) it may be necessary to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 12 12.02(d) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision may be required because consideration of this matter in public may disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The Group will need to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

To consider passing the following resolution so that financial information may be discussed.

Recommended that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the

grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

- 12 **Deposit and Rental Scheme (DARS)** (Pages 87 - 90)
Information for Members with regard to the Deposit and Rental Scheme.
- 13 **Housing Update** (Pages 91 - 96)
To receive a report from the Group Manager for Housing providing a written briefing on the latest developments relating to social housing.
- 14 **Chairman's annual report for 2018/19** (Pages 97 - 98)
To receive the annual report from the Chairman of the Policy Development Group for 2018/19.
- 15 **Identification of items for the next meeting**
Members are asked to note that the following items are identified in the work programme for the next meeting **but are 'to be confirmed' where indicated:**
 - Election of Chairman
 - Election of Vice Chairman
 - Performance and Risk Outturn for 2018/19
 - Financial Monitoring
 - Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy (tbc)
 - Corporate Asbestos policy (tbc)
 - Domestic Abuse Policy (tbc)
 - Harrassment Policy (tbc)
 - Hoarding Policy (tbc)
 - Pets and Animal Policy (tbc)
 - Allocations Policy and Procedures (tbc)
 - Homelessness Strategy (tbc)
 - Tenancy Strategy (tbc)
 - Housing Sector Update
 - Agree start time of meetings for 2019/20

Note: This item is limited to 10 minutes. There should be no discussion on the items raised.

Stephen Walford
Chief Executive
Monday, 4 March 2019

Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so, as directed by the Chairman. Any filming must be done as unobtrusively as possible from a single fixed position without the use of any additional lighting; focusing only on those actively participating in the meeting and having regard also to the wishes of any member of the public present who may not wish to be filmed. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairman or the Member Services Officer in attendance so that all those present may be made aware that is happening.

Members of the public may also use other forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to discussion. Lift access the first floor of the building is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available. There is time set aside at the beginning of the meeting to allow the public to ask questions.

An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. If you require any further information, or if you would like a copy of the Agenda in another format (for example in large print) please contact Sarah Lees on:

Tel: 01884 234310

E-Mail: slees@middevon.gov.uk

Public Wi-Fi is available in all meeting rooms.

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP** held on 15 January 2019 at 2.15 pm

Present

Councillors

W J Daw (Chairman)
Mrs H Bainbridge, D R Coren, Mrs G Doe,
R J Dolley, F W Letch and J D Squire

Apologies

Councillors

Mrs E M Andrews and P J Heal

Also Present

Councillor

R L Stanley

Also Present

Officers

Andrew Pritchard (Director of Operations), Claire Fry (Group Manager for Housing), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security), Joanne Nacey (Group Manager for Finance), J P McLachlan (Principal Accountant), Michael Parker (Housing Options Manager) and Sarah Lees (Member Services Officer)

50 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Mrs E M Andrews and P J Heal.

51 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

No interests were declared under this item.

52 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present.

53 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2018 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

54 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

It was announced that the Housing Service had been shortlisted for the TPAS Awards 2019 in the 'Community Focused Service/Product of the Year Award' category. This was in relation to work that had been undertaken in the repairs procurement service review.

55 PERFORMANCE & RISK FOR 2018-19 (00:02:47)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** a report * from the Director of Operations providing Members with an update on performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for 2018/19 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

It was noted that the average number of days to re-let remained below target and the service was congratulated for this. This was reflected in the 'Dwelling rent lost due to voids' which had decreased steadily throughout the year and was now at the same level as this time last year i.e. 0.5%.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

56 FINANCIAL MONITORING (00:04:05)

The Group received a verbal update from the Group Manager for Finance presenting a financial update in respect of the income and expenditure so far in the year.

It was reported that the previously predicted overspend for the year had reduced from £168k to £94k. This had been achieved through an amalgamation of car park income, a slight reduction in legal work in relation to Section 106, a windfall of £75k in relation to housing benefit subsidy and a slight improvement in Planning fee income. There had also been some savings in Customer Services salaries. However, the figures remained challenging and the Group would be updated at the next meeting.

57 GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2019/20 - UPDATE (00:07:42)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) reviewing the revised General Fund budget changes identified and seeking further discussion on any changes required in order for the Council to move towards a balanced budget for 2019/20.

The draft budget gap for 2019/20 had reduced from £662k to £253k. This was in part due to the provisional settlement received from central Government in December 2018 which had brought in some additional funding such as Business Rates and Levy Account Surplus Draft Allocation. There had also been a reduction in an allowance for vacancies and other salary saving in the Waste Service.

However, it was not expected that the current gap would reduce any further and therefore it was likely that the balance would need to be found through a one off transfer from Ear Marked Reserves. However the underlying issues would need to be addressed and 2021 would present a very challenging set of financial circumstances.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

58 DRAFT 2019/20 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET (00:11:53)

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) and Director of Operations considering the options available in order for the

Council to set a balanced budget for 2019/20 and agree a future strategy for further budgetary planning for 2020/2021 onwards.

The following was highlighted within the report:

- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was a ring-fenced account within Mid Devon's financial accounting system meaning that a balanced budget had to be set each year. This included all income and expenditure pertinent to the Council's landlord function.
- The appendices attached to the report showed the previous year and current year movements as well as the proposed budget for 2019/20.
- Various assumptions had been made in setting the proposed budget including a 1% decrease in all rents.

Consideration was given to the proposed increase with regard to garage rents. However it was felt that the increase proposed was so small that it would have a detrimental effect.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that the proposed HRA budget for 2019/20 be approved subject to garage rents being frozen for 2019/20 and that from 2020/2021 onwards garage rents be increased by the Consumer Prices Index plus 1%.

(Proposed by Cllr R J Dolley and seconded by Cllr Mrs G Doe)

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

59 **HRA MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (00:24:30)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED**, a report * from the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) providing an estimate of the budget required for the operation of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) from 2019/20 – 2022/23.

Further to the proposed draft budget for 2019/20 assumptions had been made for the forthcoming years which were listed in the report. This had been necessary in order to determine a reasonable forecast of the financial position of the HRA in the coming years.

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

60 **MEETING THE HOUSING NEEDS POLICY (00:27:00)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Housing Options Manager. Homelessness legislation stated under the Housing Act 1996, as amended under the Homelessness Act 2002 Part V11, that the Housing Options Service should have a Supply and Demand Policy. This had also been stated in recent Supreme Court cases.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:

- a) The revised Housing Options Supply and Demand Policy be approved;

- b) It notes the Housing Options Service will continue to make best use of its temporary housing resources when accommodating homeless households.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

61 **REVIEW OF THE VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY (00:28:10)**

The Group had before it a report * from the Group Manager for Building Services advising Members of the revised Void Management Policy.

The contents of the report were outlined with reference to a number of minor changes to the policy.

A brief discussion took place regarding the Council needing to spend £324,304 on repairing 'major' voids between 1 April and 30 November 2018. There was a requirement on the Council to adhere to the Decent Homes Standard and this resulted in inevitable costs.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that it approves the revised Void Management Policy and that the term of the policy be extended to 10 years.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: * Report previously circulated; copy attached to the signed minutes.

62 **HOUSING SECTOR UPDATE (00:32:57)**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** a report * from the Group Manager for Housing providing an update on the latest developments within social housing.

It was explained that the briefing paper only ever represented a 'snap shot in time' and that housing policy nationally was evolving very quickly. The following was highlighted within the report:

- Comments from the Housing Minister in relation to social housing tenants feeling 'disenfranchised'.
- League tables and the fact that in some areas the Council was performing in the top quartile particularly in relation to Tenant Involvement.
- Housing supply nationally remained a major area of concern.
- Housing Association mergers were creating larger organisations in some cases.
- Impending changes in relation to Universal Credit.

63 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (00:39:20)**

In addition to the items already listed in the work programme for the next meeting it was requested that the Group receive feedback from the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Director of Operations following their meeting with the Housing Minister in early February. The previously arranged meeting in December had been cancelled.

It was also requested that the Group review the situation regarding Band E in the near future.

(The meeting ended at 3.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN

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HOMES PDG
12 MARCH 2019

PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT FOR 2018-19

Cabinet Member Cllr Ray L Stanley
Responsible Officer Director of Operations, Andrew Pritchard

Reason for Report: To provide Members with an update on performance against the corporate plan and local service targets for 2018/19 as well as providing an update on the key business risks.

RECOMMENDATION(S): That the PDG reviews the Performance Indicators and Risks that are outlined in this report and feeds back any areas of concern to the Cabinet.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Corporate Plan priorities and targets are effectively maintained through the use of appropriate performance indicators and regular monitoring.

Financial Implications: None identified

Legal Implications: None

Risk Assessment: If performance is not monitored we may fail to meet our corporate and local service plan targets or to take appropriate corrective action where necessary. If key business risks are not identified and monitored they cannot be mitigated effectively.

Equality Impact Assessment: No equality issues identified for this report.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Appendix 1 provides Members with details of performance against the Corporate Plan and local service targets for the 2018/19 financial year.
- 1.2 Appendix 2 shows the section of the Corporate Risk Register which relates to the Homes Portfolio. See 3.0 below.
- 1.3 Appendix 3 shows the profile of all risks for Homes for this quarter.
- 1.4 All appendices are produced from the corporate Service Performance And Risk management system (SPAR).

2.0 Performance

- 2.1 Regarding the Corporate Plan Aim: **Build more council houses:** Birchen Lane (4 units) is completed and the first tenants have moved in. Burlescombe (6 units) is due March 2019 and for Palmerston Park; practical completion is due in March for 12 units with handover of all 26 units due August 2019.

- 2.2 Regarding the Corporate Plan Aim: **Facilitate the housing growth that Mid Devon needs, including affordable housing:** Last year was very successful with both measures well above target. This year the **Affordable homes** delivered figure is currently well below target but 10 units are due in Q4. Bringing **Empty homes** into use has now well exceeded the annual target.
- 2.3 Regarding the Corporate Plan Aim: **Planning and enhancing the built environment: Performance Planning Guarantee determined within 26 weeks** was just below target for Q3 but all 4 speed and quality measures were well above the required target. These are all reported quarterly.
- 2.4 Regarding the Corporate Plan Aim: **Other: % Properties with a valid Gas Safety Certificate;** one property's Gas Safety Certificate has expired; the tenant is deceased so this will be remedied while the property is void.
- 2.5 Rent Arrears: **Rent collected as % of Annual Rent Debit** is only just outside target at 99.9%. **Current tenant arrears** remain steady at around 1.3%.
- 2.6 The **Average days to re-let** remains better than target. This is reflected in the **Dwelling rent lost due to voids** which has decreased steadily throughout the year and is now at the same level as this time last year i.e. 0.5%.

3.0 Risk

- 3.1 The Corporate risk register has been reviewed by Group Managers' Team (GMT) and updated. Risk reports to committees include risks with a total score of total score of 10 or more. (See Appendix 2)
- 3.2 Appendix 3 shows the risk matrix for MDDC for this quarter. If risks are not scored they are included in the matrix at their inherent score which will be higher than their current score would be.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

- 4.1 That the PDG reviews the performance indicators and risks for 2018/19 that are outlined in this report and feeds back any areas of concern to the Cabinet.

Contact for more Information: Catherine Yandle, Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security ext 4975

Circulation of the Report: Management Team and Cabinet Member

Corporate Plan PI Report Homes

Monthly report for 2018-2019
 Arranged by Aims
 Filtered by Aim: Priorities Homes
 For MDDC - Services

Key to Performance Status:

Performance Indicators:

No Data

Well below
target

Below target

On target

Above target

Well above
target

* indicates that an entity is linked to the Aim by its parent Service

Corporate Plan PI Report Homes

Priorities: Homes

Aims: Build more council houses

Performance Indicators

Title	Prev Year (Period)	Prev Year End	Annual Target	Apr Act	May Act	Jun Act	Jul Act	Aug Act	Sep Act	Oct Act	Nov Act	Dec Act	Jan Act	Feb Act	Mar Act	Actual to Date	Group Manager	Officer Notes
<u>Build Council Houses</u>	0 (10/12)		26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	4				Angela Haigh	(January) Birchen Lane complete (CY

Aims: Facilitate the housing growth that Mid devon needs, including affordable housing

Performance Indicators

Title	Prev Year (Period)	Prev Year End	Annual Target	Apr Act	May Act	Jun Act	Jul Act	Aug Act	Sep Act	Oct Act	Nov Act	Dec Act	Jan Act	Feb Act	Mar Act	Actual to Date	Group Manager	Officer Notes
<u>Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)</u>	72 (3/4)		80	n/a	n/a	8	n/a	n/a	12	n/a	n/a	13	n/a	n/a			Angela Haigh	
<u>Deliver homes by bringing Empty Houses into use</u>	111 (10/12)		72	13	19	26	29	56	70	92	107	121	134				Simon Newcombe	

Aims: Other

Performance Indicators

Title	Prev Year (Period)	Prev Year End	Annual Target	Apr Act	May Act	Jun Act	Jul Act	Aug Act	Sep Act	Oct Act	Nov Act	Dec Act	Jan Act	Feb Act	Mar Act	Actual to Date
<u>% Decent Council Homes</u>	100.0% (10/12)		100.0%	99.8%	99.9%	99.7%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%			
<u>% Properties With a Valid Gas Safety Certificate</u>	99.64% (10/12)		100.00%	99.69%	99.78%	99.73%	99.91%	99.91%	99.91%	99.87%	99.91%	100.00%	99.96%			
<u>Rent Collected as a Proportion of Rent Owed</u>	99.37% (10/12)		100.00%	95.34%	96.76%	97.09%	97.68%	99.26%	99.59%	99.40%	98.61%	100.24%	99.90%			
<u>Current Tenant Arrears as a Proportion of Annual Rent Debit</u>	1.28% (10/12)		1.00%	1.13%	1.17%	1.29%	1.34%	1.32%	1.31%	1.33%	1.51%	1.07%	1.31%			
<u>Dwelling rent lost due to voids</u>	0.5% (10/12)			0.71%	0.67%	0.70%	0.65%	0.57%	0.55%	0.52%	0.50%	0.50%	0.51%			
<u>Average Days to Re-Let Local Authority Housing</u>	16.0days (10/12)		14.0days	16.6days	15.9days	16.1days	15.6days	14.9days	14.2days	13.8days	13.9days	13.8days	13.9days			

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Homes PDG Risk Management Report - Appendix 2

Report for 2018-2019

For Homes - Cllr Ray Stanley Portfolio

Filtered by Flag: Include: * CRR 5+ / 15+

For MDDC - Services

Not Including Risk Child Projects records or Mitigating Action records

Key to Performance Status:

Risks: No Data (0+) High (15+) Medium (6+) Low (1+)

Homes PDG Risk Management Report - Appendix 2

Risk: Evictions Tenants being evicted could become violent.

Effects (Impact/Severity):

Causes (Likelihood):

Service: Housing Services

Current Status: Medium (10)

Current Risk Severity: 5 - Very High

Current Risk Likelihood: 2 - Low

Service Manager: Claire Fry

Review Note: The assessment of the risk remains the same, as the Housing Service is required to house vulnerable people with complex needs who may exhibit challenging behaviour if they feel threatened. An eviction can be a very traumatic event for such people.

Risk: Hoarding Some tenants are known hoarders but we have policies in place and we do regular inspections.

Effects (Impact/Severity):

Causes (Likelihood):

Service: Housing Services

Current Status: Medium (10)

Current Risk Severity: 5 - Very High

Current Risk Likelihood: 2 - Low

Service Manager: Claire Fry

Review Note: The assessment of the risk remains the same but it should be noted that the Housing Service works closely with partners including the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service to help those who hoard to understand the possible consequences of their behaviour and to help them to commence addressing the issues.

Risk: Homelessness Insufficient resources to support an increased homeless population could result in failure to meet statutory duty to provide advice and assistance to anyone who is homeless.

Effects (Impact/Severity): - Dissatisfied customers and increase in complaints.

- This will involve an increase in officer time in dealing with Homelessness prevention and early

Homes PDG Risk Management Report - Appendix 2

intervention.

- Possible increase in temporary accommodation usage.

Causes (Likelihood): New legislation implemented in April 2018 introduced new statutory duties and as a result the numbers of people presenting as homeless are increased, having an impact upon workloads.

Service: Housing Services

Current Status: Medium (12)

Current Risk Severity: 4 - High

Current Risk Likelihood: 3 - Medium

Service Manager: Claire Fry

Review Note: The new referral procedure implemented in accordance with the provisions of the Homelessness Reduction Act is now resulting in more cases, therefore we monitor this risk as a matter of routine. Mitigating factors are still effective and the team is managing the work load.

Risk: Impact of Welfare Reform and other emerging National Housing Policy Changes to benefits available to tenants could impact upon their ability to pay. Other initiatives could impact upon our ability to deliver our 30 year Business Plan.

Effects (Impact/Severity):

Causes (Likelihood):

Service: Housing Services

Current Status: Medium (12)

Current Risk Severity: 4 - High

Current Risk Likelihood: 3 - Medium

Service Manager: Claire Fry

Review Note: Universal Credit full service has now started in Mid Devon and the number of tenants in receipt of this is increasing. This is having an impact upon our revenue stream. For this reason, the risk assessment remains the same although we now have a team in place which is dedicated to income recovery and we are also reviewing our procedures in order to streamline them.

Risk: Palmerston Park Development of 26 houses - liquidator exploring a claim against us regarding losses and damages re previous contractor.

Effects (Impact/Severity):

Causes (Likelihood):

Service: Property Services

Current Status: Medium (10)

Current Risk Severity: 5 - Very High

Current Risk Likelihood: 2 - Low

Service Manager: Andrew Busby

Review Note: Development of 26 houses - liquidator exploring a claim against us regarding losses and damages re previous contractor. A response to this claim has been submitted to those representing the liquidator and the Council despite chasing have not received a reply in accordance with the construction protocol.

Homes PDG Risk Management Report - Appendix 2

Risk: Reputational re Council Housing Stock Failure in handling a disaster/mistake properly

Effects (Impact/Severity):

Causes (Likelihood):

Service: Housing Services

Current Status: Medium (10)

Current Risk Severity: 5 - Very High

Current Risk Likelihood: 2 - Low

Service Manager: Claire Fry

Review Note: the assessment of the risk remains the same but there are adopted policies and procedures which should mitigate the risk of a disaster happening. Furthermore, we have trained and experienced staff.

Risk: Stress The physical and mental well-being of Officers could be affected by work environment and pressures caused by work demands and work relationships.

Effects (Impact/Severity):

Causes (Likelihood):

Service: Housing Services

Current Status: Medium (12)

Current Risk Severity: 4 - High

Current Risk Likelihood: 3 - Medium

Service Manager: Claire Fry

Review Note: The risk assessment remains the same due to the nature of the work. Whilst we have a strong supervision framework in place, provide appropriate training and access to support as necessary, Officers are often required to work with challenging people, make key decisions which can have a profound impact upon individuals and juggle conflicting priorities.

Risk: Tenants with Complex Needs As our housing stock shrinks, the proportion of such tenants will increase.

Effects (Impact/Severity):

Causes (Likelihood):

Service: Housing Services

Current Status: Medium (12)

Current Risk Severity: 4 - High

Current Risk Likelihood: 3 - Medium

Service Manager: Claire Fry

Review Note: The risk assessment remains the same because vulnerable people may need support and may also exhibit challenging behaviour which could impact staff wellbeing. We provide appropriate training for staff and have good links with other agencies including the Police, social services, Wiser£money, CHAT, the CA etc

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Risk Matrix Homes Appendix 3

Report For Homes - Cllr Ray Stanley Portfolio Current settings

Risk Likelihood	5 - Very High	No Risks	No Risks	No Risks	No Risks	No Risks
	4 - High	No Risks	No Risks	No Risks	No Risks	No Risks
	3 - Medium	No Risks	No Risks	1 Risk	4 Risks	No Risks
	2 - Low	No Risks	No Risks	4 Risks	1 Risk	4 Risks
	1 - Very Low	No Risks	No Risks	No Risks	No Risks	7 Risks
		1 - Very Low	2 - Low	3 - Medium	4 - High	5 - Very High
		Risk Severity				

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SPAR.net

Print Date: 22 February 2019
11:38

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HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

12 March 2019

DEVON WIDE HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY 2019-22 AND ECO FLEX 3

Cabinet Member: Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer: Simon Newcombe, Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services

Reason for Report: To present a revised Housing Assistance Policy under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 following the one year review of the existing policy that was agreed and adopted in February 2018 (Housing Assistance Policy 2018-19).

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- (1) That Cabinet approve the revised Housing Assistance Policy 2019-22 attached in Annex 1.
- (2) That Cabinet approve the ECO Flex Statement of Intent (SOI) attached in Annex 4 associated with the revised Housing Assistance Policy.
- (3) That delegated authority is given to the Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services in consultation with the Cabinet member for Housing to make minor adjustments to the policy based on demand and local priorities.
- (4) That delegated authority is given to the Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services in consultation with the Cabinet member for Housing to suspend some or all non-mandatory parts of the revised Housing Assistance Policy attached in Annex 1 (all elements of the Policy other than section 4.1 Disabled Facilities Grants) if adequate funding is not available.

Relationship to the Corporate Plan: The Housing Assistance Policy sets out the forms of financial assistance that may be available subject to available funding. The policy concentrates on disabled adaptations and assisting elderly and vulnerable people. The policy will help the Council meet Priority 2: Homes of the Corporate Plan by considering the impact of an aging population and helping the elderly to retain their independence and remain in their own home.

Financial Implications: The assistance detailed in the policy will utilise the Better Care Fund (BCF) allocation received by the Council. The delivery of the assistance will be dependent on available external funding from the BCF pot held by Devon County Council.

The Council is not expected to provide its own capital towards the delivery of the assistance as the BCF is currently sufficient to cover existing demand. The Council will however retain responsibility for meeting demand for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

Future allocations of the BCF from Devon County Council will be made on a demand basis and therefore the allocation may differ from that published by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This is to ensure that the basic demand for mandatory DFGs is met first as a priority for the whole of the County before any remaining funding is distributed to the district councils for the other forms of assistance found in the policy.

There is an ability for the Council to suspend all or parts of the discretionary elements of the policy locally (i.e. everything except the mandatory DFGs) if BCF funding is not adequate within any given year due to exceptional demand. Authority to make this decision is set out in Recommendation 4.

However, currently the Council has benefitted from substantially more funding and therefore Recommendation 3 seeks to be able to provide additional assistance where demand presents itself to ensure the full utilisation of the available grant pot.

Legal Implications: The Council must have an up to date and relevant Housing Assistance Policy under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 in order to be able to provide assistance across the district.

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) requires local authorities to produce a plan to achieve improved home energy efficiency. The plan must identify practicable and cost-effective measures likely to result in significant energy reduction in all residential accommodation in their area i.e. across the private sector housing and social housing stocks. The statutory HECA guidance requires us to report this plan to the Government every two-years and ECO schemes (see Section 3.7 and Annexes 3 and 4) form the major part of our submission in respect of private sector housing i.e. over 90% of the local housing stock.

Risk Assessment: Not having a relevant policy means that the Council would be unable to utilise the BCF for anything other than the mandatory DFG. This may have an impact on the Councils ability to help vulnerable households across the district.

Equality Impact Assessment: A full equality impact assessment was undertaken for the policy in 2018 and no substantial changes have been made that affect the validity of the assessment that was undertaken at that time. No further equality issues have been identified within the policy and none have arisen to date as a result of its implementation. The Public Sector Equality Duty will apply to decisions made under this policy.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Better Care Fund intentionally provides more funding to Devon than is currently required to meet the demand for mandatory DFGs only. A wider policy is needed to allow the Devon councils to spend the BCF on assistance that helps a wider range of households and meets the broader BCF objectives.
- 1.2 The policy agreed in February 2018 substantially updated and replaced the previous Mid Devon Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy adopted in 2012.

The Policy presented by this report has been updated based on the experience of delivering the new policy over the past year.

- 1.3 The revised version of the policy can be found in Annex 1 to this report.
- 1.4 In addition there have been changes to the ECO flex fund and therefore this needs to be reflected in the statement of intent (SOI). The SOI is a mandatory requirement setting out the specific terms for accessing this funding locally. This will allow the council to continue to provide assistance to local residents to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and reduce their fuel bills.

2.0 Main scope of the policy

- 2.1 The policy aims to provide a consistent approach to the delivery of the BCF across Devon that satisfies the terms of the funding agreement.
- 2.2 The policy will provide the flexibility and discretion for the councils to provide appropriate assistance to meet the following objectives:

Objective 1 - Assist disabled residents to remain in their own homes through supporting the provision of adaptations (so far as this is necessary, appropriate and reasonably practicable) to prevent admissions to care and to assist with delayed transfers where possible.

Objective 2 – Safeguard the health and well-being of vulnerable residents by removing unnecessary hazards to health and safety in the home to reduce avoidable emergency admissions

Objective 3 – Provide adaptations that are suitable for the future by ensuring the scheme of works is dementia aware.

Objective 4 – Assist vulnerable people to afford to heat their homes through appropriate energy efficiency and heating measures.

- 2.3 These objectives meet the combined priorities of the BCF, the district councils and the county council in Devon.

3.0 Summary of the Assistance contained in the policy

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

- 3.1 The delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grant programme is mandatory and a statutory function of the local housing authority (Public Health/Private Sector Housing Team). The delivery of this function is governed by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
- 3.2 There are no proposed changes to this part of the policy other than to introduce clarification that additional works specifically required to manage disability caused by dementia or related conditions are eligible.

Accessible Homes Grant

- 3.3 The Accessible Homes Grant enables an enhanced offer in addition to the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant subject to available funding.
- 3.4 This grant is available in the following circumstances:
- Where a mandatory grant has been approved but the cost of the work exceeds £30,000
 - Where there are works that may not be covered by the DFG in relation to adapting the home and making it safe.
 - Where the means test identifies that a contribution is required.
 - Where moving house more appropriate than adapting the existing property.
- 3.5 The main change to this part of the policy is the introduction of a stair lift grant. This grant is not means tested and is available to provide an internal stair lift where a need has been identified by an NHS Occupational Therapist or a Social Services Occupational Therapist. This means that we can help people be discharged from hospital much more quickly.
- 3.6 Mid Devon together with Exeter City Council have been piloting this change successfully since December 2018 (see Cabinet Member for Housing decision dated 10/12/2018 on the MDDC decision register available at [<decision>](#)).

Healthy Homes grant

- 3.7 The Healthy Homes grant is a flexible grant to provide urgent/essential repairs to the home to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the occupier. This has been extended to include helping those residents at risk due to hoarding or accumulations in their property.

Home Improvement Loan

- 3.8 Wessex Resolutions Community Interest Company (WRCIC) currently administers loans within the requirements of this policy and the local policies of each district council within Devon. The Home Improvement Loan is a flexible product that can be used for the following purposes:
- Home repairs and improvements
 - Adaptation works where grant is not available
 - To cover a client contribution to a grant
 - To cover the cost of the work over the DFG or Accessible Homes grant maximum.
 - To bring empty homes back into use
 - For landlords to carry out repairs or improvement to rented accommodation
 - For energy efficiency improvements
- 3.9 Continued participation in the home improvement scheme is reviewed on an annual basis by the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Director of Operations, in consultation with the Councils s151 Finance Officer.
- 3.10 There are no proposed changes to this part of the policy.

ECO3 and the ECO Flex ‘Top up’ Grant

- 3.11 Where a client is eligible for a grant provided by an external third party under the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Flex funding and ECO top ups (HHCRO – Home Heating Cost Reduction Obligation) the client may apply for a top up grant from the council. This will only be available where the ECO flex funding does not cover the full cost of the work. The ECO Flex top up grant aims to meet the funding gap for energy efficiency measures..
- 3.12 The eligibility for ECO Flex funding itself is subject to a separate Statement of Intent that needs to be issued by each Local Authority. That Statement of Intent sets out local eligibility criteria. No ECO funding is provided by the Local Authority.
- 3.13 The first phase of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), known as ECO1, ran from January 2013 to March 2015. This placed obligations on larger energy suppliers to deliver energy efficiency measures to domestic premises in Great Britain. The next obligation period, known as ECO2, launched on 1 April 2015 and ended on 31 March 2017. The government had taken action to extend ECO2 until at least the end of September 2018. Following this 18-month period, the Government was expected to introduce a longer term scheme.
- 3.14 In July 2018, the Government confirmed that the ECO3 scheme would become a 100% Affordable Warmth scheme. The Electricity and Gas (Energy Company Obligation) Order 2018 (“the ECO Order”) are the regulations that will bring into force the third ECO scheme (ECO3).
- 3.15 ECO3 supports low income, vulnerable and fuel poor households meaning that all measures should be delivered to these groups. The scheme helps homes to reduce their energy bills and consequently tackles fuel poverty and vulnerability to the cold. The scheme will run until 31 March 2022. This meets the objectives of the Better Care Fund allowing the use of that money to help ‘top up’ where needed.
- 3.16 A key change introduced by the ECO Order is that funding will not be available for replacement of oil or coal heating systems. In future systems will be funded under the scheme that source renewables such as air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps and biomass boilers.
- 3.17 Cavity, solid wall, loft and other insulation (double glazing, draught –proofing) remain as eligible measures along with heating controls and solar panels.
- 3.18 Mid Devon District Council produced a Statement of Intent (SOI) in February 2018 during the ECO2 funding phase. The SOI outlines the Council’s criteria for eligibility for ECO measures that should be adopted by heating and insulation installers. During this phase (Feb-Oct 2018) the Council approved declarations for almost 100 properties. From 1st November (commencement of ECO 3) to date the Council has approved a further 17 applications.

- 3.19 The majority of new applications are primarily for insulation. This partly reflects the fact that the replacement of oil/coal heating systems has been removed from the scheme and that installers are in new negotiations with their funders (Energy companies) following the revised ECO3 obligation rules.
- 3.20 With the introduction of ECO3 it is timely that we review the current SOI to ensure it is in line with the government's intentions. Properties with a reliance on solid fuel heating will be removed from the eligible criteria list. In addition, it is proposed that the income criteria is increased to '£38K and under'. This reflects the increase cost of heating systems that use renewables, increasing heating bills and is comparable to other district income thresholds.
- 3.21 The proposed SOI is contained in Annex 2.

4.0 Recommendation

- 4.1 That the PDG consider the updated policy in Annex 1 and recommend it for approval by Cabinet.
- 4.2 That the PDG recommends Cabinet approve the updated ECO Flex Statement of Intent (SOI) attached in Annex 2 associated with the revised Housing Assistance Policy.
- 4.3 That PDG recommends that delegated authority is given to the Cabinet member for Housing in conjunction with the Group Manager to make minor adjustments to the policy based on demand and local priorities.
- 4.4 That the PDG recommends that delegated authority is given to the Cabinet member for Housing to suspend some or all non-mandatory parts of the revised Housing Assistance Policy attached in Annex 1 if adequate funding is not available.

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Circulation of the Report:

Cllr Ray Stanley, Cabinet Member for Housing
Members of the Homes PDG
Leadership Team
Financial Services
Legal Services
Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security

List of Background Papers:

MDDC Housing Assistance Policy 2018-19 (previous policy)

More information on Wessex Home Improvement Loans is available [<here>](#)

More information on the national ECO Flex scheme is also available at [<here>](#); and by downloading the following document:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/608042/ECO_Help_to_Heat_flexible_eligibility_guidance_for_LAs.pdf

Annex 1 – Devon Wide Housing Assistance policy 2019-22 (attached separately)

Annex 2 – ECO Flex Statement of Intent (SOI) (attached separately)

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HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY FOR THE BETTER CARE FUND 2019-22

Adopted xxx

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HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY FOR THE BETTER CARE FUND 2019-22

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

This policy is required under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. The Order provides councils with the discretion to develop schemes to provide financial assistance to deal with a range of housing issues. This policy sets out the areas on which Devon will focus any available resources in order to improve housing conditions across the district. With limited resources available it is essential that funding is targeted to those areas that contribute to the delivery of the Better Care Fund and Health and Wellbeing Board priorities and local district council priorities.

The policy covers a three-financial year period: 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22

This policy provides the Devon Councils with the flexibility and discretion to provide appropriate assistance to meet the aims and priorities set out in section 3 below. Appendix 2 allows for each local authority to deliver its own local schemes that may be available over and above the Devon wide schemes.

This policy is owned by the following Councils:

Devon County Council
East Devon District Council
Exeter City Council
Mid Devon District Council
North Devon District Council
South Hams District Council
Teignbridge District Council
Torridge District Council
West Devon District Council

1.2 Review

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

1.3 Funding

The assistance contained within this policy is only available subject to the availability of funding. Where funding is limited priority for spend will be given to the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant across the County.

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 Housing and Health

Housing is a key determinant of health, and by promoting good quality housing this policy can contribute to reducing health inequalities for the residents of Devon.

In 2008, flexibilities were introduced enabling councils to use government grant that has been allocated for disabled facilities grants to be used more intelligently to deliver adaptations for disabled people outside of the mandatory grant regime.

Research has shown that there is a direct impact on the health and well-being of residents resulting from the homes in which they live; therefore, poor housing can contribute to poor health.

Each year hazards in the home result in unnecessary injuries, episodes of ill-health, and harm to mental health and in many cases the occupiers do not link the poor condition of their homes with a potential negative impact on their health. The poorest housing stock can be found in the private sector, and in some cases residents who own their own home are not able to maintain them and as a result hazards can develop.

An estimated 34,400 excess winter deaths were recorded in England and Wales in 2016/17 as reported by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in their document Excess Winter Mortality in England and Wales 2016-17.

Many of these people die unnecessarily as a result of living in cold homes each year. Although the data collected does not identify the number of people that die directly as a result of the home environment various studies have found a link and these are detailed within the ONS report. In extreme cases the inability to afford to heat the home results in cold temperatures that create hypothermic conditions; however, for many individuals (particularly older persons) cold homes may result in trips, slips and falls, or injuries/health impacts resulting from cardiovascular, circulatory diseases and respiratory disease.

2.2 Better Care Fund

In 2015 the government introduced the Better Care fund in an attempt to bring health and social care together in an integrated way. The fund is a combination of government funding from the Department of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government and includes the grant allocation for disabled facilities grants (DFG). The 2017-19 Integration and Better Care fund policy framework document lists the conditions that the better care fund must be used to address.

These are:

Condition 1: *Plans to be jointly agreed* – The plan to use the BCF allocation must be jointly agreed and signed off by the Health and Wellbeing Board, and constituent councils and clinical commissioning groups. The local housing authority must also be involved due to the inclusion of the DFG allocation, which forms part of the fund.

Condition 2: *NHS contribution to social care is maintained in line with inflation.* - The funding must be used to contribute to the maintenance of adult social care services in each local authority, which also has a health benefit. However, beyond this broad condition, the Department of Health wants to provide flexibility for local areas to determine how this investment in adult social care services is best used.

Condition 3: *Agreement to invest in NHS commissioned out of hospital services, which may include 7 day services and adult social care* - This should be achieved by funding NHS commissioned out-of-hospital services, which may also include 7-day services and adult social care, as part of the agreed BCF plan.

Condition 4: *Managing Transfers of Care* - Plans should set out how local partners will work together to fund and implement transfers of care effectively.

More detail can be found in the 2017-19 Integration and Better Care Fund Policy Framework.

Based on these broad conditions, Devon county Council and the District Councils have identified an opportunity to provide additional grant and loan products to meet these conditions and deliver against the Health and Wellbeing Board priorities.

2.3 Delayed transfers of care.

Delayed transfers of care, sometimes referred to as ‘bed-blocking’, occur when a patient is ready to depart from care and is still occupying a bed. According to NHS England, a patient is ready to depart when:

- a. A clinical decision has been made that the patient is ready for transfer AND
- b. A multi-disciplinary team decision has been made that the patient is ready for transfer, AND
- c. The patient is safe to discharge/transfer.

In 2016/17 there were 2.3 million total delayed days in England with 1.3 million of these attributable to the NHS, averaging around 6,200 delayed transfers of care per day with around 3,600 of these attributable to the NHS. *Delayed transfers of care in the NHS Briefing paper number 7415, 20 June 2017.*

The longer a patient stays in hospital the more detrimental this can be in terms of patient morale, mobility, and an increase in the risk of hospital-acquired infections. Older patients are particularly susceptible to negative effects around mobility with studies suggesting that a wait of more than two days negates the benefit of intermediate care, and a wait of seven days or more is associated with a 10% decline in muscle strength.

Delayed transfers of care are also costly for hospital trusts as insufficient beds can mean elective procedures need to be cancelled, resulting in the hospital trust losing these as a source of income.

A survey in 2015 by the Guardian found that at least 10% of beds were occupied by patients who were ready to be discharged and the NHS providers' audited accounts for 2016/17 estimated that delayed transfers of care cost £173 million.

Much of the recent debate around delayed transfers of care attributes rising numbers to pressures in social care.

The number of delayed days attributable to social care had been in decline until August 2013, after which the figure began to rise sharply. When looking at the specific reasons for delayed transfers of care, there are notable increases in non-healthcare reasons as indicated below:

Table 1: Reasons for delayed transfers of care, 2016/17

Reason for delay	Total delayed days	Change from previous year
Awaiting care package in own home	456,447	+45.3%
Awaiting further non-acute NHS care	386,028	+16.8%
Awaiting completion of assessment	380,832	+22.9%
Awaiting nursing home placement or availability	342,982	+39.6%
Patient or family choice	245,033	+5.8%
Awaiting residential home placement or availability	231,994	+22.9%
Awaiting public funding	81,327	+17.5%
Housing – patients not covered by NHS and Community Care Act	52,431	-1.0%
Awaiting community equipment and adaptations	52,121	+12.8%
Disputes	24,641	+18.9%

3.0 PRIORITIES

In Devon, the Better Care Fund priorities aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reduced admissions to residential and nursing care homes
- Reduce delayed transfers of care
- Reduce avoidable emergency admissions
- Increase dementia diagnosis rates

To meet these priorities this policy aims to focus on the following areas:

Objective 1 - Assist disabled residents to remain in their own homes through supporting the provision of adaptations (so far as this is necessary, appropriate and

reasonably practicable) to prevent admissions to care and to assist with delayed transfers where possible.

Objective 2 – Safeguard the health and well-being of vulnerable residents by removing unnecessary hazards to health and safety in the home to reduce avoidable emergency admissions

Objective 3 – Provide adaptations that are suitable for the future by ensuring the scheme of works is dementia aware.

Objective 4 – Assist vulnerable people to afford to heat their homes through appropriate energy efficiency and heating measures.

4.0 TYPES OF ASSISTANCE

4.1 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

The delivery of the disabled facilities grant programme is mandatory and a statutory function of the local housing authority. The delivery of this function is governed by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Eligibility

Any disabled householder seeking financial assistance with the cost of adaptations to their home must be assessed by an occupational therapist (OT) working on behalf of, or approved by Devon County Council.

For the purposes of the DFG a person is considered disabled if they meet any of the following criteria:

- their sight, hearing or speech is substantially impaired,
- they have a mental disorder or impairment of any kind, or
- they are physically substantially disabled by illness, injury, impairment present since birth, or otherwise.

A person aged eighteen or over shall be considered disabled if:

- they are registered under section 29(1) of the National Assistance Act 1948 (disabled persons' welfare), or
- they are a person for whose welfare arrangements have been made under that provision or, in the opinion of the social services authority, might be made under it.

A person under the age of eighteen shall be considered disabled if:

- they are on a register of disabled children maintained under paragraph 2 of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, or
- they are in the opinion of the social services authority a disabled child as defined for the purposes of Part III of the Children Act 1989 (local authority support for children and their families).

All owner-occupiers, tenants, licensees or occupiers who meet the above criteria are eligible to apply for a DFG.

Conditions

1. All grants other than those for children are subject to a test of financial resources, which is prescribed by The Housing Renewal Grants Regulations 1996.
2. The grant maximum is £30,000
3. The disabled person must intend to occupy the property as their only or main residence for a period of five years after the works are complete (or such shorter period as the person's health or other relevant circumstances permit).
4. In order to make an application the client must supply the following:
 - A completed and signed application form
 - Evidence of financial situation
 - Evidence of ownership of the property or the right to reside at the property
 - Permission for the works to be carried out
 - A detailed schedule of works and plans for complex works that must be agreed by the council
 - Any planning or building regulation approvals
 - 2 tenders for the works unless using an agreed framework.
5. Only the works agreed by the council will be covered by the grant.
6. If the grant is approved there are 12 months to complete the works
7. The works must be completed by the contractor stated on the approval document
8. No grant works should proceed until the grant application has been processed and all relevant planning, Building Regulation or landlord approval has been obtained.
9. Owner occupiers may have a local land charge placed on their property on completion of the grant. If the property is sold, assigned or transferred within 10 years of the grant being completed then the grant may have to be repaid. The council will have regard to *The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996: Disabled Facilities Grants (Conditions relating to approval or payment of Grant) General Consent 2008* when deciding whether to demand repayment. The charge only applies where the grant is more than £5,000. Where the grant is more than £5000 only the amount over the first £5,000 is added as a charge. There is a charge limit of £10,000.
10. If the applicant has a contribution to pay they must ensure they have the money to cover their share of the costs before the work begins on site.

11. Unforeseen and additional costs will only be paid for where they are necessary to complete the adaptation and must be agreed by the council before they are undertaken.
12. Any increase in the grant may have an impact on the charge placed against the property.
13. Where the cost of the work exceeds the mandatory grant limit of £30,000 the applicant may be eligible to apply for the **Accessible Homes Grant** subject to available funds.
14. Applicants who are successful in their application for assistance will be required to maintain the adaptation.
15. The contract for the works is the responsibility of the applicant.
16. The grant will normally be paid direct to contractors in all but the most exceptional cases.
17. The council will only offer grant for those works that are considered mandatory to meet the needs of the disabled person.
18. No grant will be paid until a satisfactory invoice has been received and the works have been carried out to the satisfaction of the client and Council.

4.2 Accessible Homes Grant

The Accessible Homes Grant enables an enhanced offer in addition to the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant subject to available funding.

This grant is available in the following circumstances:

- Where a mandatory grant has been approved but the cost of the work exceeds £30,000
- Where there are works that may not be covered by the DFG in relation to adapting the home and making it safe or in relation to fees associated with feasibility works to determine if the adaptation can proceed
- Where the means test identifies that a contribution is required.
- Where moving house more appropriate than adapting the existing property.

Eligibility

To be eligible for this grant the applicant must meet the following:

- The applicant must have applied for and be eligible for the DFG first before the discretionary grant can be considered.
- All applicants are subject to a means test including the parents and/or guardians of a disabled child. Adult clients will have been means tested as part of the formal DFG application. In the case of a child's application the means test will be applied to the parents or guardians of the disabled child **before** an application for a discretionary grant can be made.
- As an alternative to the adaptation of an applicant's home, consideration will be given to the option of re-housing to more appropriate or adapted accommodation.

- An applicant will only be eligible to apply for additional grant to cover any identified contribution where the amount the client has to pay represents at least a third or more of the applicant's savings.

Conditions

1. Conditions relating to the DFG as described above also apply.
2. The grant maximum is £20,000. Anything over £20,000 will not attract any further public grant unless in exceptional cases.
3. Where additional funding is required to cover either a contribution or the cost of works over £50,000 (£30,000 from the Disabled Facilities Grant and £20,000 from the Accessible Homes Grant), then a Home Improvement Loan application can be made.
4. The DFG paperwork will be used to assist the applicant in making an application for this grant.
5. Only the works agreed by the council will be covered by the grant
6. If the grant is approved there are 12 months to complete the works
7. The works must be completed by the contractor stated on the approval document
8. No grant works should proceed until the grant application has been processed and all relevant planning, Building Regulation or landlord approval has been obtained.
9. Owner occupiers will have a local land charge placed on their property on completion of the grant. If the property is sold, assigned or transferred within 10 years of the grant being completed then the grant will need to be repaid.
10. Unforeseen and additional costs will only be paid for where they are necessary to complete the adaptation and must be agreed by the council before they are undertaken.
11. Any increase in the grant may have an impact on the charge placed against the property.
12. Applicants who are successful in their application for assistance will be required to maintain the adaptation.
13. The contract for the works is the responsibility of the applicant.
14. The grant will normally be paid direct to contractors in all but the most exceptional cases.
15. The council will only offer grant for those works that are considered appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person.
16. No grant will be paid until a satisfactory invoice has been received and the works have been carried out to the satisfaction of the client and Council.
17. Housing association properties - where the mandatory DFG does not fully cover the cost of the adaptation then the client and/or council may approach the housing association for a contribution towards the cost.

4.3 Accessible Homes Grant – Stair lift Grant

This grant provides internal straight track or curved track stair lifts without a means test for the applicant.

Eligibility

To be eligible for this grant the following must be in place:

- A referral or statement of need must be received from a social services OT or from an NHS OT.
- Where additional works are required to install the stair lift these will be covered as part of this grant.
- Where a client requires multiple adaptations in addition to the stair lift, the stair lift will be provided through this grant and the other adaptations through the DFG or accessible homes grant where the client is eligible.

Conditions

1. The applicant must have permission from the owner of the property for the work to be carried out. The council will require an owners certificate if the property is rented.
2. The applicant agrees to live in the property as the only or main residence for the period of 5 years or for a shorter period as health or other relevant circumstances permit.
3. The contractor must be sourced from the stair lift company determined by the Devon Framework agreement. Where the Council does not use the framework it should be sourced in a manner determined by them.
4. Only the works agreed by the Council will be covered by the grant.
5. If the grant is approved there are 8 weeks to complete the works.
6. The works must be completed by the contractor stated on the approval document
7. No grant works should proceed until the grant application has been processed and all relevant planning, Building Regulation or landlord approval has been obtained.
8. Unforeseen and additional costs will only be paid for where they are necessary to complete the adaptation and must be agreed by the council before they are undertaken.
9. Applicants who are successful in their application for assistance will be required to maintain the stair lift and have it regularly serviced.
10. The contract for the works is the responsibility of the applicant.
11. The grant will be paid direct to the stair lift contractor.
12. No grant will be paid until a satisfactory invoice has been received and the works have been carried out to the satisfaction of the client and Council.

4.4 Accessible Homes Grant - Moving application

This grant may be available to assist a disabled person to move to more suitable accommodation subject to available funding.

Eligibility

An applicant will be eligible for this grant where:

- Where the Occupational Therapist and/or the Council consider re-housing to be more appropriate than adapting the existing accommodation.
- Where the landlord has refused permission for any adaptation works to be carried out and therefore it is no longer feasible for the occupier to remain in the property.
- Where it is possible to carry out works at the existing property the total cost incurred in the eligible 'moving on' expenses and any estimated eligible adaptation costs at the 'new' property should not be greater than the cost of adapting the applicant's current home.
- The 'new' property shall in the opinion of the Council provide a long term, sustainable home for the person for whose benefit the works are required.
- If the property is within a neighbouring authority covered by this policy then the new authority will need to ensure the new property is suitable. This should also be agreed with the occupational therapist. The applicant must ensure that the relevant council's officers and Occupational Therapist have been consulted.

In determining the 'reasonable expenses' regard shall be had to the following criteria:

- The cost of the eligible works at the applicants existing property are not deemed reasonable, or;
- The eligible works at the applicants existing home are not technically feasible, or;
- The adaptation of the applicants existing property does not provide a sustainable, long term solution for their housing needs, or;
- The landlord of the property refuses to give permission for the necessary works to be carried out.

Eligible Expenses

Owner Occupier

The expenses that can attract grant under this section may include the cost of:

- Any arrangement fee charged by a lender to cover the formation of a mortgage.
- Conveyancing fees.
- Land Registry Fee
- Local Authority Searches
- Stamp Duty
- Valuation, Homebuyers or Full Structural Survey

- Professional or other removal costs
- Estate Agent Commission.

The maximum grant payable for eligible expenses under this heading for an owner occupier is £10,000.

Tenant

For a tenant the expenses that can attract grant under this section may include the cost of:

- Letting agent fees
- Rent deposit
- Professional or other removal fees

The maximum grant payable for eligible expenses under this heading for a tenant is £5000.

Conditions

1. Grant assistance is only payable to an owner occupier upon the successful completion of the purchase of the 'new' property and the disabled person then occupying that property as their only and main residence.
2. When moving to rented accommodation the applicant must obtain permission from the landlord for any adaptations to be carried out before the grant will be paid.
3. To qualify for this grant the applicant must have been resident in the property for at least 2 years prior to making an application to move.
4. The applicant must agree to live in the property as their only or main residence for a period of 5 years (or such shorter period as the person's health or other relevant circumstances permit).
5. For owner occupiers a local land charge will be placed against the property for a period of 5 years.

4.5 Healthy Homes grant

The Healthy Homes grant is a flexible grant to provide urgent/essential repairs to the home to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the occupier. This includes assisting an occupier with accumulations (hoarding) where this poses a risk to health and safety.

Eligibility

- An applicant must apply for a loan first including a Home Improvement Loan and will only be eligible to apply for this grant if a loan is refused.
- Only those works agreed by the Council as urgent or essential will be eligible for this grant. A loan application will be required for all other types of works and repairs.
- To qualify for this grant the applicant must be in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Housing benefit
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independent Payment with the daily living component
- Attendance Allowance
- Guarantee Pension Credit
- Income support
- Council tax benefit (not the single person discount)
- Universal Credit – universal credit replaces the following means tested benefits – Housing Benefit, income related ESA, Income based JSA, Child tax credit, working tax credit and income support.

Conditions

1. The maximum grant available is £5000 over a rolling two year period.
2. For owner occupiers a local land charge will be placed against the property for 5 years.
3. For tenants the grant may only be available to assist with immediate repairs or to deal with hoarding and accumulations. The landlord is responsible for the general repair of the property and the Council may require the landlord to carry out works as appropriate.
4. An applicant must apply for a loan for any substantial work beyond removing the immediate health and safety risk.

4.6 Home Improvement Loans

Wessex Resolutions Community Interest Company (WRCIC) is a not-for-profit company contracted to deliver loans to residents in the Devon area.

WRCIC administer loans within the requirements of this policy and the local policies of each district council within Devon. The Home Improvement Loan is a flexible product that can be used for the following purposes:

- Home repairs and improvements
- Adaptation works where grant is not available
- To cover a client contribution to a grant
- To cover the cost of the work over the DFG or Accessible Homes grant maximum.
- To bring empty homes back into use
- For landlords to carry out repairs or improvement to rented accommodation
- For energy efficiency improvements

Eligibility

This will vary and is based on the individual circumstances of each client. Loan advisors will carry out an assessment and provide independent advice on ethical and responsible lending the most appropriate product to suit their needs.

Conditions

Conditions may vary depending on the loan product selected and the individual circumstances of each applicant.

Loans are subject to status and Wessex Resolutions CIC may insist on loans being protected at the Land Registry by a Title Restriction. Missing any payments could affect your credit rating and ability to obtain credit in the future.

The typical APR for this loan is 4.2%.

4.7 Top up to Eco-Flex

This grant is to provide top up funding for energy efficiency measures where EcoFlex funding and ECO top ups (HHCRO) have been provided by energy providers but the available funding does not cover the full cost of the work.

Eligibility

- Applicants must have been identified through each Council's Statement of Intent which can be found on the council's website.
- To qualify for the top up a survey must be carried out by the energy provider, a local installer, or an agent and qualifying works identified.
- For owner occupiers and private landlords a maximum of up to £2000 is available.
- If more than £2,000 is needed then the client should apply for a Wessex loan subject to availability and eligibility (see 4.6)

Conditions

1. The applicant must agree to live in the property as their only or main residence for a period of 5 years (or such shorter period as the person's health or other relevant circumstances permit).
2. A local land charge will be placed on their property on completion of the grant. If the property is sold, assigned or transferred or the tenant vacates within 5 years of the grant being completed then the grant may have to be repaid.
3. Any increase in the grant may have an impact on the charge placed against the property.
4. The contract for the works is the responsibility of the applicant.
5. The grant will normally be paid direct to contractors in all but the most exceptional cases.
6. No grant will be paid until a satisfactory invoice has been received and the works have been carried out to the satisfaction of the client and Council.

5.0 EXCEPTIONS TO THE POLICY

The Councils accept that applications may be received for adaptations not covered by the circumstances listed above which will need to be formally determined. Any such application will be referred through the appropriate process of the council managing the application.

6.0 APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

- Where the applicant has a complaint about the manner in which a council is applying this policy, then they should follow that Councils formal complaints process.
- Where there is a complaint about the content of this policy this should be made to Devon County Council so that it can be considered on a Devon wide basis.
- Where the complaint is in respect of works, the complaint should be made to the contractor in the first instance, if this does not resolve the problem then the appropriate council should be contacted for advice.
- Where an applicant wishes to appeal against a decision of the Council in respect of any of the grants contained in this policy this should be made to the appropriate Council. Where agreement cannot be reached then the appeal should be escalated to the Devon wide group of Councils for a decision. Consensus between all the participating Councils will need to be reached as any decision may result in an amendment to the policy.

APPENDIX ONE – ELIGIBLE WORKS

Disabled Facilities Grant and Accessible Homes Grant

This is a guide and there may be scope for discretion on the works that can be included under the Accessible Homes Grant in some circumstances.

Facilitating access

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant

- to and from the dwelling
- to a room used or usable as the principle family room
- to a room used for or usable for sleeping
- to a room in which there is a lavatory
- to a room in which there is a bath or shower
- to a room with a wash hand basin

Such works may include:

- Ramping and/or handrails to the main external door. This could instead be a rear door in the case of a rear access. Only one access point will be allowed for each dwelling. External stair lifts will be considered if reasonably practicable and they are not prone to vandalism.
- Widening the main entrance door and the doorways to the bedroom, bathroom and living room. Automatic door opening to main entrance doors will only be allowed for persons who are otherwise unable to open the door. Door entry systems will be considered where the person has severe mobility problems.
- Alterations to facilitate wheelchair access to the bedroom, bathroom and living room. Access to other rooms may be considered where the disabled person is also a carer.
- Other adaptations that are necessary to facilitate access to any of the relevant rooms by the disabled person, for example, stair lifts or vertical lifts in some cases. Where a stair lift breaks down and it is 5-10 years old, a manufacturers report is needed before it can be replaced. If it is over 10 years, a report may not be required.
- Provision of hard standings (3.6 m x 4.8 m max unless exceptional circumstances) and associated crossover for vehicle access where the disabled person is in a wheelchair or has difficulty walking to the house. This will only be given where existing on-street parking is considered unsatisfactory and a marked disabled parking bay is not possible or where it affords a more economical

solution than providing additional paths/ramping from the roadside. Provision of off-street parking on its own is not eligible.

Please note: Being a holder of a blue badge is not an eligibility criterion for this item.

Washing facilities

Facilitating the use of washing facilities by the disabled occupant

- Adaptation of the facilities in the bathroom and toilet, including the provision of flush floor showers, lever taps, specialist WCs, Clos-o-mat or Geberit etc. The adaptation or provision of more than one bathroom to a house e.g. additional ground floor wc, will only be considered if evidenced by functional need.

Kitchen Facilities

Facilitating the preparation and cooking of food

- Where someone other than the disabled person does and will continue to do the cooking and preparation of meals, normally it will not be necessary to carry out full adaptations. However, it may be possible to carry out minor adaptations to allow the disabled person to prepare light meals or hot drinks, typically this may include a low-level worktop with power points for a kettle/microwave.
- Full adaptations can be considered where the disabled person is the only or main user of the kitchen. The following adaptations can be considered:
 - a. Kitchen sink, including alteration to its height or position or the type of taps fitted to it. Powered, adjustable-height sinks will not generally be allowed, as the provision of a second sink is a more economic solution.
 - b. Cooker point and oven-housing unit ensuring its height and position is in a safe location and the provision of worktops on either side.
 - c. Work surfaces located beside the sink and on each side of the cooker having a total length of approximately 1.5m, all at a suitable height for the disabled person.
 - d. Food storage in an accessible position, usually space for a refrigerator with power supply.
 - e. Wheelchair access, if necessary, including wider doors, rearrangement of facilities etc.
 - f. Alterations to the kitchen door, light switches and power points, but only if it is necessary.
 - g. Extensions or enlargement to kitchens can only be agreed where they are absolutely necessary in order to provide turning space for a wheelchair and if suitable space cannot be achieved by rearrangement of the existing facilities.

- h. The provision of cupboard and storage units on an "essential" basis. (2x1m base units and baskets or equivalent).
- i. Mechanical ventilation where kitchen schemes require Building Regulation approval.

Other works that may be considered for grant assistance

Electrical work

- Alterations to the height and/or position of light switches and power points to make them accessible to the disabled person.
- Upgrading of electrical installation where the current installation is considered unsafe.

Heating

- Heating the rooms that are in everyday use by the disabled person where a medical need can be demonstrated. Changes to the type of heating system will only be allowed if evidenced by medical need (e.g. change from solid fuel to gas where applicant can no longer carry fuel) and the applicant is not eligible for other types of grant such as ECO Flex.
- Upgrading/replacing of boilers/radiators where the property has been extended as part of the adaptation.

Guarding

- Provision of laminate glass or specialist lighting or guards to fires and around radiators where disabled children with violent behavioural problems may harm themselves.
- Restrictors or works to windows for the safety of the disabled person.

Alarms

- Provision of enhanced fire alarm systems for those with hearing difficulties.

Structural alterations

- Carrying out structural alterations where necessary to provide fixings for disabled equipment provided by Social Services e.g. fixing for tracking /overhead hoists.
- Storage or space for essential medical equipment as part of the adaptation works but not as a stand-alone item.
- Where an adaptation is required to a listed building and additional works are required to comply with requirements.

- Where an adaptation cannot be carried out due to disrepair issues those repairs, within reason, may be carried out. Such works may include replacement of rotted flooring or strengthening of the floor as part of a flush floor shower installation, electrical repairs to enable works to be carried out safely, and dealing with low water pressure. More substantial repairs that are not directly affecting the adaptation will need to be referred to a home improvement loan or healthy homes grant.
- Additional bathrooms or bedrooms may be allowed where they are specifically for the disabled person and it can be demonstrated that adaptation of other rooms or space or access to those rooms in the property is unsuitable. **Extensions will only be allowed following a detailed cost/benefit analysis of alternative options.**
- Requests are sometimes received to provide separate bedrooms where disabled children with behavioural difficulties share a room with other siblings and disturb their sleep. This will only be considered where it can be demonstrated the child is prone to violent outbursts and there is risk of physical harm to the child or to the other siblings. Families will first be expected to re-arrange the sleeping arrangements in their home to try to eliminate the need for extra bedrooms. If there is more than one reception room the family will be expected to use the extra room(s) for sleeping purposes.

Garden and external access

- In cases of small terraced properties with narrow passageways or very difficult access, effective adaptation can only proceed where it can be reasonably and practicably carried out without having a detrimental impact on neighbouring properties.
- Access to the garden may be given to improve an existing access to make it safe for the disabled occupant to use. It does not include extending an existing access e.g. creating a side access so a person can also go around the side of a house. Generally, the most modest solution for providing access to both the house and the garden will be considered and this can mean that one access may be sufficient to access both the house and the garden. Where homes have communal gardens, e.g., blocks of flats served by a single access, grants will not normally be provided for an individual access to the garden unless it can be demonstrated that because of the disabled persons condition the travel distance to the garden would be excessive and unreasonable.
- The grant will only be for providing immediate access to the garden and does not include landscaping gardens to make them more suitable for the disabled person

to access. However, to assist a disabled person to live independently, an allowance of 4m² of pathway, (which may include a turning circle for a wheelchair user), will be considered to assist access to any specific areas enjoyed by the disabled person.

- Provision of fencing or guarding for the safety of the disabled person when in the garden.

Fees and feasibility works

- The Accessible Homes Grant may be available to cover the cost of works associated with assessing whether an adaption is reasonable and practicable and/or necessary and appropriate. These costs can be covered even if the works do not go ahead, at which point a moving grant may be more suitable.

Additional Adaptations for Dementia (or related conditions)

- Replacing floor coverings that cause confusion or safety issues
- Replacing tiling or bathroom fittings (such as toilet seats and rails) to improve visual perception
- Changing cupboards to glass fronted doors, to enable recognition of where items are in the kitchen
- Changing lighting schemes to improve visibility around the home
- Installing noise reduction measures

Healthy Homes grant

An assessment of the property may be necessary to determine the scope of the work and does not cover the full renovation of a property. It is intended that the grant is sufficient to make safe a defect that is considered to pose a risk to the health, safety or welfare of the occupier.

This could include but is not limited to the following:

- Hoarding and accumulations – where the conditions pose a serious risk to the safety of the occupier.
- Electrical safety- where the condition of the electrical wiring could lead to imminent risk of electrocution or fire or accidents as a result of inadequate lighting.
- Falls – where the condition of the stairs or floors are in such a state as to provide an imminent risk of a fall in the home.

- Cold – where the heating is inadequate or lacking, and the condition of the doors and windows are contributing to the home being cold in the winter and there is a risk of falls or other ill effect from cold temperatures.
- Dampness – damp conditions so significant that a roof is failing and water is visibly entering the property. Rising damp, condensation or minor leaks may not be covered by this grant.
- Structural collapse- where a structural part of the building is in such a state as to constitute an imminent risk.
- Amenities – the lack of a functioning basic amenity such as a toilet, bath, wash hand basin or kitchen sink.
- Hot water – where there is no hot water available for the occupier due to a fault with a boiler or hot water tank.

This list is not exhaustive and each case will be assessed based on its individual circumstances.

Home Improvement Loan

The loan will cover those works covered by this policy and any other works specified by each individual Council involved in the Home Improvement Loan scheme.

ECO Flex Top up

Works will generally include:

- Mains gas boiler replacement,
- Loft insulation,
- Cavity wall insulation,
- Heating controls,
- Replacement storage heaters,
- Internal or external wall insulation,
- Room in roof insulation,
- Flat roof insulation

APPENDIX TWO – LOCAL POLICIES

The following councils have their own additional policy that can be viewed on their websites.

East Devon District Council
Exeter City Council
North Devon District Council
South Hams District Council
Teignbridge District Council
Torridge District Council
West Devon District Council

APPENDIX THREE – SUMMARY TABLE

Type of assistance	Scope	Grant Max	Eligibility	Main Conditions
Mandatory DFG	Disabled adaptations as described by the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.	Up to £30,000	Meets disability criteria Assessed by an OT Subject to means test No means test for Children	Must remain in the property as only or main residence for 5 years Local land charge for 10 years for owner occupiers in some circumstances
Accessible Homes Grant	Cover the costs of adaptations over the mandatory DFG limit Cover some contributions identified under mandatory DFG Cover some works not covered by the DFG	Up to £20,000	Meets disability criteria Assessed by an OT Subject to means test for children's applications Contribution constitutes more than a 1/3 of available savings	Must remain in the property as only or main residence for 5 years Local land charge for 10 years for owner occupiers
Accessible Homes Grant – Stair lifts	Cover the cost of internal straight track and curved track stair lifts	No grant max	Assessed by the OT or referred by NHS OT Must have permission from the property owner	Must remain in the property as only or main residence for 5 years

Type of assistance	Scope	Grant Max	Eligibility	Main Conditions
Accessible Homes Grant – Moving	Cover some of the costs associated with moving to a more suitable property	Owner occupier up to £10,000 Tenant up to £5000	Suitable property has been identified Cost of moving with any adaptation to the new home is less than adapting existing home Been resident in existing property for 2 years prior to making the application For tenants – landlord has referred to make adaptations	Must remain in the property as only or main residence for 5 years Local land charge for 5 years for owner occupiers
Healthy Homes Grant	Works to make safe a defect or hoarding/accumulation that is considered to pose a risk to the health, safety or welfare of the occupier.	Up to £5000 over a 2 year rolling period	In receipt of a qualifying benefit Works agreed by the Council	Local land charge for 5 years for owner occupiers Must apply for a loan for more substantial works and repairs Council may require landlord to carry out repairs
Home Improvement	Cover works identified in the other grants	Based on affordability	Based on local criteria	Based on local criteria

Type of assistance	Scope	Grant Max	Eligibility	Main Conditions
Loan	As determined by each Council policy			
ECOFlex Top up	Energy efficiency works	Up to £2000	<p>Qualify for ECO funding</p> <p>Meet the councils statement of intent criteria</p> <p>Owner occupier or private landlord</p>	<p>Must remain in the property as only or main residence for 5 years</p> <p>Local land charge for 5 years</p>



Statement of Intent

Local Authority Flexible Eligibility Statement of Intent

- 1) Mid Devon District Council
- 2) Date of publication xx/xx/19
- 3) Version 3.0
- 4) <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/ECOFlexibleEligibility>

1) Introduction

According to the Devon Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2017), fuel poverty in Devon (13%) remains higher than the national average (10.6%). Mid Devon District Council's Public Health Plan 2016-19 identifies fuel poverty as a key priority area.

A number of health conditions arise or are exacerbated by living in a cold and/or damp home. These are included in this Statement of Intent (SOI).

Mid Devon District Council supports the continuation of Flexible Eligibility scheme (ECO Flex 3) so that those who don't qualify through existing schemes but are in fuel poverty can obtain financial help to install key energy measures.

Important Note: The final decision on whether a household receives an ECO measure is made by the energy suppliers or their agents/contractors. Inclusion in a Declaration of Eligibility made by the Local Authority to a supplier will not guarantee installation of measures. The final decision will depend on:

- i) The survey carried out by suppliers' agents/contractors and installation costs calculated.
- ii) The energy savings that can be achieved for a property, and
- iii) Whether suppliers have achieved their targets or require further measures to meet their ECO targets.

Mid Devon District Council expects that any obligated energy supplier, or contractor working on behalf of the obligated energy supplier will;

- comply with the Data Protection Act 2018
- fully follow Ofgem requirements for the Energy Company Obligation Help to Heat, and

- act in accordance with industry best practice in relation to consumer care and quality standards of any works that may take place.

2) How Mid Devon District Council intends to identify eligible households

The Department of Business, Energy and Industry Strategy (BEIS) provides guidance on the targeting of Flexible Eligibility which seeks to identify private households that may benefit from energy saving measures and these are:

- i) Fuel poor households, especially those that are not in receipt of Affordable Warmth eligible benefits, and the estimated 20% of fuel poor households that are not in receipt of any benefits; and
- ii) Low income households that are vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home (LIVC)

In addition, the council may use its discretion to declare some non-fuel poor homes as eligible to facilitate solid wall insulation projects, as long as a proportion of the households in the project are in fuel poverty or LIVC.

From time to time and subject to available resources within the Council we may work with those households having regard to BEIS guidance. Any focussed activity will be carried out in accordance with the legal use of data. Relevant groups may include:

- i) Those living in the private sector and in receipt of the relevant means-tested benefits and/or on a low income
- ii) Those living in energy inefficient Residential Mobile Homes (Park Homes) who are over the age of 55
- iii) Low income households living in energy inefficient housing will be identified in the private rented sector.
- iv) Households receiving help through the Local Energy Advice Programme (LEAP) or Exeter Community Energy
- v) Private tenants living in properties with D, E, F or G EPC rating

Identifying households in fuel poverty

Private homeowners qualify to apply through ECO flexible eligibility subject to meeting category 1 and category 2 eligibility criteria below. Private tenants and residents of park homes will be eligible regardless of income.

Category 1

For the 'low income' portion of this indicator, the referring agency will look to find evidence that a member of the household is in receipt of an ECO qualifying income-related benefit in the first instance. Should the resident not receive any ECO

qualifying income-related benefits, then the referring agency will consider a household in receipt of Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit, or with a combined household income of less than £38,000 (gross) for the purposes of these criteria.

Category 2

For the 'high cost' portion of the indicator, the referring agency will look to identify eligible households as those that have an **Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'D' or lower**. These properties will be identified using the Landmark online EPC register. In the event that a property does not meet this criteria or does not have an EPC, the referring agency will identify if the property falls into one of these additional categories which have been selected due to their high energy bills, hard to treat and hard to reach nature:

- Park homes and other permanent caravan residences (regardless of income)
- Privately rented properties including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) (regardless of income)
- Properties with a reliance on solid fuel heating
- Flats above commercial premises
- System built properties
- Homes which require cavity wall insulation
- Homes which require a loft insulation top up
- Homes which require solid wall insulation
- Homes with a boiler which meets the ECO Qualifying Boiler criteria

Council will provide advice on request to heating and insulation installers on appropriate marketing of ECO Flex and will also use existing networks, such as community energy agencies, the community and voluntary sector and Council officer intelligence to identify eligible households.

Identifying low income and vulnerability to cold

Mid Devon District Council will target households containing people with the following 'at risk' characteristics, which reflect the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) 2015 guidance on excess winter deaths and illness caused by cold homes. In addition to the 'below £38,000 income' threshold we will need one of the following categories.

- i. Aged over 60 (55 in the case of mobile homes), and particularly those over 75
- ii. Households with children under 16
- iii. Pregnant mothers
- iv. Private tenants on low income living in properties with D, E, F or G EPC rating
- v. Respiratory disease (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma)

- vi. Cardiovascular disease (e.g. ischaemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease)
- vii. Moderate to severe mental illness (e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar disorder)
- viii. Types of Dementia or Creutzfeld-Jacob disease (CZD)
- ix. Neurobiological and related diseases (e.g. fibromyalgia, myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) or similar fatigue syndromes)
- x. Cancer
- xi. Limited mobility
- xii. Haemoglobinopathies (sickle cell disease, thalassaemia)
- xiii. Severe learning disabilities
- xiv. Autoimmune and immunodeficiency diseases (e.g. lupus, multiple sclerosis (MS), diabetes, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV))

(c) Any details of scheme requirements for Solid Wall Insulation “in-fill” projects

Where potential works have been identified households will be supported to take advantage of "in-fill" projects where the minimum number of vulnerable households is met. Reference will be made to the guidance.

3) Referrals

Mid Devon District Council will use a number of referral mechanisms and pathways to identify and generate customers for ECO Flex as follows:

1. Through the Local Energy Advice Program (LEAP) which is currently providing energy advice across Devon in partnership with Cosy Devon districts.
2. Referrals generated by community agencies, local energy agencies, contractors and installers.
3. Referrals generated as a result of Council staff interaction with householders, landlords e.g. Private sector housing, Benefits, Customer First (front of house)

4) Evidence, monitoring and reporting

- a. Anonymised data on the characteristics of households reached through Flexible Eligibility will be reviewed
- b. The data above will include details of households assessed, how many were deemed eligible and ineligible, and how many received heating and insulation
- c. Eligibility checks will be conducted internally using data sets held by Council in accordance with Data Protection guidance and legislation.

d. Dedicated officers within Public Health and Regulatory Services will collect, collate and review data generated from the roll out of the program.

5) Governance

Responsible officer

The officer below will be responsible for signing Declarations on behalf of the local authority (in his absence the Director of Operations).

Simon Newcombe

Job title: Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services

Telephone: 01884 244615

Email: snewcombe@middevon.gov.uk

Monitoring and Implementation

The Coordination Team, Public Health and Regulatory Services, will be responsible for initial enquiries about the Statement of Intent and the process for submitting and receiving declarations.

Coordination Team

Telephone: 01884 244625

Email: health@middevon.gov.uk

6) Signature

Andrew Pritchard

Director of Operations

Mid Devon District Council

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HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

12 MARCH 2019

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING FEES AND CHARGES 2019/20 AND ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

Cabinet Member: Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer: Simon Newcombe, Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services

Reason for Report: To provide members with the revised fees and charges in addition to an enforcement update for the relevant statutory and discretionary Private Sector Housing functions within the Community Team of Public Health and Regulatory Services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) That Cabinet approve the revised fees and charges as set out in Annex 1.
- (2) That Public Health and Regulatory Services are authorised to enforce The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 as amended 2016.
- (3) That a charge is made for providing copies of the Mandatory HMO Licensing Public Register when requested.

Relationship to the Corporate Plan: This report relates to the economy, homes and community elements for the corporate plan priorities, by recharging for officer time in relation to enforcement activities, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing and recovering costs associated with non-statutory services.

Financial Implications: The revised fees and charges are set out in Annex1 of the report. The fees have been updated to reflect current service delivery costs. Any income generated from this activity is unpredictable based on the nature of enforcement action. It is therefore not possible to forecast any income levels for the year. It is important to remember that that this is not an income-generating stream, but recovering the cost of those services where the Council can lawfully do so. Targets are not therefore appropriate, as this might appear to incentivise enforcement action – which is categorically not the way the service is operated.

Legal Implications: Where there are specific provisions under legislation, statutory functions or discretionary services for fees to be charged then these are indicated in the body of the report. In the event that charges are properly due but are not paid, legal proceedings may be required.

Risk Assessment: There are no major risks. A failure to update the relevant fees and charges could mean we are not able to adequately recover costs where we are able to do so.

Equality Impact Assessment: A full assessment is not necessary for this report. The charges are set and applicable to the service being provided and do not disadvantage any protected characteristics or specific groups.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Private Sector Housing has a duty to ensure that private accommodation meets minimum standards. In particular there are regulations for the licensing, management and use of houses in multiple occupation (HMO), carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms, and hazards within the home.
- 1.2 All enforcement activities and relevant fees and charges within this report are set out in compliance with the legislation and the Public Health Services Enforcement Policy adopted in August 2016 and the draft Operations Directorate Enforcement Policy 2019.

2.0 Changes to the fees and charges

- 2.1 A breakdown of the Council's current and proposed charges in respect of the private sector housing functions is included in Annex 1.

HMO Licensing

- 2.2 Section 63(3) of the 2004 Act gives the Council the power to recover all reasonable costs associated with the administration of the HMO licensing function.
- 2.3 The officer time and resources involved in processing a new application have been reviewed and a revised fee calculated. As part of this review the issuing of licence renewals has also been considered.

Mandatory HMO Licensing Public Register

- 2.4 Section 232 of the Housing Act 2004 allows the council to make a reasonable fee for supplying a person with a copy of the register if requested.
- 2.5 It is proposed to charge a nominal administration fee for providing the register in electronic form or hardcopy. Details of the proposed charges can be found in Annex 1.
- 2.6 An extract from the register will be provided on our website free of charge and the charges will only apply for requests for the full register.

Charging for enforcement action

- 2.7 The Housing Act 2004 section 49 gives the local housing authority the power to charge for certain enforcement action. The provisions are clear that only the costs associated with determining whether enforcement action is

necessary, identifying the type of action and the serving of the notice can be recovered.

- 2.8 The average officer time and resources for carrying out these functions have been recalculated and a revised standard fee has been proposed.
- 2.9 The charge can be applied to all enforcement action under part one of the Act; we currently apply the charge to Improvement Notices, Prohibition Orders, Emergency Remedial Action, Emergency Prohibition Orders and Demolition Orders.
- 2.10 A demand for payment of the charge will be applied where Prohibition Orders, Emergency Remedial Action Notices and Emergency Prohibition Orders are served. The charge for a Demolition Orders will also include the survey cost that is required as part of the serving of the order.
- 2.11 This is a change from the previous approach as we propose to charge for Prohibition Orders and Demolition Orders on service rather than where there is non-compliance in order to be more consistent with section 49 of the Act (see 2.7). These are the more complex and serious enforcement actions in respect of private sector housing.
- 2.12 Where an Improvement Notice is served the charge will be applied where there is non-compliance with the notice only. This will encourage compliance with notice requirements and, as these are relatively common notices addressing non-urgent improvements, then this approach is designed to increase housing standards as widely as possible.
- 2.13 It is not considered appropriate to charge for the service of Hazard Awareness Notices as there is no penalty for non-compliance, it is a recommendation of the work to be carried out and it is not placed as a local land charge.

Immigration housing request visits

- 2.14 Historically applications to live and/or work in the UK have required the local housing authority to undertake an inspection of the proposed living accommodation to check its suitability and ensure there would not be overcrowding. These visits no longer need to be undertaken by the local housing authority as part of an application but occasionally the team will receive a request to carry out a visit and provide a report.
- 2.15 As this is not a statutory requirement it is acceptable for the Council to charge for the provision of this service. The proposed fee covers the average amount of officer time involved in dealing with a request, visiting and producing the relevant report.

Financial penalties for Housing Act offences

- 2.16 The Housing and Planning Act 2016 introduces an amendment to the Housing Act 2004 to allow local housing authorities to impose a financial penalty on an owner of a property where they have failed to comply with provisions under

the 2004 Act as an alternative to prosecution. The maximum penalty is £30,000.

Penalty Charges for offences under the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015

- 2.17 There is no change to the penalty under these regulations. The Council has already introduced the maximum penalty of £5,000 with a 25% reduction if payment is made within 14 days of the demand for payment.

Financial penalties for offences under the Electrical Safety Standards

- 2.18 Section 122 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 imposes electrical safety standards for properties let by private landlords. The following section 123 makes provision for the local housing authority to impose a financial penalty on an owner of a property where they have failed to comply with the electrical safety standards.
- 2.19 Neither section has currently been brought into force.

Penalties for offences under The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 as amended 2016

- 2.20 The regulations require that private rented domestic properties meet a minimum energy performance level before they can be rented out. The regulations came into force on 1st October 2017 and from 1st April 2018 landlords of certain domestic properties may not grant a tenancy to new or existing tenants if their property has an EPC (energy performance certificate) rating of band F or G. From 1st April 2020 landlords must not continue to let a domestic property that has already been let if the property has an EPC rating of band F or G.
- 2.21 Local authorities have responsibility for enforcing these regulations which means it can be enforced by either Trading Standards Officers or Environmental Health Officers. It is recommended that the local housing authority should be the enforcing body for the domestic private rented part of the regulations and this would sit within Public Health and Regulatory Services at Mid Devon. Commercial properties are required to be enforced by Trading Standards under the regulations.
- 2.22 Non-compliance with any notice served under the regulations may result in a financial penalty. The regulations set the maximum amount of penalty that can be administered. It is recommended that the maximum fines are agreed for contraventions as detailed in Annex 1.
- 2.23 In addition to a financial penalty the council may serve a Publication Penalty. This means that we can publish details of the landlords breach on a publicly accessible part of the Private Rental Sector (PRS) Exemptions Register and should remain on the register for a minimum of 12-months.

Works in default

- 2.24 As set out by provisions contained in Schedule 3 Part 3 of the Housing Act 2004, it is proposed that interest is to be paid on all costs associated with carrying out works in default (including the costs of the work itself) where the demand for payment remains unpaid after the initial 28 days. A £100 administrative fee is proposed with an interest rate of 3% applied per annum.

Contact for more Information: Tanya Wenham, Team Leader (Community Team) 01884 244610 or twenham@middevon.gov.uk or Simon Newcombe, Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services 01884 244615 or snewcombe@middevon.gov.uk.

Circulation of the Report:

Cllr Ray Stanley, Cabinet Member for Housing
Members of the Homes PDG
Leadership Team
Financial Services
Legal Services
Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security

Annex 1

Mid Devon District Council Public Health and Regulatory Services (Community Team) Private Sector Housing Fees and Charges 2019/20

HMO licensing		
New licence	Fee 2019/20	Previous fee 18/19
3-5 Units	£820	£793
6-10 units	£876	£838
11+ units	£933	£883
Renewal		
3-5 Units	£673	£658
6-10 units	£701	£680
11+ units	£729	£703

HMO Licensing Public Register	
	Charge
Request for full register electronically	£5
Request for full register hardcopy	£8

Charging for enforcement action		
	Charge 2019/20	Previous Charge 18/19
Improvement notice	£438	£333
Prohibition Order	£438	£333
Emergency Remedial Action	£438	£333
Emergency prohibition order	£438	£333
Demolition Order	£438 plus survey fees	£333

Immigration housing request visits		
	Fee 2019/20	Previous Fee 18/19
All requests	£261	£199

Financial penalties	
	Penalty
Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms	£5000 reducing by 25% if paid within 14 days of demand
Electrical Safety Standards	Not yet in force
Housing Act offences	Financial penalty as alternative to prosecution up to £30,000

Energy Efficiency Regulations		
	Penalty	
Renting out a non-compliant property	Less than three months in breach	£2000 and Publication penalty
	Three months or more in breach	£4000 and Publication penalty
Providing false or misleading information on the Exemption register	£1000 and Publication penalty	
Failing to comply with a compliance notice	£2000 and publication penalty	

- These penalties are applied to each property where there is a breach to a maximum of £5000 per property
- Publication penalty – some of the details of the financial penalties are published on the publicly accessible part of the PRS Exemptions Register

Works in default	
	Charge
Interest on works and associated costs	Cost of the work plus £100 admin fee plus 3% interest per annum

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HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

12 MARCH 2019

EMPTY HOMES PLAN 2019-22

Cabinet Member: Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer: Simon Newcombe, Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services

Reason for Report: To provide members with the revised Empty Homes Plan for 2019-22.

RECOMMENDATIONS: To note the updated Empty Homes Plan

Relationship to the Corporate Plan: Dealing with empty homes links directly to the aspirations of the corporate plan. In particular, Economy - Improving and regenerating our town centres by intervening in empty homes, and ensuring that flats over shops are safe for occupation; and Homes – Facilitating the housing growth that Mid Devon needs, including affordable homes by bringing empty homes back into use as housing across all tenure types including private rented, affordable rent and home ownership.

Financial Implications: There is a capital budget in place to support private sector housing enforcement activity which includes the empty homes plan delivery. This budget is available in the current year and has been included in the financial plan for the next 3 years to implement future interventions. Capital used for enforcement or works in default to improve property conditions, can be recovered in most cases.

There is revenue income available to the Council generated from the New Homes Bonus (NHB). All properties brought back into use may qualify for the NHB and are included in our annual out-turn figures.

During 2017/18 128 empty properties were brought back into use as a direct result of interventions by the Private Sector Housing team (Public Health) under the current Empty Homes Plan. We are on track to bring a further 140 back into use during 2018/19 and the business plan for 2019/20 sets a minimum target 72, with an ambition to deliver up to 100 (see 3.5 of this report).

Members will be aware that income generation from the NHB has become tighter with the NHB only being payable once a 0.4% baseline has been reached with the dowry period falling to 5-years and reducing again in 2018/19 to a 4-year dowry. The 0.4%/4-year thresholds have been retained for 2019/20. The NHB funding is used to deliver the Empty Homes Plan and the two are therefore directly linked.

NHB calculations depend on what Council Tax band the property is in – taking an average – bringing an estimated 140 empties back into use in 2018/19 would generate around £503k over the 4-year dowry period. If a minimum of 72 properties are brought back into use in 2019/20 then the resulting dowry for these would be around £259k. Therefore, an estimated gross income of £792k for 2018-20 combined, reduced to a net figure of £655k once the plan delivery costs for this

period are taken into account (assuming the baseline is met and no change to average Council Tax value).

Bringing empty properties back into use therefore makes a positive net financial contribution to the Council's revenue budget in addition to the wider beneficial social, housing and regeneration impacts.

Legal Implications: In those cases where it is appropriate to take formal action the relevant legislation must be followed. It is important to work with other services with enforcement powers, including Development Management, to ensure a coordinated and proportionate response. All decisions and actions must take account of all relevant considerations, including any applicable human rights (property) and equalities (public sector equality duty) issues which arise.

The use of certain council tax data for the purposes of identifying empty homes and communicating with the owners in order to bring properties back into occupation is expressly permitted by paragraph 18A of Schedule 2 to the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as inserted by the Local Government Act 2003).

Risk Assessment: The risks associated with this activity are low. If the empty homes activity was not undertaken some properties may continue to come back into use naturally but the numbers would be significantly reduced and the time frame wholly dependent on property owners.

Equality Impact Assessment: A full assessment is not necessary for this report. This activity relates to empty properties and any action taken is based on the circumstances of the property therefore there are no adverse impacts on individuals with protected characteristics.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Empty Homes Plan has been revised to reflect the progress that has been made and the learning of the team in delivering the current plan.
- 1.2 As a result of the original plan (2016-19) and the continued development of this area of work; 295 homes have been brought back into use as at 31 January 2019. This is against a combined target for the three years of 112.
- 1.3 This is great progress but it is likely that these figures will begin to slow as we begin to deal with more complex cases. The Plan has been reviewed to ensure that we continue to take positive steps using the tools and resources available.

2.0 Progress since the last plan

- 2.1 The 2016 plan suggested some potential initiatives to consider. Below is a list of the suggestions and our progress with them:

Initiative from 2016 Plan	Progress
Consider the potential opportunity to provide an in house service to sell empty homes on behalf of the owners.	This has been discounted and a partnership agreement is now in place with Clive Emson Property Auctioneers
Review the scope of rent guarantee or bond schemes, Private Sector Leasing schemes and Partnership working schemes	This is still being considered as a possibility in the future
Consider potential partnerships with local Letting Agents, Estate Agents, and auction houses.	<p>A tendering exercise was undertaken in 2017 to procure an auction partner. Clive Emson Property Auctioneers were appointed to work with us to help owners of empty homes to sell their properties at a preferential rate.</p> <p>In addition local lettings, managing and estate agents are invited to the annual Landlord Networking Event to encourage and assist local landlords to bring empty homes back into use</p>
Consider potential for lease-repair schemes and/or purchase-repair schemes	As part of the assessment of empty homes we consider if the property would be appropriate for housing purposes. Details of suitable properties are sent to the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group for consideration.
Land assembly to create viable development sites	This is led by the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group. Any sites identified through empty home work are sent through to this group for consideration.
Use of the Councils Grounds Maintenance service to provide garden clearance for empty home owners.	This is not in place and has been superseded. The council has expanded the loan scheme to include empty homes work and the councils DLO are being used to provide works on behalf of private clients when requested.

2.2 The table below details additional initiatives that have been developed during the course of the current plan.

Grant scheme for empty units over shops	A project to help realise the potential of empty units above commercial premises for housing has been drafted
National Empty Homes Week	<p>Promotion of the importance of dealing empty homes, whilst taking the opportunity to publicise the work we do.</p> <p>We have participated in two events and will continue to support this</p>
Landlord Networking Event	Two events have taken place bringing landlords and property investors together to network and access advice and services to assist in bringing homes back into use and improving the rental market
Loans	The Home Improvement Loan product has been expanded to include the provision of loans to landlords and those looking for additional funding to bring an empty home back onto use either for owner occupation or for rent.

3.0 Empty Homes Plan 2019-22

- 3.1 The new plan provides a clearer link to the national and local strategies relating to empty homes including how this contributes to delivering homes to meet local housing need.
- 3.2 There is more detail on how we will investigate an empty home, how we will prioritise it for intervention and how we might progress any formal action that may be necessary.
- 3.3 It also outlines the initiatives we are working on the types of enforcement we will consider in order to bring empty homes back into use.
- 3.4 The plan can be found in Annex 1 to this report.
- 3.5 A conservative target of 72 properties brought back into use in 2019/20 has been set in the business plan to reflect the likely increased regulatory and enforcement activity required as we deal with more complex cases. This is a minimum target and there is an ambition within the service to achieve up to 100 properties if possible.
- 3.6 The target for 2020/21 and 2021/22 will be reviewed towards the end of each year as part of a mid-point review of the plan and when details of any changes to NHB going forward are known.

Contact for more Information: Tanya Wenham, Team Leader (Community Team) 01884 244610 or twenham@middevon.gov.uk or Simon Newcombe, Group Manager for Public Health and Regulatory Services 01884 244615 or snewcombe@middevon.gov.uk.

Circulation of the Report:

Cllr Ray Stanley, Cabinet Member for Housing

Members of the Homes PDG

Leadership Team

Financial Services/Legal Services

Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security

Annex 1 – Empty Homes Plan 2019-22 (attached separately)

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Empty Homes Plan 2019-22



1.0 Introduction

Empty and derelict properties have an adverse effect on neighbourhoods. They are unsightly and can attract crime and anti-social behaviour such as squatting, arson, graffiti and fly-tipping. They may also affect the value of neighbouring properties by creating an impression of neglect and decline within the community. Communities are less likely to flourish and prosper in areas where multiple empty properties are in close proximity.

Such properties are not only eyesores and a source of neighbourhood distress; they are a wasted resource in a time of ever growing housing demand. Many people cannot access good housing, yet many homes stand vacant.

Properties can remain empty for a number of reasons, including inheritance complications, high repair costs combined with low values, limited or negative equity, adverse lending policies, and owners going into residential care. A lack of awareness of available options and sentimentality are common reasons.

Council interventions help increase overall housing supply and reduces the negative environmental and economic effects that empty properties have on neighbourhoods.

The purpose of this empty homes plan is to provide clarity on the approach that Mid Devon District Council intends to take in tackling empty homes across the district.

The main objectives of this plan are:

- To regenerate areas where empty homes are having an adverse effect on the community;
- To maximise the use of the districts existing housing stock;
- To provide more homes to meet the demand for affordable housing;
- To alleviate the pressure on the Councils own housing stock;
- To improve the visual impact of derelict and eyesore properties;
- To rejuvenate town centres by utilising empty units above commercial premises as housing

The plan covers a three-financial year period: 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22

2.0 Context

Tackling empty homes in our communities continues to be a priority. According to data released by the Empty Homes Network in October 2018 there are over 200,000 homes that have been empty for more than six months in England.

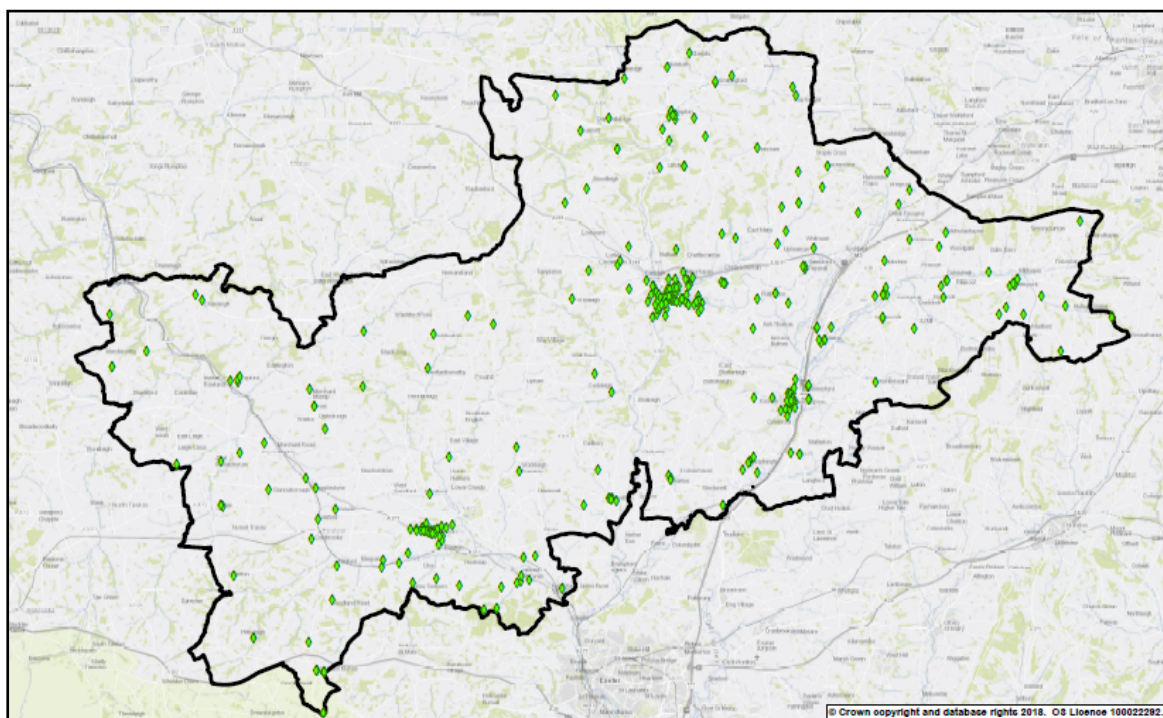
The Housing White Paper 'Fixing Our Broken Housing Market' February 2017, specifically identifies empty homes as a priority. 'Chapter 4: Helping people now' states:

"Empty homes

4.41 We will also continue to support local authorities to encourage efficient use of our existing stock, making best use of homes that are long-term empty. Local authorities have powers and incentives to tackle empty homes. Through the New Homes Bonus they earn the same financial reward for bringing an empty home back into use as building a new one. They also have flexibility to impose a council tax premium of up to 50% (on top of the council tax bill), on properties that have been empty and substantially unfurnished for more than two years. Great progress has been made in recent years and the number of empty homes stands at its lowest since records began. At May 2010 over 300,000 homes in England had been standing empty for longer than 6 months. As of October 2015 the number of long-term empty properties had fallen to 204,000." DCLG Live Table 615 - All long-term vacant dwellings by local authority district, England, from 2004 '

In Mid Devon the number of long term empty homes is around 340 although the figure fluctuates month on month where properties regularly move from being empty to occupied or vice versa. As of the 31st January 2019 there were 359 on the list being actively engaged with. This plan focuses on properties that have been empty for 6 months or more. Each month a check is made for any new properties that have reached the 6 month empty point and are added to the list of homes actively being monitored.

The map below illustrates the location of homes that have been empty for more than 6 months, across Mid Devon, at October 2018.



3.0 Links to other Policies and Strategies

3.1 Corporate Plan

The Mid Devon District Council Corporate Plan 2016-20 identifies four priority areas; Economy, Homes, Community and Environment. Bringing empty homes back into use is identified under the priority heading 'Homes' but this activity contributes to other aspects of the Corporate plan as detailed below:

Economy - Improving and regenerating our town centres:

Intervening in empty homes that are in poor condition; ensuring that space above commercial units is being utilised; ensuring that where possible the space above commercial units is safe for occupation.

Homes - Facilitating the housing growth that Mid Devon needs, including affordable homes:

Working with landlords to improve housing conditions across the private rented sector; bringing empty homes back into use as housing across the various tenures including private rented, affordable rent and home ownership; providing loans to assist landlords, home owners and empty home owners to improve their properties, carry out essential repairs and install energy efficiency measures.

3.2 Housing Strategy

Priority one of the Mid Devon District Council Housing Strategy 2015-2020 makes reference to empty homes by 'continuing to work with private sector landlords to bring empty homes back into use and also partner agencies, if appropriate.'

The private rented sector is seen as a vital component in dealing with housing provision and preventing homelessness. Bringing empty homes back into use as private rented accommodation helps to meet some of the local housing need.

In addition to using the private sector to bring homes back into use, some properties have the potential to meet local housing need in specific locations. In consultation with the housing options team some of these properties may be considered by the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group for further intervention.

3.3 Enforcement Policy

The Public Health and Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy is under review but provides details on the range of enforcement tools available to deal with empty homes and guidance on taking formal action (see 4.2).

4.0 Options for intervention

There are a number of options available to the council to tackle empty homes and no single type of action fits all circumstances.

4.1 Initiatives

Initiatives are informal and are regularly reviewed for viability. There are a range of possible initiatives that the Council may wish to adopt and further work will be needed to implement such schemes if they are not currently available.

Initiatives are more likely to be successful at achieving the objectives of the empty homes plan but require resources to set up and manage.

The following initiatives are already in place:

- Partnership with a property auction company;
- Promotion of the loan scheme to revitalise stalled works;
- Use of the Councils in house services to provide repairs and garden clearance for empty home owners.

The following are initiatives that are being developed:

- Purchase by negotiation for housing purposes through the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group;
- Grant/loan scheme specifically for units above commercial premises.

4.2 Enforcement

Enforcement can be a useful tool in achieving a particular outcome where the owner is absent or failing to engage with the council. Enforcement can be time consuming and lengthy but in some cases is the only option.

A range of statutory powers can be used to help bring empty homes back into use and the most significant forms of intervention include:

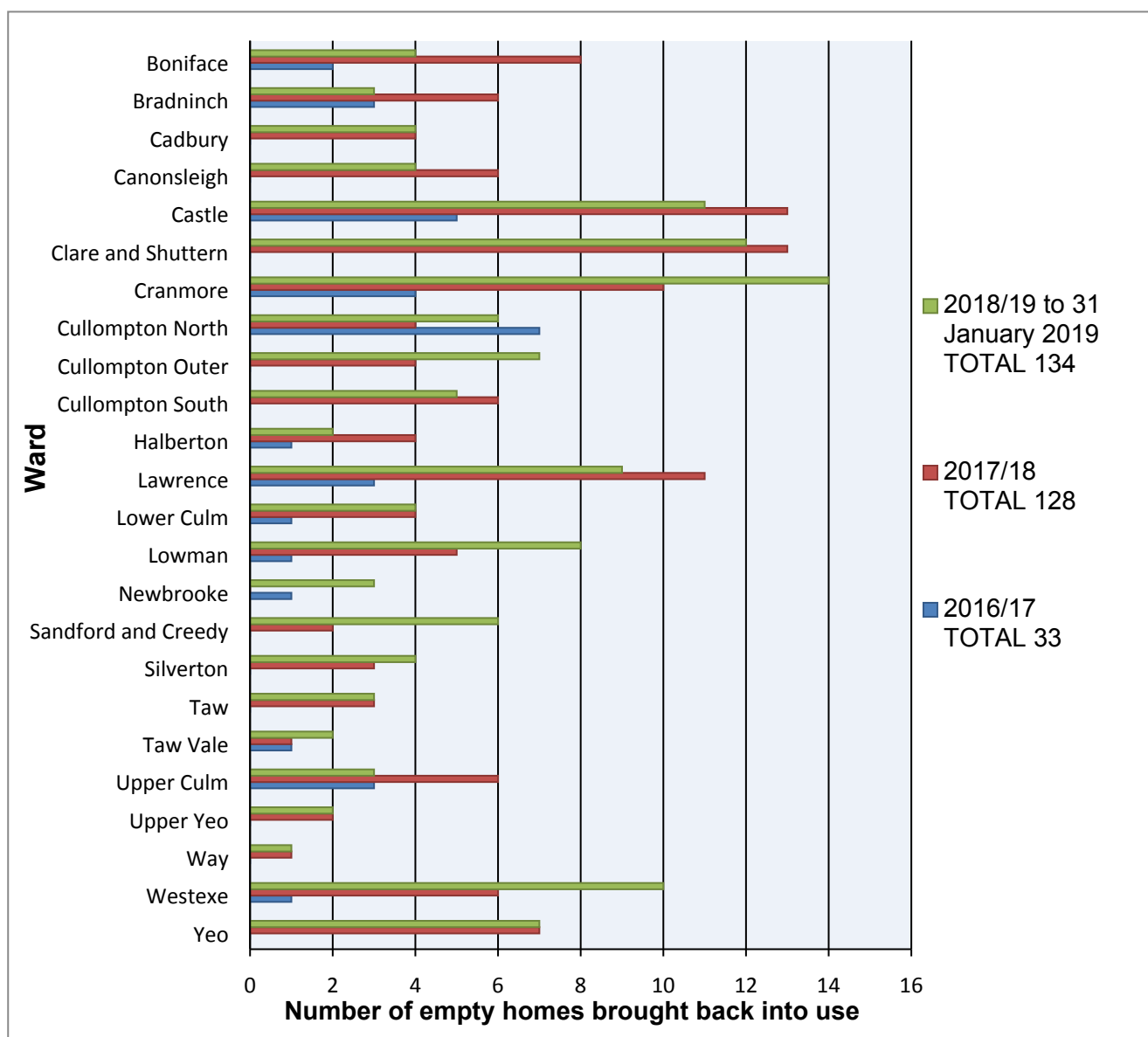
- The compulsory purchase of the land or building concerned to ensure that the site is brought back into use;
- Following the service of a statutory notice, the carrying out of works-in-default to improve property conditions (and the placing of a charge on the property to secure the repair costs as a debt);
- The enforced sale of a property, as a means of recovering any debt owed to the council (such as a debt resulting from works-in-default).

The Public Health and Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy provides more detail on the enforcement tools available and how these tools are used. This is due to be incorporated into a broader Operations Directorate Enforcement Policy due for adoption in April 2019.

5.0 Progress

5.1 Properties Brought back into use

The table below shows the number of properties that have been brought back into use by ward, between the beginning of the previous plan in October 2016 and 31 January 2018.



5.2 Auction partner

A tendering process was undertaken in 2017 to procure a property auction partner to assist owners of empty homes to sell their properties where this is appropriate.

Clive Emson Property Auctioneers were successful and were awarded the contract to provide their services in partnership with the council. Clive Emson offer owners of properties in Mid Devon a preferential rate to sell their property through them.

The advantage of auction is that the property will exchange contracts within 28 days of the property being auctioned. This provides a quick and cost effective solution for those owners that do not have the capacity or experience to sell a property or want to remove the burden of the property quickly.

There is a misconception that property sold at auction is cheap and sells far below market value - this is not the case. As part of the service Clive Emson surveyors will provide an auction valuation which is based on the property selling quickly. They will provide advice as to whether auction is suitable for the property and offer an option to place a reserve that ensures the property is not sold at an unreasonable price. If the surveyors believe that the property would benefit from being sold on the open market through an estate agent, they will tell the owner this would be a better option for them.

As part of the contract we receive a copy of the auction brochure and details of the property sale prices achieved at the auction. All of the Mid Devon properties that have sold through this auction process have sold above the top end of their guide price.

5.3 Empty Homes Week

Empty Homes Week is a national campaign that falls in October each year. We are committed to promoting empty homes week every year through media campaigns to raise awareness of the issues surrounding empty homes and the progress we have made in dealing with the problem locally.

5.4 Landlord Networking Event

The annual Landlord Networking Event is used to promote services relating to the private rented sector which includes encouraging landlords to invest in properties. A range of exhibitors pay to attend and provide advice to delegates on subjects such as tax, buying at auction, property maintenance, letting properties and management. This is a valuable resource for local property investors.

5.5 Loans

Wessex Resolutions Community Interest Company (WRCIC) is a not-for-profit company contracted to deliver loans to residents in the Mid Devon area and is funded by Mid Devon District Council.

The Home Improvement Loan is a flexible product that can be used for the following purposes:

- Home repairs and improvements;
- Adaptation works where grant is not available;
- To cover a client contribution to a grant;
- To cover the cost of the work over the DFG or Accessible Homes grant maximum;
- To bring empty homes back into use;
- For landlords to carry out repairs or improvement to rented accommodation;
- For energy efficiency improvements.

Owners of empty homes may apply for a loan to help pay for repairs to their property. Eligibility for the loan will vary and is based on the individual circumstances of each client. Loan advisors carry out an assessment providing independent advice on ethical and responsible lending and recommending the most appropriate product to suit the needs of each client.

Conditions may vary depending on the loan product selected and the individual circumstances of each applicant, with a typical 4.2% APR and are subject to status. Wessex Resolutions CIC may insist on loans being protected at the Land Registry by a Title Restriction. Missing payments could affect the client's credit rating and ability to obtain credit in the future.

5.6 Enforcement

So far most of the homes that have been brought back into use have been achieved through informal action. However, enforcement action has been used to abate some of the issues being caused by an empty home: Community Protection Notices have been used to tidy up overgrown gardens; Housing Act Notices have been used to carry out repairs and prohibit the use of uninhabitable accommodation; Prevention of Damage by Pests Act notices have been used to clear excessive accumulations of rubbish outside empty properties; and consideration has been given to the Councils first Demolition Order.

We will also liaise with Development Management in respect of actions that may be undertaken to manage properties having an adverse impact on the amenity of an area and/or in disrepair, for example section 215 notices and listed building repair notices. Joint action may be considered where appropriate.

Enforcement is used where it is appropriate to do so and informal approaches to the owners are unsuccessful. The approach being used to deal with empty homes is discussed in more detail in section 6.0.

6.0 Approach and targets

6.1 Checking records

Council tax records are checked monthly to provide a list of properties where the council tax code has changed. This list is then scrutinised to extract the new data. Where the code has changed to show an empty home as now being occupied, the addresses are then checked against our activity to identify those properties that have had any involvement from Public Health and Regulatory Services.

The list is then checked for any properties that have a new long term empty council tax code. Those which have become empty for more than 6 months (previously identified as occupied or empty for less than 6 months) are then added to the teams active list for intervention.

A running total of properties that are empty using the above criteria is held and updated monthly. This list is used to target resources for intervention.

6.2 Stage 1 - Information

When an empty home first comes to our attention we send out an initial letter giving advice and asking for the owners to contact us.

The first letter introduces the empty homes project but also identifies the legal sanctions available to the council. It is important that this information is included at an early stage to ensure that correct legal process has been followed should enforcement action be required in relation to that property at any point in the future.

Very few initial letters result in further action. Most empty home owners make contact with the Council to advise of their intentions for the property or simply take action to bring the property back into use without further assistance.

6.3 Stage 2 - Intervention

After a period of six weeks, if there has been no response to the first letter, a second letter is sent again asking for contact to be made. It is important to provide owners of empty homes an opportunity to respond before more formal action is considered. The reasons for a home being empty can be complicated and sensitive particularly if the circumstances relate to the death of a family member or someone going into residential care for example. However, if there is no response to the second letter we will progress to Stage 3.

6.4 Stage 3 - Inspection

At this stage an appointment will be made to carry out a full inspection of the property. A notified inspection is necessary to allow us to take formal action under the Housing Act 2004 should this become necessary.

The Housing Act 2004 allows us to assess the condition of the property and require improvements to be made if appropriate. If the owner does not turn up to the appointment or doesn't arrange alternative access for the officer, an external inspection will still be carried out from public accessible areas, and where appropriate, will only capture images of the external view of the property. The property will then be prioritised based on its condition, impact on the local area and its suitability for use as housing. If it is well kept and not causing a problem to the community, consideration will be given as to whether it is suitable for council housing purposes but no formal action is likely to be taken at this stage.

Where the property is considered to be a priority for action the legal process for gaining access will be followed which may result in applying for a warrant to enter.

Once a full inspection has been carried out the officer will determine the most appropriate form of action to deal with the property.

At all stages the owner will be given the opportunity to engage with us and access any of the available initiatives.

6.5 Targets

Targets for the number of empty properties bought back into use by year across the plan period are:

- 2019/20 - the business plan sets a minimum target 72 with an ambition to deliver up to 100
- 2020/21 and 2021/22 will be confirmed following a review towards the end of each year

7.0 Prioritising action

Due to the limited resources of the team it is necessary to prioritise the properties for action.

Not all long-term empty homes are in poor repair or in a location that is impacting on the amenity of the area; therefore it is not appropriate for us to intervene in every case. The resources available to the council must be used to good effect and be directed at those properties causing the most problems or that have the potential to be brought back into use as housing relatively quickly and cost effectively.

Once an inspection of the property has been carried out it will be assessed against a set of criteria to determine whether it is a priority for further action.

A property that has no impact on the community will be given a low priority for intervention. Where a property is having an impact on the community it will then be considered under the next set of criteria relating to the condition of the property (see flow chart below).

Community impact

- Crime and anti-social behaviour - historic and future risk; including arson, trespass, squatting, fly-tipping and graffiti;
- Prominence - property size and location; for example, whether the property is in a high profile location seen by many;
- Physical effect - whether the condition of the property is causing damage to other residential buildings; for example, whether the roof is leaking to such an extent that water penetration has begun to affect neighbouring homes;
- Desirability of the property for housing purposes - is the property type and location suitable to meet housing need.

Condition of the property

- Appearance - the degree to which the premises are unsightly and detrimental to the area, including matters such as decorative repair;
- Rubbish accumulations and overgrown vegetation;
- General condition - physical condition of the premises, both internal and external; for example, whether the building is in an uninhabitable condition.

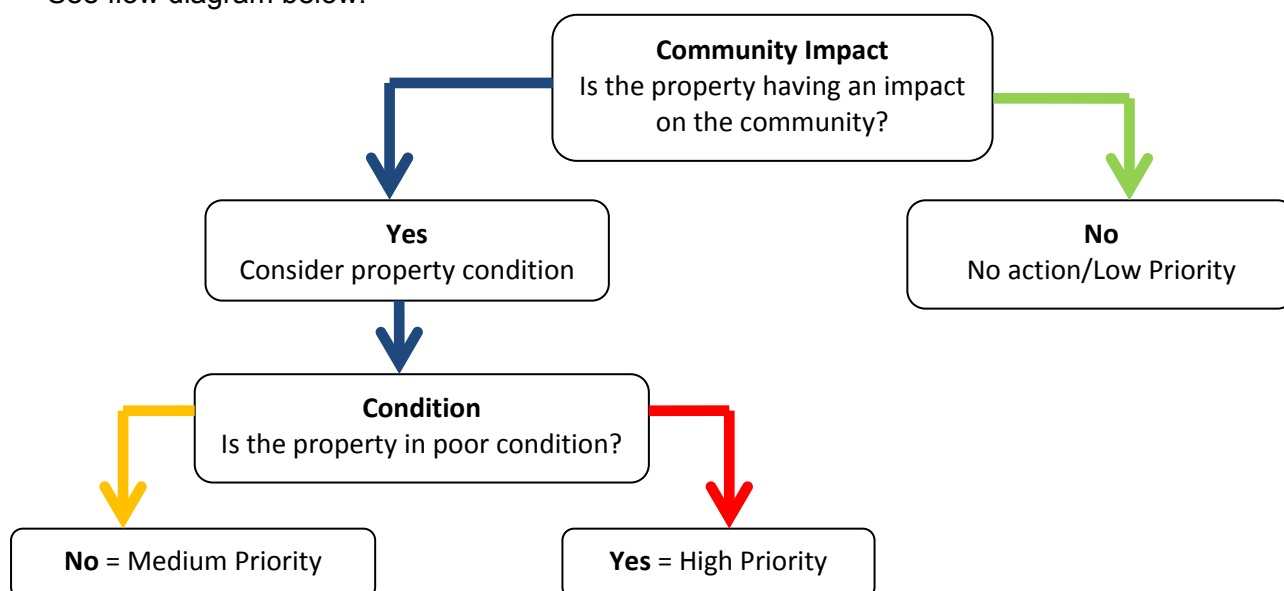
This may involve liaison with other service areas as required, for example Development Management and Housing Needs as set out above.

A property with a community impact that is in fairly good condition will be given a medium priority. In consultation with the housing options team consideration will be given to the properties suitability to meet local housing need.

A property with a community impact that is in poor condition will be given a high priority for more formal action to be taken.

Properties given a Low priority are unlikely to be subject to further action.

See flow diagram below.



8.0 Types of action

There are a range of enforcement tools available to the Council and these are detailed in the Mid Devon Enforcement Policy which describes the Councils approach to enforcement and the powers available. For full details on how enforcement is undertaken please refer to that policy.

This section provides an overview of the considerations when taking action with an empty home.

Priority	Considerations	Options available
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No relevant factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No further action other than monitoring
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints have been received about the property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal Letter Loan advice Auction advice
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property is of interest for housing purposes Owners have engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase by negotiation Empty Dwelling Management Order
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property is of interest for housing purposes No engagement from the owner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empty Dwelling Management Order Compulsory Purchase

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property not of interest for housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Auction Loan
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property is of interest for housing purposes Owners have engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase by negotiation Housing Act notices and/or work in default
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property is of interest for housing purposes No engagement from the owner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Act notices and/or work in default Enforced Sale Compulsory Purchase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property not of interest for housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demolition Order Auction Loan

9.0 Plan Review

This plan runs from April 2019 to March 2022.

A light-touch mid-point review will be carried out towards the end of each year, in particular to review the empty homes target for the coming financial year.

A full Plan review will be carried out in November 2021 or as required following any significant changes to legislation, the New Homes Bonus or any related statutory guidance.

Public Health and Regulatory Services
February 2019

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP 12 MARCH 2019

HOUSING UPDATE

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer: Mrs Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing

Reason for Report: To provide a written briefing on latest developments relating to social housing

RECOMMENDATION: Members to note the report

Financial Implications: None arising from this briefing

Legal Implications: None arising from this briefing

Risk Assessment: None arising from this briefing

Equality Impact Assessment: None arising from this briefing

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Homes are a priority for the Council and this includes increasing supply in the District and also ensuring that those homes in our ownership are managed efficiently and effectively

1.0 Introduction/Background

- 1.1 Members agreed that it would be helpful to receive a regular briefing on matters relating to social housing.

2.0 Health & Safety Issues

- 2.1 A Housing Association in the South East was criticised by the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) which found “maladministration” in relation to maintenance at one housing block in its management.
- 2.2 In November 2017, the association had been ordered to provide more information to the resident who had complained, to pay compensation and to carry out necessary repairs and maintenance, by 1 April 2017. The housing association, which has 57,000 homes in management, complied with the first two requirements but failed to finish the necessary works before the deadline.
- 2.3 The HOS issued a special report, which is unusual. This said that the association had notified them that the delay had been caused by procurement and personnel difficulties (HOS, 2019).
- 2.4 To put this matter into context, the Government discussed proposals for giving the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) more powers to respond to maintenance issues; and discussions about the relationship between the HOS and the RSH have been ongoing for many months.

- 2.5 In another case, a housing association based in the greater South West, was ordered to pay £1 million plus £40,000 in legal costs at Bournemouth Crown Court. This related to a tragic incident where a 5 year old girl died in one of its homes in 2015. It had pleaded guilty to breaching health and safety laws in the run up to the little girl's death. A panel had been damaged in early 2013 and was not fixed or replaced, despite a lift engineer, employed by a lift company, noting that work was required three months before she died. The lift company also pleaded guilty to breaching health and safety laws.
- 2.6 The Health and Safety Executive, which had taken the case to court, said after the sentencing that the negligence of the housing association and the lift company had caused "a wholly avoidable tragedy, under horrific circumstances". (Barker, 2019).
- 2.7 Elaine Bailey, the chief executive of Hyde Housing, will be part of the Industry Safety Steering Group (ISSG) which has been set up following the publication of the report by Dame Judith Hackett into building safety. Dame Judith will chair the ISSG. The Government has stated its intention to implement all of the recommendations in her review and some of the reforms to be made include tougher sanctions on building owners and companies that show a disregard for building safety. (Simpson, January 2019)
- 3.0 **Development**
- 3.1 The Cabinet at Barking and Dagenham Council has agreed "in principle" to set up a housing association division for its housing company. This is to enable it to use grant totalling £25.3 million which was made available through a programme operated by the Mayor of London (the Building Council Homes for Londoners fund). The funding will be used to build up to 253 homes for let through the Council's Reside housing company. (Barking & Dagenham, 2019)
- 3.2 Homes England has announced more strategic partners. A number of Housing Associations will receive a share of the budget of £500 million funding for provision of affordable homes. These partners will be expected to build approximately 11,000 new homes across the UK. They must also include some social rent. Under this initiative, 23 strategic partners, in total, are now expected to work in partnership to start 40,000 affordable homes by March 2022, using funding of up to £1.7 billion. (Simpson, 1 February 2019)
- 3.3 The only housing association included in this group of registered providers which will be receiving funding from this latest initiative, which is based in the South West, is Curo (based in Bath). This association has formed a partnership with Swan Housing Association (based in Essex) to deliver an additional 1067 homes on top of existing plans, using £51.12 million in grant. (Curo, 2019)
- 3.4 Inside Housing has reported that a number of private house builders have registered their own housing associations in order to keep the affordable homes built in their developments (Simpson, 8 February 2019). If other house builders move forward in this way, it could reduce the opportunities for other registered providers of social housing, including those Councils with retained stock, to acquire new homes which may be available under section 106

planning arrangements. Members will recall that these section 106 agreements set out planning obligations under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and are made between local authorities and developers. They can be attached to planning permissions.

- 3.5 The research showed that a number of companies have found it difficult to agree arrangements relating to the affordable homes with existing associations. Hopkins Homes, which has a turnover of £166 million has registered Peal Community Housing as a housing association; the new Chairman of this association, Martin Aust, has stated that housing associations lack capacity to buy up section 106 properties, particularly in rural locations. Larkfleet Homes established Swift Homes as an association last year and a developer working in Suffolk, Park Properties, registered a housing association in September. Chris Wakefield, a Director, said that costs were also an issue, with associations often offering “less than build cost” on developments.

4.0 The Right to Buy

- 4.1 The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) has stated that more than 165,000 social rent homes have been lost in England over the past 6 years. Based on reports provided by central government (the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), the CIH found that over that number were lost between 2012 and 2018. Nearly 118,000 of these were owned by Councils; and nearly 48,000 owned by housing associations. The CIH projected further losses due to Right to Buy sales, demolitions and conversions to the affordable rent tenure. They predicted further losses totalling more than 33,000 homes by 2020, bringing the total number of homes lost between 2012 and 2020 to approximately 199,000. (CIH, 2019)

5.0 Universal Credit

- 5.1 Universal Credit was introduced to consolidate many other benefits and is paid in 12 monthly instalments based on a 52 week year, in arrears. The aim is to help people to cope better with the transition into work. Housing costs are included in the payments of Universal Credit if tenants claim them and tenants are expected to pay their rent themselves.
- 5.2 The Council works in partnership with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The Housing Service uses their online portal to provide information on rents due in respect of the homes of those tenants claiming Universal Credit. The rents of all new claimants are verified by our Officers provided that the tenant has notified the DWP that they are a Council tenant and that the Council is their landlord.
- 5.3 If a tenant is vulnerable and meets the criteria specified by the DWP, the Housing Service can request direct payments of rent using the Alternative Payments Scheme; in addition, Officers can request direct payments in respect of arrears in some cases, but the amount which can be paid will depend upon what other debts the claimant may have which are also being collected using this method.

- 5.4 Universal Credit is now being rolled out in the District. All new claimants are now put onto this benefit although the managed migration of existing claimants of other benefits is on hold for the time-being. As at 24 February 2019, 226 current tenants were in receipt of Universal Credit.
- 5.5 The National Housing Federation (NHF), which represents housing associations, is raising concern with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) regarding issues relating to Universal Credit payments during 2019/20. Many landlords charge rent every Monday. This means that periodically there is a year with 53 weeks where rent is payable. 2019/20 will be one of these years. It should be noted that the last Monday in March 2020 will be on March 30, meaning that that week will include 5 days of April 2020. The start of the new financial year (2020/21) will be on 6 April 2020.
- 5.6 The Council charges rent, based on the annual charge; and then divides the total by 48 because rent is currently charged over 48 weeks. Next year, there will be 5 rent free weeks and the rent free weeks have been re-scheduled so that no rent will be charged during the weeks commencing:
- | | |
|---------|------------------|
| Week 9 | 27 May 2019 |
| Week 22 | 26 August 2019 |
| Week 39 | 23 December 2018 |
| Week 40 | 30 December 2019 |
| Week 53 | 30 March 2020 |
- 5.7 Council tenants are required to pay the rent weekly in advance. They are responsible for paying their rent and other charges on time. The tenancy agreement states that tenants are responsible for making claims for any benefits to which they may be entitled. Therefore, the onus of responsibility for paying the rent will always lie with the tenant regardless of whether or not they are in receipt of any benefits. Our Officers will provide support and advice; and relevant policies include some discretion to ensure that vulnerable tenants receive all appropriate help and assistance.
- 5.8 Our Neighbourhood team will be working closely with tenants to mitigate the impact of the additional week. Our Income team maintains close contact with those affected tenants and will provide tenants with all relevant information regarding what they need to pay. We have Community Housing Support Officers and these Officers will be mobilised to work to minimise the impact of the additional week during the year.
- 5.9 However, other registered providers are very concerned regarding the impact of the arrangements being operated by the DWP, on those tenants in receipt of Universal Credit. This is due to the fact that the system will continue to calculate payments based on 52 weeks. This will mean that many tenants in receipt of the benefit who pay their rent weekly may be unable to pay their rent for one week next year. The National Housing Federation (NHF) has raised the issue with the DWP. (Barker, January 2019)
- 5.10 The DWP has stated that no one on Universal Credit will be left with a week's rent shortfall due to there being more Mondays in the year (2019/20) than would normally be expected. They said that most of the final payment for

2019/20 would cover the rent due during the first week of 2020/21. (Barker, 8 February 2019).

6.0 Housing Allocations

- 6.1 The High Court found that a north London housing association had not discriminated against two non-Jewish families in a recent case regarding the allocation of housing to the orthodox Jewish community.
- 6.2 The case was the subject of a judicial review on the grounds that the housing association had been discriminatory. The case had been brought against Hackney Council on the basis that it should not have a nominations agreement with the housing association as a result of this.
- 6.3 According to the Equality Act, service providers may take action to respond to issues arising from the disadvantages experienced by people who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act. (Barratt, 2019)
- 6.4 The Council works in partnership to allocate homes through the Devon Home Choice (DHC) scheme and this case demonstrates the importance of having robust and transparent allocation policies which can be justified under all relevant legislation.
- 6.5 The Council's planning policy relating to the allocation of affordable housing on rural exception housing sites is based on the need of housing applicants and their local connection. There is a cascade approach which categorises different levels of need. The definition of need is set out in the Devon Home Choice assessment framework and ranges from Band A (emergency housing need) to Band E (no housing need).

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Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley, Cabinet Member for Housing, Mr Andrew Pritchard, Director of Operations

List of Background Papers:

Nathaniel Barker, Landlord fined £1m over death of five-year-old girl, Inside Housing, 18 January 2019

Nathaniel Barker, UC claimants facing underpayment threat, Inside Housing, 25 January 2019

Nathaniel Barker, DWP claims 53-week year will not affect UC tenants, Inside Housing, 8 February 2019

Barking & Dagenham website, Cabinet agenda & draft minutes, 22 January 2019
<https://modgov.lbbd.gov.uk/Internet/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=180&MId=10022&Ver=4>

Luke Barratt, Court dismisses claim against Jewish HA, Inside Housing, 8 February 2019

Chartered Institute of Housing website (CIH), 6 February 2019

http://www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/More_than_165000_homes_for_social_rent_lost_in_just_six_years_new_analysis_reveals

Curo website, 30 January 2019

<https://www.curo-group.co.uk/news/news-stories/curo-swan-and-homes-england-establish-strategic-partnership-to-deliver-1-000-affordable-homes/>

Housing Ombudsman Service website, 16 January 2019

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/2019/01/16/housing-ombudsman-issues-special-report-on-metropolitan/>

Jack Simpson, Hyde boss gets role on official safety panel, Inside Housing, 18 January 2019

Jack Simpson, Next strategic partners names in £500m deals, Inside Housing, 1 February 2019

Jack Simpson, Flurry of private builders set up HAs, Inside Housing, 8 February 2019

Homes Policy Development Group

Chairmans Annual Report

Looking back on the year of work that our group has discussed and made recommendations on it is clear that as ever we have had a busy time over the last 12 months.

As well as our usual workload of policy revisions, performance and risk and budget reports we have looked in great detail on many aspects of Housing that affect all providers in the sector.

There are ongoing challenges that we face continually not least those of working within tight budget constraints yet still providing a top class service to all of our tenants, something which must be paramount in all our undertakings .

Once again this year our housing team have met the challenge of maintaining the very high standards that all our tenants should and do expect, our portfolio of accommodation is challenging , not least because we are a rural authority and travel time and costs are ever rising, often by things that are beyond our control especially on fuel costs for vehicles.

Our housing service works on a very tight timescale of voids turnarounds and it may be that we have driven the times down as low as realistically can be achieved, but this timescale is important to enable us to work within our budgets.

As a group we have studied policies that change to meet the ongoing legislation laid upon us as a housing provider, and in the ongoing fallout from the Grenfell tower fire we have strengthened our Neighbourhood Management Policy to prevent any such event happening in our area.

In October we met as a group to consider our response to the green paper on social housing and worked through all of the 48 questions and gave strong responses.

Our Tenant Involvement Group has worked well again and this has been recognised by them being shortlisted for awards again at the 2019 TPAS awards. We are fortunate that our tenant group work so diligently and closely with our housing officers and I hope their involvement goes from strength to strength.

We must congratulate all those involved in our ongoing council house building programme, whilst we still face the challenge of Right To Buy it is comforting to know that we are forging ahead in trying to increase our housing stock, I know our Cabinet Member will robustly discuss the problems of Right To Buy with Government Ministers at the earliest opportunity.

On behalf of our group I would like to thank all the staff that make up our housing service, once again this past year they have risen and met the substantial challenges before them to provide a service that as members we can be proud of.

I must also take this chance to record the thanks of all the group to all the officers who have attended our meetings and especially our Clerk Sarah Lees who keeps us up to date with things and is as ever so helpful to me as Chairman.

In May we will see a new Council formed, some of us will come back to this group and no doubt we will see some new faces at our meetings, I know they will be welcomed and supported by the more experienced members as we start a new year.

John Daw

Chairman