

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report to Service Delivery Panel

16th March 2022

TITLE:	Revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2021-26
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Bowen – Cabinet Member for Communities
CONTACT OFFICER:	Mike Towers, Senior Housing Officer
WARDS INVOLVED:	All Wards

Appendices Attached:

Appendix 1 – Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2021-26

1. **Reason for the Report:** To present to the Committee the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council following public consultation.

2. **Recommendation**
 - 2.1 To recommend that the Cabinet approves the revised Staffordshire Moorlands Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy for 2021-26.

3. **Executive Summary**
 - 3.1 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council is required to publish a policy that outlines how the local housing authority will comply with their obligations under the Housing Regulatory Reform Orders and the Housing Act 2004 to provide housing renewal interventions for the maintenance of the private sector housing stock and enforcement of their legal obligations.
 - 3.1.1 The Housing Regulatory Reform Order 1994 requires that local authorities publish a policy on their interventions in the private housing sector in order to maintain and improve as necessary the housing stock in their area.

- 3.1.2 The Housing Act 2004 requires local authorities to publish their enforcement policy for the application of their legal powers and duties.
- 3.2 Local Authorities are required to review their Private Sector Housing Policies from time to time to ensure that they reflect current housing regulation and guidance and current trends in housing renewal. The Policy was last reviewed in 2016, and the current revised Policy is intended, on implementation, to determine the Council's regulatory and discretionary interventions in respect of the private sector housing stock for the next 5 years.
- 3.3 The draft Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy was circulated to Staffordshire Moorlands members in December 2021 as an Information Digest as a precursor to the launch of the public consultation. The public consultation was subsequently launched on 7th January 2022 and ran to 4th March 2022, and at the same time the draft policy was sent directly to a number of external stakeholders, as detailed in Section 4 of the Policy. The public consultation was supplemented by a press release and promotion on the Council's Social Media platforms.
- 3.4 On conclusion of the consultation period, the Council had received no formal representations from the public or other stakeholders.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Aim 1 Staffordshire Moorlands - To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work.
- 4.2 Aim 4 Staffordshire Moorlands – To protect and improve the environment including responding to the climate emergency.

5. Implications

5.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

There is an established link between poor housing conditions and the prevalence of neighbourhood anti-social behaviour (ASB). Improvement of housing conditions in the private rental sector in particular should therefore contribute to reduced casual neighbourhood ASB.

5.2 Workforce

The implementation of the Policy will fall to the existing Housing Standards enforcement Team in Environmental Health, in partnership with other services and external agencies.

5.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Council's

Diversity and Equality Policies.

In particular, the Policy is designed to focus on vulnerable tenants in private sector accommodation, and people living with disability in our community.

5.4 Financial Considerations

Elements of the Policy are dependent on the availability of grant funding, internally from the Council's resources and externally through funding streams such as the Better Care Fund. Variations in the availability or value of the funding streams may affect the ability to deliver non-mandatory schemes.

5.5 Legal

It is a duty that local authorities publish a policy on their interventions in the private housing sector in order to maintain and improve as necessary the housing stock in their area, and also that the local authority publish their enforcement policy for the application of their legal powers and duties.

5.6 Climate Change

The provisions of the Policy are intended to deal with the issues relating to poor housing in the borough over the next 5 years, with a particular focus on long-term improvements in property condition and energy efficiency, along with improvements allowing people living with disability to remain living independently in their own homes.

5.7 Consultation

The Policy has been widely consulted on, both internally and externally, during the consultation period in order to meet our legal obligations.

5.8 Risk Assessment

The Policy is a requirement set out in legislation, but wherever appropriate the content has been reviewed to ensure compliance with relevant health and safety requirements.

Mark Trillo

Executive Director (Governance & Commissioning) and Monitoring Officer

**Web Links and
Background Papers**

Location

Contact details

Revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2021-26
Appendix 1

6. Detail

- 6.1 The Regulatory Reform Order 1994 re-defined the landscape in which local authorities intervene in the private housing sector. The Order was instrumental in dismantling the previous grant-heavy private sector renewal programmes following the withdrawal of the majority of government funding for large scale renewal and private property renovation. The Order stated that local authorities were no longer required to make grant funding available, but instead were to produce Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policies outlining their approach to renewal, the interventions they would make and the priorities for doing so.
- 6.1.1 Since the Order took effect, Staffordshire Moorlands has produced three Renewal Assistance Policies, the last one being in 2016.
- 6.1.2 Since the formation of the Alliance and the closer working relationships between housing services serving the High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands, and further to the closer alignment of the two Council's Corporate Priorities, the current revisions include reference to cross-council initiatives and have regularised the intervention and enforcement processes across the Housing Services.
- 6.2 The Housing Act 2004 brought in a requirement that local authorities must also publish their Housing Enforcement Policy, so that their use of the range of legal powers introduced by the Act was clear, open and transparent. The current revised Policy includes the Housing Enforcement Policy as an appendix to the main document.
- 6.3 The majority of the content of the revised Policy has been reviewed and updated where appropriate, and the opportunity has been taken to revise the format of the Policy so that the focus is on the aims, objectives and priorities of the interventions, and the detail of the specific methods of intervention have been included as appendices. This has made the documents more logical and makes reference to specific interventions much easier.
- 6.4 There have been some changes to the Policy to align across the Alliance Councils where possible and address any inconsistencies around assistance and enforcement. Some of the main changes are highlighted below;
- 6.4.1 The section relating to Landlord Accreditation has been revised to reflect the fact that neither local authority now operate a local accreditation scheme, and where there is alternative provision, landlords are advised of other schemes available.

- 6.4.2 The section relating to Disabled Facilities Grants has been re-written to reflect the current arrangements at each Council and to bring the arrangements for registering local land charges and recovering grant funding into line with the wider policies across Derbyshire and Staffordshire. This section has also been revised to include a suite of discretionary adaptation grants, designed to address some of the shortcomings in the mandatory regulated scheme, particularly with regard to means testing and top-up funding but also including assistance to move house where adaptations are unfeasible and to apply a holistic approach to home improvements for persons living with disability.
- 6.4.3 In relation to the mandatory and discretionary Adaptation Grants outlined in Appendix A of the Policy, changes to some of the grant values are proposed to reflect current intelligence regarding increasing costs of materials (at present, timber and glass are escalating quite significantly and there is evidence to suggest that other building materials are becoming more scarce and costly) and overall quotes for larger scale complex adaptations involving property extension. It is proposed that the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant limit is increased from £35,000 to £45,000 and that the discretionary Adaptation Grant is set at a level of £20,000, with an option for the Head of Environmental Health to consider an application for a greater sum in severe hardship cases based on the individual circumstances of the client. The level of funding for the Safe and Secure Adaptation Grant is proposed to be set at a maximum of £10,000.
- 6.4.4 The provision for other grant funding programmes has been rationalised to reflect the current realities of the resources available to the Council, so reference to Decent Homes grant funding has been removed from the current Policy. The Home Repairs Assistance Grant has been retained as it is planned to provide some limited funding for assisting vulnerable residents to heat and insulate their homes, and for helping the owners of empty properties to bring the properties back into use.
- 6.5 The section on Home Energy Efficiency and Affordable Warmth under PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE AND INITIATIVES in Section 7 of the revised Policy has been re-written to reflect the current moves towards enforcing minimum standards of energy efficiency in the private rented sector and how the housing service can contribute to the overall climate change agenda.
- 6.6 A copy of the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy is appended for consideration. The Cabinet is recommended to approve the revised Assistance Policy so that it can be implemented for the new financial year commencing 1st April 2022.