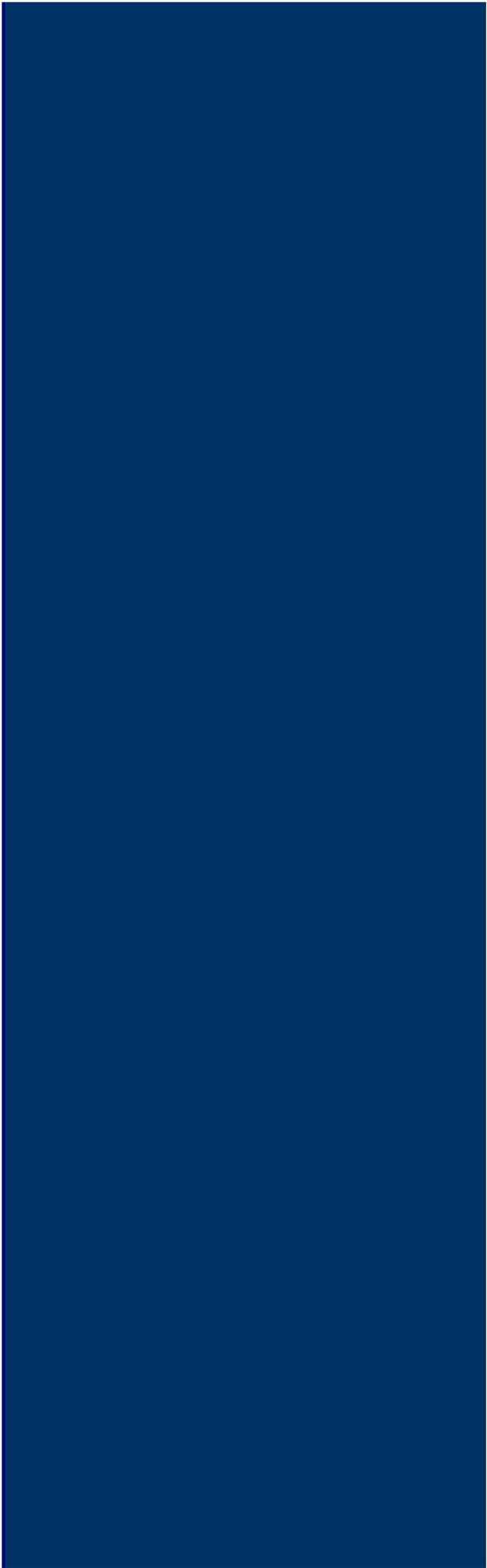




Mid Devon District Council

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY

Private Sector Housing
2012-13



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This policy explains the way in which the Council provides advice and, wherever possible, financial assistance to the owners and occupiers of private sector property within Mid Devon.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) that came into force on the 18th July 2002, repealed much of the prescriptive legislation together with the associated detailed rules, procedures and conditions that governed the provision of Housing Assistance. The exception to this is the system of Mandatory Disabled Facilities grants, which remains largely unaltered.

The RRO provides the Council with general powers to provide grants, loans, advice and materials, or to directly carry out works for the purpose of repairing, improving, extending, converting or adapting housing accommodation. This provides a greater degree of flexibility to contribute to the national, regional and local needs.

The Government has made it clear that the responsibility to maintain private property lies firmly with the owner. However the Council recognises that the private sector stock is a major public asset and seeks to offer assistance with conditions as a form of investment for long term public benefit, as well as directly assisting vulnerable groups to remain in their homes within the area of Mid Devon.

The amount of assistance that may be offered will always be directly related to the levels of funding available and subject to conditions that protect the public funds. The Council will work to ensure that it levers in the maximum amount of finance to make the best improvement to the private sector that it can.

The Council has collected data through commissioning surveys: Local Housing Condition (LHCS), Housing Needs and Housing Market Assessment (HMA). The most recent LHCS survey was in 2008, and a further sample survey was made in 2010. The concept and use of house condition surveys is being critically examined. The Exeter & Torbay SHMA was completed in 2007. The priorities for assistance set out in this policy are based on this data and informed by previous renewal approaches, but more importantly are set against a background of expected spending cuts across Government departments based on the Coalition Government's emergency budget requirements.

This policy sets out the mechanisms by which the Council will achieve these priorities.

The Council originally set its Housing Assistance policy in 2003 and has reviewed annually to take into account changing priorities and needs. This revised policy has amalgamated all the policies and aims to build on these retaining the examples of good practice currently being undertaken by the Mid Devon District Council and its partners. It will also introduce changes to the existing policy to meet targets for the Decent Homes Standard in the Private Sector, rising prices for building work, response to the Exeter Housing Market Assessment for additional homes, the on-going work of the temporary accommodation strategy and Sustainable Community Plan for Mid Devon and the constraints of public spending cuts which could see its base budget reduced.

2.0 MID DEVON

Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) is a predominantly rural area covering 365 square miles in the heartland of Devon from the edges of Dartmoor in the South West to Exmoor in the North East.

The current population of around 77,800 (2011 Census) is located in principal towns of Tiverton, Cullompton and Crediton. There are around 29,000 households in the private sector.

The district is an area of contrasts with rural sitting alongside urban and areas of economic and social advantage being adjacent to areas of comparative disadvantage.

The Indices of Deprivation 2010 (DCLG) shows that one part of Tiverton Lowman ward is in the upper quartile with the greatest deprivation and parts of both Tiverton Westex and Tiverton Cranmore are in the second quartile along with Boniface in Crediton and Cullompton North and South.

House prices – affordability

- Average house prices have steadily increased without similar rises in earnings.
- The average price for a home is now £197,400 (Land registry Jan-March 2012)
- The average net household income is £22,900 p.a. (ONS 2011)
- Average house prices in Mid Devon are now 8.6 times average earnings

The 2010 house condition survey revealed that -

- Non decency, at 39.7%, is slightly higher than the national average (ref.33.1%,English House Condition Survey 2008)
- Failure rate largely driven by energy efficiency standards and Category 1 hazards which are in turn dominated by Excess Cold and Falls
- Non decency has become a greater problem since April 2006 with the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System

The following list gives some of the key features of Mid Devon's housing stock and population (from Local House Condition Survey March 2011 and ONS 2011).

- A greater proportion of the housing stock was built after 1965 (52.8%). 21.4% were built before 1919.
- The stock is dominated by bungalows, medium/large terraced houses, semi detached and detached houses.
- More residents are 60 years old and over.20.4% of the population is of retirement age compared to 16.6% nationally(ONS 2010)

- Housing Health and Safety Rating System(HHSRS) Category 1 hazards are strongly associated with older dwellings, converted flats and dwellings occupied by households in receipt of benefits.
- Category 1 hazards are more prevalent in the owner occupied sector but only by a very small margin to that in the privately rented sector.
- Average incomes are 12.6% lower than the national average , with a substantial proportion (31.6%) of employees earning less than £15,000.
- Nearly half of all households have an income of under £20,000 therefore a potential poor ability to move up the housing ladder.
- Benefit receipt at 32% is above national average (17%), mainly lone parent with dependant child, couple with dependent child and one person households.
- There are high proportions of homes where the head of household is 65 and over that are non-Decent and who have a household income of less than £10,000.This has implications for the potential greater needs of support associated with the older households.



Mid Devon - The Corporate Plan (2012-2015)

The Council revised the Corporate Plan priorities in 2012 and confirmed the four key priorities for the Council.

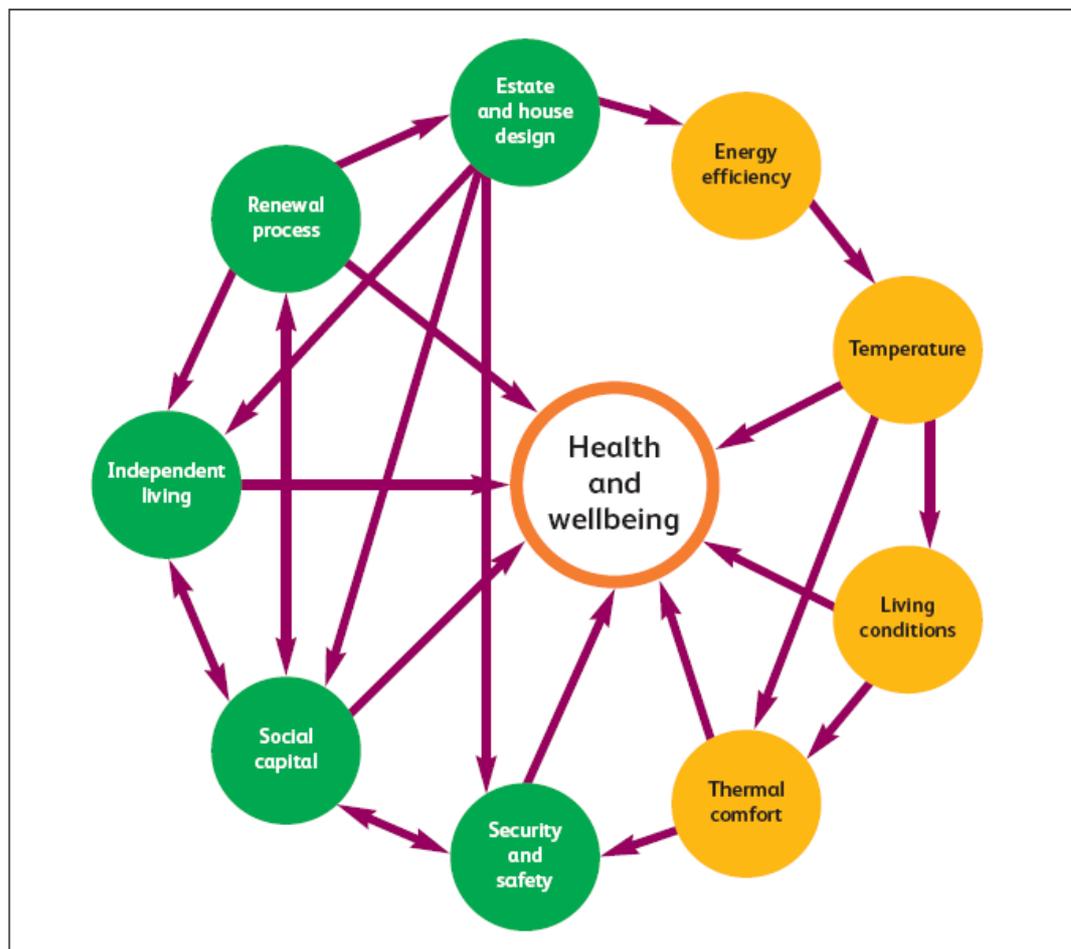
The focus of the new Corporate Plan is on:

- Thriving Economy
- Better Homes
- Empowering our Communities
- Caring for our Environment

The Housing Renewal policy links with the Corporate Plan in assisting to achieve its affordable home delivery target ,bringing empty homes back into use,enable provision of good quality housing in the private rented sector and helping to provide value for money in aiming to help reduce the need for temporary accommodation to homeless people.

The relationship of Private Sector Housing Renewal with Health and Wellbeing is shown in the diagram Figure 2 from CIEH “Commission on Housing Renewal and Public Health Final Report”

Figure 2 The components and interrelationships of health and wellbeing and housing renewal



Source: Housing and Health in Liverpool, Sheffield Hallam University

Sustainable Community Plan for Mid Devon 2010 - 2015

The Mid Devon Strategic Partnership (LSP) has produced its Sustainable Community Strategy for Mid Devon 2010 – 2015, and has identified its main priorities for the district as:

- Meeting Housing Needs
- Building the Local Economy
- Supporting Stronger, Healthier &
- Safer Communities
- Improving Access to Local Services
- Protecting the Environment

Under Meeting Housing Needs the main actions identified in the plan were the delivery of affordable housing and undertaking a survey of the support needs of older people.

Supporting People Strategy

Since 2003, under the Supporting People programme, Local Authority housing services and the Adult and Community Services of the County Council have worked in partnership with all stakeholders to address the needs of vulnerable people. This partnership had forged a Devon-wide Home Improvement Agency (HIA), Devon Care & Repair in 2006, providing a wide range of advice, support and assistance to older people, disabled and vulnerable people who privately rent, or own and live in their own property. This agency helps residents through the complexities of repair, adaptation and renewal of their homes. The contract with the HIA ended at end March 2011 and whilst the County will retain its Social Care duty, the Private Sector Housing Team will need to ensure elderly people do not get confused with applying for assistance.

Home Energy Conservation and Climate Change

Since the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) 1995, the Council has been committed to encouraging and supporting the work to reduce Fuel Poverty and develop the Devon Affordable Warmth strategy in cross cutting Devon wide partnership programmes. Mid Devon has reached 27.67% energy efficiency saving since 1996(HECA return 2008). No data has been officially collected recently as the Act was going to be repealed by the Coalition Government. However Government has recently announced it requires all English authorities to prepare further reports by 31 March 2013 setting out the energy conservation measures that the authority considers practicable, cost-effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in its area.

The guidance under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) to English local authorities with housing responsibilities was published on 26 July 2012.

It sets out requirements for those authorities to report on the measures they propose to take to significantly improve the energy efficiency of all the

residential accommodation on their areas. The guidance links with the delivery of the Green Deal by local authorities.

Exeter and Torbay Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

The Exeter and Torbay Strategic Housing Market Assessment was launched in July 2007 and points to the private sector as a major contributor to the future provision of housing needs within Mid Devon.

3.0 MAIN PRIORITIES FOR ASSISTANCE

Our key priorities have been identified in the findings of the previous House Condition Survey, experience during implementation of the existing Policy and through the South West Regional Housing Strategy.

Providing Decent Homes for the vulnerable

- Promoting wherever possible the availability of loans and any grants to continue with the Government target “that 70% of vulnerable households in the private sector should live in house that meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010” to be met. The coalition Government may refresh or redraw this target but as a base line it is the aspiration of the Policy
- Focus policy on provision of loans and any possible discretionary grant aid for premises with category 1 hazards; in particular, direct resources to specific areas such as vulnerable households in the private rented sector and the rural areas.
- Carry out some form of House Condition surveys and Housing Market assessments to target assistance subject to funding.
- Engage with the private rented sector, through schemes such as Direct Letting to enable Council nominations for tenancies, in addition to the current reactive enforcement policy. Continue to work with private sector landlords to bring their properties up to the Decent Homes standard
- Continue to investigate and implement alternative funding arrangements for home owners
- To make the best use of existing disabled adaptations in partnership with Tenancy Services, Devon County Council, the Devon Districts and any successor Home Improvement Agency.

Provision of Affordable Housing

The Council will use its housing renewal powers to support its main aim of providing Affordable Housing. The main tools within this policy include use of the loan and grant conditions that support the retention of units to ensure best use of existing stock and support to enable applicants to maintain independence, remaining in their existing homes.

Empty Homes

The most important aspect of empty properties is that they are a wasted resource when so many people desperately need a decent home. Empty properties offer a good opportunity to help ease the pressure on local

housing, whether by bringing existing empty homes back into use or by creating new homes through conversion of under-used space.

The present Corporate Plan has a target of providing 15 empty homes brought back into use each year. The Council has agreed the Mid Devon Empty Homes Strategy 2011-2015 to enable this to be achieved. Appendix 1 Summary of Private Sector Renewal Assistance 2012-13 outlines the assistance available to help bring empty homes back into use.

Tackling Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency Measures

The Council believes that in order to meet the Government's objectives of a 30% reduction in energy usage in the area, the following will be the priority area for dwellings in the district:

- Insulation of hot water tanks, cavity walls and lofts.
- Installation of double glazed windows.
- Draught proofing.
- Replacement of inefficient central heating boilers.

We look to achieve this by:-

- Tackling fuel poverty, encouraging affordable warmth and energy efficiency by working in partnership with the Devon Private Sector Housing Group to continue the development and delivery of the Devon wide Affordable Warmth Strategy
- Working with energy efficiency companies such as Energy Saving Trust, National Energy Action, SW Carbon Action Network and the Utilities
- Working in partnership with colleagues in Benefits, Council Tax, Planning, Building Control, Community Development, and Tenancy Services carrying out joint promotions and data sharing, where appropriate.

By addressing these key areas, the aim is to improve the private sector stock, maintain its diversity and condition for the wellbeing of our community. "Increasing and sustaining access to the private rented sector can also reduce the number of people who experience homelessness and need to be assisted under the homelessness legislation (Part 7 Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) with a corresponding positive impact on the number or households placed in temporary accommodation" (*Introducing Preventing Homelessness: A Strategy Health Check DCLG*)

ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement in the context of this policy is not limited to formal enforcement action such as serving notices or prosecution, but includes for example, the inspection of premises to check for compliance with legislation and the provision of advice.

The Housing Act 2004 introduced the new statutory minimum, the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This standard works by assigning housing defects to one or more of 29 separate hazards and then assigning

scores on the risks that they present to the occupants of the house. These are divided into Category 1 and Category 2 hazards.

When a hazard falls into Category 1 the Council has a duty to take formal enforcement action. The Council may take enforcement action at its discretion in respect of Category 2 hazards but resources may not allow all to be dealt with. Each case will be considered on its merits. Where appropriate, action outside these guidelines may be authorised by the Head of Environmental Services.

The actions available to the Council are

- Improvement Notices
- Prohibition Notices
- Hazard Awareness Notice (HAN)
- Emergency Remedial Action
- Emergency Prohibition Order
- Demolition Order
- Clearance Order

Section 11 of the Housing Act 2004 requires only that where there is a Category 1 hazard, the works specified must reduce the hazard to a Category 2. However, the Council will generally seek to specify works which, whilst not necessarily achieving the ideal, will achieve a significant reduction in the hazard level. The Council will try to ensure that any works required to mitigate a hazard are carried out to a standard that prevents building elements deteriorating.

All investigations into alleged breaches of legislation will follow best professional practice and the requirements of:

The Environmental Services Enforcement Policy

The Human Rights Act 1998

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 – Codes of Practice

The Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act 1996

The Code for Crown Prosecution Service

Enforcement Guidance issued under section 9 of the Housing Act 2004

The Housing Act 2004 provides a range of enforcement options to address hazards. The action the Council takes will be what it considers to be the most appropriate course of action in relation to the hazard in all the circumstances. In considering the most appropriate course of action, the Council will have regard to the extent of control that an occupier has over works required to the dwelling. It is usually the owner's responsibility to carry out works.

There will be a staged approach to Enforcement .

Stage 1:

As a first principal the Council will take an informal approach to the enforcement of the Act.

Advice and guidance: to assist individuals, existing and prospective businesses and other organisations to comply with their legal obligations. This will be achieved by providing both information leaflets and the opportunity for face-to-face contact to discuss and help resolve potential

problems.

Informal letters: these will be used to reinforce advice and guidance where minor breaches of the law may have been discovered but it was not thought appropriate to take formal action. This may be where the consequences of non-compliance will not impose a significant risk to health and safety, or where there is confidence that informal action will achieve compliance.

Stage 2:

Formal letters and warnings: These warnings will be written. Where warnings are issued, follow-up visits will normally be made to ensure the problem is being rectified. Warnings issued in respect of significant breaches of the law will include timescales within which the breaches should be remedied and will always result in follow-up visits to ensure compliance. This may follow an informal letter where there remains some confidence that compliance may be achieved before resorting to formal enforcement if necessary, without undue delay.

Stage 3:

Formal Enforcement ;this includes the use of statutory (legal) notices, formal cautions, and prosecution. Notices will generally be served where there are significant failures of statutory requirements, there is a lack of confidence that the recipient will respond to an informal approach, and will normally be served when informal action has failed to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

Formal cautions or prosecution are likely where there is a failure to comply with a notice within the specified time period or a subsequent breach of the regulations, or where health, safety or well being is put at risk such that prosecution is the most reasonable response in all respects.

Works in default or Immediate action: this includes the power to take emergency action by entry to premises if necessary, and make safe areas or articles which are a cause of imminent danger of serious harm. Enforcement will normally progress from advice to formal enforcement. Where an owner or landlord agrees to take the required action, it may be appropriate to wait before serving a notice unless the owner fails to start the work within a reasonable time.

In serious cases, for example where the offence involves a significant breach of the law such that the residents health, safety, environment or well being is or has been put at risk, and there are concerns that the owner or landlord will not co-operate, it may be appropriate to commence formal enforcement immediately. This may include cases where the HHSRS assessment reveals category 2 hazards and where the current occupants are vulnerable.

Where reasonably practicable, the Council will ensure that the landlord and tenant(s) have the opportunity to discuss the Council's proposed action before a Notice is served.

Owner-occupiers:

Enforcement action against owner/occupiers will be undertaken if the property they occupy has category 1 hazards or it is causing a statutory nuisance.

Owner-occupiers, in most cases will not be required to carry out works to their own home and a Hazard Awareness Notice is likely to be the most appropriate action. Where a category 1 hazard is still present at the property a HAN is served to record hazards for future review.

Leaseholders:

Complaints from leaseholders requesting assistance in taking action against other leaseholders or against freeholders will be limited to :-

1. Contraventions of the relevant Management Regulations (this may necessitate action being taken against the leaseholders themselves).
2. Category 1 and high Category 2 hazards where the leasehold flat is tenanted.
3. Statutory Nuisances.

In all other situations the leaseholders will be directed to:

The Leasehold Advisory Service-

an Executive Non Departmental Public Body (ENDPB) funded by Government to provide free legal advice to leaseholders, landlords, professional advisers, managers and others on the law affecting residential leasehold in England and Wales. Maple House, 149 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 7BN. telephone 020 7383 9800 , or email: info@lease-advice.org.uk

Charging for Notices

There will be a charge for the service of Notices under the Housing Act 2004. Section 49 of the Act permits the Council to make reasonable charges as a means of recovering administrative and other expenses incurred by them in relation to certain enforcement actions exercised.

Any charge may be waived if the landlord or legal recipient makes representations and agrees the extent of the works and timescales prior to the service of Notice. Any charge made after service of Notice may be repaid if all necessary works required are carried out. If there is an Appeal against the Notice then the charge will not be applied until the Appeal is resolved and if the Notice is upheld.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL CAPITAL FUNDING

The South West Regional Housing (SWHB) Strategy expected to see Private Sector Housing Renewal (PSHR) strategies being developed and robust plans for PSHR activity in their assessment of Local Authority Housing Strategies being Fit for Purpose.”

Government Office of the South West (GOSW) allocated specific Capital Grant funding in 2010/11 to enable the Decent Home target to be met through a range of initiatives developed by Local Authorities in their PSH Renewal Policies .

Following the Coalition Government's Comprehensive Spending Review GOSW funding for 2011 -12 - has been withdrawn completely.

Advice is that local authorities should be looking to revise their House Condition Survey data annually rather than every 5 years. To facilitate this and following advice from GOSW £11k per annum had been allocated from the ring fenced capital budget. A survey was last carried out in 2008 and a

longitudinal survey has been carried out in September/October 2010 after which the whole process of House condition surveys will be reappraised.

All money recovered through repayments if over £10,000 will be placed in a separate capital renewal account which will roll over annually to permit further discretionary payments in the future with the aim of the resource becoming self perpetuating, repayments below £10,000 will assist in the running of the programme.

TYPES OF ASSISTANCE

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

Subject to the statutory mandatory financial assessment, applicants who are registered disabled ,or registrable as disabled ,and have received an assessment by an Occupational Therapist (OT) will be eligible. The Council's officers will decide on whether the works are reasonable and practicable - including deciding on the most appropriate course of action, which could include alternative sources of funding and/or accommodation and or loans, particularly where the property is deemed not to meet the Decent Homes standard.

All other grant aid is discretionary and completely dependent on the level of funding available. Nothing in the policy is intended to assert that a grant allocation will be forthcoming; its purpose is to look at what is the process and limit if funds are available

Discretionary Disabled Facilities Loan

Subject to a financial assessment applicants who are registered disabled and have received an assessment by an OT will be eligible following consideration in accordance with the agreed policy.

Discretionary elements that will be considered are:-

- The provision of safe play areas.
- Adapting or providing a room in order for the person to work from home or receive medical care at home.
- Or to assist a move to a more suitable property, where this is considered to be more cost effective than adapting the current home
- To fund costs over the maximum mandatory DFG up to a maximum of £5,000

Applications for discretionary DFG will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances.

(Discretionary DFG is defined as any amount of assistance over £30,000 (the statutory maximum) or for work, which is to make the dwelling suitable for the accommodation, welfare or employment of the disabled occupant. In using up

to £35000 of public money, it would be a 'no alternative' situation that has prompted that level of spending.)

Move-on assistance

Move-on loans are available to allow a disabled person to move to a suitable property in Mid Devon for example when the cost of adapting their current home is not reasonable or practicable in the opinion of the Council or where it is the best course of action identified in consultation with the Occupational Therapist (OT). These grants are conditional on the new property being suitable for the disabled applicant, as assessed by the OT and within the financial constraints of the Private Sector Housing Renewal capital programme.

Assistance will also be given to prevent under occupancy at the same level as the level of assistance to help a DFG applicant relocate. This would apply for example to an elderly owner-occupier currently living alone in a house far too big for their needs and in need of extensive repair. The facility to help pay for them to move in return for assignment of the property/nomination rights would provide for better use of the property and secure its repair/renovation.

Mid Devon already offers a grant/loan to help people move to a more appropriate property for their needs, particularly where they can no longer cope. There is also a downsizing grant available for people in Council housing and some Housing Association properties. However, many people make it clear that it is the absence of a package of help during the move, and/or the lack of desirable alternative accommodation that deters them.

The loan would be for the current specific uses, e.g. where a move is a better solution for a person with disabilities (where adaptations to their existing home are not "reasonable and practicable"), and extending the assistance to include people who are downsizing and would be willing to sell their land and home at market price to a RSL partner of the Council.

Minor Works Assistance (MWA)

MWA is assistance that might be available to carry out minor repairs and adaptations to reduce trips and falls and help maintain independence.

MWA is available for all tenures (except RSL and Council tenants) in receipt of a means tested benefit or if over 70 years of age would qualify for a 100% grant following a test of resources.

The grant level will be restricted to the maximum agreed grant values (subject to periodic review, separate levels detailed in Appendix 1) per applicant in any 3 year period.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Landlords of all HMOs will be eligible for assistance without the need for financial assessment, for works required to provide adequate means of escape in case of fire and missing/inadequate amenities to bring the property up to the standard of the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS).

We want to encourage landlords to provide accommodation that is up to standard, in particular, HMOs that would house people who would not normally be deemed vulnerable but who might otherwise become homeless.

As part of this we will be carrying out an active programme of inspection and licensing, prioritising those that require mandatory licenses.

The existing HMO grant is to be extended to include any works required to meet statutory licensing conditions, including the first year's licence fee. Note that the fee would come back to Mid Devon as income to help sustain the programme.

House Renovation Assistance

Assistance might be available to landlords or tenants with a repairing obligation and owner/occupiers. To qualify the dwelling must be in Council Tax Bands A- D and assistance is subject to financial assessment Owner occupiers must have had ownership for 3 years.

The aim is that the property should meet the current Health and Safety Rating system requirements and the basic Decent Homes standards when work has been completed.

In the case of thatched properties; any grant offered is subject to the property being in that applicants ownership for 3 years and any roof recovering being of higher thermal value than previous and sustainable for 20 years. The grant will be no more than £15k or 50% whichever is lower.

Assistance will be limited to where an applicant has been refused a loan or where shortfall in funding works with a loan Council Tax bands A-D only Discretionary award of up to £15,000 for owner/occupier & with approval by H o ES/Cabinet Member for Housing.

Empty Homes Loans

Empty Homes Loans are available to landlords of properties that have been empty for at least 6 months, to ensure that their properties are brought back into use. Works will be required to meet the Decent Homes Standard and enable the property to be let. The economic downturn has had an impact on the development of new housing, with a significant reduction in new starts. One way of supplementing the supply of affordable housing is to make better use of the existing stock, especially empty homes.

Mid-Devon already offer assistance to the owners of empty homes to bring them back into use. Our consultations suggest that there are many, complex reasons for homes lying empty, and we are building a network to encourage and support the owners. The network will consist of a regular landlords' forum to exchange news, views and experience, a landlord's handbook and direct links to nominated key officers inside the Council to help troubleshoot issues. In addition, where a tenant is nominated by the Council to a former empty home, we will aim to provide floating support (if vulnerable) or advice for the tenant to help them maintain the tenancy.

In order to make best use of a finite grant budget, Empty Homes loan assistance will endeavour to focus firstly on areas where there is the greatest need, starting with properties in best repair and with a built form (bedrooms), that matches the highest demand on the Housing Register.

Loans are to be modified to encourage a longer term partnership with the Council,

by offering tiered higher rates of loan in exchange for nominations of tenants for longer periods. If the owner of an empty home prefers a lower level of loan then there will still be a period of 15 years in which loan conditions apply – in other words, the property must still be available for letting in that period.

Loans

The Council is realigning its policy to the use of loans – which recycle its limited funds and away from grants, which simply gift funds to successful applicants whilst limited funds are available. Loans will become the Council's preferred method securing improvement to private sector stock as it recycles limited funds for future use rather than relying on repayment when grant conditions are defaulted.

The Council has worked with other Devon local authorities and other authorities in the general South West to set up a scheme in the District to address this need through our partners Wessex Home Improvement Loans. The then South West Regional Housing Body had encouraged and approved bids from all local authorities in the region to fund loan schemes to replace or supplement grant schemes. Obvious advantages include a long-term certainty that assistance will be recycled and that a loan reduces a “dependence culture”, although uptake may be slow at first. Evidence from Avon and Somerset, where loans have been successfully given, suggests that a high proportion of applicants find other sources of finance and that the replacement of grant by loan acts as a “reality check”, so enabling the budget to be spread further.

Loans are given by Wessex Home Improvement Loans, a not-for-profit organisation, subject to a stringent financial check and given at a fixed, subsidised rate of 4.0 % (4.2 % APR) Loans can be interest-only, capital repayment or roll-up. Wessex Home Improvement Loans has improved the selection of loan facilities and may make available 0% loans in certain circumstances. Such loans may be firstly where applicants are unable to sustain a 4 % (4.2% typical APR) loan on any amount up to £15k, and secondly, at the discretion of the Council, to cover works over and above the £15k ceiling instead of offering a grant.

Households with a disposable income above £125/week would be referred to other commercial lenders. To streamline the process it is proposed that a preliminary means test would be carried out as a first step so that applicants knew whether it was worth proceeding. The loan option for renewables is set at a higher disposable income level.

Energy Grants: CosyDevon

This grant scheme for subsidised or free loft and cavity wall insulation is directly funded by utility and power generating companies, and will be supported (by mailshots and advertising materials) by the council., The Head of Environmental Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to have the discretion to additionally fund measures for specified groups of people (such as those in the “benefits trap” who are earning low incomes but receive no benefits) so as to offer subsidised or free

insulation. These additional measures would be funded through a scheme subsidy, administered by the installers, not to individuals. There would be no grant conditions attached.

Mid Devon supports the use of renewable energy and would if funds became available be prepared to chase those funds to assist with renewable energy, however because of financial restraints, the policy merely confirms support at present.

Energy Loans:

These existing energy grants for landlords are based on a 'cash back' (maximum) £1,000 split between insulation and central heating. i.e. £500 or 50% whichever is lower for insulation and the same for boiler replacement. Payment of this grant is conditional on the property remaining available for letting for a 15 year period.

Hard-to-Treat/Off-gas properties

In Mid-Devon about a fifth of all homes pre-date 1919 and have solid walls, but currently there are no cost-effective measures (in terms of the economic payback periods) for treating them. In comparison with cavity wall insulation, for example, external insulation can cost ten times as much for a similar dwelling. Early Park Homes have similar, poor insulation, and can be difficult to improve internally because of the loss of floor space. Many homes in Mid-Devon are not on mains gas. For households on low income, fossil fuels are becoming increasingly expensive. Discretion to introduce assistance under this heading together with eligibility criteria and grant limits when and if cost-effective packages of treatment are identified. will be by agreement between Cabinet Member for Housing and Head of Environmental Services, however the Devon Private Sector Housing Group found no deliverable conclusions from its work last year.

Discretionary power to limit assistance to areas of particular need or risk

The Local House Condition Survey has provided evidence of the areas of highest need, and of the most vulnerable residents living in the highest risk types of property, often with the lowest income. The information is only available at statistical level, and cannot identify individual properties. A follow-up survey in late 2010 ("longitudinal surveys") has updated information.

There is discretion for the Head of Environmental Services, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Housing, and with subsequent reporting to the Policy Development Group, to restrict types of discretionary assistance to specific geographical areas, types of buildings or groups of people highlighted as being in greater need or risk in Mid Devon as evidenced by the 2010 Local House Condition Survey and annual updates. This would not apply to any of the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants that would continue to be available in all areas of Mid Devon.

Grant Limits

See Appendix 1 Summary of Private Sector Renewal Assistance 2012-13

Agency Fee

If the Council acts as an agent for an applicant, doing benefit health-checks, filling out forms and making applications, acting as trouble-shooter, dealing with professions, trades and neighbours, there is power to charge a fee up to 12 % of the grant (normally taken at source, so the applicant is not out of pocket).

This would help the Council recover the real costs to the service, and reflects agency fees normally paid to other professions such as structural engineers and architects. It should be noted that there would be no change to the assessed contribution applicants make based on their means test unless the cost of work exceeds the grant limit or in cases where grant is given as a fixed percentage (e.g. landlords).

COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE POLICY

The Council welcomes any comments, complaints, questions or suggestions about this Policy. You should put these in writing to the following address :-

Paul N Williams
Head of Environmental Services
Mid Devon District Council
Phoenix House
Phoenix Lane
Tiverton
Devon EX16 6PP

Or by email to customerfirst@middevon.gov.uk

Dissatisfaction with any action or decisions can be taken up through the Council's complaints procedure which you can also be accessed from the Council's website by the following link - <http://www.middevon.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=663>

You can request a copy of complaints form by contacting us by
Telephone: 01884 244601/244602/244603/244609
FAX: 01884 234256
Email; customerfirst@middevon.gov.uk

REVIEWING THE POLICY

The current policy will be revised on an annual basis following the reports to the Policy Development Group and the Cabinet .

If for any reason, such as the need to increase or change the level or type of assistance available, it may be necessary to review this policy then it will be carried out prior to its annual review and reported subsequently in the annual review..

If you require this policy in larger font or any other format please contact us on 01884 244601 with your needs.

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**Appendix 1
Summary of
Private
Sector
Renewal
Assistance
2012-13**

Name of Assistance	Property Criteria	Who can Apply	Type of work for which Assistance given	Amount of Assistance	Conditions
Mandatory DFG	N/A	Those registered as disabled	Adaptations to meet assessed need by OT within the mandatory guidance	£30,000	Yes,5yrs.for equipment and portable buildings.
Discretionary DFG Loan	N/A	Those registered as disabled	Mandatory Works over the £30,000 max and discretionary works, welfare, accommodation, office and secondary as access around the garden	£5,000	Yes for 10 years
Move on loan	To be suitable for clients needs as assessed by OT and Officer Property able to be adapted or is adapted	Disabled applicants and over 60's Move is within MDDC only	To allow person to move to more suitable accommodation Where existing property cannot be adapted for the client needs	£5,000 As appropriate for each case Loan of maximum £5,000 to facilitate removal inc. removal costs	Yes for 15 years Grant and loan to be repaid on sale of the property being moved from
Loans	Must fall in Council Tax bands A-D	Landlords;Owner Occupiers, tenants with a repairing obligation; Park Homes(Permanent); Discretionary Disabled Facilities grant	1)Category 1 hazards- 2)Decent Homes standard – or in exceptional circumstances a lesser standard	Max.£15,000, for any one loan	Yes for 15 years Loan and grant conditional on eligible works being carried out.Loan subsidy to be repaid if sold within 15 yrs.
Minor Works Assistance	Council tax bands A-D only	Over 70 yrs old or People on same qualifying benefits as WarmFront	Category 1 hazards + discretionary for Minor repairs, improvements, energy efficiency and adaptations	£3,000 per applicant & £6000 in any 3 year period	Repay loan in full on demise of applicant or sale of property
Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Loan	Must be an HMO	Landlords of HMOs	Means of Escape in case of fire, other fire precautions, Decent Home standard, Council amenity standards	Max £15,000 or 50% whichever is less	Conditions to apply 15 years. nomination rights for tenanted properties
House Renovation Assistance	Council Tax bands A-D only Been refused a loan or where shortfall in funding works with a loan	Owner Occupiers, tenants with a repairing obligation ; and for Landlords	To bring property up to basic Decent Homes standard Subject to funding or abortive loan attempt	Discretionary award of up to £15,000 for owner/occupier. & with Approval by H o ES/Cabinet Member for Housing	Yes for 15 years. All tenures
Empty Homes Loans (tiered offer) First Time Buyer Deposit loan	Prepared to lease to Council and have been empty for at least 6 months To buy Empty Home(empty for at least 6 months)via Wessex HIL scheme	Landlords First Time Buyer Owner Occupiers	To bring property up to the Decent Homes standard and capable of being let for rent or for sale	Maximum loan/per unit- £30,000 (less than £5k,2 yrs;5-10K,4 yrs;10-15k,6 yrs;15-30k10 yrs nomination rights) Maximum £15,000	Let at affordable rent-no admin.fee allowed- Repayment for up to 10 yrs. with MDDC Nomination Rights for up to 10 yrs 15 yrs
Energy loans	1;None 2.Rented accommodation	All Landlords	Insulation and cavity wall insulation Boilers and loft insulation	1 Dependent on age but in some cases free through CosyDevon 2. Maximum £1k per property £500 boiler/£500 insulation	15 years
All Loans(excepting Energy Loans) to be a minimum of £1000	Discretion of less with approval by H o ES /PSHM				