



NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SHADOW AUTHORITY

SHADOW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

3 FEBRUARY 2021

Report Title	Private Sector Housing Policy
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List of Appendices

Appendix A – North Northamptonshire Private Sector Housing Policy

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval of the draft North Northamptonshire Private Sector Housing Policy attached as Appendix A to this report.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The report sets out the draft Private Sector Housing Policy for North Northamptonshire following conclusion of work that has been undertaken by officers across North Northamptonshire district and boroughs as part of the Private Sector Housing workstream to achieve a common policy by April 2021.
- 2.2 The policy sets out key areas delivered by the service and sets out the proposed housing grants criteria as required by The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. The grant areas covered include the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants, discretionary disabled facilities grants and other key housing related grants.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Shadow Executive Committee agrees to adopt the draft Private Sector Housing Policy for North Northamptonshire
- 3.2 Reason for Recommendations –
- The option proposed aligns with local government reform and transformation outcomes;

- The future Council (or customers) will receive the maximum benefit from the option proposed
- To accord with legislation or the policy of the Shadow Authority

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The Private Sector Housing Policy was reviewed and drafted by the SMEs for Kettering, Corby, East Northants and Wellingborough in October 2020. The draft policy brings together information from all 4 councils existing policies and updates throughout to create a consistent policy.
- 4.2 All four councils in the north have been working together on private sector housing matters for a number of years and have concentrated our efforts on working towards consistent policies ready for North Northamptonshire. Where an authority has made a change to their policies in the last few years, they have been discussed across the north to seek the views of officers and looking forward to North Northamptonshire.
- 4.3 In developing the draft policy provided in Appendix A we have reviewed all work areas relating to private sector housing and considered the different grants available across the four Councils currently. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 requires a local authority to set out in a policy the types of grants that are offered and criteria relating to the application of those grants. The main areas included are Disabled Facilities Grants.
- 4.4 Each authority is required to provide mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant as stated in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants are currently in place at Kettering and it was the aim of the other 3 councils to adopt the same discretionary criteria prior to North Northamptonshire commencing, however it has not been possible to do so. This policy therefore includes the discretionary disabled facilities grant criteria currently in place at Kettering and it is viewed by the SMEs that this is an appropriate addition for the new North Northamptonshire Council and would benefits all of our applicants across the north.
- 4.5 A review of other grants currently provided across the four councils was also considered and is detailed in section 4 of the policy and include:
- HomeMove Grants (Private Sector) – cost effective alternatives to the mandatory DFG for example relocation costs to a suitable property rather than trying to adapt existing;
 - Renovation Grants – detailed criteria set out within the policy and aim to ensure the legal decent home standards are met;
 - Landlord Improvement Grants – minor repairs for privately rented accommodation offered to homeless or threatened with homelessness households
- 4.6 Each of these grants have specific eligibility criteria, terms and conditions and with the exception of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant are available subject to sufficient budget being available.

- 4.7 There are some authorities that do not currently offer the above grants, therefore the proposal to extend them across the north moving forward is a positive benefit to the residents of those areas.
- 4.8 Aside from the grant framework the policy sets out key private sector housing functions such as:
- Empty Properties – how we review and deal with long term empty properties
 - Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) – minimum amenity standards for HMOs (currently set agreed across the north and in operation), licensing requirements and processes
 - Immigration Inspections – process for application and reports
 - Support for Tenants – includes the new Homes (fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 requirements and how it is proposed North Northamptonshire council will deal with related requests.
- 4.9 The policy does not replicate enforcement functions as these are specifically set out in the North Northamptonshire Enforcement Policy.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 In reviewing the differences in the existing policies across the north, the SMEs felt that the inclusion of grants in place across some of the councils being extended across the whole of the north was a benefit to all residents and that as they are limited to budget availability, the amount and number could be controlled via the budget setting process.
- 5.2 The SMEs recognise that the inclusion of these grants is a choice because they are not mandatory like the DFGs but they do provide a benefit and a useful tool in improving private sector housing, potentially saving time and further costs elsewhere, if a different route was taken.
- 5.3 A critical area that is required to be included within the new policy is the discretionary DFGs. The process in place at Kettering is considered to be an appropriate process for North Northamptonshire to ensure that maximum benefit is achieved for our DFG clients. The whole DFG process is currently under review nationally but due to BREXIT and COVID-19 the recommendations for change have not been addressed yet. There are several key areas that the discretionary DFG policy will benefit for those clients in need of ensuring adaptations are undertaken.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 Funding for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) is provided through the Better Care Fund and is currently passported from upper tier authorities to lower tier authorities that have the requirement for DFG delivery. Each area receives a certain allocation determined by the government each year. The grant money provided contains certain grant conditions that have to be met and an annual return is undertaken each year to central government. Audits of the money spent are also undertaken.

6.1.2 The proposals for discretionary DFGs to be included in the North Northamptonshire Private Sector Housing Policy would be funded via the government grant allocation and is subject to funding availability.

6.1.3 The other housing related grants would need to be funded by Northamptonshire Council and is a key consideration in relation to this policy. No specific budget has been proposed in relation to these grants and as stated within the policy their availability is subject to budgets.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 requires each local authority to detail the housing related grants that they offer and the criteria for applying for these grants. In order to ensure the new authority is safe and legal it is necessary to adopt the policy in advance of vesting day.

6.3 Risk

6.3.1 A key risk in relation to this policy is ensuring a policy is in place by vesting day that details what housing grants North Northamptonshire will offer. This is a legal requirement for an authority to have in place.

6.4 Consultation

6.4.1 This Policy is an amalgamation of existing policies which have already been consulted on by the Sovereign Councils and does not suggest the removal of certain functions and grants therefore, there is no need to consult again.

6.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

6.5.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee has not made any recommendations in relation to this report.

6.6 Environmental Impact

6.6.1 There is no environmental impact arising from this report.

6.7 Community Impact

6.7.1 This policy has a positive impact on the community of North Northants in relation to the details and mechanisms the authority will follow, in relation to private sector housing and grants.

6.8 Equalities

6.8.1 An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken ([link to web](#)). There is an overall neutral impact across all groups in relation to private sector housing and the processes and services provided.

6.8.2 In relation to DFGs and the other proposed grants there is a positive impact in relation to the following groups:

- Disability – DFGs and discretionary DFGs when provided will improve their quality of life and ability to live independently at home
- Socioeconomic – All grants available have an element of financial eligibility; this assists those in lower incomes to access grant funding to improve their property in relation to DFGs or for repairs and improvements.

7. Background Papers

7.1 Equalities Impact Assessment ([link to web](#))