

REPORT TO: CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING: 18 JULY 2008
REPORT BY: ALAN CUFLEY, HEAD OF COMMUNITY HOUSING
WRITTEN BY: ROY SCANLON, Housing Renewals Manager
SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR HOME REPAIR ASSISTANCE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To seek the Cabinet Members view on a request to relax the eligibility criteria for grant in certain circumstances.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) That the eligibility criteria in the policy remain unchanged.
- ii) That the applicant be offered the loan assistance available within the policy pending an appeal to EAGA over their decision not to help.

3. BACKGROUND

The council adopted the current Financial Assistance policy on 22 July 2003 in response to the Regulatory Reform Order 2002. The policy introduced a range of assistance packages aimed at helping homeowners repair and improve their property. A report to the Executive Member in February 2006 recommended the adoption of the Financial Assistance Policy for Private Sector Housing 2006 following a review of the 2003 policy. A further report on the 18 March 2008 expanded the range of assistance available.

The policy 2006 makes provision for a Home Repairs Assistance grant targeted at vulnerable people to enable repairs to be carried out that would otherwise affect the health, safety, comfort and welfare of an older person.

Applications for a grant can be considered from homeowners who are in receipt of an income related benefit, ie council tax benefit, but this assistance is limited to residents of property in council tax bands a – d. For residents of property in bands e and above the assistance is offered in the form of an interest free equity loan with repayment being made on sale of the property. Research from council tax records indicates that there are 80 residents over 60 occupying property in bands e and above.

4. CURRENT SITUATION

Mrs X is eligible and had applied for a government funded 'Warmfront Grant scheme, operated by EAGA, to replace her

central heating boiler that has been deemed unsafe due to changes in the gas safety regulations, however the Warmfront installers will only supply a combination boiler which they would locate in the second bedroom on an outside wall. The management company for the apartment building will not give permission for this and have arranged quotes for a replacement system boiler to be installed using the existing communal flue. All the boilers in the apartment block are being replaced. Warmfront will not provide the grant towards the replacement system boiler.

Some of Mrs X's neighbours, who are over 60, are being given a £300 by Warmfront towards the cost of the boiler exchange but Mrs X has been refused this as she is on benefit and eligible for the full grant of £2700. Attempts by the council's energy advice officer to resolve the matters with EAGA on Mrs X's behalf have not been successful.

Mrs X has subsequently requested a Home Repair Assistance grant to replace her central heating boiler. Mrs X lives in a band f apartment so was advised that the assistance we could give would be in the form of an equity loan. Mrs X, who is in her 80's and in receipt of council tax benefit, feels that it is wrong that she is refused the grant because she and her late husband worked hard to get somewhere nice to live.

Mrs X brought the matter to the attention of her ward councillor who has requested that the issue is considered.

5. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

a) the council's Financial Assistance Policy for Private Sector Housing 2006 could be amended to remove the council tax band restriction on Home Repair Assistance. The measure was introduced to target this type of assistance to those most in need.

b) an exception could be made to relax the council tax band restriction in this case and the policy amended to introduce discretion to cover similar cases in the future with delegated authority given to the Head of Community Housing to exercise that discretion.

c) an exception could be made in this case to relax the council tax band restriction.

d) leave the policy unchanged and confirm the availability of the loan.

6. CONCLUSION

The council's current policy was amended earlier this year to broaden the scope of assistance available. Provision exists within the policy to meet the needs of this resident in this instance,

however her needs would have been met if the Warmfront grant had been paid. Therefore it is recommended that the applicant is offered the loan assistance available within the policy pending an appeal to EAGA over their decision not to help.

7. SIGNING OFF THE REPORT

Signed.....
Alan Cufley Head of Community Housing

Dated.....

As this report is within existing policy provision an Equalities Impact assessment is not required.

The City Solicitor has seen and approves this report.

8. APPROVAL TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out above were approved / approved as amended / deferred / rejected by the Cabinet Member for Housing, on.....

Signed.....
Councillor Steve Wylie
Cabinet Member - Housing