



Report to: Council

Date of Meeting: 27th July 2006

Report from: Environmental Health Manager

Title of Report: Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy
Discretionary Repairs Assistance

Agenda Item Number: **10**

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is seeking the Council's approval to add an additional qualifying benefit to the Discretionary Repairs Assistance Scheme.
- 1.2 This report requests that the changes are approved and recommends that they be adopted by Council.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Officers of the Housing Strategy Working Group

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy contributes to the delivery of priority 4 'Regenerating the District' within the Corporate Plan
- 3.2 The policy also helps support the Housing Strategy and delivery of the SHIP funding.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

The proposed changes bring in an additional qualifying benefit to the Discretionary Repairs Assistance scheme making it more accessible to a broader client base of low income vulnerable households.

4.2 Legal

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

4.3 Personnel

There will be no implications for personnel.

4.4 Other Services

There will be no further impacts on other services

4.5 Diversity

The revisions are specifically aimed at targeting and providing more assistance to vulnerable households within the Chester-le-Street area.

4.6 Risk

There are no immediate risks to adopting this policy.

4.7 Crime and Disorder

There will be no impact on crime or disorder

4.8 Other Implications

There are no other implications associated with this report.

5. BACKGROUND, POSITION STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL

5.1 The current Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy was agreed by the Council on the 24th November 2005 when a new financial assistance package called Discretionary Repairs Assistance (D.R.A.) was introduced to replace Home Repair and Renovation Grants. This new system is essentially an interest free loan repayable to the Council on disposal/sale of the property regardless of the length of time which has elapsed since the loan was given. Section 7 of the policy allows for regular reviews of the policy to be undertaken as and when required.

5.2 Experience of using the new system by operational staff has quickly showed that not enough vulnerable households are being targeted. This is because if the applicants are not in receipt of council tax benefit a 50% client contribution is required. In practice it is evident that many applicants living in vulnerable low income households which are not in receipt of council tax benefit are unable to afford the 50% contribution. Also as a result of the successful SHIP bid the Council has been awarded an additional £300,000 over the next two years towards DRA funding in the Sacriston and Grange Villa areas. It is therefore vital to target as many vulnerable low income households as possible by broadening the client base in order that the award can be spent.

- 5.3 To overcome this problem it is proposed therefore to include working tax credit (not child tax credit) as a qualifying benefit in addition to council tax benefit. This will enable more vulnerable low income households to qualify for DRA without having a 50% contribution to make towards the cost of the works.
- 5.4 Details of the Council's Private Sector Housing Policy are available on the Council's web site and these changes if agreed will be included.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is important to the continued improvement of Chester-le-Street District Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy that it is reviewed at regular intervals and that changes are made as and when required to maximize assistance to those households most at need. This report was approved by the Executive on 3 July 2006 and it is now recommended that Council approves the additions and changes to the Private Sector Renewal Policy to be applied across the whole of the Council's district.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO

- 7.1 Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy

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