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Report to: Executive
Date: 5 July 2005
Report of: Executive Member for Housing
Subject: Deletion of Water Meters Policy
Ward: All

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise the Executive of the current position in respect of the policy for dealing with tenant's requests for the installation of water meters, which now requires deletion.

2 Consultation

2.1 In preparing this report I have consulted with

- Northumbrian Water,
- East Durham Homes,
- Director of Community Services,
- District of Easington Tenants and Residents Federation,
- Council's Monitoring Officer.

3 Background

3.1 In April 1999 Northumbrian Water introduced a scheme for the installation of water meters for domestic properties at no charge to the water customer.

3.2 The council considered a report in November 1999 based on the information available at the time.

3.3 It was resolved that in consultation with The Chair and Vice Chair of the Housing and Community Services Committee each individual request by a tenant to install a water meter be considered on its merits in accordance with the Housing Act 1985 and whether the request was 'reasonable'.

3.4 Since 1999, 37 requests have been received and all have been refused.

4. Position Statement and Options Appraisal

4.1 Under the Water Industry Act 1999 all domestic water customers have the right to request that a meter be fitted to their supply, at no extra costs to themselves. Anyone renting a property from the Council does not need landlord's permission to request the installation of a water meter. Indeed, the 1999 Act specifically states that no express or implied term of a tenancy is to exclude or prevent the installation of a meter if requested by a customer. As such, by refusing requests under the 1999 policy the Council is acting outside of its powers and in breach of the 1999 Act.

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- 4.2 Northumbrian water are currently publicising information directed at customers to consider changing to a water meter which may reduce their water bill subject to how much water they use. This information includes advice that tenants do not need Landlord's permission unless the tenancy period is less than six months.
- 4.3 Northumbria Water do not routinely check the ownership of the property, but If the tenant volunteers the information that property is owned by the Council, Northumbria Water will write to the Council asking for permission to fit a meter inside the property. If the Council refuses permission Northumbria Water will fit the meter to the outside of the property instead.
- 4.4 Although there are no major technical implications associated with the fitting of water meters, the following should be taken into account in deciding on the future course of action :-
- a) If a lead water pipe is used as an earth connection , consideration must be given to the electrical installation within that building. Water gas or other service pipes are not to be used as the main earth electrode (earth connection) although they must be bonded (connected) to it. This is because water pipes will not give a satisfactory earth.
 - b) The water company advise it is permissible to connect a water meter to a lead supply pipe. Following any works the system should be flushed, commissioned and a contractors certificate issued to the client.
- 4.5 It is the responsibility of Northumbria Water to ensure that these actions are undertaken on the installation of a water meter to a Council property, and a survey and risk assessment is carried out before each installation.

5 Implications

- 5.1 Financial
As the fitting and maintenance of the meter is undertaken free of charge, and future repairs/maintenance of the meter are the remain the responsibility of the water supplier there are no direct financial implications to the Council.
- 5.2 Legal
Consultation has taken place with the Council's Monitoring Officer who confirms that on the basis that this is tenant lead the Council, as landlord, has no powers to prevent the installation of a water meter.
- 5.3 Policy
If approved, the recommendations contained in this report would delete the previous policy of the Council.
- 5.4 Risk
A risk assessment has been carried out and all the necessary actions required to manage the identified risks have been implemented.
- 5.5 Communication
The recommendations in the report will be reported to East Durham Homes who administer the requests as the Council's management agents. They will be responsible for disseminating this information to operational staff and to tenants.

6 Corporate Implications

- 6.1 Corporate Plan and Priorities
If agreed, the policy will help to meet the following Corporate Objective "Quality services to our people"
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- 6.2 Equality and Diversity
There are no equality and diversity issues.
 - 6.3 E-Government
There are no E-Government implications
 - 6.4 Procurement
There are no procurement or sustainability issues
 - 6.5 Service Plan
The Strategy will not divert activity from the Service Plan
 - 6.6 Performance Management and Scrutiny
The report will be presented to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.
 - 6.7 Sustainability
The proliferation of metered water supplies is, in part, intended to encourage households to exercise more prudent use of the domestic water supply, protecting this scarce commodity and reducing the impact on the environment on the collection, treatment and distribution of domestic water.
 - 6.8 Well Being Powers
The report has no 'well being powers' implications.
 - 6.9 Human Resource Implications
There are no human resource implications
 - 6.10 Crime and Disorder
There are no crime and disorder implications
 - 6.11 Human Rights
There are no human rights implications
 - 6.12 Social Inclusion
Northumbria Water advises customers that the Installation of a water meter could reduce water bills for smaller person's households, which will include the young and the elderly.
- 7 Recommendations**
- 7.1 It is recommended that Executive Members agree to the deletion of the existing Water Meters policy.

Background papers/Documents referred to :-

Report to Housing and Community Services 8th November 1999
Northumbrian Water Advice Leaflet NW/04

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