

## **HOME REPAIR ASSISTANCE(Min 20/97)**

### **1        SUMMARY**

- 1.1    Following a successful appeal against refusal of a home repair assistance application the Local Review Board requested that the criteria for receiving such assistance be reviewed. This report outlines the current policy and the options available.

### **2        INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1    Home repair assistance was introduced by the Housing Grants Construction & Regeneration Act 1996 to replace the previous minor works grant.
- 2.2    Home repair assistance is discretionary and is available to owner/occupiers and private tenants. Eligible works include repairs and improvements, adaptations, energy efficiency measures and crime prevention works in respect of dwellings, mobile homes and house-boats.
- 2.3    Applicants have to be over 18 and, with certain exceptions, be in receipt of a designated income related benefit. These exceptions relate to applicants who are over 60, disabled or infirm or who are caring for someone in one of these 3 categories.
- 2.4    There is a 3 year prior residence requirement in respect of works for mobile homes and house boats except in certain circumstances.
- 2.5    The maximum grant payable is £2000 per application and £4000 in relation to any property over a 3 year period.

### **3        COUNCIL POLICY**

- 3.1    Local Authorities are responsible for determining how home repair assistance can be used to maximum effect. In doing so Authorities have to consider their private sector renewal strategy and the role this type of financial assistance can play alongside disabled facilities grants and renovation grants as well as wider strategic objectives including care in the community, energy efficiency and crime prevention.
- 3.2    The Council determined its policy for home repair assistance when Members considered the Housing Strategy Statement 1998/1999 – 2000/2001. In view of the limited budget available for private sector renewal grants overall, it was decided that home repair assistance would be administered by the Springboard Home Improvement Agency and targeted at:-

- (i) Owner-occupiers over 60 in receipt of a designated income related benefit.
- (ii) Registered disabled persons or their carers in receipt of a designated income related benefit in respect of minor adaptations.

- 3.3 The Council cannot however refuse to consider any application or refuse an application which does not meet its criteria, without some mechanism for determining applications which are outside existing policy. Government guidance advises Authorities to make provision for ensuring where a strong case based on need is established that an individual case is considered on its merits even where it does not fall within an Authority's strategic objectives.
- 3.4 Where an applicant does not meet the Council's criteria there is a right of appeal to the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) with subsequent right of appeal to the Local Review Board.

#### **4 APPEAL CASE**

- 4.1 The Council received an application for assistance from a registered disabled person under the age of 60. As the works for which assistance was applied constituted repairs rather than adaptations, the application did not meet the Council's criteria.
- 4.2 The Local Review Board considered the case on 4 April 2000 and decided there were exceptional circumstances with this case by reason of the applicant's disability and the nature of the works to warrant an exception to policy. The Board also felt it was appropriate to review the criteria for receiving home repair assistance at the earliest opportunity.

#### **5 OPTIONS**

- 5.1 There are a number of options available as far as the Council's Policy is concerned including:

- (i) To continue with the current policy.

Comment – The appeal mechanism that exists will ensure that exceptional cases will be determined on their merits.

- (ii) To modify the policy to allow any application from a registered disabled person in receipt of an income related benefit.

Comment – Such a policy could recognise the greater difficulty disabled persons under 60 may have in carrying out repairs and improvements to the property. It would avoid the need for disabled applicants to prove their case through the Council's appeals mechanism.

There would also be the advantage that disabled applicants under 60 may then be eligible for help with energy efficiency measures that go beyond the Government's new Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES). This could help the Council achieve its objectives under the Home Energy Conservation Act and in particular assist in meeting the Government's requirements on Local Authorities to develop policies for tackling fuel poverty.

- (iii) Modify the policy to grant assistance to any applicant in receipt of a designated income related benefit.

Comment – The Council's private sector renewal budget is very limited and has been mainly targeted at helping the elderly maintain and improve their property and keep it secure. Whilst there is some justification for using home repair assistance to help disabled applicants in the same way, providing assistance to all applicants would severely limit the help that could be given to target groups.

## **6 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Home repair assistance can be used to improve the security of a property.

## **7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Home repair assistance performs an important function in the Council's strategy to maintain the condition of the housing stock. Assistance can also be used to implement energy efficiency measures.

## **8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The private sector renewal budget which includes house renovation grants as well as home repair assistance is £170,000 for this financial year. Any change of policy which increases the range of eligible applicants will increase demand on the budget.

## **9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None.

## **10 PARISH IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Home repair assistance is available throughout the District.

**11    RECOMMENDATION**

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1)    That the Council's policy is to award home repair assistance to:
- (a)    Owner/occupiers over 60 years old in receipt of designated income related benefit.
  - (b)    Registered disabled persons or their carers in receipt of a designated income related benefit. (HHHCC)

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