

## Introduction

Officers believe that ordinarily property owners should take responsibility for the repair and maintenance of housing belonging to them. Nevertheless, it is recognised that some vulnerable households will need assistance to adequately maintain their homes. It may also be prudent, in certain circumstances, for the Council to provide financial assistance to property owners to facilitate bringing empty properties back into use.

## Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 gives local housing authorities a general permissive power to assist private property owners to improve housing conditions. Paragraph 3 of the Order states that local housing authorities can offer property owners assistance to acquire, adapt, improve, repair and demolish/re-build living accommodation. The available powers can only be applied if the Council has an approved Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy.

The policy represents an opportunity to align different funding streams relating to private housing sector housing assistance and, where applicable, pool resources to deliver improved outcomes and best value for money. This could include offering disabled people a grant to deliver adaptations to their home and an equity release/interest free loan to fund wider improvements. The Council could arrange for the same contractor to carry out works which could reduce work timescales and price.

The draft Leeds policy covers:

- The delivery of major adaptations for disabled people
- Minor adaptations for disabled people
- Equity release or interest free loans for vulnerable property owners whose homes are in a poor state of repair
- Equity release or interest based loans to property owners to bring empty homes back into use
- Installation of security measures to create a 'safer' living environment for people experiencing domestic violence or other forms of hate crime
- Group Repair
- Leeds Neighbourhood Approach

## Funding Opportunities

The Disabled Facilities Grant pot (£6.7m in 2015/16) will form part of the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy pool of finance. The DFG budget for 2015/16 is made up of £2.93m government allocation and £3.77m Council contribution. Since 2010/11 the ring-fence attached to the government allocation has been removed and funding can be used for any capital purpose – in accordance with s31 of the Local Government Act 2002. The reasoning for the removal of the ring-fence was to encourage local authorities to align and pool DFG funding with other funding streams to deliver improved outcomes. Funding streams can be aligned and/or pooled providing that a Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy has been adopted.

The DFG budget is being effectively managed and, in addition to the base budget, £180k in 2015/16 will be generated by placing a charge on adapting housing association stock (21% of cost) and contributions from customers who are not entitled to a full grant. The national DFG pot will increase from £220m to £394m (79% increase) and therefore the government allocation of £2.93m in 2015/16 is likely to rise significantly in 2016/17.

It is proposed to use £102k of DFG funding to capitalise a further 3 posts in the Private Sector Housing service. This capitalisation of staffing costs will release revenue funding to cover the cost of Housing Inspector posts for which there is no long-term budget. 13 Private Sector Housing Service posts, which work on bringing empty homes back into use, are already capitalised at a cost of £382k.

It is also proposed to use DFG funding of £60k to part fund the Sanctuary scheme: security measures to help people experiencing domestic violence or hate crime to live 'safely' in their own home. The base budget in 2015/16 is £110k and is covered within the HRA. The HRA should not be covering the full Sanctuary cost as the service is cross-tenure. The forecast spend for 2015/16 is £110k. It is proposed that the DFG will cover £60k of the service cost and the HRA £50k. The Sanctuary scheme makes an important contribution to the Domestic Violence Breakthrough Project and the service is often accessed through the Domestic Violence Front Door Hub. The funding proposal will ensure that the Sanctuary scheme can be fully funded. Both funding proposals will alleviate pressure on the General Fund and HRA.