

Report of Director of Environment and Housing

Report to Scrutiny Board (Housing and Regeneration)

Date: 24th September 2013

Subject: Council Policy on the Provision of Cookers to Tenants

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. At the Scrutiny Board meeting on 25 June 2013, the Board enquired as to the Council's position on the provision of gas cookers and fridges as it felt that provision would help health inequality.
2. Council tenancies are currently let on an unfurnished basis. Under the terms of the tenancy agreement, the Council does reserve the right to offer additional services which would be subject to a charge. Additional services could include equipment such as cookers and fridges as well as furnishings.
3. In April 2013, the Council launched a Local Welfare Support Scheme to provide support for families and vulnerable people faced with unforeseen difficulties and emergency situations. This includes the provision of cookers where the applicant fulfils the eligibility criteria.
4. The Council also supports the growth of furniture re-use schemes in Leeds to ensure opportunities to recycle and re-use furniture are maximised.

Recommendations

5. Scrutiny Board is asked to note the content of this report and request a further report on the potential for developing a scheme to provide cookers and fridges to tenants.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Scrutiny Board of the Council's position in relation to the provision of gas and electric cookers to tenants.
- 1.2 The report also outlines the schemes available to vulnerable tenants for the provision of household equipment at no or little cost to the recipient.

2 Background information

- 2.1 At the June Scrutiny Board meeting, the Board enquired as to the Council's position on the provision of gas cookers and fridges as it felt that provision would help health inequality.
- 2.2 Leeds City Council tenancies are currently offered on an unfurnished basis. Under the terms of the tenancy agreement, the Council does reserve the right to offer additional services which would be subject to a charge. Additional services such as Heat Lease are provided in this way and could be extended to include equipment such as cookers and fridges as well as furnishings. Prior to introducing new services, the tenancy agreement provides that tenants will be consulted.
- 2.3 If the Council was to provide household appliances as an additional service, it would bear the responsibility to repair, maintain and service the appliance. As a result, the application of a service charge would be such to cover these costs.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The Council does not currently provide cookers or fridges to tenants. Historically, there has not been recognisable demand for the provision of appliances and under the terms of the tenancy agreement the Council would have to apply a service charge to cover the cost of the appliance as well as its maintenance and servicing. Instead, the Council supplies household goods left in homes to furniture re-use stores and refers vulnerable tenants to these services. The Council also provides support through the Local Welfare Support Scheme.
- 3.2 Furniture Re-Use Schemes
- 3.3 The Council supports the growth of furniture re-use schemes in Leeds to ensure opportunities to recycle and re-use furniture are maximised. The Council, through the ALMOs, has been working with its repairs and maintenance contractors and third sector organisations to ensure that any furniture left in a vacated council property is recycled.
- 3.4 When a tenant vacates and a property becomes void, the ALMOs ensure that any items that are left are removed and re-used wherever possible. Household items including furniture and appliances are stored so third sector furniture re-use organisations can collect and distribute.
- 3.5 The furniture re-use organisations receive referrals from a wide range of public sector and voluntary sector agencies including the ALMOs. A number of

organisations collect and distribute white goods including cookers and fridges and deliver items directly to the tenant. There is often a small charge for the provision and delivery of white goods usually in the region of £10.

3.6 Local Welfare Support Scheme

3.7 From April 2013 Crisis Loans for general living expenses and Community Care Grants were abolished by the government and the budgets devolved to Local Authorities to administer.

3.8 In March 2013 the Executive Board approved a Local Welfare Support Scheme to provide support for families and vulnerable people faced with unforeseen difficulties and emergency situations.

3.9 The scheme seeks to assist vulnerable people in meeting their needs for subsistence or financial support where they are unable to meet their immediate short term needs or where they require assistance to maintain their independence within the community. The scheme identifies the following groups of people who are perceived to be vulnerable:

- Families or vulnerable people under exceptional pressure;
- Homeless people or rough sleepers;
- Vulnerable older people;
- People fleeing domestic violence;
- Young people leaving care or living independently;
- People moving out of institutional or residential care into the community;
- Ex- offenders leaving prison or detention centres; and
- People with disabilities.

3.10 The scheme focuses on providing goods instead of cash. Specifically, the goods provided under the scheme are:

- Basic household goods:
 - Cooker/microwave
 - Fridge
 - Washing Machine
 - Beds and Bedding
 - Seating
 - Clothing (where need related to disability)
 - Removal costs where supported by Homeless Support Team
 - Travel costs related to Domestic Violence cases or connected to welfare of children
 - Curtains where connected to a move
- Emergency provision:
 - Food
 - Baby provisions
 - Items resulting from loss due to a disaster

- 3.11 White goods are delivered and installed where required and there are schemes with the major supermarkets for the provision of store cards to deal with food, baby provisions and clothing.
- 3.12 The focus for the scheme will be on supporting families, people with disabilities, people with mental health issues and people leaving care, facing homelessness or needing help with resettlement from prison. This includes people identified by Housing Support workers, Mental Health workers and Family First workers as requiring help.
- 3.13 Applications for assistance that are supported by the following partners will be accepted as a priority:
- Housing Options: Homeless people who have obtained a tenancy;
 - Support Workers: People who are moving into independent living;
 - Families First: Families under exceptional pressure and where children are at risk; and
 - Leeds City Council Domestic Violence Team: People fleeing domestic violence.
- 3.14 The above applicants are likely in this case to have the majority of their basic household items met subject to need and personal resources. The provision of goods would be at no cost to the recipient.
- 3.15 Welfare and Benefits are closely monitoring the scheme and reporting on performance each month. In the first four months of the scheme 393 cookers, 14 microwaves and 322 fridges have been provided.
- 3.16 The scheme will look to further develop the relationships with key partners in the third, voluntary and public sector to create an integrated and sustainable local welfare provision across Leeds. This will include support and assistance in developing food banks and expanding furniture re-use. It will over time support the creation of a clear map of local welfare provision across Leeds and the information and advice needed to access these services.
- 3.17 Future provision of cookers and fridges
- 3.18 It is proposed that further analysis be done and presented at a future meeting to explore:
- The cost of providing, maintaining and servicing cookers and fridges to council tenants;
 - Eligibility criteria that might apply;
 - The level of service charge that would apply and whether housing benefit would cover such charge;
 - The benefits and risks of provision; and
 - Any best practice from other local authorities.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 Under the terms of the tenancy agreement, the Council reserves the right to offer additional services (for example furnishings) which would be subject to a charge. Prior to introducing new services, the tenancy agreement provides that tenants will be consulted.

4.1.2 The Local Welfare Support Scheme was developed in consultation with advice agencies and frontline staff that historically identified and supported the majority of Community Care Grant applications. Elected members were also invited to comment on the proposals.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.3 All existing Council policies, procedures and schemes referred to in this document have been subject to an Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Screening and if appropriate an Equality Impact Assessment

4.2.4 The Local Welfare Support Scheme focuses on people in need irrespective of ethnicity, religion, sexuality or gender and prioritises people in need who also have a disability or mental health issue.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 There are no implications within this report for existing Council policies or City Priorities.

4.3.2 The re-use and recycling schemes contribute to the corporate objectives outlined in the Vision for Leeds 2011-30; specifically that Leeds' economy will be prosperous and sustainable with a commitment to finding new ways to reuse and recycle.

4.3.3 The Local Welfare Support Scheme provides support to families and vulnerable people and contributes to tackling child poverty, homelessness and debt.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 If the Council was to provide household appliances as an additional service, it would bear the financial responsibility to repair, maintain and service the appliance. As a result, the application of a service charge would be necessary to cover these costs.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

4.5.2 This report is not eligible for call in.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 If the Council was to provide household appliances at an additional service charge, this might result in the numbers of people accessing the furniture re-use organisations to reduce.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Council tenancies are currently let on an unfurnished basis. Under the terms of the tenancy agreement, the Council is permitted to offer additional services (such as cookers) which would be subject to a charge.
- 5.2 The Council's Local Welfare Support Scheme provides support for families and vulnerable people faced with unforeseen difficulties and emergency situations. This includes the provision of cookers and fridges where the applicant fulfils the eligibility criteria.
- 5.3 A number of re-use organisations operate across the city providing recycled white goods to tenants following referrals from public and voluntary sector agencies. These organisations deliver items directly to the tenant for a small charge usually in the region of £10.
- 5.4 It is proposed that further analysis be done and presented at a future meeting to explore:
- The cost of providing, maintaining and servicing cookers and fridges to council tenants;
 - Eligibility criteria that might apply;
 - The level of service charge that would apply and whether housing benefit would cover such charge;
 - The benefits and risks of provision; and
 - Any best practice from other local authorities.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Scrutiny Board is asked to note the content of this report and request a further report on the potential for developing a scheme to provide cookers and fridges to tenants.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.