

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

meeting date: THURSDAY, 29 AUGUST 2024
title: DISCRETIONARY PRIVATE SECTOR GRANT POLICY
submitted by: NICOLA HOPKINS- DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
principal author: RACHAEL STOTT – HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To seek Committee's approval of amendments to the Discretionary Private Sector Grant Policy.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – To address the housing needs of all households in the borough.
- Corporate Priorities – To demonstrate we are a well-run authority.
- Other Considerations – N/A

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The First-Time buyers grant was introduced in March and is included within the Council's Discretionary Private Sector Grant Policy. The purpose of the grant was to encourage first time buyers to purchase older housing stock in the borough and to improve the energy efficiency of the property.

2.2 At the time the grant was introduced Committee was informed that the grant would be for first time buyers towards improvements of energy efficiency of the property which could include a wide range of improvements determined by the dwellings Energy Performance Certificate. This includes, but not limited to, central heating boilers, replacement windows, and all forms of insulation.

2.3 The following criteria applied to the grant:

- It applies to properties within Council Tax groups A-C.
- All applications would be means tested.
- On completion the EPC rating would have to reach a minimum of a C.
- The maximum grant available would be £15,000 and will cover half of eligible costs up to £15,000 (i.e. match funding will be required).
- Would be registered as a charge on the property to be repaid when the property is sold. If the property is sold after 5 years from receipt of the grant the repayment amount decreases to 50% of the total grant award.

2.4 When the grant was introduced the Policy document confirmed that the grant can include:

- all items identified on the EPC Certificate.
- any disrepair items that would be identified during a housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) inspection

- 2.5 The second criteria set out above acknowledged that the dwellings, which would meet the grant criteria, will be the Borough's older housing stock which potentially would require works to remove hazards such as re-wiring, damp proofing etc. On completion of the approved grant works the property is inspected and the EPC rating for the property recalculated to evidence the energy improvements made.
- 2.6 The grant was reviewed in March 2024 with Committee approving continuation of the grant into the 2024/25 financial year including transferring £100,000 from the Landlord Tenant Grant budget. At the time of the review the following was added to work covered by the grant *at the discretion of the LA, the Council cannot pay retrospectively* and the requirement for a recalculated EPC rating removed, although it is unclear why this requirement was removed.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 The Housing Team have been administering this grant since April 2022 and identified that sometimes the items listed on an EPC Certificate can be vague. In these cases, the Officers work with the applicants to ensure that improvements identified and included with the grant application will improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. Given this it is considered important that the requirement for a re-calculated EPC at completion stage is reintroduced into the requirements of the grant to enable monitoring of the impact this grant is having.
- 3.2 At this stage however, it is not proposed to re-introduce the requirement for the EPC rating to reach a minimum of a C on completion (as per the original grant conditions). The proposed amendment of the Policy will facilitate better monitoring of the improvements achieved through provision of this grant funding and Officers will be able to report to Committee with a more complete picture thereafter. The important element of this grant is improvements to the EPC rating and for very poorly rated dwellings achieving a specified minimum rating may not be achievable although with the grant the rating will be improved.
- 3.3 The current Policy includes *at the discretion of the LA* within the work covered by the grant. In practice as the Housing Officers consider all applications against both the EPC certificate and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (see below) this bullet is not considered to be necessary and is proposed to be removed from the Policy.
- 3.4 Committee should also note that a full housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) inspection and assessment is not undertaken. When hazards are identified as part of a grant application the Housing Officers consider the profiles of potential health and safety hazards in dwellings as set out in the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (please see Appendix 1 and <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a799834ed915d0422069a0a/150940.pdf>)
- 3.5 To date an application which only relates to disrepair items with no reference to the EPC Certificate has not been received by the Local Authority. Committee should note there is the potential for such an application. For example, improvements listed on an EPC Certificate for a listed building may be difficult to achieve within the fabric of the building although rectifying hazards may be more acceptable. Such proposals will be dealt with on an individual basis and will not require a re-calculated EPC on completion.
- 3.6 The current Policy requires evidence of savings when assessing financial eligibility however the Policy does not specify what level of savings would result in an applicant being ineligible for the grant. Given that the maximum grant is £15,000, which should

equate to half the costs of the works, it is proposed that a person with savings in excess of £30,000 will be ineligible for the grant. It is considered that any person with more than £30,000 in savings would be able to fund improvements to the property without the need for financial assistance from the Council.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – the grant scheme will be operated in accordance with the budget available and will be reviewed at budget setting time early 2025.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – the suggested changes to the Policy reflect how the grant is operated in practice and will enable the impact of the grant to be effectively monitored.
- Political – improving the older housing stock whilst supporting first time buyers is considered to be a positive outcome for the Borough.
- Reputation – N/A
- Equality & Diversity – Addressing the needs of vulnerable households is essential.

5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Approve the amendments to the Policy as shown in track changes in Appendix 2.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

For further information please ask for Rachael Stott, extension 3235.

A. Physiological requirements- Hygrothermal conditions

1. Damp and mould growth
2. Excess cold
3. Excess heat
4. Asbestos and MMF (manufactured mineral fibres)
5. Biocides (these are chemicals used to treat timber and/or mould growth in dwellings)
6. Carbon monoxide and fuel combustion products (nitrogen
7. Dioxide, sulphur dioxide and smoke)
8. Lead
9. Radiation
10. Un-combusted fuel gas

B Psychological requirements- Space, security, light and noise

11. Crowding and space
12. Entry by intruders
13. Lighting
14. Noise

C Protection against infection Hygiene, sanitation and water supply

15. Domestic hygiene, pests and refuse
16. Food safety
17. Personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage
18. Water supply

D Protection against accidents

19. Falls associated with baths etc
20. Falling on level surfaces etc
21. Falling on stairs etc
22. Falling between levels
23. Electrical hazards
24. Fire
25. Flames, hot surfaces etc
26. Collision and entrapment
27. Explosions
28. Position and operability of amenities etc
29. Structural collapse and falling elements

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