

# Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy

July 2003

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Introduction

Following publication of the Government's Housing Renewal Guidance, Councils are allowed freedom to provide financial assistance as they consider appropriate, to people who own or live in private homes.

This Policy document sets out how the Council intends to provide access to grants, loans and other forms of support to implement the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and replaces the Housing Grants Policy which was adopted by Members on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1998. This Policy is not stand alone and is subsidiary to the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.

### Enactment of the Policy

Grant applications approved prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2003 will continue to be dealt with under the provisions of The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Housing Grants Policy 1998. Applications approved on or after the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2003 will be dealt with under the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy.

A grant Application for this purpose will be considered as any enquiry for grant assistance where an initial visit to undertake a priority assessment and/or means test and/or assess the eligibility of the applicant and/or eligible works has been undertaken prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2003. This will ensure that applicants who have been held on our waiting list will not be penalised due to the actions of the Authority.

Where an applicant has 'applied' prior to this date, but would benefit from being dealt with under the new policy, the applicant will be informed of the facts and agreement reached to proceed on this basis.

### Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy

Housing Renewal Grants deliver a key intervention role in delivering the Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and are drawn up on a local basis apart from the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants which are dictated by legislation. Through the targeting of grant aid at the private rented or owner occupied sector, a financial incentive is given to owners to improve their properties assisting in the general renewal of Harrow's housing stock.

This Policy was drawn up in consultation with stakeholders, see chapter 3, and Strategic Priorities to meet identified need. The Renewal Grant Service (Renovation Grants and Home Improvement Agency) also administers Disabled Facilities Grants to enable adaptation to address the needs of disabled people. The aim is to improve the housing stock and protect the occupant's health, which can be placed at risk by poor conditions.

The Renewal Grant Policy is intended to address the needs of those living in the worst conditions, who are least able to afford the necessary works of repair and improvement. The Supporting People, Harrow Partnership and Housing Strategy Priorities will inform future development of this policy.

The policy is also intended to address the requirements of Best Value indicators BV62, number of properties made fit, and BV64, empty properties brought back into use. These place specific requirements on the authority to reduce the number of unfit premises and empty properties within the borough, respectively. The grant policy is targeting the limited resources at these priorities and to support the renewal tools in use and to ensure that grants decrease the number of non-decent homes within the borough in line with current guidance.

The Policy is specific about the circumstances in which an application for assistance will be given priority. However, it will consider each application on its individual merits where it appears to fall outside the Council's system of priority. It is envisaged that such applications will normally be approved only where an applicant can demonstrate exceptional hardship or provide a strong justification on the basis of need.

The Council will provide 4 main types of assistance to meet the priorities described in this Strategy. Each measure is designed to meet either the full cost or a proportion of the cost of works. Conditions are attached in respect of eligibility and repayment, dependant on the form of assistance given.

The 4 main types of assistance are as follows:

1. Non-repayable Discretionary Grants
2. Discretionary Grant repayable on sale of dwelling
3. Equity release loans/HouseProud Scheme.
4. Non- Repayable Mandatory Grants for Disabled Adaptations.

Detailed information on the individual grants available is given below in chapter 5.

#### **Sources of Advice:**

Further information or advice on may be given by contacting the following agencies or departments:

Improvement Grant Service	8424 1077/1319
Staying Put Home Improvement Agency	8424 1894
Quality Mark Builders	0845 300 80 40
Citizens Advice Bureau	0870 1264460
Housing Benefit Service	8424 1644
Age Concern	8424 9344
Environmental Health/Housing Enforcement Team	8424 1379
Supporting People	8424 1895
Occupational Therapy, Dept of Social Services	8424 1694
Trading Standards Service	0208 937 5555/6
Rent Officer Services	0208 863 6688
Housing Services	8424 3735
Empty property Officer	8424 1096
Housing Options Officer	8424 1093
Private Sector Initiatives Officer	8424 1179
Housing Advice Centre	8861 4079

## Chapter 2

### Strategic Context

#### National

The Government's Housing Policy Statement, 'The Way Forward for Housing' 2002, includes the main themes of quality and choice emphasising the importance of links to the wider issues of tackling social exclusion and the need to achieve lasting regeneration.

The key priorities for the private sector, which we have incorporated, are measures to:

- Enhance the strategic role across all types of housing.
- Support sustainable home ownership and promote affordable housing.
- Improve standards in the private rented sector and houses in multiple occupation.
- Improve stock condition in the private sector.
- To ensure equal access to all services.

Central Government's Public Service Level Agreement 7 states

***"By 2010, bring all social housing into decent condition with most of this improvement taking place in deprived areas, and increase the proportion of private sector housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable groups."*** The Government's aim is to offer everyone the opportunity of a decent home, promoting social cohesion, wellbeing and independence.

Other relevant national strategies which have been taken into account include Best Value, Quality and Choice for Older Peoples Housing, the Social Care and Health Agenda, Fuel Poverty Strategy, Urban White Paper, Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future & Sustainable Communities in London, Supporting People Strategy, ODPM guidance on the Reform Order, Delivering Adaptations etc, guidance on preparing community strategies and other relevant legislation.

#### Regional

The Regional strategies are clearly stated in the London Housing Statement 2002, 'Working Towards Solutions and the Government Office for London's 'Regional Housing Priorities in London.' The key issues for London related to the private sector are the:

- High demand for housing, especially affordable housing, outstripping supply, which has led to increasing use of temporary accommodation.
- Lack of affordable housing making it difficult for households on low or medium income to secure suitable and affordable accommodation, including key workers.
- The continuing presence of social exclusion, particularly in black and minority ethnic people and asylum seekers, and the need to link housing, regeneration and community safety initiatives to secure improvement in local communities.
- The condition of the housing stock and the need to improve these to decent homes standards and minimum levels of fitness.
- Promotion of the Supporting People agenda in relation to vulnerable people who would benefit from housing related support.

There are four relevant priority areas for action in London:

- To increase affordable housing
- To decrease homelessness and develop suitable forms of temporary accommodation and support for vulnerable people.
- To develop an effective private sector strategy.
- To ensure that housing renewal is contributing effectively to wider regeneration strategies.

## **West London**

The West London Housing Strategy 2003 provides a sub-regional strategic context for existing and new housing strategies; including local housing strategies, homelessness, Supporting People, private sector strategies, the intermediate housing market and Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) strategies and to feed into the review of the forthcoming London Housing Strategy.

The Strategy identifies four key aims for the boroughs up to 2012:

- **Increase the supply of housing** to meet anticipated growth in population and employment.
- **Increase the provision of affordable homes** to ensure those not able to access the private market can continue to live in West London
- **Improve the quality of housing** to meet the decent homes standard across all tenures and ensure provision of quality housing services
- **Create sustainable communities** to ensure our diverse population is effectively served and housing promotes the well-being of communities

## **Corporate Context**

The Corporate Vision is to strive for a community:

- where everybody is able to enjoy healthy and happy lives in an environment which is clean, safe and secure
- which is cohesive and strong
- where all have the widest range of opportunities to succeed and the capacity to achieve their aspirations
- where no-one feels excluded where young people have a strong voice and are heard

The Council's Corporate Strategic Priorities were reviewed in 2003 to focus activity in 5 Key areas that will make a real difference to those living and working in Harrow. The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy impinges directly on four of the five corporate priorities as follows:

- i **Strengthen Harrow's Communities**
- ii **improve the quality of health and social care**
- iii **Develop a prosperous and sustainable economy**
- iv **Enhance the Environment**

## **Local Housing Strategy Statement 2002 - 2007**

The Housing Strategy remains the predominant housing strategy. The housing mission statement and strategic aims for Harrow are as follows:

Our mission is to enable choice and access to a range of good quality, homes, including affordable homes, for all the people of Harrow

We will achieve this by working:

1. To maximise the supply of affordable housing
2. To deliver excellence in housing services
3. To build quality and choice into housing options across all tenures
4. To combat poverty, social exclusion and increase community safety
5. To ensure housing meets the needs of all groups in the community
6. To make sure best use of the resources available – people, property, finance, information technology and other assets – in support of strategic priorities
7. To work in partnership with customers, service providers and other stakeholders to meet strategic and service objectives
8. To contribute to more sustainable communities in social, economic and environmental terms.
9. To ensure equal access to all services

And we will ensure the following cross-cutting themes are incorporated into our work:

1. Equalities – ensuring we promote equal access and combat disadvantage for all groups for example people from black and minority ethnic communities and disabled people.
2. Sustainability – aiming to promote housing solutions that are viable in the long term from an economic, social and environmental perspective.
3. Partnership and inter-borough working – the benefits of working with partners and other authorities in pooling ideas, resources and effort to meet common objectives.
4. Choice, consultation and customer focus – the basis of our approach to strategy and service development.

## **Relationships with Other Strategies**

In addition to the strategic context outlined above, development and successful implementation of the Policy is dependent on a clear understanding of the aims, objectives and action plan/programmes of a number of other Council strategies or those in which the Council is a partner. Effective delivery will continue to be achieved through strong working relationships which will also enable effective monitoring to take place to facilitate positive review of policies.

The key strategies with which this strategy inter-relates are:

### **Homelessness Strategy**

The Homelessness Act requires that all homelessness strategies address the following:

- Prevention of homelessness.
- The securing of accommodation for people who are homeless or are likely to become homeless.
- The securing of satisfactory support for people who are homeless or those who need it to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

In Harrow we have taken these core requirements and translated them into practical, innovative objectives with the aim of making a real difference to the lives of homeless people.



(i) Prevention and Options:

We believe that every case of homelessness or threatened homelessness is preventable. Through direct early intervention and targeting the main cases of homelessness in Harrow we will seek to keep people in their homes wherever possible. Our approach will be combined with the development of options and support to enable homeless people to help solve their own housing problems.

(ii) Securing of Accommodation

We will ensure that homeless families spend the minimum amount of time in bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation and that no family with children will spend over 6 weeks in a bed and breakfast hostel. Temporary housing itself will be self contained and located in the borough boundaries.

No one will need to sleep rough in Harrow and accommodation and support options will be offered to all single homeless people regardless of priority.

We will continue to maximise the number of affordable housing units available in the borough for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Homeless people will be given choice in allocations through our Locata Scheme and will have fair and equal access to all our available social housing.

(iii) Support

We will provide support for all homeless people. We accept that homelessness and its causes can only be successfully tackled through addressing the broader socio-economic issues of employment, health, education and vulnerability. Only by taking a wider prospective will high levels of homelessness and repeat homelessness be reduced.

### **Economic Regeneration Strategy**

The Draft Economic Regeneration Strategy 2003 states 'By 2010 Harrow will be known as a genuinely enabling borough, with a proactive council who together with our partners in Harrow will have acted as the catalyst for sustainable development.' Two of the top ten outcomes identified are directly relevant to private sector housing renewal.

These are to:

- Have made major strides working with both the private and public sector to address joint issues particularly to both increase the amount and range of key worker and affordable housing and to have provided a support mechanism for those in need in the private sector to greatly improve the standard of their homes
- Have an acknowledged role in the West London sub region

The strategy also identifies that support is necessary for some residents to improve housing conditions and sustainability. This will be achieved by supporting the development and implementation of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy to provide a mechanism to help improve private sector housing standards for:

- Owner occupiers, vulnerable residents and the disabled
- The private rented sector, and,
- Bringing empty properties back into use.

### **Replacement Harrow Unitary Development Plan (HUDP)**

The replacement HUDP, due for adoption early in 2004, incorporates a vision that includes the following:-

- Performs a dynamic role as part of a more sustainable world city.
- Plays a part in securing the sustainable use of natural resources.
- Provides a healthy and safe environment.
- Continues to be an attractive, vibrant and enjoyable place to live and work in.
- Provides a better choice of good quality housing that promotes developments with an appropriate mix of housing to cater for local needs thereby contributing to London's overall housing provision
- Promotes development that contributes to improving the overall quality of life for residents, workers and visitors.

It also includes objectives and strategic policies aimed at creating more sustainable communities and pattern of land use in the Borough. Whilst the Plan focuses on the interactions between a number of land uses, considerable attention has been paid to the need to develop a range of policies which relate to the largest land use in the Borough, housing, reflecting the role of the private sector, which comprises the overwhelming proportion of overall housing. Various policies are included relating to housing provision and mix, maintenance and improvement, the use of empty property, conversions and houses in multiple occupation, as well as aspects of sustainable design and construction.

Delivery of several corporate housing objectives is achieved through the HUDP, and monitoring and close co-operation will continue to take place to ensure that both this strategy and the HUDP continue to fully complement each other.

### **Supporting People Strategy**

Supporting People is a new framework for delivering supported housing services to the vulnerable people. Led by the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), Supporting People will administer grant funding to service providers, ensure service quality by introducing a framework for monitoring and reviewing services in Harrow. Supporting People aims to make Harrow a place where people are able to achieve their potential for independent living.

The Supporting People strategy recognises that; 'Harrow is a borough where home ownership is very high (80%). The supported housing sector, however, is dominated by services for people in local authority or RSL (Registered Social Landlord) rented housing. The Supporting People programme, which is based on funding from the existing supported housing rented sector, has very limited ability to respond to the needs of home owners. Most of the supported housing in Harrow is accommodation based with few floating support services.

This means that there is extremely limited capacity to develop services that would support national and local strategies, to allow people to stay in their own homes. The strategy also has a clear role for the Home Improvement Agency and recognises the needs of the older homeowner.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy is committed to working in unison with Supporting People to develop services that respond to the needs of homeowners and allow people to remain in their own homes. We will seek to build a partnership with the Supporting People Team in pursuit of common priorities.

### **Empty Homes Strategy**

The Empty Property Strategy was launched in 1996 and has been successful in bringing 636 properties back into use by April 2003.

The high level of demand for affordable housing in the Borough means that it is unacceptable for properties to remain empty. The Empty Property Strategy aims to reduce the number of empty and wasted properties in the Borough and is a key element in Harrow's overall Housing Strategy. Households from the Housing Register have been nominated to 543 (87%) of the properties which have been brought back into use. This has assisted with the Council's successful bid for Beacon Status for Tackling Homelessness for other clients who are in housing need such as key workers and supported housing.

The Empty Homes Strategy is well developed, has shown significant achievement since its inception and is likely to be self-maintaining but is also heavily dependent on sufficient capital funding and grant policy.

### **Crime and Disorder Strategy**

Crime prevention remains a key priority for the Council, particularly relating to hate crime and domestic violence. As a result of the last Crime and Disorder Audit conducted in 1998 the then Harrow Partnership identified the following areas as requiring individual strategy development relevant to housing:

- Burglary with the overall objective to 'reduce the level of burglary offences'.
- Domestic Violence with the overall objective to 'raise awareness of domestic violence and encourage reporting'

As a result of the audit and simultaneous review of Harrow's performance in relation to the Objectives set out in the Crime and Reduction Strategy 1999 to 2003, carried out under the 'Safer Harrow' Best value Review, the following were identified as issues for development in relation to these objectives:

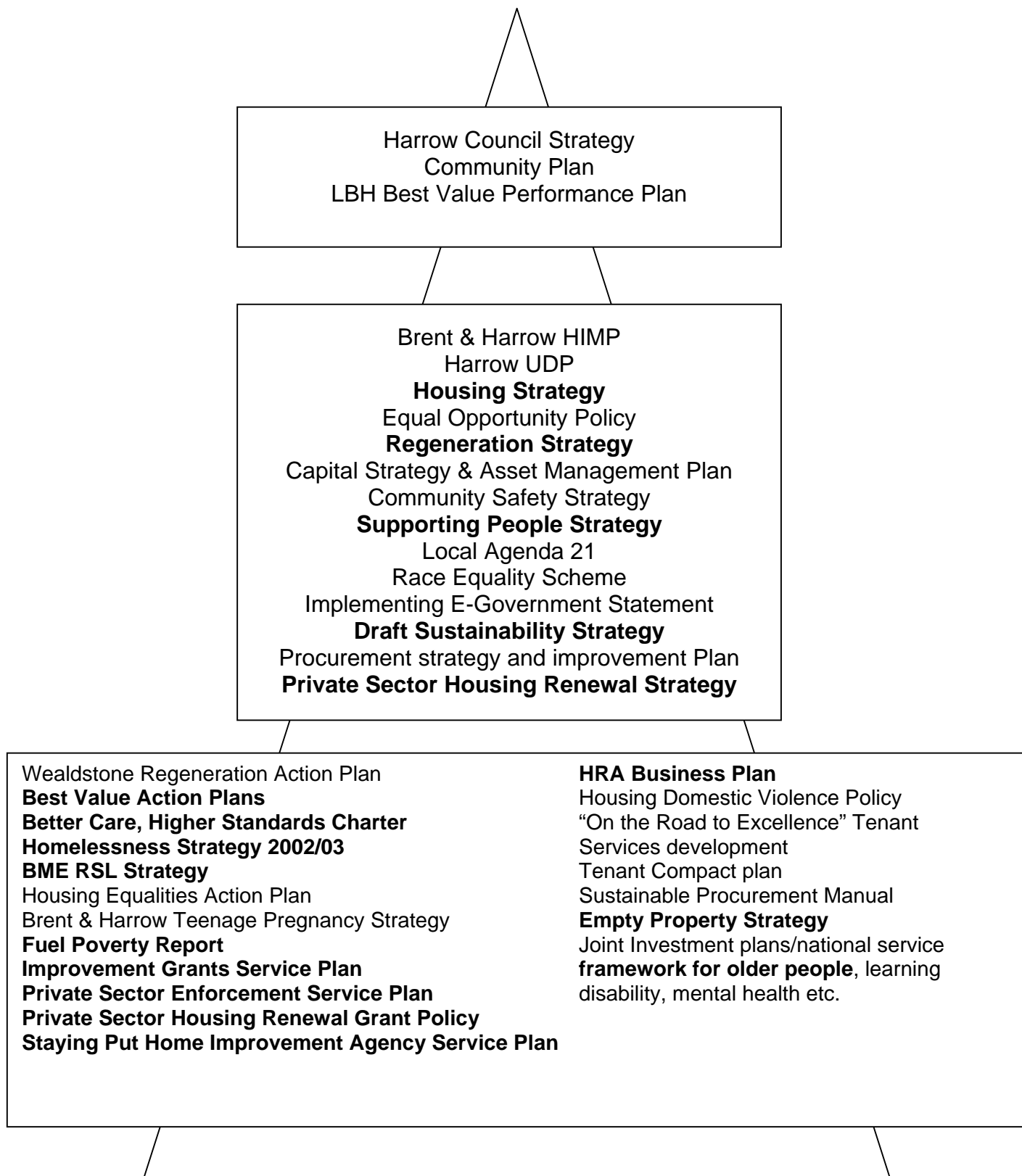
- Expansion of the Handyperson Scheme, providing practical help and advice to burglary victims.
- To reduce the number of offences of repeat victimisation for domestic violence by 10%.

To implement these objectives the Handyperson Scheme will undertake works to provide a safe refuge for victims of domestic violence and to make the properties of the victims of burglary secure on referral through the Crime and Disorder Partnership.

This is targeted at those in need with labour provided free but has not been supported through any direct financial support for the scheme in the past. This is not a replacement for the Sanctuary Project but intended to provide an alternative means of providing and funding necessary works.

### Strategic Links

The manner in which the Strategies and Plans link is shown pictorially below.



## Chapter 3

### Development, Review, Partnership and Consultation

#### Development and Consultation

The private sector housing element of the 'Your Home Your Needs' best value review has been used as the main vehicle for developing the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy within the framework of the Regulatory Reform Order (July 2002). The process is detailed in the Housing Strategy 2002 – 2007, which remains the overriding Housing Strategy.

The assessment of our current performance was undertaken through completion of the Housing Quality Network Self-assessment Workbooks relating to the private sector and the Foundations Best Value Toolkit for the Home Improvement Agency which enabled the authority to undertake an honest assessment of our performance. This was undertaken by the individual service teams and managers and validated through both internal challenge meetings within the remit of the review attended by a variety of internal stakeholders and critical friends. This was also validated through a challenge event to a cross party panel of Elected Members in March 2003.

This assessment was validated through a Challenge and Consultation day, which took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2003 and as part of the 'Housing Strategy Consultation Day' and Your Home Your Needs Staff Open Day. These events were structured to enable consultation in three targeted areas through presentations and discussion groups and the use of questionnaires:

- Validation of current performance and identified service development and provision priorities for inclusion within the Housing Renewal Strategy.
- Strategic Priorities to inform development of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.
- Priorities for grant assistance, eligibility criteria for applicants, eligible works and grant conditions to inform the Private Sector Renewal Grant Policy.

The events were attended by a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders, partners and "critical friends". This included the public, previous recipients of renovation and disabled adaptation grants, users of the Home Improvement Agency, representative groups i.e. Harrow Action for the Disabled, Harrow Racial Equalities Council, Age Concern, Panel for Older People etc. Internal attendees included Elected Members, Housing Services, Planning, Occupational Therapy Service, Supporting People and staff from all housing provision services.

Consultation was also undertaken through the Landlords Forum held in conjunction with Housing Services through presentations, discussion groups and the use of questionnaires. This event was specifically used to consult on:

- Strategic Priorities to inform development of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy.
- Priorities for grant assistance in the private rented sector and empty properties, eligibility criteria for applicants, eligible works and grant conditions to inform the Private Sector Renewal Grant Policy.

Attendees were predominantly landlords drawn from private and public sector and service providers to these groups from both the public and private sector. Also in attendance were Elected Members, staff from all housing provision services and representative groups.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy final draft document was subject to targeted internal and external consultation with interested parties identified through attendance at the consultation events. Where relevant the Policy states the consultation source of the identified priorities identified.

## **Best Value Review**

As stated the Private Sector Housing element of the Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review was carried out between June 2002 and May 2003. The review process has been used as the main vehicle for developing the Private Sector Renewal Grant Policy. The Review and resultant action plan will be reported in September 2003 and is due for inspection in November 2003.

The key service improvements emerging from the private sector element are as follows:

- Review the current organisational structure to provide a single point of accountability for all private sector services to provide a single system for service delivery.
- To work with partner organisations and internal services to provide a purpose built evidence base to guide service provision and strategy development.
- The establishment of a long-range (3-5 year) capital finance planning process to allow for better forward planning of services is a critical factor common to all service areas.
- Research, develop and implement an Affordable Warmth Strategy linked to funding provision to enable delivery, to improve HECA returns and deliver corporate priorities.
- Development of links to the Supporting People Strategy, Community Strategy and Economic Regeneration Strategies to ensure critical issues are addressed and funding streams maintained and developed.
- Develop the Home Improvement Agency to work with groups prioritised within the Supporting People Strategy to assist in needs assessments of the relevant groups.
- Improve service delivery working with a broad range of partner organisations to develop effective liaison arrangements with external agencies and internal services.
- Research, develop and implement an enforcement strategy for private sector housing.
- Increasing enforcement activities in the private rented sector and in relation to the HMO Registration Scheme for non compliant landlords.
- Increase the number of empty homes refurbished each year to ensure that the Empty homes strategy is implemented and an increased number of properties are brought back into use.
- Work with Housing Needs and the west London Private sector Housing Group to reduce the level of reactive enforcement work in Assured Shorthold Tenancies and Registered Social Landlord sectors.
- The provision of transparent policy statements and clear and simple procedures so that customers have access to information regarding the services available.

In 2001 the Renovation Grants and Staying Put Services were subject to a Best Value Inspection following the review of the service in 2000. The service was assessed at that time as a 'fair' 'one star' service that 'will not improve'. The inspectors' recommendations were incorporated into the best value improvement plans for 2000/1 and 2001/2 and have been fully implemented. The re-inspection of the service in May 2002 confirmed that all of the recommendations made had been fully implemented and the service assessed as a 'two star' 'good' service that 'will definitely improve.' This underlines the progress and service improvement that has been made in the last two years. These include:

- Reorganisation of services to bring together Renovation Grants and the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency functions to improve efficiency and customer service to provide a comprehensive home improvement agency approach.
- The routing of all disabled adaptations via a single delivery system working closely with the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency and Adaptations Service in line with the Disabled Adaptations Best Value Review.
- The setting and achievement of challenging targets, response and service standards for the service and all stages of the grant process reported through the Annual Service Plan.
- Increasing the involvement of residents, internal agencies, users and other stakeholders including the Harrow Association for the Disabled and Harrow Racial Equality Council through a range of liaison and focus groups.
- Consultation in addition to the above through the use of customer questionnaires and satisfaction surveys including the monitoring of uptake by vulnerable and black and ethnic minorities and the Builders and Landlords Forum.
- Establishment of an approved contractor list to drive up quality of work and customer care in conjunction with staying put.
- The service was awarded the Charter Mark award in 2001 in recognition of the customer service ethos, which has been applied to service development.

### **Best Value Performance Indicators**

The most significant is BV62 for which the authority achieved 1% following revision in 2001/2, which is in the bottom quartile against the top quartile for London Borough's of 4.4%. This PI is also included in those taken into account by the CPA Assessment and as such is a critical indicator. There has been a significant improvement over the last three years from a position where we were unable to calculate the indicator to 0.25 % in 2000/01 to 1% in 2001/2. There has been no identifiable improvement in 2002/03 with the indicator remaining at 1%.

The indicator is made up of three elements, Renewal Grant activity on unfit properties, unfit empty properties brought back into use and houses in multiple occupation and private rented sector properties made fit through enforcement activity.

The critical factor in achieving a high level of activity in these areas is sufficient capital finance provision to support grant activity, including that for empty homes, linked to a targeted grant strategy and sufficient staffing to undertake an increased enforcement role linked to an inspection and enforcement strategy.

The other Statutory indicator is BV64, proportion of empty properties brought back into use which had been empty for more than 6 months, which achieved 4.62% against the top quartile of 5% in 2001/02. This indicator has been changed for 02/03 to the number of empty properties brought back into use or demolished, and it is not known how this will affect this position.

## **Corporate Review**

The Improvement and Development Agency (I&DEA) Peer Review 2002 identified that Harrow Council is a good organisation but insufficiently focused and robust to deliver services to meet changing needs. In response the Authority is in the process of reform to ensure the Council is able to deliver good front line services-and put citizens first. Under the New Harrow Project the existing functional departments are being abolished to create new, customer focused service provision that will adopt area based delivery to reflecting the wide-ranging needs of the diverse local population.

As part of this process the Harrow Strategic Partnership was launched on the 20th May 2003 which will build on the relationships and successes of its predecessor the Harrow Partnership. The Harrow Strategic Partnership will deliver the ten-year vision of what for Harrow will be. It will prepare and implement a Community Strategy for the area which focuses on delivering solutions to local problems and unmet needs, identify and deliver the most important things which need to be done, keep track of progress and keep it up to date. The Community Strategy will be launched in the spring of 2004.

Work has already started on the identification of community need will via the development of a purpose built evidence base. This will provide a strong evidence base to demonstrate to external and internal bodies where local intervention is needed and provide a better foundation for identification of priorities at neighbourhood level. The Objectives are:

- To support the development of the Community Strategy
- To maximise the use of information held and research carried out cross-departmentally and by external partners
- To establish a user-friendly way of storing community profile information
- To make profiles accessible through the intranet for use by all departments and partners in future bidding and service planning

When complete, community profiles will be used to inform other Harrow strategies, e.g. Economic Regeneration Strategy, Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. A monitoring process will also be developed, to ensure profiles continue to be of benefit to all.

The content of this Renewal Strategy will be reviewed to reflect the identified priorities of the Council and its partners and to address identified community need.



## Partnership Working within Services provided

Liaison arrangements are essential to the provision of the Service and are in place with the following organisations:

Organisation	Liaison
Housing Services	Strategic Direction and Provision, Enabling, Resources, Housing Provision, Homelessness, Housing Needs Assessment, Empty properties, monitoring, Advice.
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)	Guidance and Advice. Monitoring.
Harrow Council Elected Members	Strategic Direction and decision making. Advice and assistance to public. Portfolio Holder role and promotion.
Elderly Care Management Social Services;	Disabled facilities grant and liaison for joint provision.
Harrow & Hillingdon Primary Care Trust;	Disabled facilities grant referral and liaison for joint provision.
The London, Fire and Emergency Planning Authority	Advisory and support service. Consultee in formal enforcement action.
Housing Associations;	Empty Properties, enabling and provision, Housing Association leasing scheme.
Client Group Representatives;	Consultation and review of provision. Advisory role for Home Improvement Agency.
Age Concern;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role
Harrow Association of the Disabled;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role
Harrow Council for Racial Equality;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role
Housebound Readers Service	Information and promotion
Benefit Agency;	Formal consultation in means test assessment. Advisory role for benefit assessment. Advice to public.
Social Services/ Occupational Therapists	Occupational Health referral system for disabled adaptations. Partnership working in delivering adaptations.
Supporting People	Strategic provision. Funding and monitoring role for Home Improvement Agency. Service commissioning in future.
Building Control	Consultee and advice service for major adaptations and discretionary grant work. Support for enforcement role.
Architects and Surveyors, Builders;	Contractors list and service provider to client.
Office of Fair Trading;	Monitoring role for contractors and suppliers of product. Advisory role.

Environmental Health;	Liaison on housing standards, private rented sector, enforcement activities and advice.
Health and Safety Executive (Gas Safety)	Liaison on enforcement issues.
CORGI	Advisory role and contractor scrutiny.
NICEIC	Advisory role and contractor scrutiny.
Harrow Partnership for Older People (POP);	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role
Charities, e.g. Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association (SSAFA).	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Formal consultation and advisory role.
Carers Support Harrow;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency.
Citizens Advice Bureau;	Advice to public. Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency.
Crime Prevention Panel	Referral system for clients to Home Improvement Agency. Partnership working with Handyperson Scheme.
Greater London Authority	Guidance and Advice. Monitoring.
Empty Homes Agency	Guidance and Advice
BABIE	Enforcement standards for bed and breakfast. Advisory and support role.

## Monitoring and Review

There is no formal legislative process in place at present to assess the 'fitness for purpose' of the Private Sector Renewal Grant Policy or which dictates the requirement for review. The Policy is however seen as a dynamic and must be regularly reviewed in consultation with internal and external stakeholders, partners, emerging housing needs information and the public.

The existing Landlords Forum, Housing Strategy Conference, staff and public consultation processes will be used to inform this review process in conjunction with monitoring information on the effectiveness of implementation of the Policy.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy will also require regular review and development to ensure that it is aligned with the Community Strategy, New Harrow Project and Regeneration Strategy and development of housing/regeneration needs base data to inform service provision. The Policy will also need to be reviewed to ensure that it aligns with the Housing Strategy, Supporting People Strategy and the Homelessness and Black and Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy when the latter are developed.

The implementation of the Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review and Action Plan will by necessity require the Policy to be reviewed to reflect changes in Housing Renewal service provision over time.

The Best value Review of Adaptations, completed in July 2002, Implementation Plan includes disabled facilities grant provision and the recommendation, in line with ODPM guidance on delivering adaptations, to move towards an umbrella organisation and has been endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2003. A Strategic decision regarding implementation of this aspect of delivery will be made in due course.

The draft Housing Bill, which comes into force in April 2004 will provide a major change to the primary legislation with regard to housing fitness and enforcement activities. The West London Housing Strategy and the work of the West London Private Sector Housing group set up to implement that strategy will support these activities and implementation of the Housing Bill. The result of this will be used to inform future review in this regard.

In 2003/04, the Council intends to make use of skills and newly formed working relationships with other departments and service providers to create a more co-ordinated service delivery. This will include joint working to avoid duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy, wherever possible. Regular meetings and working policy arrangements will continue to be held with:

- □ Staying Put Home Improvement Agency.
- □ Environmental Health Private Sector Housing Enforcement.
- □ Social Services Occupational Therapists Department.
- □ Housing Services, Empty Property Officer and Private Sector New Initiatives Officer.

In order to ensure that the Renewal Grant Policy is reviewed on a timely basis it is envisaged that formal review will be undertaken as soon as practicable after the Community Strategy is launched in the spring of 2004 which coincides with publication of the Housing Bill.

## Chapter 4

### Harrows Housing Renewal Grant Priorities

The way in which the Housing Renewal Grant Priorities will be used to deliver the identified priorities to address housing and regeneration needs within the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy is shown against each grant priority identified. The links to the strategic context and source of the grant priorities and conditions attached to those grants, which were developed through the consultation processes, outlined in Chapter 3, is also shown. Where accountable to an individual source these have been shown in italics at the end of each action.

#### Local Priorities for Private Sector Renewal Grants 2003/05

The following priorities for the provision of grant aid, in order of importance, have been identified:

1. Provision of **Mandatory Disabled Facilities** grants to those who qualify.

Meets Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Priority – 1 & 2

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002, London Housing Statement, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I & II, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 4,5,6,7,8, Economic Regeneration Strategy, Unitary development Plan priorities 3 & 6, Supporting People Strategy.*

Informed by: *Challenge Event, Internal Consultation, Landlords Forum, Staff Consultation, Occupational Therapy, Housing Services, Private Sector Housing Services, Housing Conference, representative groups.*

2. Provision of **Discretionary Disabled Facilities** grants for eligible works above the statutory mandatory limit to those who qualify having been refused assistance under the Houseproud Equity Release Scheme.

Meets Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Priority – 1 & 2

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002, London Housing Statement, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I & II, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 4,5,6,7,8, Economic Regeneration Strategy, Unitary development Plan priorities 3 & 6, Supporting People Strategy..*

Informed by: *Challenge Event, Internal Consultation, Landlords Forum, Staff Consultation, Occupational Therapy, Housing Services, Private Sector Housing Services, Housing Conference, representative groups.*

3. Discretionary **Home Safety Grants** where applicants, or the applicant's spouse or partner, is aged 60 years or over who are on a means tested benefit, or for occupants at risk or clients referred from the councils Domestic Violence Unit or Crime Prevention Panel regardless of age.

Meets Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Priority – 1 & 2

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002 priorities 1 & 4, London Housing Statement priorities 3 & 4, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I & IV, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 4,5,6,7,8, Unitary development Plan, Supporting People Strategy, Economic Regeneration Strategy, Crime & Disorder Strategy.*

Informed by: *Challenge Event, Internal Consultation, Landlords Forum, Staff Consultation, Housing Services, Private Sector Housing Services, Housing Conference, representative groups.*

4. Discretionary **Home Repairs Assistance Grants** for applicants over 60 and those under 60 years in receipt of a qualifying means tested benefit, living in a dwelling with minor defects.

Meets Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Priority – 1 & 2

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002 priority 1, London Housing Statement priorities 3,4 & 5, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I& II, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 4,5,6,7,8, Unitary development Plan, Supporting People Strategy, Crime and Disorder Strategy.*

Informed by: *Challenge Event, Internal Consultation, Landlords Forum, Staff Consultation, Housing Services, Private Sector Housing Services, Housing Conference, representative groups.*

5. Discretionary **Housing Renewal Assistance Grants** for owner occupiers on low income living in statutorily unfit housing, who qualify for grant and can establish a three year residency.

Meets Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Priority – 1,2 & 3

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002, priorities 1 to 4, London Housing Statement priorities 3 & 4, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I to IV, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 4,5,6,7,8, Unitary development Plan, Economic Regeneration Strategy.*

Informed by: *Challenge Event, Internal Consultation, Landlords Forum, Staff Consultation, Housing Services, Private Sector Housing Services, Housing Conference, representative groups.*

6. Discretionary **Empty Property Grants** to potential landlords for bringing back into use long term vacant dwellings or convert vacant space to residential accommodation on condition that the rent is affordable and that the Council has nomination rights.

Meets Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Priority – 1,2 & 4

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002 priorities 1 & 4, London Housing Statement priorities 2 to 4, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I, II & IV, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 4,5,6,7,8, Unitary development Plan, Crime and Disorder Strategy, Economic Regeneration Strategy, Homelessness Strategy.*

Informed by: *Challenge Event, Internal Consultation, Landlords Forum, Staff Consultation, Empty Property Officer, Housing Services, Private Sector Housing Services, Housing Conference.*

7. Discretionary **House In Multiple Occupation Grants** to Landlords of houses in multiple occupation in order to provide a safe means of access in case of fire and essential amenities in support of our registration scheme.

Meets Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Priority – 1,2 & 3

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002 priorities 1,3 & 4, London Housing Statement priorities 2 & 3, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I,III & IV, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 2,3,4,5,6,7,8, Unitary development Plan, Economic Regeneration Strategy.*

Informed by: *Challenge Event, Internal Consultation, Landlords Forum, Staff Consultation, Housing Services, Private Sector Housing Enforcement, Housing Conference.*

8. Discretionary **Housing Renewal Assistance Grants** for landlords of single occupancy dwellings which are unfit and where the landlord can demonstrate that financial assistance is necessary.

Meets Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy Priority – 1,2 & 3

Links to the following Strategic Priorities and Strategies: *Governments Housing Policy Statement 2002 priorities 1,3 & 4, London Housing Statement priorities 2 & 3, West London Housing Strategy, Corporate Priorities I,III & IV, Local Housing Strategy Statement objectives 2,3,4,5,6,7,8, Unitary development Plan, Economic Regeneration Strategy.*

Informed by: *Challenge Event, Internal Consultation, Landlords Forum, Staff Consultation, Occupational Therapy, Housing Services, Private Sector Housing Services, Housing Conference.*

This is a list of the council's private sector renewal grant priorities for 2003/5 and it accepts that adequate funding may not be available to achieve all these aims. Where funding is limited grants will be restricted in the order of priority as indicated above then by priority and date order.

It is clear that we will not be able to deliver across all priority areas within the resources available through the capital pot. We will therefore look to provide a range of alternative loan vehicles and grant aide administered through the Staying put Home Improvement Agency and Improvement Grant service.

We will investigate the provision of alternative loan products through mainstream lenders, LA direct, RSL direct and special purpose vehicles to provide assistance in addition to the provision of grant aid. This is particularly relevant to certain minority ethnic groups who can not accept an interest bearing loans for religious reasons. These will include the provision of:

- Secured - Interest Only
- Secured - Fee Based (no interest)
- Secured - Capital & interest repayment
- Unsecured - capital and interest

## **Needs and Expectations**

A good understanding of private sector needs derives from qualitative and quantitative support of this Council's Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy. The 2000 Private Sector Stock Condition Survey showed that there are significant numbers of people who cannot meet the financial burdens associated with maintaining and improving their homes to an acceptable standard.

This renewal grant policy is intended to address the needs of those living in the worst conditions, who are least able to afford the necessary works of repair and improvement. It also provides significant support for the Empty Property Strategy and Homelessness Strategy through targeted grant aid and grant conditioned nomination rights.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy will require regular review and development to ensure that it is aligned with the Community Plan, New Harrow Project and Regeneration Strategy and development of housing/regeneration needs base data to inform service provision. It will also need to be reviewed to ensure it supports the requirements of the draft Housing Bill, which comes into force in April 2004. The West London Housing Strategy and the work of the West London Private Sector Housing group set up to implement the strategy will support these activities and implementation of the Housing Bill. Both the Private Sector Renewal Strategy and this Grant Policy will be reviewed following the launch of the Community Plan to ensure that the range of housing renewal tools at our disposal are effectively targeted at the emerging priorities.

Although the Council has been specific about the circumstances in which an application for assistance will be given priority, it will consider each application on its individual merits, even if it appears to fall outside the Council's system of priority. However, it is envisaged that such applications will normally be approved only where an applicant can demonstrate exceptional hardship or provide a strong justification on the basis of need. The Chief Environmental Health Officer will be responsible for the final decision in consultation, where necessary with the Housing Portfolio Holder.

Any applicant who feels that their application has been unfairly refused can make a complaint under the Council's complaints procedure and ask for their case to be reviewed. Complaint forms and guidance are available on request or from our reception areas.

## Chapter 5

### Housing Renewal Grants

#### Disabled Facilities Grant

All applicants for a Disabled Facilities Grant will in the first instance be offered assistance from a Home Improvement Agency (Staying Put) Case Worker. The Case Worker will give all necessary advice and assistance in matters related to eligibility and the grant process. The applicant is not obliged to use the services of the Home Improvement Agency and may make their own arrangements as they see fit.

The Council will entertain an owner's application for a Disabled Facilities Grant where:

- they are satisfied that the owner can show the necessary proprietary interest in the dwelling.
- that the relevant works are necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of a disabled person.
- that it is reasonable and practicable to carry out the relevant works having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling.

The amount of grant payable will be in accordance with the prescribed test of the applicant's financial resources and subject to the maximum grant which may be set by directions given by the Secretary of State at the date of approval of the grant.

Where the eligible cost of works and professional fees incurred are in excess of the maximum grant able to be paid (currently £25,000), the applicant for grant will in the first instance be directed to the Council's HouseProud Equity Release Scheme. Where the applicant is eligible for a loan under the scheme to finance the cost of works in excess of the eligible amount they will not be eligible for a discretionary grant in this respect. If they do not wish to take up a loan under this scheme they must find an alternative means of financing the works in excess of the eligible amount. Full details of the scheme may be obtained from the Home Improvement Agency Staying Put Officer.

Where an applicant has been assessed under the Houseproud Scheme and has received confirmation that they are not eligible for a loan under the scheme a Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant will be provided, subject to available finance, for the full value of the works. This discretionary element of the grant will be repayable on disposal or the sale of the property.

In all cases the fee element only will be eligible for Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant without being subject to the Houseproud Scheme loan eligibility test but will be subject to application of the standard means test and available finance, to ensure that the full £25,000 limit is available to undertake adaptation work.

The purposes for which an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant must be approved are:

- facilitating access by the disabled occupant to and from the dwelling.
- making the dwelling safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with him.



- facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room used or usable for sleeping.
- facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, access to a WC, bath or shower, wash hand basin or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such amenities.
- facilitating access by the disabled person to a room used as the principal family room.
- facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled occupant.
- improving any heating system to meet the needs of the disabled occupant or providing additional heating or any such system which may be required for the disabled occupants needs.
- facilitating the use of a source of power, lighting or heating by altering the position of one or more means of access or control to that source or by providing additional means of control.
- facilitating access and movement by the disabled person to all internal aspects of the dwelling to enable them to care for a person who is normally resident in the dwelling and is in need of such care.

Where a number of different suitable options have been identified to meet the needs of the disabled person, the Council will provide a Disabled Facilities Grant in relation to the most cost effective option. Where the most appropriate or cost effective course of action is to move to a more suitable property the cost of moving will be considered as eligible work subject to the same means test criteria.

Two estimates are required to be submitted from different builders with the application for grant. Estimates must be signed and dated by the builder and clearly showing the name, address and telephone number of the contractor. Each item of work should be separately priced.

The disabled person and any spouse or partner will be subject to a test of his financial resources in accordance with prescribed legislation.

The applicant must give prior written agreement to the works proposed.

Grant aid may be considered in respect of all or any ancillary/professional fees that may be incurred in making an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant in accordance with the Council's scale of professional fees and charges.

The applicant will be required to engage the services of an Occupational Therapist and a private surveyor, who will assist in preparing the scheme of works and related specifications, detailed drawings and party wall agreements.

Any detailed drawing related to a structural alteration or extension of the dwelling must be submitted and approved under the Building Regulations, Town Planning requirements and party wall agreement prior to a Notice of Grant Approval being given.

Grant aid may be considered in respect of all or any ancillary/professional fees, which may be incurred in making an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant in accordance with the Council's scale of professional fees and charges.

Mandatory Disabled facilities Grants will be registered on the Council's Local Land Charges Register. Responsibility for repayment of grant monies following a breach of grant conditions, rests with the owner of the dwelling for the time being.

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants continue to be given in accordance with directions given by the Secretary of State.

### **Home Safety Grant**

This grant is available where the applicant, or the applicant's spouse or partner, is aged 60 years or over who are on a means tested benefit, or people identified at risk or clients referred from the councils Domestic Violence Unit or Crime Prevention Panel or through the Sanctuary Project regardless of age.

The total value of grant assistance that may be given in respect of any one application is £1,000.

These works will normally be managed through the Home Improvement Agency and undertaken by the Handyperson Scheme.

No further application for a Home Safety Grant will be eligible during a period of 5 years from the certified date of completion of the relevant works except where the client is referred from the Councils Domestic Violence Unit or Crime Prevention Panel.

The applicant, or spouse or partner of the applicant must be able to prove current receipt of one or more of the following benefits:

- Pensioner Credit
  - Child Credit
  - Housing Benefit
  - Council Tax Benefit
  - Disability Living Allowance
  - Attendance Allowance.
- Home Safety Grants are not given where a grant application for Home Repairs Grant or Housing Renewal Assistance has been made or is pending.
  - The applicant for grant must certify that he or she has the power or duty to carry out the necessary works.
  - The applicant must have been resident for a minimum period of residence of one year unless the referral is via the Councils Domestic Violence Unit or Crime Prevention Panel where there is no minimum residence.
  - there is no repayment of grant required on sale of the dwelling.
  - there is no certificate of future occupancy required in respect of owners or tenants.

- a minimum of one estimate is to be submitted from the appointed building contractor. This estimate must clearly show the contractor's name, address and telephone number. The estimate must be signed and dated by the contractor or someone authorised to do so on behalf of the Company. If the estimate submitted is considered unreasonable on any grounds by the Council a second estimate will be required.
- final payment of grant monies will be made following an inspection of the dwelling and on receipt of the applicant's declaration of satisfactory completion of the relevant works. This declaration will also show the names of the contractor who carried out the work, date of estimate and the actual cost incurred.
- the applicant for grant must give prior written agreement to the works proposed.
- payment of grant will be subject to receipt of a satisfactory contractor's invoice or demand for payment.
- payment of grant monies will be made to the applicant or following receipt of a signed mandate for payment, to any person the applicant nominates.
- Where the works are undertaken by the Handyperson scheme payment will be made direct into the relevant Council centre for the scheme.

### **Eligible Works**

The grant is available for the following works:

- Minor disrepair, which is materially affecting the fabric of the building or safety of the occupant.
- Works of an emergency nature, or, requiring immediate attention, or, that are in the opinion of the grant officer, affecting the health and safety of the occupants i.e. smoke alarms for hearing and the deaf, safety catches etc.
- Works to implement recommendations made on referral from the councils Domestic Violence Unit or Crime Prevention Panel

Works specified in the referral from the councils Domestic Violence Unit or Crime Prevention Panel.

### **Home Repair Grants**

Home Repair Grants are available to carry out works of minor repair and improvement to a dwelling for people over 60 subject to a test of financial resources, or under 60 and in receipt of a means tested benefit.

The total value of grant assistance that may be given in respect of any one application is £5,000.

Or

In respect of the same dwelling, during any period of 5 years, the total value of grant assistance that may be given is £10,000 and the minimum period between approvals is 1 year.

Home Repair Assistance Grants are not given in respect of works where a Housing Renewal Grant has been approved or where an application for such a grant has been made or is pending.

No grant can be paid in respect of work started or completed before the Council has given a Notice of Grant Approval. It is a condition of Home Repair Grant Assistance that:

- the applicant has occupied the dwelling for a period of 3 years immediately preceding the date of the application, except where, in the opinion of the grant officer, the required works are to provide means of escape or other fire precautions or are in respect of emergency works affecting the health and safety of the occupant.
- the applicant has the power or duty to carry out the works.
- the applicant satisfies the Council that they have an owner's interest in the dwelling or have an approved tenancy of the dwelling.
- that the applicant for grant is aged 60 or over or under 60 in receipt of a means tested benefit at the date of the application.
- it is a condition of a home repair grant that if an owner of the premises to which the application relates makes a relevant disposal (other than an exempt disposal), before the certified date of completion of the works or within 5 years following the certified date of completion of the works, he shall repay the amount of grant monies on demand by the Council. Following a breach of this condition, responsibility for repayment of grant monies rests with the owner for the time being of the dwelling.
- the applicant and any spouse or partner will be subject to a test of their financial resources in accordance with the Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy, which may be relevant at the date of the application, unless the Council is satisfied that the applicant or their partner is in receipt of Pensioner Credit, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit or Income Based Job Seekers Allowance.
- A minimum of two estimates are required to be submitted from different builders with the application for grant.
- Estimates must be signed and dated by the builder and be submitted clearly showing the name, address and telephone number of the contractors concerned.
- The applicant must give prior written agreement to the works proposed.

### **Eligible Works:**

Home Repair Assistance is available for works required to remedy the more minor items of disrepair and to protect the occupants from exposure to risk or danger as a result of insecure or defective elements of the building, or drainage system and/or remedy a defect materially affecting the long term integrity of the building and/or works to bring the property up to the decent homes standard.

Such works may include:

- Provision of fixed central heating to the main living areas, namely the main living room, main bedroom, kitchen and bathroom.
- repair or replacement of windows/external or internal doors, make good flooring, architrave and skirting and works to an internal or external staircase.
- repairs to roof tiles or slates and renewal of built up felt flat roof coverings.
- repairs to plumbing, drainage, manholes and rainwater goods.
- electrical repairs in respect of power and lighting circuits, fittings, earthing and consumer units.
- repairs to amenities, bath, wash hand basin, internal WC and sink unit.
- renewal of defective plastering to walls and ceilings.
- make good entrance paths, paved areas and steps to the front or rear entrance of a dwelling.
- Re-pointing of brickwork, making good external rendering and repairs to chimney stacks.
- energy efficiency measures related to gas fired boilers, radiators and controls.
- insulation works to the roof void, cold water storage tanks and exposed pipework.
- draught-proofing works to doors and windows.
- Redecoration of disturbed areas only.
- incurred professional or ancillary fees incurred to enable an elderly or disabled person's needs to be met under the HouseProud Scheme.

Where in the opinion of the Grant Officer, the extent of the works required are such that Home Repair Assistance is not appropriate, the client will be advised that Housing Renewal Assistance should be considered as a more satisfactory solution.

Where the owner of a dwelling engages the services of the Council's Staying Put Home Improvement Agency or incurs other properly incurred fees, these may be considered for grant aid. Home improvement agency services are defined as advice, guidance, contractual arrangements and any management of the works.

Where the owner engages the services of the Council's Handyperson Scheme, material costs only may be considered for grant aid.

Home Repair Assistance Grants will be registered on the Council's Local Land Charges Register. Responsibility for repayment of grant monies following a breach of grant conditions, rests with the owner of the dwelling for the time being.

The extent of the works must be agreed in writing with the owner of the dwelling prior to the Notice of Grant Approval being given. In addition, should any unforeseen or additional costs arise during the course of the works, these works must also be agreed in writing before they are carried out. The owner must give prior written agreement that he is able to fund any additional cost in excess of the maximum eligible expense limit.

### **Housing Renewal Assistance Grant**

This form of assistance is a grant, which is repayable on disposal of the dwelling, available to enable a dwelling to be made fit for human habitation or to carry out other substantial or structural works or bring the property up to the decent homes standard.

The total value of grant that may be paid in respect of any one application is £25,000. On completion, the dwelling should, in the opinion of the Improvement Grant Officer, be in a reasonable state of repair and meet the decent homes standard. In addition the property must be subject to insulation works to the roof void and have window and door draught proofing. The property must also be provided with a fixed central heating to the main living areas, namely the main living room, main bedroom, kitchen and bathroom.

The Council will not entertain an application for Housing Renewal Assistance, unless they are satisfied that the applicant has an owner's interest in the dwelling and in every part of the land on which the relevant works are to be carried out, and, with the exception of a landlords application, can show a minimum of 3 years residence prior to the date of application for a grant, or,

Where the applicant is a qualifying tenant of the dwelling, It is a requirement that:

- he has a full repairing obligation and is aged 18 years or over
- is in receipt of a means tested benefit, i.e. Income based job seekers allowance, income support, working tax credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit, pensioner credit, child credit.
- the dwelling is unfit or in substantial disrepair
- they have occupied the property for at least three years
- have the power or duty to carry out the works

Portfolio landlords, i.e. a landlord who owns more than two tenanted dwellings, with regulated, protected or statutory tenants, will be subject to a maximum grant of £10,000 or a 50% reduction in the amount of grant able to be paid, whichever is the less.

A landlord other than a portfolio landlord and any spouse or partner, will be subject to a test of their financial resources in accordance with [the Council's] grant policy, which may be relevant at the date of the application. Where the dwelling is tenanted under an assured or assured shorthold tenancy agreement, there will be a nil entitlement to grant.

The applicant for grant must provide a certificate of future occupation in respect of the dwelling. This certificate must be either a certificate of owner occupation or a certificate of letting. It is a condition of a Housing Renewal Grant that if the owner of the premises to which the application relates makes a relevant disposal at any time (other than an exempt disposal) they shall repay the whole amount of grant monies that has been paid. Following a breach of this condition, responsibility for repayment of grant monies rests with the owner of the dwelling for the time being.

Where Housing Renewal Assistance has been given it is a condition that if the dwelling is transferred under the provisions of a will or on intestacy of the applicant, any onward sale of the dwelling by the beneficiaries will require repayment of the amount of grant previously paid.

Where the applicant provides a certificate of owner occupation, the applicant and any spouse or partner will be subject to a test of their financial resources in accordance with the Council's grant policy which may be relevant at the date of the application, unless the Council is satisfied that the applicant or their partner is in receipt of Income Support or Income Related Job Seekers Allowance.

Where the applicant occupies a leasehold property with a common parts maintenance responsibility under the letting of this lease, they will be subject to a maximum grant of £10,000 or 50% of the attributable costs eligible for grant aid, whichever is the less. The applicant and any spouse or partner will be subject to a test of their financial resources in accordance with [the council's] grant policy which may be relevant at the date of application

Two estimates are required to be submitted from different contractors with the application for grant. Estimates must be signed and dated by the contractor and must be submitted clearly showing the name, address and telephone number of the contractor.

Payment of grant monies will be made directly to the applicant for grant, unless a signed mandate is received by the Council from the applicant, giving the name of any person or Company to whom grant payments should be made.

Final payment of grant monies will be made on receipt of the applicant's declaration of satisfactory completion of the relevant works. This declaration will also show the names of the contractors who carried out the work, date of estimates and actual costs incurred.

Payment of grant monies for interim payments will be considered following a request by the applicant for grant, together with the builder's properly prepared invoice or demand for payment up to a maximum of 90% of the total cost.

Where the owner of the dwelling engages the services of the Council's Home Improvement Agency (Staying Put), any properly incurred fees may be considered for grant assistance. For this purpose, Home Improvement Agency services are defined as advice, guidance, contractual agreements and any management of the works.

Fees accepted for Housing Renewal Assistance will be in accordance with the Council's scale of fees accepted for ancillary services and site supervision duties, if applicable.

If, in the opinion of the Council, the relevant works proposed by the applicant for grant are more, or less, extensive than is necessary to render the dwelling fit for human habitation, or to bring it to a reasonable standard of repair to the decent homes standard, the Council may - with the consent of the applicant - treat the application as varied, so that the relevant works are limited to or, as the case may be, include such works as are deemed by the Authority necessary for that purpose.

Prior to any Notice of Housing Renewal Assistance, the applicant for grant must give his written agreement to the works proposed. Any additional or unforeseen works must be agreed prior to the works being undertaken. This agreement to additional unforeseen works must be given in writing prior to any revised Notice of Grant Approval.

Where the maximum eligible expense is exceeded the applicant for grant must provide prior written confirmation that he is able to fund his proportion of the excess cost.

### **Eligible Works:**

Housing Renewal Assistance Grant is available for works required to enable an unfit dwelling to be made fit for human habitation or to allow the applicant for grant to remedy serious disrepair and/or to protect the occupants from exposure to risk or danger as a result of insecure or defective elements of the building, or drainage system and/or remedy a defect materially affecting the long term integrity of the building and/or works to bring the property up to the decent homes standard.

The external decorative condition of a dwelling house will be excluded for grant aid unless in the opinion of the Grant Officer, exterior painting is necessary to ensure the integrity of the building.

Substantial or structural work eligible for Housing Renewal Assistance may include:

- renew any external elements of the fabric of a dwelling which are liable to failure through dislodgement or spalling or are otherwise prejudicial to safety or the integrity of the building.
- renewal of chimney pots and provision of lead flashing details.
- repointing of brickwork and renewal of defective external rendering.
- Replacement of defective roof tiles.
- replacement of defective barge boards, fascia and soffit boards and rainwater goods.
- Replacement of defective windows and external doors.
- injection of horizontal and vertical damp proof courses and related internal replastering.
- renewal of defective joinery in respect of internal doors, flooring, staircase, skirting boards, architrave and internal window boards.
- renewal of defective kitchen fittings up to a maximum of two 1000mm base units and associated worktop and two 1000mm wall units.
- new electrical power and lighting circuits, together with the replacement of consumer units and cooker control panels and provision of earthing.
- renewal of gas pipes, gas fired boilers, space heating appliances and gas flues where they are in such disrepair as to seriously increase the risk of fire or the emission of toxic fumes.
- renewal of incoming mains water supply and hot and cold water supply to the bath, basin and WC, where the existing pipes are in such disrepair as to cause leakage, blockage or cause problems of dampness which may present a risk to the health of the occupants.
- erection of satisfactory scaffolding to comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive and provision of skip hire to ensure that all rubble and waste are properly stored during the execution of the works.



- eligible professional fees for ancillary works related to preparation of the specification and obtaining Building Regulations approval and any necessary consents in respect of Town Planning and Party Wall Agreements.
- any works which in the opinion of the Grant Officer are required to provide an effective underground drainage system together with the provision of manholes, gullies and soil and vent pipes.
- effective drainage of surface water to a drain or gully.
- any works related to remedy ponding of water on yards or pathways to prevent a risk to the safety of vulnerable occupants.
- The provision of basic amenities for the first time and any associated services. A basic amenity is a bath or shower, wash hand basin, sink to the kitchen, WC and hot and cold water supplies and services.
- Provision of fixed central heating to the main living areas, namely the main living room, main bedroom, kitchen and bathroom.
- Repairs to or renewal of roof tiles or slates and renewal of built up felt flat roof coverings.
- repairs to or renewal of plumbing, drainage, manholes and rainwater goods.
- electrical repairs or renewal in respect of power and lighting circuits, fittings, earthing and consumer units.
- repairs to amenities, bath, wash hand basin, internal WC and sink unit.
- renewal of defective plastering to walls and ceilings.
- make good entrance paths, paved areas and steps to the front or rear entrance of a dwelling.
- insulation works to the roof void, cold water storage tanks and exposed pipework.
- draught-proofing works to doors and windows.
- Internal Redecoration of disturbed areas only.
- incurred professional or ancillary fees incurred to enable an elderly or disabled person's needs to be met under the HouseProud Scheme.

### **Empty Properties Grant**

This grant is available to the owner of an empty property, as defined in the Empty Property Strategy, to fund essential works to bring an empty property back into use. Grant assistance will be conditional on the works proposed meeting with the Empty Property Strategy of this Council.

Where no nomination rights are given to the Council the applicant will not be eligible for assistance. The applicant and any spouse or partner will be subject to a test of their financial resources in accordance with the Council's grant policy which may be relevant at the date of the application, unless the Council is satisfied that the applicant or their partner is in receipt of Income Support or Income Related Job Seekers Allowance.

To qualify the property must have been vacant for a minimum of 3 years

Where nomination rights are given to the council the total value of grant assistance that may be given in respect of any one application is on a sliding scale and repayment of the grant is on a sliding scale dependent on the period of nomination. In all cases the property must be brought to lettable standard and meet the decent homes standard as described in the Housing Strategy.

The scales and eligibility are detailed below.

<b>Eligible Grant (£)</b>	<b>Nominati on Rights (yrs)</b>	<b>Payback condition and availability of grant</b>	<b>Purpose and Eligibility</b>
Up to £5,000	3	Grant only available providing 3 yr nomination rights given. No requirement for grant to be paid back.	Small works grant to assist with cost of minor refurbishment required to bring property to lettable standard – e.g. replacement heating system, installation of new kitchen, rewiring or redecoration of property where this is proving the major hurdle in bringing the property back into use.
£5,000 to £10,000	5	Grant only available providing 5 year nomination rights given. No requirement for grant to be paid back	Only available if property been empty for longer than 6 months & to assist with refurbishment costs – not designed to carry out complete refurbishment – anticipate contribution from owner to cover total cost of works
£10,000 to £15,000	8	Grant only available providing 8 years nomination rights given. No requirement for grant to be paid back	As above but designed to provide assistance where more refurbishment is required.
£15,000 to £30,000	15	Grant only available where 15 years nomination rights given. No condition of payback attributable.  Where owner only willing to let property for 8 years then 50% payback on disposal of property.,  Where owner only willing to let property for 10 years then 25% payback on disposal of property.	This grant may cover complete refurbishment of empty properties where owners unable to access alternative funding or partial costs in cases where disrepair is so severe that additional funding required. Grant aimed at longer-term empty properties.

£30,000 to £50,000	20	Where 20 yr nomination rights given then no condition of payback attributable. Where owner only willing to let property for 10 years then 50% payback on disposal of property, 15 years lease 25% payback	This grant may cover complete refurbishment of empty properties where owners unable to access alternative funding or partial costs in cases where disrepair is so severe that additional funding required. Grant aimed at long-term empty properties.
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- Grants will be available only where properties are referred via Councils Empty Homes Officer.
- In all cases the provision of Central Heating essential to bringing properties to the decent homes standard is mandatory.
- In all cases the property must be provided with insulation to the roof space and have draught proofing to doors and windows as appropriate.
- Grant will not be considered for the enlargement or extension of a property other than to provide additional units of accommodation in relation to nomination rights.

On completion of relevant grants nomination rights must be provided via Housing Association Leasing Scheme, Finders Fee Scheme or any other Council initiative which is providing accommodation for households in need of accommodation – to include homeless households and affordable rented accommodation for key workers from the certified date of completion of the relevant works. A Local Land Charge entry will be recorded for this purpose.

The landlord is under an obligation to notify the Council of any intended sale of the dwelling during the agreed nomination period. In any circumstance where the disposal of a property negates the nomination rights the grant will be repayable in full.

### **Eligible Works:**

The standard of works must ensure that the dwelling is of a lettable standard in accordance with this Council's requirements. A schedule of works will be prepared by the Grant Officer and made available to a landlord applying for grant assistance.

- electrical rewiring for power and lighting circuits, electrical fittings, consumer unit and satisfactory earthing.
- satisfactory gas supply from the utility boards main.
- all repair and renewal of internal carpentry and joinery which may be considered necessary.
- repair or renewal of all internal wall plaster and ceilings which may be required.
- all necessary installation of a horizontal damp course, together with any timber infestation treatment which may be required following submission of a specialist DPC and timber treatment Company.

- a satisfactory hot and cold water supply to bathroom and kitchen and any WC compartment.
- the dwelling will be provided with a satisfactory bath/shower, wash hand basin, sink unit and WC.
- satisfactory provision for adequate foul and surface water drainage.
- all necessary repair or renewal of roof slates, tiles, chimney stack, flashing details, valleys, ridges, soffit boards, fascia boards and barge boards.
- External decoration where this is required to make the property lettable or is required to protect the integrity of the dwelling
- provision of satisfactory space heating in accordance with the Council's lettable standard.
- Internal decorations to achieve a lettable standard.
- satisfactory natural and artificial ventilation to habitable rooms, bathroom and kitchen.
- where there is more than one household in the property at completion of the works, provision of all necessary smoke and fire detection and alarms linked to the mains wiring circuit.
- the provision of Central Heating essential to bringing properties to lettable condition
- Insulation to the roof space and draught proofing to doors and windows as appropriate.

### **Houses in Multiple Occupation Grant**

This Council operates a Registration Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's). HMO grants are available to help landlords provide basic amenities, fire proofing works and undertake works affecting the health and safety of occupants only to meet the HMO Registration Scheme standards.

In order to be considered for grant assistance in respect of an HMO, the landlord must make a full application prior to enforcement action of any nature being taken by the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Team and must be Registered or Provisionally Registered under the MHO registration Scheme.

Where no nomination rights are given to the Council the total value of grant assistance that may be given in respect of any one application is £10,000 or 50% of eligible expense whichever is the less, repayable on disposal of the property. The applicant and any spouse or partner will be subject to a test of their financial resources in accordance with the Council's grant policy which may be relevant at the date of the application.

Where nomination rights are given to the council the total value of grant assistance that may be given in respect of any one application is on a sliding scale and repayment of the grant is on a sliding scale dependent on the period of nomination. In all cases the property must be brought to lettable standard and meet the decent homes standard. The scales and eligible works are detailed below. In any case where the disposal of a property negates the nomination rights the grant will be repayable in full.

<b>Eligible Grant (£)</b>	<b>Nominati on Rights (yrs)</b>	<b>Payback condition and availability of grant</b>
Up to £5,000	3	Grant only available providing 3 yr nomination rights given. No requirement for grant to be paid back.
£5,000 to £10,000	5	Grant only available providing 5 year nomination rights given. No requirement for grant to be paid back
£10,000 to £15,000	8	Grant only available providing 8 years nomination rights given. No requirement for grant to be paid back
£15,000 to £30,000	15	Grant only available where 15 years nomination rights given. No condition of payback attributable.  Where owner only willing to let property for 5 years then 50% payback on disposal of property.,  Where owner only willing to let property for 10 years then 25% payback on disposal of property.
£30,000 to £50,000	20	Where 20 yr nomination rights given then no condition of payback attributable. Where owner only willing to let property for 10 years then 50% payback on disposal of property, 15 years lease 25% payback

- In all cases the provision of Central Heating essential to bringing properties to lettable condition is mandatory.
- In all cases the property must be provided with insulation to the roof space and have draught proofing to doors and windows as appropriate.
- Grant will not be considered for the enlargement or extension of a property.

On completion of relevant grants nomination rights must be provided via Housing Association Leasing Scheme, Finders Fee Scheme or any other Council initiative which is providing accommodation for households in need of accommodation – to include homeless households and affordable rented accommodation for key workers from the certified date of completion of the relevant works. A Local Land Charge entry will be recorded for this purpose.

The landlord is under an obligation to notify the Council of any intended sale of the dwelling during the agreed nomination period. In any case where disposal negates the nomination rights the grant will be repayable in full.

### **Eligible Works**

Following an inspection by a Housing Enforcement Officer, the landlord will receive a copy of the schedule of works. On receipt of this schedule, the landlord may make application for grant assistance. In order to be considered for grant assistance in respect of an HMO, the landlord must apply within a period of 3 months from date of receipt of the Officer's notification. Grant aid will be limited to fire proofing works, the provision or repair of basic amenities and works affecting the health and safety of occupants as dictated by the HMO Registration scheme..

- no grant can be paid in respect of work started or completed, before an application for grant has been received by the Council.
- the applicant will provide a certificate of future occupation related to an HMO application. This certificate states that the applicant has the necessary proprietary interest in the dwelling and that throughout the grant conditions period, the dwelling will be occupied or available for occupation by persons who are not connected with the owner of the dwelling for the time being. Any breach of this condition during the period when conditions of grant continue to apply, will result in the grant being repayable on demand to this Council.

Grant assistance is available for the following works, or as may be specified by the Council as part of the HMO Registration Scheme:

- installation of fire detection systems.
- formation of protected escape routes.
- provision of half hour fire protection between all units of accommodation with upgrading to any walls, ceilings or stair cases in common areas, as may be necessary.
- Provision of basic amenities and associated services.
- Repair works affecting the health and safety of the occupants.

A minimum of 2 builder's estimates are required to be submitted with the application for grant. Estimates must be signed and dated by the builder and be submitted clearly showing the name, address and telephone number of the contractor.

## Chapter 6

### Application Process

#### Application process

The following explains, stage by stage, how someone can apply for and receive financial assistance from the Council subject to eligibility. It should be noted that all renewal grants, except Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants, are discretionary and no person has a right to such a grant. Discretionary grants will only be approved within the resources available to the authority within any one financial year. Where an application can not be approved these will be held on a waiting list and dealt with in priority and then date order. The applicant will be informed in writing and kept informed of progress on a regular basis. In all cases the opinion of the grant officer will be final in relation to eligible works.

For information and advice please contact the Improvement Grant Service based at:

8424 1077/1319  
020-8427 0389 – fax  
improvement.grants@harrow.gov.uk – email

#### Initial Enquiry

- i. Following an initial enquiry received in person, by telephone, letter or email, the Council will send to you a preliminary financial assessment form and the relevant grant application form. Following the return of this completed preliminary financial assessment form, you will then be advised as to your indicative or likely contribution based on your present financial circumstances. It will only be after a valid application has been received that you will know your full contribution, having regard to any ineligible costs or works that may be submitted.

All initial enquiries for discretionary renewal grants will be dealt with in date order of receipt. In urgent cases, the Council will do everything possible to arrange a survey as soon as possible in cases where the applicant or members of his family are at risk due to structural or other serious defects in the dwelling.

For Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants initial enquiries will in the first instance be directed to the Occupational Therapy Team for assessment. The Occupational Therapy Team will refer the applicant to the Improvement Grant Service when the assessment of necessary and appropriate works has been completed. Referrals received through this route will be dealt with in priority order and then date of receipt. Where the Occupational therapy Service consider the case to be urgent, the Council will do everything possible to arrange a survey as soon as possible and these cases will be prioritised.

- ii. Your name and address are then entered on the waiting list and following an inspection of the dwelling, your enquiry will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Priority Category Points system first and then date order.

## Priority Category Points System

The priority Points scheme is applied to all applicants regardless of the type of grant being applied for, except in the case of empty property grants and landlords grants to assess the priority for repair, improvements and adaptation of dwellings. In all cases the system will be used to deal with applicants in priority and then date order.

<u>Disrepair</u>	<u>Points</u>
Seriously Unfit (urgent Health & safety implications, or Prioritised by Occupational therapy Service)	20
Other Unfit	15
Substantial Disrepair	10
Minor Repairs	2
<u>Household with any person Elderly</u>	
60 - 70 years of age	5
71 & over	10
<u>Children</u>	
18 - 16 years of age	0
15 - 10 years of age	1
9 - 5 years of age	2
4 years or under	3
<u>Disabled Person</u>	5
<u>Applicant's Financial Contribution</u>	
Towards cost of works based on statutory test of resources	
Nil	10
1 - 1000	8
1001 - 2000	6
2001 - 3000	4
3001 - 4000	2
4001 - 5000	1
5001 and above	Nil



## **Application Pack**

- iii. When your enquiry is dealt with, the Council will send to you an information pack containing a schedule of works and any necessary certificates for you to complete and return.
- iv. To make a valid application, the applicant must obtain at least two estimates from contractors based on the schedule of works prepared by the Council and complete the application form, certificate of owner occupation or letting certificate, and any landlords certificate or other applicable agreement or undertaking. In making an application for assistance, the applicant agrees to the terms and conditions under which that assistance is provided.

## **Approval of Application**

- v. When approving an application for assistance, the Council must be satisfied that the application is complete and accurately reflects the circumstances of the applicant. The Council also has to be satisfied that the costs of the proposed works are reasonable. A Notice of Grant Approval will be sent to the applicant following an assessment of the builder's costs submitted. With this Notice of Approval, the applicant will receive a form setting out the conditions that apply to the Notice of Grant Approval.

In addition, a certificate of declaration will be included, which requires the applicant at completion of the works to certify that they have been satisfactorily carried out and giving details of the names of the contractors who carried out these works, together with the actual cost claimed by each contractor. This will be required in addition to the inspection by the Council to assess that the works have been satisfactorily carried out.

## **Starting the Works**

- vi. Once the applicant has received a Notice of Approval, he may then make arrangements for the works to start. This Council is not responsible for the builder's conduct, site attendance or standard of workmanship.

## **Completion and Payment**

- vii. On satisfactory completion of the works, the applicant must notify the Council by signing and returning the owner's declaration of completion. The builder's invoices should also be submitted to the Council at this stage. Payment of grant monies cannot be released unless a satisfactory invoice or demand for payment from the contractor is received.
- viii. A Council Officer will inspect the works to satisfy audit requirements. The Council Officer will identify any outstanding items of work or snagging problems and the contractor will be expected to satisfactorily complete these outstanding items before final payment of grant monies is released. If the Council officer does not consider the works to be to a satisfactory standard payment will not be made until they have been rectified.
- ix. Payment of grant monies will normally be made directly to the applicant, unless the Council receives a written mandate from the applicant to make payment to a third party.

- x. Payment will normally only be made on satisfactory completion of the works. However, for large works or where several contractors are employed, stage payments can be made for up to a total of 90% of the total value of Council funded assistance. Assistance will only be paid in respect of works that have been carried out, checked for payment purposes by the Council and following receipt of a valid invoice. For payment to be made, the applicant must make a written request for the Council to release the payment. The Council reserves the right to make stage or final payment of grant monies directly to the contractor.

### **Repayment of Grant Monies**

Repayment of assistance will be required in accordance with the terms and conditions under which it was granted.

### **Contractual Arrangements**

The contract of employment is made between the applicant (or their representative) and the contractor. In approving an application for assistance, the Council makes a commitment to pay a specified sum, provided the applicant honours the specific terms and conditions of assistance, and is subject to satisfactory completion of the approved works.

An applicant who does not comply with the terms and conditions of assistance may be fully responsible for meeting any costs incurred under the contract.

The contractor is responsible for ensuring that the works progress to a satisfactory conclusion. Prior to commencement of works, it is expected that the applicant (or their representative) and contractor will satisfy themselves as to the following:

- the exact scope of the work (what is included and what is not).
- the time it is likely to take to complete the work.
- arrangement for gaining access to the property, including hours of work.
- making good and site clearance on completion of the works.

### **Contractual Disputes**

The applicant and the contractor will be expected to resolve any disputes that arise during the course of the works. The Council will make available to either party, copies of all or any documents related to any dispute that may arise but will not take part in resolution directly.

### **Reasonable Costs**

The applicant (and their representative) must satisfy themselves that the contract price represents value for money. However, in safeguarding the use of public money, the Council will only approve financial assistance based on a reasonable cost of materials, labour and a profit margin of not more than 15%. The cost of works above this threshold (as determined by the Council), will not be included under the assistance given.

## **Unforeseen Works and Savings**

Where the contractor identifies additional works during the course of the contract, these works will only be approved by the Council if they are given prior notification and are satisfied that these works could not have been reasonably foreseen prior to commencement of the works. Where a variation to the originally approved scheme is necessary, the Council requires the applicant's written consent to any such variation of the works.

Where an application has been approved or revised following a test of the applicant's financial resources, the applicant will receive with any notice of approval or revised notice of approval, a summary of the total cost, eligible cost, eligible fees and amount of grant calculated.

## **Change in an Applicant's Circumstances**

Applicants or their representatives are required to inform the Council if, following their application, but prior to approval of assistance, there is a relevant change in their financial circumstances.

Where, due to deterioration in health, the applicant has to move into residential or nursing care, due to medical advice/necessity but not by choice, the Council will provide assistance for any works already completed. The same arrangement exists if the applicant dies during the period between approval and payment of grant monies.

The requirement for repayment of grant monies will be waived when an applicant makes a disposal of the dwelling and the Council is satisfied that the disposal is a result of going to live in a hospice, sheltered housing, nursing or residential care due to medical advice/necessity but not by choice.

Applicants are therefore encouraged to let the Council know in advance if they believe their circumstances may change, so that advice on available options can be given.

## **Ineligible Categories or Items**

In all circumstances the following are considered to be ineligible for assistance and would be funded from the resources of the applicant or owner of the dwelling:

- repairs or disabled adaptations to a Council or registered social landlord owned house or flat.
- commercial premises other than for conversion to residential accommodation under the Empty Property Strategy.
- internal decorations to walls, ceiling and joinery to areas other than new or disturbed areas.
- provision of new or replacement fixtures and fittings, furnishings or appliances other than where specifically stated including white goods.
- renewal of otherwise satisfactory amenities such as the bath, wash hand basin, WC, sink and taps.

- pruning or felling of trees or shrubs in garden areas other than in relation to an Empty Property Grant.
- provision of additional rooms for living or sleeping accommodation other than on the recommendation of an Occupational Therapist in respect of a disabled person's needs or to provide additional accommodation in respect of an Empty Property Grant.
- construction of a garage or hard standing for a vehicle other than on the recommendation of an Occupational Therapist in respect of a disabled person's needs.
- removal of single glazed windows and provision of double glazed units where the existing windows are in a reasonable state of repair.
- removal and replacement of existing kitchen fittings, where the existing units are in a reasonable state of repair.
- splashback tiled areas above kitchen units and around the bath and wash hand basin will be limited to a maximum of 2 courses of 150 mm tiles. Floor to ceiling tiling will not be eligible for assistance unless the area is required by a recommendation from an Occupational Therapist on behalf of a disabled person's needs.
- replacement or provision of electrical fittings above a basic standard of single drop pendants for lighting purposes, 3 double socket outlets to each room and 4 double socket outlets above worktop levels.
- provision of radio or television socket outlets.

This list of ineligible works or items is provided as an example of the type of work which would not receive assistance. There may be other items that will be given or refused at the discretion of the Council.

### **Standard of Service**

The London Borough of Harrow places a high priority in the well being of its residents and the maintenance of the built environment. This Council will always try to help owners and tenants in the private sector to meet their essential housing repair costs, by providing assistance in appropriate cases. We may not be able to give you help for everything you want to do, but we will always do our utmost within the bounds of financial and policy constraints. All service users can expect a high quality, responsive service from the Private Sector Housing Renewal Team, which operates to the following standards:

- from receipt of an initial enquiry, the preliminary means testing form will be sent to you within 2 weeks.
- from receipt of your preliminary financial details, your likely contribution calculation will be completed and sent to you within 3 weeks. Where an applicant is on a qualifying means tested benefit your contribution will be completed and sent to you as soon as practicable after confirmation of receipt of the benefit by financial services.
- all telephone calls received will be answered within 15 seconds between the hours of 9am and 5pm.

- any request for written information will be dealt with within 5 working days or where the request entails extensive research and retrieval of documentation, within 2 weeks.
- where the health and safety of the owner or occupants of the dwelling are at risk, an inspection of the dwelling will be carried out by an Officer of the Council within a maximum of 3 weeks where resources are available to do so.
- more general enquiries will be dealt with as soon as possible and owners will be advised by letter of the date and time an inspection is to be carried out. Appointments will be kept punctually and always within 30 minutes of the pre-arranged time. The applicant will also be given the name of the Officer who is to carry out this inspection.
- following an inspection of the dwelling, a schedule of eligible work will be prepared and sent to the owner within 6 weeks. The owner will also receive all necessary forms and information to enable him to make an application in due course.
- following receipt of a valid application, the owner will receive a notice of approval or refusal within a period of 8 weeks
- payment for work satisfactorily completed will require a prior inspection by the Officer of the Council and following this inspection, a recommendation for payment will be made within a period of 4 weeks from date of receipt of the builder's invoice. Payment will normally be made within 1 week of recommendation.
- revisits requested by the owner to discuss problems or concerns regarding any works in progress, will be carried out within a period of 3 weeks.

Finally, if at that stage you continue to be dissatisfied, you are able to contact a local Councillor or the Local Government Ombudsman Service. Details are available from Housing and Environmental Health Services reception areas, the Housing Advice Centre or the Citizens Advice Bureau.

## **Customer Satisfaction**

Harrow Council is committed to providing the best possible service to its residents and also to ensure that the service provided is equally accessible and efficiently delivered. On completion of any form of repair or adaptation assistance, a customer satisfaction survey is carried out, allowing the occupier of the dwelling to express their opinions as to:

- courtesy of staff.
- prompt attention to enquiries and requests for information.
- efficiency of administrative staff and clarity of correspondence or information provided.
- efficiency of technical staff carrying out site inspections, preparation of schedules of work and recommendations for payment.

The views and comments of the users of the service are a valuable means of improving service delivery. All applicants will receive a customer service questionnaire which we ask you to complete and return.

## Chapter 7

### Resources needed to meet demand

In order to put this policy into action we have evaluated the use of existing resources. We will identify and pursue potential new resources and ensure all resources are being used to maximum effect in support of strategic priorities.

#### Revenue Resources

General Fund revenue resources cover salaries and running costs for the Improvement Grant, Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Staying Put Services. Services provided through Housing Services are covered by the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund revenue resources as appropriate. In 2003/04 the ODPM have provided £10,000 for the development of the Home Improvement Agency which will increase to £14,000 in 2004/05.

The following Table details the revenue resources for private sector housing services and includes both salaries and running costs of the various services detailed.

<b>Private Sector Housing Service</b>	<b>2001/02 Out turn</b>	<b>2002/03 Out Turn</b>	<b>2003/04 Original</b>
Improvement Grants	£1,048,630	£1,461,990	£2,450,720
Staying Put Home Improvement Agency	£72,690	£108,380	£137,580
Private Sector Housing Enforcement	£191,230	£198,570	£192,870
Total	£1,312,550	£1,768,940	£2,781,170

#### Capital Resources

Capital Resources are divided between Discretionary Housing Renewal and Disabled Facilities Grants and Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants.

In 2001/02 we used the results of the Private sector House Conditions Survey to secure increased corporate capital resources for private sector renewal grants, with most of the increase being allocated to disabled facilities grants.

Improvement Grants	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Approved Capital Allocation	£1.4m	£1.95m	£1.76m	£2.10

In 2002/03 we secured £1.76m for grants with an estimated requirement of 2.25 million, due to increased pressures on the capital pot. In 2003/04 we secured £2.10m, including ££0.25m ring fenced for empty properties activities, against an estimated requirement of £2.5m.

We anticipate increased housing renewal grant demand in future due to the increasing number of sources of referral and the growing links between private sector renewal and other socio-economic objectives (see Housing Strategy and West London Housing Strategy).

It is expected that the expenditure of the £2.20m in 2003/04 will be split as follows:

- Mandatory Disabled facilities Grants - £850,000
- Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants - £250,000
- Discretionary Housing Renewal Grants - £750,000
- Empty Properties Grants - £250,000

The medium term budget currently makes provision for the same level of capital provision in 2004/05 and 2005/06. An additional bid for additional capital to support an affordable warmth programme has been submitted but has not been successful to date due to the pressure on the capital pot.

Conventional funding sources are never enough to meet our service and investment needs and we are constantly looking for new ways to increase resources through partnership and government funding for new initiatives.

### **Alternative Funding Streams**

Releasing equity is being put forward by the government as a means of using the debt free equity value of owner occupied homes to provide repairs, improvements and adaptations at nil or minimal public sector cost. The very high property value in Harrow means that the majority of homeowners are equity rich, even where they are cash poor, and that repayment of capital interest will still leave a large amount of equity for other uses.

The Authority has signed up to the Home Improvement Trust Equity Release Scheme which is described in detail in the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy and the Housing Strategy. For a £10,000 investment 'the Council' has access to 100 loans per year. At an average of £15,000 per loan this would lever in £1.5m of private finance to improve, repair or adapt private homes, with a guarantee of no repossession, which may otherwise not be achieved.

The system is not a replacement for the renewal grant system, as many properties and people, especially in the rented sector, will fall outside the criteria. It will however provide an essential supplement that levers in private sector money, enabling scarce resources to be targeted elsewhere. The loan may also represent a client's contribution towards a grant, particularly with Disabled Facilities Grants, or to fund discretionary work in addition to the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant provision.

This scheme is operated in partnership with the Home Improvement Trust, a none profit making charity set up nationally for the purpose, who act as the lead agency. Their experience and resources are invaluable in integrating the various strands of the scheme, reassuring occupiers and minimising scheme time and cost. They act as the main promoter of the scheme and are the first point of contact. Cases are then passed to the Staying Put Agency who will work closely with the Trust until completion of work. It is proposed that by April 2005 2000 enquiries, 25% of which proceed to the second stage with a take up of 100 loans.

In addition the payback condition on disposal of the applicants property attached to relevant Discretionary Renewal Grant will ensure that a significant proportion of capital expenditure will be returned to the authority to reinvest in future renewal activities and reduce the pressure on the capital pot.

### **Future Investment Mix**

The need for, and availability of, resources in 2004/05 and future years for private sector housing investment will be determined by a number of factors. These include ODPM capital allocations, corporate priorities for revenue and capital expenditure generally, and the priorities in the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant Policy.

In 2003/04 the ODPM funding for the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency is provided via the Supporting People commissioning role, although this is ring fenced to match previous funding levels in this financial year. From 2004/05 the level of funding will be determined through the Supporting People commissioning role in line with the Supporting People Strategy according to identified local need. In order to protect this funding stream it is essential that the Home Improvement Agency is developed in line with the Supporting People Priorities on an ongoing basis.

During 2003/04, as we determine the appropriate mix of funding types and flexibilities for private sector investment in Harrow, we will develop a forward plan as the basis of a bid for corporate capital funding and leveraging in private and partnership finance. This will be reflected in the Housing Strategy for 2005 and beyond, giving a realistic view of the resources available to meet agreed priorities in the medium to long term.

During 2003/04 there are a number of projects underway, which will influence the need for future resources and the corporate ability to meet housing priorities. These include:

- Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review of housing
- The New Harrow Project
- Development of the Community Strategy
- The provision of a range of alternative loan vehicles and grant aid administered through the Staying Put Home Improvement Agency and Improvement Grant service

Areas identified as having a financial resource implication for private sector housing through the Your Home Your Needs, Best Value Review of housing are:

- The establishment of a long-range (3-5 year) capital finance planning process to allow for better forward planning of services is a critical factor common to all service areas. This will be coupled with the investigation of alternative funding opportunities and delivery systems to supplement capital funding provision.
- Research, develop and implement an Affordable Warmth Strategy linked to funding provision to enable delivery, to improve HECA returns and deliver corporate priorities.
- Establishing a dedicated Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Officer to implement an Affordable Warmth Strategy and promote energy efficiency initiatives linked to sustainability and corporate strategies.
- Improve HMO Registration levels for known non-compliant landlords in order to meet legislative requirements and protect the safety of Harrow Residents and in relation to the HMO Registration Scheme for non compliant landlords will require evaluation of the requirement for additional enforcement staff within the emerging enforcement strategy.

These resource implications will be managed through implementation of the Your Home Your Needs Best Value Action Plan.



## Index Of Defined Expressions

The expressions listed below are defined by or otherwise should be construed in accordance with the following -

**Disabled Person** - a person is disabled if:

- his sight, hearing or speech is substantially impaired,
- he has a mental disorder or impairment of any kind, or
- he is physically substantially disabled by illness, injury, impairment present since birth, or otherwise.

A person aged 18 or over shall be taken for the purposes of housing renewal assistance to be disabled if:

- They are registerable in pursuance of any arrangements made under section 29(1) of The National Assistance Act 1948 (Disabled Persons Welfare), or
- They are a person for whose welfare, arrangements have been made under that provision or, in the opinion of the social services authority, might be made under it.

A person under the age of 18 shall be taken for the purposes of housing renewal assistance to be -

- He/she is registered in a register of disabled children maintained under paragraph 2 of Schedule 2 to The Children Act 1989 or,
- He/she is in the opinion of the social services authority, a disabled child as defined for the purposes of part 3 of The Children Act 1989 (Local Authority for Children and their Families).

**Social Services Authority** - means the Council that is the local authority for the purposes of The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970;

**Dwelling** - means a building or part of a building occupied or intended to be occupied as a separate dwelling, together with any yard, garden or outhouses belonging to it;

**Elderly** - means a person aged 60 years or over;

**House in Multiple Occupation** - means a house that is occupied by two or more persons who do not form a single household;

**Improvement** - means alterations or enlargement to a dwelling;

**Decent Homes Standard** – meaning is as given in The Housing Strategy 2002 - 2007

**Local Housing Authority** - means the London Borough of Harrow Council;

**Owner's Interest** - means anyone who has in relation to any premises, an estate in fee simple absolute in possession, or a term of years absolute of which not less than 5 years remain unexpired at the date of the application, where this interest is held alone or jointly with others;

**Partner** - means that person's spouse or a person other than a spouse with whom he or she lives as husband or wife;

**Secure Tenancy** - means a weekly or other periodic tenancy which cannot be brought to an end by the landlord, except by obtaining an Order of the Court for the possession of the dwelling house;

**Statutory Tenancy** - means a tenancy or statutory tenant within the meaning of The Rent Act 1997;

**Relevant Disposal** - means a conveyance of the freehold or an assignment of the lease or the grant of a lease (other than a mortgage term) for a term of more than 21 years, otherwise than at a rack rent;

**Exempt Disposal** - means a disposal of the whole or part of the premises to which repayment conditions apply in respect of:

- a conveyance of the freehold or an assignment of the lease where the person, or each of the persons, to whom it is made is the spouse or former spouse of that person or a member of the family of that person, or in the case of a Company, it is an associated Company of the Company by whom the disposal is made.
- a vesting in a person taking under a will or on an intestacy.
- a disposal in pursuance of any order made under Section 24 or 24a of The Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 (Property Adjustment Orders or Orders for the sale of a property in connection with matrimonial proceedings).
- A compulsory disposal of a dwelling following a compulsory purchase order.
- A conveyance of the freehold or an assignment of the lease where the person making the disposal is aged at least 70 and the disposal is to provide for an annuity income and the person concerned is entitled to continue to occupy the premises as his only or main residence.

**Unfit for Human Habitation** - means where a dwelling is lacking a standard amenity, i.e. bath, basin, sink, WC and hot and cold water supplies, or where the premises are deemed to be so far defective in one or more of the following matters, that they are not reasonably suitable for occupation in that condition:

repair  
stability  
freedom from dampness  
internal arrangement  
natural lighting  
ventilation  
water supply  
drainage and sanitary conveniences  
facilities for the preparation, cooking and storage of food and for the disposal of waste water.

**Provisions relating to a deceased applicant** – means liabilities which have been incurred for any preliminary or ancillary services or charges in respect of housing renewal assistance or Disabled Facilities Grant. The Local Housing Authority may, if they think fit, pay grant in respect of some or all of these matters subject to the Council's agreed scale of fees.

Where the applicant dies after the relevant works have been begun and before the certified date of completion of those works, the local housing authority may, if they think fit, pay grant in respect of some or all of the works already carried out and any other relevant works as the Grant Officer considers reasonable in the circumstances.

**Owner Occupation Certificate** - means a certificate which certifies that the applicant has or proposes to acquire, a qualifying owner's interest and that he or a member of his family will live in the dwelling as his or that member's only or main residence.

**Certificate of Intended Letting** - means that the applicant has or proposes to acquire, a qualifying owner's interest and that the dwelling will be let or available for letting as a residence (and not for a holiday) to a person who is not connected with the owner of the dwelling for the time being. Not connected means that the person is not a member of the owner's family.

**Tenant's Certificate** - means that the applicant is a qualifying tenant of the dwelling and that he or a member of his family intends to live in the dwelling as his (or that member's) only or main residence.

**House in Multiple Occupation Certificate** - means a certificate of future occupation, which certifies that the applicant has or proposes to acquire, a qualifying owner's interest in the house and that the house will be occupied or available for residential occupation under tenancies or licences by persons who are not connected with the owner for the time being of the house. In this context, residential occupation does not include occupation for a holiday and tenancies does not include a long tenancy.

**Certified Date** - means the date certified by the local housing authority as the date on which the execution of the eligible works is completed to their satisfaction.

**Eligible Works** – means works agreed by the applicant for grant and the local housing authority as being relevant to the scheme of works proposed.

**Professional Fees/Ancillary Cost** - means charges which may be included in an application in respect of technical and structural surveys, design and preparation of plans and preparation of schedules of work, obtaining estimates, applications for Building Regulations approval and planning permission, supervision of the works and public utility boards charges in respect of electricity, gas, water and disconnection and reconnection of services. The Council will provide details of what charges and services are eligible for assistance.

**Reasonable Repair** - means having regard to the age and character of the dwelling, house or building and the locality in which it is situated and disregarding the state of internal decorative repair.

**Repayment of Grant on Disposal** - means that if an owner of the premises to which this condition applies makes a relevant disposal of the whole or part of the premises to which the application relates, after an instalment of grant has been paid and before the certified date of completion, he shall repay to the local authority on demand the amount of grant that has been paid.

It is also a condition that if an owner of the dwelling to which the application relates makes a relevant disposal of the whole or part of the dwelling on or after the certified date, he shall repay to the local authority on demand the amount of grant that has been paid. A condition under this section is a Local Land Charge and is binding on any person who is for the time being an owner of the premises concerned.

**Waiver/Grant Repayment** - means where the Authority is satisfied that the owner of the dwelling:

- is elderly or infirm and is making the disposal with the intention of going to live in a hospital, hospice, sheltered housing or residential care home or similar institution, or
- is moving to somewhere where care will be provided by any person or,
- is making the disposal with the intention of going to live with and care for an elderly or infirm member of his family or his partner's family.

**Repayment of Grant/Insurance Claim** - means an insurance claim or a legal claim against another person in respect of damage to the premises in respect of works to which grant monies had previously been paid. In the event of a breach of this condition, the applicant shall on demand pay to the local housing authority the amount of grant relating to any such works as may be reimbursed to him under the insurance claim.

**Owner Occupation Certificate:** An owner's application for the Housing Renewal Grant must be accompanied by an Owner Occupation Certificate. This certificate certifies that the applicant:

- has a qualifying owners' interest in the dwelling and that he or a member of his family will live in the dwelling as his main or only residence and
- any sale of the dwelling, other than an exempt disposal, will be a breach of that condition on that sale, repayment of grant monies will, on demand, be repayable to the Council
- the owner of the dwelling will inform the Council of any intention to sell the dwelling

**Tenant Certificate:** A tenant's application for a Housing Renewal Grant must be accompanied by a Tenant's Certificate. This certificate certifies that the applicant:

- is a qualifying tenant of the dwelling and
- he or a member of his family intends to live in the dwelling as his main or only residence

**Landlord's Certificate of Intended Letting:** Where a tenant's application is made it must also be accompanied by a Certificate of Intended Letting signed by the person who at the date of the application is the landlord under the tenancy. A letting certificate certifies that the dwelling will be available for letting as a residence (and not for a holiday home) to a person who is not connected with the owner for the time being of the dwelling.

- Any sale of the dwelling will be a breach of this condition and repayment of grant monies will, on demand, be repayable to the Council.