

REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

**ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY POLICY AND GUIDELINES IN RELATION TO  
WIRRAL'S PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING AND REGENERATION ASSISTANCE  
POLICY**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report seeks to update Members on the progress being made towards a new policy and guidance on environmental responsibility linked to support provided under the Council's *Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy* (referred to as "the Assistance Policy"). The draft policy seeks to encourage environmental responsibility amongst both beneficiaries of assistance and contractors implementing associated works. Beneficiaries will be encouraged to participate in the *CRed Wirral* initiative, and contractors asked to demonstrate their commitment to environmental good practice. Members are requested to agree the draft policy as detailed in this report and note that work will continue on the associated guidelines. Both the policy and the guidelines will be introduced following the next review of the Assistance Policy, due to take place early in 2011.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The *Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002* (referred to as "the RRO" in this report) gives Local Authorities the power to provide assistance to improve living conditions in their area. This assistance can be provided in any form and can include such things as advice about property improvements and financial assistance in the form of grants and/or loans. This power cannot be used unless a policy for the provision of such assistance has been adopted. In addition to the RRO, Part 1 of the *Local Government Act 2000* allows Local Authorities to give financial assistance to any person in order to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of an area. This power supports the use of products aimed at non-residential interests involved in regeneration activity connected with housing schemes. Related products involving non-housing interests are also included in Wirral's policy. Since 2002, annual reports have been presented to Cabinet to update the Assistance Policy. Consideration has been given to the environmental impact of successive Policies, largely focussing on the provision of certain financial assistance targeted at improving houses. The last review resulted in a number of changes being made to the standard 'schedule of works' used in connection with both the *Equity Renewal Loan* and the *Home Repair Assistance Loan*. The changes introduced flexibility for service users to opt to use more environmentally friendly methods of renovation and/or materials. In relation to both Group Repair and Neighbourhood Facelift Schemes a commitment was given to introduce measures to reduce the carbon footprint of the houses involved, building on the introduction of insulation measures, solar thermal water heating as an option and the use of recycled plastic rear yard gates and frames.

- 2.2 On 27<sup>th</sup> May 2010, Cabinet agreed to adopt the current Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy. In addition, at the same Cabinet meeting, Members also resolved that:

- the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services be requested to provide a report for consideration at a future meeting of the cabinet outlining how an environmental responsibility policy and guidelines can be incorporated into the Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Policy as a future specific condition of all grant assistance where relevant

- 2.3 On 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008, Cabinet agreed to adopt a *Preferred Builder Protocol* in connection with both *Equity Renewal Loans* and *Home Repair Assistance*. This protocol restricts the use of contractors to those registered with the Council's *Wirral Traders Scheme* and was implemented on the 1st September 2009. The protocol was designed to give service users assurance about the quality of work, integrity and customer service. Members of the *Wirral Traders Scheme* have to agree to adhere to a strict Code of Practice.
- 2.4 On the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007, Cabinet approved a *Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan* for implementation across the Council. This Strategy seeks to achieve a year on year reduction in Wirral Council's carbon emissions as well as reductions in carbon emissions from residents and local businesses. Raising awareness about everyone's impact on climate change and decreasing dependency on fossil fuels feature amongst the aims of the Strategy. In support of the Climate Change Strategy, the Council, and its partners, launched the *CRed Wirral* initiative in December 2009. CRed Wirral (short for Carbon Reduction Wirral) is designed to help people living or working in the Wirral to cut carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions and to play a part in wider efforts to build a cleaner, greener, low carbon Wirral. CRed Wirral offers a simple free-to-use online tool that allows people to choose from a range of carbon reducing pledges to suit different lifestyles. Once pledges are made, progress against these pledges can be tracked online. The online tool shows users the impact of pledges made in kilograms/tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> saved. CRed Wirral also gives access to news, events and links for further information and support. CRed Wirral is part of a wider CRed initiative with an ambition to create visible community of individuals, whose energy saving actions would lead to a 60% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2025, providing a road map for others to follow.

### **3.0 POLICY AND GUIDELINES ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY**

- 3.1 In preparing a policy on environmental responsibility (referred to as 'the policy'), consideration has been given to how the policy should be applied. It is suggested that this policy should apply to both the recipients of the assistance themselves and any contractors employed by both the recipients, to undertake renovation/improvements works through the Preferred Builders Protocol and directly by the Council.
- 3.2 The draft policy comprises a policy statement, policy aims, identification of the forms of assistance where the policy applies and an overview of how the policy should be implemented, including monitoring arrangements. Details can be found in Appendix 1. The policy is to be supported in more detail by guidance and work continues on preparing this guidance.
- 3.3 Subject to Members being happy with the draft policy, as detailed in Appendix 1, it is suggested that the guidance to support this policy is finalised and be reported back to members for consideration as part of the annual review of the Assistance Policy which is due to take place early in the New Year. Should Members find the guidance to be acceptable then implementation of both the policy and guidance could coincide with the adoption of the revised Assistance Policy.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The suggested policy aim of maximising the opportunity for service users to incorporate sustainable micro renewable energy generation, where applicable, is likely to increase the overall costs of either a grant funded scheme or loan, whichever financial product is used. These costs will vary and be dependant on the type of technology selected. In the case of loan assistance the maximum loan limits will determine the ability of this technology to be installed. In the case of grant funded projects the budget available at the outset of the scheme will dictate whether or not this technology can be incorporated within the scheme. In either case the resources made available by the Council will determine both whether this technology and what type of technology can be installed. The provision of financial products is managed within the resources made available by the Council in any one financial year.

## **5.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 It is anticipated that the introduction and operation of a policy and guidelines on environmental responsibility can be undertaken using existing staffing resources.

## **6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES/EQUALITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The introduction of a policy and guidelines on environmental responsibility will apply to all service users and contractors equally. Service users will have the option not to take part in the CRed Wirral scheme, should they wish to do so.

- 6.2 The existing HMRI Clearance and Improvement Programmes Equality Impact Assessment has been reviewed in light of the proposals in this report and no changes are considered necessary.

## **7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 None

## **8.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The introduction of a policy and guidelines on environmental responsibility will support Wirral Council's commitment to reduce Wirral's carbon footprint, which is a Corporate Priority in the Council's Corporate Plan 2010/11, and supports National Indicator 186, one of Wirral's LAA Targets.

## **9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Retrofitting existing properties with renewable energy generation technology may qualify as permitted development which will not require planning permission, subject to S.I. 2008/675 (The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2008). Larger scale proposals, however, will require planning permission.

## **10.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Raising awareness on environmental impact and encouraging residents to adopt behavioural changes to reduce their energy use is likely to result in financial savings for individual residents. Where beneficiaries are on low incomes, this may help alleviate fuel poverty.

## **11.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The Assistance Policy helps those members of society least able to afford to undertake improvements or move to alternative accommodation. The introduction of a policy and guidance on environmental responsibility will help reduce any adverse environmental impact and empower service users to make a contribution towards reducing their carbon emissions.

## **12.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 This report has implications for all wards

## **13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 13.1 Cabinet 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007 – ‘Nottingham Declaration’ Group – Update Report No 2

Cabinet 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008 – Adoption of a Preferred Builder Protocol in Connection with the Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy

Cabinet 27<sup>th</sup> May 2010 – Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy

## **14.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 Members agree a new policy on environmental responsibility in relation to the support provided through the *Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy*, as detailed in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 14.2 Members agree that supporting guidance for the Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy can be approved in due course by delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Housing.
- 14.3 Members are advised that they will be presented with the full policy with amendments in early 2011.

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