

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

21 JUNE 2012

SUBJECT:	PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING AND REGENERATION ASSISTANCE POLICY 2012/13
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, HOUSING AND PLANNING
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
KEY DECISION?	YES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to amend the Council's Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy (referred to as "*the Assistance Policy*") to enable officers to make minor changes to the policy without having to undertake a full consultation exercise. Any such changes will be reported to and agreed by the portfolio holder for Housing and Community Safety at the time the changes are made and will also be reported to Cabinet at the annual review of the Assistance Policy. The Assistance Policy is provided using statutory powers.
- 1.2 This report also advises members that the existing Assistance Policy will remain in place throughout 2012/13 and will be formally reviewed in time for the 2013/14 financial year. This review will include a consultation exercise with members of the public.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (referred to as *the RRO* in this report) gave 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. Once adopted, the policy should be monitored, reviewed and amended (if necessary) to take into account changes in local circumstances and government policy. In this way, the policy should evolve over time to meet the needs and aspirations of Wirral residents. Any significant changes should be subject to consultation prior to being adopted and the public should be notified about the revised policy. 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.

- 2.2 Following a consultation exercise the current *Assistance Policy* was adopted by Cabinet on 13th October 2011:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/housing/housing-strategies-policies-partnerships/housing-regeneration-assistance-policy>

3.0 MINOR CHANGES TO THE ASSISTANCE POLICY

- 3.1 ODPM Circular 05/2003, Housing Renewal, advises that the *Assistance Policy* can be drafted to allow for minor changes to policy delivery to be made, which do not affect the broad thrust of policy direction, without the need for a formal re-adoption process. Wirral's existing *Assistance Policy* does not currently make any provision for minor changes to be made without a formal review which involves a public consultation exercise, formal adoption of any changes and publication. This review is normally undertaken on an annual basis. The reliance on an annual review to incorporate relatively minor changes can be a barrier to programme delivery, achieving targets and fully utilising funding resources allocated. In order to remove this barrier, it is suggested that the existing *Assistance Policy* be amended to make provision for officers to incorporate minor changes without the need to formally re-adopt the policy each time a change is made. Any such minor changes will have to be discussed with and agreed by the portfolio holder for Housing and Community Safety prior to the change being made. If agreed, the policy will be subsequently amended to incorporate the change(s) with the specific change(s) being clearly referenced in the policy document showing the date when the change was made. The annual review of the *Assistance Policy* will still be held and it is suggested that at this point any minor changes made during the previous year be summarised and be reported to Cabinet at this review.

4.0 ANNUAL REVIEW

- 4.1 The existing Assistance policy was formally reviewed and adopted towards the end of 2011. In order to align future reviews with the start of financial years, I would suggest that the next formal review should be undertaken towards the end of 2012/13.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 Failure to amend the Assistance Policy to make provision to allow minor changes to be made without a formal review could have implications for the delivery of targets and ability to fully utilise funding resources allocated.
- 5.2 Failure to regulate the minor changes made could lead to significant policy changes outside the formal review process. The procedure suggested takes this into account
- 5.3 Failure to align the formal *Assistance Policy* reviews with the end of financial years can delay expenditure and put target delivery at risk.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 Doing nothing was considered, however, this was ruled out on the grounds that the change would facilitate more efficient programme management and delivery.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 Any mid year minor changes introduced to the *Assistance Policy* will be subject to public consultation as part of the relevant annual reviews.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 None

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 The ability to make minor changes to the *Assistance Policy* may have implications for financial resources particularly changes made to financial product thresholds. Any changes having financial implications will only be made in the knowledge that agreed budgets are not exceeded.

9.2 No new IT investment is required as a result of this report

9.3 There are no Staffing implications to this report

9.4 There are no asset implications to this report.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The proposed change is consistent with the guidance to the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The revised assistance policy will continue to help those members of society least able to afford to undertake improvements or move to alternative accommodation. In addition, it will assist private landlords to improve housing conditions for some of the most vulnerable members of society. The policy targets the majority of the assistance towards low income households. Those applicants deemed to have the ability to afford improvements or relocation by other means will be sign-posted accordingly.

11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy and no changes are considered necessary due to this report.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 None.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 None

14.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 14.1 Members agree to amend the Council's Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy to enable officers to make minor changes to the policy without having to undertake a full consultation exercise, formal adoption of the changes made and publication. Any such changes are to be reported to and agreed by the portfolio holder for Housing and Community Safety at the time the changes are made are also to be reported to Cabinet at the annual review of the *Assistance Policy*.
- 14.2 Members note that the next formal review of the current *Assistance Policy* will be undertaken towards the end of 2012/13 to align the annual review process with the financial year

15.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 15.1 The reliance on an annual formal review of the *Assistance Policy* to incorporate relatively minor changes can be a barrier to programme delivery, achieving targets and fully utilising funding resources allocated.
- 15.2 The current *Assistance Policy* was formally reviewed towards the end of 2011 and it is suggested that in order to align future reviews with the beginning of financial years the next review should be undertaken towards the end of 2012/13

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SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet 'Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy 2011/12'	21 st July 2011
Cabinet 'Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy 2011/12'	13 th October 2011