

Summary of Plymouth City Council Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

Version 1.0

Policy Approved 19th April 2008



**Housing Strategy and Renewal
Community Services
Plymouth City Council**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Housing Assistance Policy sets out how the Council implements its Policy on grants, loans, advice, signposting and other services, which help private sector property owners improve and maintain housing in Plymouth. Following the approval of the last Housing Assistance Policy in May 2006, this new document contains a number of amendments to the approved policy in order to improve the services offered to Plymouth residents.

Background

Relevant Legislation

- 1.2 Under the Government's Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO), a Council has the discretion to decide whether it provides grants, loans, advice etc for the purpose of repairing, improving, extending, converting or adapting housing accommodation. The exception to this is the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

Decent Homes Standard

- 1.3 The **Decent Homes Standard** stipulates that a property should be free from Category One Hazards (as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System) that it should be in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and services, and should provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

Plymouth Stock Condition

- 1.4 The Plymouth Stock Condition Survey (2005) demonstrated that as at July 2005, 66.4% of vulnerable households occupied Decent Homes, compared with a Public Service Agreement target of 65%. The private sector Decent Homes target has now been absorbed into the Community and Local Government's Departmental Strategic Objective 2 (DSO2). This now contributes to the Government's PSA20, which aims to "increase long-term housing supply and affordability".

2 Strategic Framework

Private Sector Housing Strategies

- 2.1 The revised Assistance Policy has been informed by the current Private Sector Renewal Strategy (2003), the Empty Homes Strategy and the Home Energy Strategy (2007-2010).

Local Strategic Partnership

- 2.2 The Assistance Policy addresses the objectives set out in Plymouth's Local Strategic Partnership's 'Towards a sustainable community strategy' - principally addressing 'Working Towards Decent Homes'.

Housing Strategy

- 2.3 There are direct links with the Council's Housing Strategy 2004 – 2007, namely:

- Improving standards in private sector housing
- Improving energy efficiency through grants and advice
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- Contributing to the regeneration of Plymouth

Corporate Improvement Priorities

- 2.4 The Private Sector Housing Assistance policy directly supports the Council's Corporate Improvement Priorities of Improving our City through :

- Supporting independent living
- Narrowing the gap between communities

3 Assistance Principles

Roles and responsibilities

- 3.1 Whilst acknowledging that it is primarily the responsibility of homeowners to maintain their own properties, Plymouth City Council recognises that vulnerable people may not have the financial resources to keep their homes maintained.
- 3.2 The Council has a duty to review housing conditions and intervene by enforcement if necessary in order to address Category 1 Hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). It also has discretionary powers to take action in respect of Category 2 Hazards.
- 3.3 The 2005 Stock Condition Survey shows that vulnerable households living in the private rented sector experience the highest rates of non-decency and category 1 (HHSRS) hazards. Landlords have a legal duty to keep their property in a good state of repair. However experience has shown that a supportive approach is more effective in raising the standard of private rented housing than taking enforcement action.

Targeting of Assistance

- 3.4 There is commitment to the implementation of an area approach in the most deprived parts of Plymouth (Devonport, City Centre, North Prospect, Barne Barton, and Stonehouse) to narrow the gap between communities.
- 3.5 Stonehouse and Devonport were identified as the highest priority when looking specifically at private sector housing. The 2005 Stock Condition Survey identified Efford and Lipson as areas with the highest rates of non decent dwellings for vulnerable occupiers. Further statistical analysis in 2007 revealed areas in Stoke, St Budeaux and the City Centre (Super Output Areas).The East End neighbourhood is still an area of high priority and is seen as an important element of the area approach.
- 3.6 In addition to an area-based approach, assistance is offered citywide to homeowners. Those in the greatest need will be able to access grant-based assistance. Non-financial assistance in the form of a maintenance booklet and advice is available to all. Other Urban Care initiatives will be developed as a result of stakeholder consultation, current priorities are:
- Developing loans for vulnerable home owners.
 - Developing and improving information through leaflets, the Council's website and partners
- 3.7 Council assistance will also be targeted at reducing the number of empty properties in the City.

4. Grants available

- Decent Homes - Assistance for Owner Occupiers and Qualifying Tenants
- Decent Homes - Assistance for Owner Occupiers and Qualifying Tenants (Common Parts)
- Decent Homes - Assistance for Landlords
- Decent Homes – Assistance for Landlords (Common Parts)
- Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)
- Empty Homes Empty Property Grant

- Living Over The Shop Grant (LOTS)
- Empty Homes LOTS (Devonport grants)

5. Comments, Complaints and Appeals

- 5.1 Comments, complaints or suggestions about the Policy or any aspect of our work are welcomed. The Council's standard comments, complaints and appeals procedure will be followed. If you would like a copy of this please contact us on Tel 01752 307075 or go to the website www.plymouth.gov.uk and click on the Have Your Say section on the home page.
- 5.2 If a complaint is about a Freedom of Information request you can complain to the Information Commissioner.
www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk