

**DECENT HOMES FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR
(Report by the Head of Housing Services; Technical Services; and
Environmental and Community Health Services)**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet that a £167,000 capital grant has been awarded to the Council for 2007/08 from the East of England Regional Assembly's (EERA) Housing and Sustainable Communities Panel, administered by GO-East, to help improve the non-decent homes in the private sector.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE CAPITAL GRANT

- 2.1 This grant has come from the Regional Housing Pot. The decisions on how to spend the Pot are made by EERA's Housing and Sustainable Communities Panel and are guided by the Regional Housing Strategy which we are consulted on and contribute to.
- 2.2 The Panel decided to top slice the Regional Housing Pot for improving non-decent homes in the private sector occupied by vulnerable people. It is a 'housing' capital grant, not intended as substitute funding and although legally the grant carries no conditions, there is an expectation that the grant is used for the purposes for which it was intended. EERA will monitor the use of the grant.

3. BACKGROUND TO DECENT HOMES

- 3.1 A Decent Home is one which:
- Does not contain a category 1 hazard (The new Housing Act introduced the Housing Health & Safety Rating System and a category 1 Hazard requires that action is taken);
 - is in a reasonable state of repair;
 - has reasonably modern facilities and services; and
 - provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.
- 3.2 Vulnerable households have been defined as those in receipt of at least one of the principal means tested or disability related benefits. For the purpose of establishing the national 2001 baseline from the English House Condition Survey the benefits taken into account were: income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit, disabled persons tax credit, income based job seekers allowance, working families tax credit, attendance allowance, disability living allowance, industrial injuries disablement benefit, war disablement pension.
- 3.3 Government has set a target that by 2010, all social housing provided by Councils and housing associations must meet the Decent Homes standard. Public Service Agreement 7 states that by 2010, 70% of private sector homes occupied by vulnerable people must also meet the Decent Homes standard. They also expect a year on year improvement in achievement.

- 3.4 The Council commissioned a stock condition survey in 2005 to establish the local baseline of Decent Homes. In Huntingdonshire at present there are 11,500 dwellings occupied by residents in receipt of a means tested benefit (excluding housing association dwellings). Of these 2,000 are classified non decent, which represents 17% of dwellings occupied by a vulnerable residents. This means that 83% are decent. Therefore, Huntingdonshire is already above the Government's 2010 target for decent homes occupied by vulnerable people in the private sector.
- 3.5 The majority of dwellings that fail the standard in Huntingdonshire do so because of poor thermal efficiency. Non-decent dwellings are associated with the private sector and with occupiers on low incomes either below 30 years of age or over 65 years of age.

4. TACKLING NON DECENT HOMES IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

- 4.1 Last year, a grant of £328k was awarded and Cabinet agreed on 29 June 2006, that the money should be used to improve the thermal efficiency of vulnerable people's homes in the private sector, where other grants such as Warmfront, do not apply. Only those on a low income are eligible.
- 4.2 A tender was drawn up and a contractor selected to undertake the cavity wall and loft insulation work. Households are being identified by the Energy Efficiency Team in Technical Services, who are also arranging publicity and manage the project. Installations started in September 2007 and using the original grant of £327k, circa 1,000 installations could be provided.
- 4.3 Upon completion of the insulation work, that element of the property will comply with the Decent Homes standard. However, the property could fail on one of the other elements. Therefore, Officers now propose to develop this project, using the 2007/8 grant, to implement a full programme of inspection and monitoring system against the Decent Homes standard. Guidance states that Councils should be able to monitor and report on the number that:
- are made decent through assistance / enforcement
 - received assistance / enforcement action but where the full decency standard was not achieved; and
 - are not decent because assistance was rejected by the owner.
- 4.4 Despite targeted publicity the take up of grant has been lower than anticipated and it is estimated that spend in the current year will be circa £85k. It is proposed that the remaining budget be carried over to the new financial year 08/09.
- 4.5 Bearing in mind that a failure to spend the grant on the intended use may prejudice future allocations it is proposed that the grant of £167k funds future years' spend on insulation grants to qualifying applicants. This could be for 2009/10 and/or 2010/11. The advantage of this is that the Council's position could be reviewed at a later date when the basis and likelihood of allocation of grant in future years is known. A consultation document on the future basis of allocation has recently been released.


6. RECOMMENDATION

That the 2007/08 grant of £167k be reserved for future years' spend on insulation grants to qualifying applicants.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Sustainable Communities Plan: Building for the Future, ODPM, 2003
- A Decent Homes: The Definition and Guidance, ODPM, February 2004
- Regional Housing Strategy for the East of England 2005-2010, EERA, 2005
- Letter dated 19 February 2007 from the Head of Housing at Government Office
- HDC's Housing Renewal Assistance Policy Document, April 2003 as amended in 2006
- HDC's Housing Strategy 2006-11
- Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order (England and Wales) 2002
- Cabinet report entitled 'ADDITIONAL FUNDING FROM REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD FOR DECENT HOMES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR' dated 29 June 2006

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