

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

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet that a £162,400 capital grant has been awarded to the Council for 2008/09 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.
- 1.2 To make proposals for the use of this new grant, and for previously received grants.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE CAPITAL GRANT

- 2.1 This grant has come from the Single Regional Housing Pot allocation for 2008/09. 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. The regional allocation was based on a 'ready reckoner' ie the number of vulnerable households in non decent accommodation as a percentage of the regional total. Each authority has received a proportionate share of the regional total of £10.18m. This method is a stop-gap measure whilst a new programme is being developed. The new programme is due to be launched in April 2009.
- 2.2 In 2008/09 this authority has received a grant allocation of £162k. This and previous years' funding is for improving non-decent properties in the private sector occupied by vulnerable people. The grant itself carries no conditions and can be used to support any of the authority's legitimate capital allocation activities. However, in terms of monitoring, EERA proposes to monitor the outcomes and intends to survey authorities during the third quarter of 2008/09 in relation to the 2008/09 grant.
- 2.3 Previous grants, for which there has been no EERA monitoring process, were:

Year	Amount	Cabinet Approved use
2006/07	£328k	Thermal efficiency improvements
2007/08	£167k	Insulation grants

- 2.4 Bearing in mind that a failure to spend the grant on the intended use may prejudice future allocations it is proposed that the 2008/09 grant is used for work relating to Decent Homes and that previous years' allocations are rephased to cover work in future years. The advantage of this is that the position on future years can then be reviewed at a later date when the basis and likelihood of allocation of grant in future years is known.

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 Spending of previous grants has not been as prompt as anticipated due to the EU procurement process, customer targeting, advertising, and the setting up of vetting and inspection processes.

4.2 Upon completion of insulation work, that element of the property complies with the Decent Homes standard. However, the property could fail on one of the other elements. Therefore, officers implemented an inspection programme of completed works for compliance 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.

4.3 Despite targeted publicity the take up of grant has been lower than anticipated but with recent fuel cost rises and the intention to expand the works to the provision of improved heating controls and to rectify category 1 hazards it is estimated that spend in the current year will be circa £165k. It is also proposed that the previous grants be combined into one scheme for this wider focus.

4.4 In order to compliment the work being undertaken to improve thermal efficiency under the current scheme, it is also proposed to transfer £75k of the previous years' grants to a scheme for incorporating energy efficiency measures into two exemplar display homes representative of the housing stock of the District. The objectives of the project are to demonstrate practical and cost effective energy efficiency, renewable energy and water efficiency measures and to encourage the widespread adoption of appropriate technologies. The Building Research Establishment who already has extensive knowledge and expertise in this area will be a partner in the project to advise and provide an accurate cost in use assessment and quantify the potential carbon savings achievable.

4.5 During the financial year 2007/08 the Council's Environment Team handled 143 energy efficiency grant referrals for vulnerable residents in non-decent homes. A list of these referrals was passed to Environmental Health at the beginning of the current financial year and follow-up visits were carried out to determine how many of these properties met the Decent Homes Standard. It was found that:

- 129 properties met the standard through HDC assistance/enforcement and this equates to 6.45% of the total number of non-decent homes (2000);
- 11 properties received assistance/enforcement but did not achieve the full Decency standard; and
- 3 properties refused the assistance offered.

4.6 Given EERA's intention to monitor the spending of the 2008/09 grant it is proposed that the phasing and use of the grants is revised as follows:

Grant Year	Proposed Purpose	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000
2006/07 and 2007/08	Thermal efficiency improvements and Category 1 Hazards	44	3	105	180	88
	Transfer to Exemplar display homes			75		
2008/09	Thermal efficiency improvements and Category 1 hazards		162			
		44	165	180	180	88

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet approves that:

- the 2008/09 grant of £162,400 be used in the current year for Decent Homes for vulnerable people – to rectify category 1 hazards, and to provide thermal efficiency improvements; and that prior year grants be rephased, as shown in para. 4.6 above, and used for the same purpose;
- the programme for future years be reviewed when the basis and likelihood of the allocation of grant in future years is known; and
- £75k of the previous grants be transferred to the scheme for incorporating energy efficiency measures into two exemplar display homes as part of the Environment Strategy.

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
- Letter dated 10 April 2008 (notification of capital grant and monitoring) from Head of Housing at *Go-East*
- Letter dated 6 June 2008 (notification of required monitoring information) from Regional Monitoring Officer (Housing).
- 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

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