

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

HOUSING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING CABINET MEMBER

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOME IMPROVEMENT POLICY

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

1.1 To agree allocation of resources for the Home Improvement Policy.

1.2 The key points in this report are as follows:-

- The council revised the Home Improvement Policy in December.
- Following the setting of the council's budget the resources available for each form of assistance can be determined.
- The allocation of resources takes into account the outcome of a procurement exercise for disabled adaptation works and the use of the Regional Homes and Loans Service.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 The council amended its Home Improvement Policy in December to reflect the higher demand for disabled facilities grants and the availability of additional funding for home improvements from the Regional Homes and Loans Service.

2.2 Since December a procurement exercise for the main types of disabled facilities grant works has been completed. The procurement was started in December 2007 and was followed a competitive European Union compliant procedure.

2.3 A preferred supplier for all four categories of work advertised has been identified. In addition to significant cost savings this framework arrangement should improve the quality of the work undertaken whilst reducing the delay in completing work.

2.4 In March a compact (service level agreement) was drawn up with the Regional Homes and Loans Service (RHLS) to establish the level of funding available to North Lincolnshire for the next two years.

2.5 The RHLS has offered £331k for home loans during 2009/10 and £552k in 2010/11. This will be the main form of housing assistance for

home improvements. Hardship assistance will be limited to those households who are not eligible for RHLS or other forms of loan assistance and whose property is in such serious disrepair as to affect their health or safety. Loan applications are already being made.

2.6 The Regional Housing Board has also allocated the council £75k towards energy efficiency measures for 2009/10.

2.7 The council is now in a position to agree the allocation of resources to various forms of housing assistance to be made available to householders in North Lincolnshire during the current financial year.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Option one. To approve the allocation of resources set out below.

- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants £940k
- Discretionary funding for Disabled Facilities Grants £500k
- Hardship assistance /energy efficiency grants £338k

3.2 Option two. To agree an alternative allocation of resources.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Option one. The proposed allocation of funding takes into account the views of the Audit Commission expressed in report on strategic housing services in January. This confirmed the importance of reducing as far as possible the waiting times for disabled facilities grants.

4.2 The council has identified the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions as one of the 35 priorities in the Local Area Agreement. Domestic energy efficiency measures make a measurable contribution to carbon dioxide reduction. At the same time tackling hard to heat homes has health benefits whilst reduced fuel bills helps those on low incomes.

4.3 Some flexibility in the allocation of resources is sensible as many of the hardship cases have the potential for involving energy efficiency measures.

4.4 Option one is the preferred option as allocates resources in accordance with the priorities identified in the Home Improvement Policy agreed in December.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 The Home Improvement Policy will be funded from three sources during 2009/10.

- £564k of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants funding is government subsidy at a rate of 60% on grants below £30k.

- £331k from the Regional Homes and Loans Service.
- £1,214k from the council's own capital resources.

5.2 here are no immediate staffing, property or IT implications.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Housing Act 2004 introduced a new approach to the way that private homes are assessed as suitable to live in and how those standards are enforced. The Home Improvement Policy has to reflect those changes.

6.2 The Home Improvement Policy seeks to increase investment in energy efficiency measures. National Indicator 186 (the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions) has been adopted as one of the 35 priorities under the North Lincolnshire Local Area Agreement.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 The proposed allocation of resources is the outcome of extensive discussions with adults and children's services, together with legal services.

7.2 Comments from those enquiring about home improvement assistance and members of the home improvement team have been taken into account with the flexible allocation between hardship and energy efficiency measures.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the Housing and Strategic Planning Cabinet Member approves the allocation of resources set out as option one in paragraph 3.1 above.

SERVICE DIRECTOR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

Church Square House
Church Square
Scunthorpe
North Lincolnshire, DN15 6XQ
Author: Mark Sherwood
Date: 1 April 2009.

Background papers used in the preparation of this report

Delivery Compact with the Loans Service for 2009/11.