

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET MEETING**  
**30<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

**Wyre Forest District Council Private Sector Housing**  
**Assistance Policy 2006**

<b>OPEN</b>	
<b>COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:</b>	Improved Health and Wellbeing
<b>CORPORATE PLAN THEME:</b>	Enabling Community Wellbeing
<b>KEY PRIORITY:</b>	Housing and Independent Living
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	Councillor Mrs. Anne Hingley
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:</b>	Head of Planning, Health and Environment
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Richard Osborne (Ext. 2564) Richard.osborne@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
<b>APPENDICES</b>	Appendix 1 – Wyre Forest District Council Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2006. The appendix has been circulated electronically and a public inspection copy is available on request. See front cover for contact details.

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To set out the background to the Housing Act 2004 and put forward policy proposals as to how the Council can meet the requirements placed upon it by the new Act. This includes changes to how private sector housing standards are assessed by the Council and how the Councils grant and assistance arrangements are to be carried out.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council:**

- 2.1 **The Wyre Forest Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2006, as set out in the Appendix to this report, be adopted.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Housing Act 2004 is a key piece of legislation which aims to assist vulnerable households by improving housing conditions and trying to meet Government targets on Decent Homes.

- 3.2 The key proposals and main elements of the Act were set out in a Report entitled "The Housing Act 2004" to Cabinet 25<sup>th</sup> August 2005. This report also set out what actions the Council needed to take to implement the Act.
- 3.3 A whole series of Regulations have subsequently been laid before Parliament and detailed guidance has and continues to be issued, with a requirement for the new powers for Local Authorities to be effective from 6<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Some of these have only just been issued and officers are actively drawing up new policies and procedures against a very tight timescale. Therefore this current report is dealing with part of the Acts implementation, namely the introduction of the new Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and proposed changes to the Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2006 which deals with mandatory and discretionary housing grants. A second report dealing with the remaining areas of policy will be available for full Council on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2006.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 The Council's current Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy has been updated to take account of the Housing Act 2004 requirements. The new document is attached to this Report.
- 4.2 The Policy sets out the basis upon which the new HHSRS will be used and proposes changes to the way in which grant funding and assistance will be provided to meet the Council's housing objectives. A key change is a move to a new discretionary scheme, known as Decent Home Assistance which replaces the current discretionary housing grants system. This will be targeted at vulnerable households whose properties do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Details of the scheme are set out in the proposed Private Sector Assistance Policy 2006, as are the definitions of Decent Homes and Vulnerable People (Section B) and the HHSRS Hazards (Section D).
- 4.3 Officers are currently amending procedures, working practises and briefing partner organisations to enable the policy to be implemented once agreed by the Council.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants and Decent Home Assistance are provided through the Single Housing Capital pot as part of the Council's Capital Programme.
- 5.2 Additional training requirements and new information technology hardware and software are expected to be met from within existing budgets.

#### **6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The Council is required to meet the duties as set out in the Act.

## **7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

7.1 There is a requirement to meet Government targets on Decent Homes and failure to do so could impact upon the Council's rating by the Audit Commission. It is also important to ensure that housing conditions do not have a detrimental effect on peoples health and safety.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

8.1 The Council's updated Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2006 implements key elements of the Housing Act 2004. The new policy and approach to assessing standards in private sector housing will contribute towards the improved health, safety and wellbeing of the local community.

## **9. CONSULTEES**

9.1 Corporate Management team

9.1 Health Housing and Rural Affairs Policy and Scrutiny Panel on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 The Housing Act 2004 and Government guidance notes on the Act can be found on the following links:

The Housing Act 2004:

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040034.htm>

Official Guidance Notes:

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/thehousingact2004>

10.2 Cabinet Report dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 2005 entitled 'The Housing Act 2004'

10.3 HHRA Policy and Scrutiny Panel Briefing Paper dated 24<sup>th</sup> January 2005 entitled 'Draft Private Sector Housing Assistance and Enforcement Policy'.

10.4 The Wyre Forest Private Sector Assistance Policy 2003.

21.3.06