

PRIVATE SECTOR RENOVATION GRANT PROGRAMME

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Cllr G Clements

LEAD OFFICER: Mike Tichford

REPORT AUTHOR: Brian Kirkbride

Summary: To present to Members an update on the Private Sector Renovation Grant Programme and to seek approval to appoint a 12 month fixed term post to help address current demands on the service.

Recommendation: That Members agree to the following recommendations:
1) Note the current demand on the grants programme and Private Sector Housing team
2) Agree to support a new 12 month fixed term post from April 2006.

Impact on delivering the Corporate Plan: Will support delivery of mandatory requirements for disabled adaptations.

Impact on other statutory objectives (e.g. crime & disorder, LA21): Will aid delivery of housing improvements within Private Sector Housing

Financial and human resource implications: The cost of employing a fixed term post is £29,445 which is to be fully funded from the Renovation Grants Budget of £1,719,000. This Housing Capital allocation is higher than previous years which enables us to support the post. Further funding will also be ring fenced from the Capital allocation to support County wide policy initiatives which will be the subject of further detailed reports.

Project & Risk Management: The implementation of the recommendations will aid delivery of the Grants Programme and ultimately aid management and delivery of the programme.

Key Decision Status

- **Financial:** N/A
- **Ward:** N/A

Other Ward Implications: None

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Private Sector Housing services function is going through a period of change due to new legislation and demand due to increased applications for Disabled Facilities Grants as detailed to the Executive on 27 September 2005.
- 1.2 The main demands upon the service due to legislation are through the implementation of the housing health and safety rating system which is detailed further in item 3.0.

- 1.3 The implication of these changes will delay allocation of grants and stretch the team (consisting of 1 technical and 1 administrative officer) to an unrealistic position.

2. CURRENT PROGRAMME POSITION

- 2.1 As detailed within the Executive Report dated 27 September 2005 the increase in supporting Disabled Facilities Grants is growing and this places an additional burden on current staffing levels
- 2.2 Discussions with residential social landlords have also identified potential further increases for Disabled Facilities Grants which may impact on the Council's resources both human and financial. Further discussions are to be held in order to quantify the potential impact.
- 2.3 The Trusteel contract has commenced in February 2006 which requires officer support and will generate potential Renovation Grant enquiries and further administrative work for the team.

3. HOUSING HEALTH AND SAFETY RATING SYSTEM

- 3.1 The current Housing Policy for Renovation Grants supports assistance to individuals living in properties which fail the fitness standard as introduced by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and subsequent Housing Act 1985.
- 3.2 From 1 April 2006 new legislation will be coming into force to replace the Housing Fitness Regime set out in the Housing Act 2005. The new Legislation for testing the fitness of a property is to be based on evidence based risk assessment process carried out using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).
- 3.3 HHSRS is a new approach to the assessment of risks to health and safety in residential premises and will also be the basis for Local Authorities in assessing enforcement decisions in respect of all residential premises. The assessment is based on risks to the potential occupant who is most vulnerable to that hazard. (For example, stairs constitute a greater risk to the elderly, so for assessing hazards relating to stairs they are considered the most vulnerable group). This is a statutory duty.
- 3.4 Officer training is currently being undertaken to ensure that we are able to implement a new legislation as of 1 April 2006, policy changes will be required in light of this change in legislation and will be the subject of further reports to the Executive and relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 3.5 The significant impact of this legislation is the currently only 1 technical officer has the training and could be totally committed to implementing the new system to the detriment of delivering the grant service.

4. OPTIONS

- 4.1 The options for managing the demands that are currently being placed on the Private Sector Housing Team are

Options	Impact
No additional human resources	The backlog of Renovation and Disabled Facilities Grants as well as new enforcement requirements would not be met potentially leading to failure in delivering statutory duties.
Permanent post created	The additional resource would enable us to meet our statutory obligations but would increase salary costs without clear justification for the post.
Fixed Term Position (12 months)	The additional resource would enable us to meet our statutory obligations in the short term whilst allowing a review of the demands on the housing service. Subject to the review the potential for a permanent position to be created will be determined and presented to the Executive.

- 4.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Social Well-being considered this issue at their meeting of 2 March and are supportive of the bid for additional support.

5 TECHNICAL OFFICER

- 5.1 In light of the current proposals/demands being directed to the Private Housing Grants Team it is recommended that additional support is obtained for an initial period of 12 months through creating a Technical Officer post.
- 5.2 A budget growth bid was made but rejected. It is now proposed that a fixed term post is created at a scale 4/5 which would equate to £29,445 (maximum) expenditure in 2006/07. This is to be funded through the Renovation Grants budget.
- 5.3 Review of the post will be undertaken following analysis of 2006/07 period and consideration made as to whether the requirements for a full time post is required.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This report presents initial measures to help overcome the demands on the Private Sector Housing team. In light of increasing statutory duties and growth for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants.

List of Appendices

None

List of Background Documents: Executive Report on DFG – 27 September 2005

List of Consultees: Corporate Team, P Robson