

**Body:** Cabinet

**Date:** July 16th 2014

**Subject:** Private Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018

**Report of:** Senior Head of Community

**Ward(s)** All

**Purpose** To approve Eastbourne's Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018

**Decision Type:** Key Decision

**Recommendation:** Cabinet is recommended to:

- Approve the Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018
- Approve continuing the arrangements made in 2008 to work with Parity Trust to support loan finance to help property owners maintain their homes for the life of the proposed Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018

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## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The Council's Housing Services department is responsible for improving the quality of housing across in Eastbourne, working with both individuals and corporate property owners. Within the department, the Housing Standards (Private Housing) team takes the lead on working with private property owners and housing associations while the Housing Strategy team work with Eastbourne Homes Limited to maintain and improve the quality of the Council's own homes. In all cases, the aim is to encourage maintenance of homes to the highest practicable standard and so help people be better able to enjoy where they live. In extreme cases, where properties are in a very poor condition, the intervention of the Council to help put right such problems can help prevent people having to move home.
- 1.2 It is primarily the responsibility of property owners to maintain their property. However some homeowners, particularly the elderly and most vulnerable, do not have the resources to keep their homes in good repair. The Council therefore has an important role to provide and facilitate assistance in these cases. This service is likely to be in greater demand over the next few years as vulnerable households may be more at risk of experiencing falls in their

income as a result of changes to social security, pensions and employment patterns.

1.3 The same responsibility applies to landlords. However, there are examples of landlords failing to maintain their properties in a condition and manage them to a standard that allows people to enjoy a safe and secure home in return for their rent payments. Tenants in such cases need help and support from the Council to help them secure from their landlord improvements to their accommodation.

1.4 For people with disabilities, timely and proportionate assistance to help them adapt their home to mitigate any disadvantages arising from their disabilities will help improve their quality of life and in some cases prevent them from being forced to move home. This important area of work- adapting homes to suit the changing needs of people with disabilities - is provided for people in Council-owned homes by the Council's managing agent Eastbourne Homes Limited and for people living homes owned either by themselves or other landlords the Housing Standards team.

1.5 This report sets out a Housing Renewal Policy for the Council that will help the Council address the issues raised above and so help contribute towards two of the 'At Home in Eastbourne' outcomes:

- Improving the Quality of Homes in Eastbourne
- Enjoying Homes and Neighbourhoods in Eastbourne

1.6 A copy of the full policy is attached to this report as Appendix A.

## **2.0 Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018**

2.1 The Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018 is drafted to reflect the current economic climate and limited capital finance available to the Council. It includes:

- Maintaining an emphasis on delivering loans, where assistance required is in excess of £1,000, through the Council's partner organisation Parity Trust. This approach will continue to assist in recycling available resources, improving houses to create healthy homes, ensure value for money as well as develop new voluntary sector partnerships.
- Taking enforcement action where necessary to encourage private landlords to improve the quality of the accommodation provided to local households
- A limited grants programme to help vulnerable households over 60 or who are disabled, with savings of less than £10,000, to maintain their homes.
- Explore and where practicable take advantage of opportunities arising from the Your Energy Sussex (Sussex Energy Saving Partnership) initiative and national energy efficiency initiatives to help reduce fuel bills for people in Eastbourne
- Encourage the bringing back into use of empty properties to provide more homes.
- Home Security and Sanctuary Schemes- targeted towards vulnerable households including those at risk of homelessness due to fear of violence.

Continued effective joint working with other agencies including for instance,

continuing joint work with the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service as part of their vulnerable household inspection programme to promote energy efficiency alongside fire safety.

### **3.0 Consultation**

3.1 Extensive consultation took place in relation to the development of the Council's Housing Strategy which included private housing.

### **4.0 Resource Implications**

4.1 Since 2010, financial resources have not been made available from the Government to the Council to directly fund improvements to privately owned homes, with the exception of the Disabled Facilities Grant programme for those with disabilities. As of March 31<sup>st</sup> 2104, approximately £400,000 is available for this activity over the duration of the policy.

4.2 The Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018 is designed to make efficient long term use of these limited resources by offering targeted assistance through the offer of low cost loans, repayable over time to the Council, to vulnerable households in Eastbourne. This will allow continued housing renewal activity for up to four years.

4.3 Parity Trust<sup>1</sup> has been an integral part since 2008 of the Council's approach to housing renewal by helping vulnerable people access low cost finance to improve their homes. This assistance helps households who would not be successful in securing loans from other high street lenders or alternative finance institutions.

4.4 To allow a smooth continuation of the current service provided by Parity Trust, and the development of the service, including the continued accumulation of recycled resources for future investment, it is recommended that Cabinet approve:

- The arrangements made in 2008 to work with Parity Trust to support loan finance to help property owners maintain their homes are extended for the life of the proposed Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018.

4.5 There are no additional human resources issues in implementing the Private Housing Renewal Policy in Eastbourne.

4.6 Regular monitoring of our commitments and spend will take place as part of the capital monitoring process. If the recommendations are accepted as drafted the Senior Head of Communities will be authorised to suspend or limit the policy in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder should commitment be likely to exceed allocated budget.

4.7 This policy has been drafted to maintain performance in line with budgetary targets and ensure that spend of allocated resources is maximised.

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<sup>1</sup> Parity Trust is Britain's first Community Development Finance Institution. To complement the delivery of unsecured personal and business loans, since 2006 it has been offering the Home Trust Loan, designed to help people finance essential repairs and adaptations to their homes.

## **5.0 Other Implications – Environmental, Human Rights, Community Safety**

5.1 The Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018 will form part of our approach to improving housing conditions and addressing community safety issues in conjunction with the Crime Reduction Partnership.

## **6.0 Youth and Anti-Poverty**

6.1 The policy to improve private housing in Eastbourne (in conjunction with the use of powers under the Housing Act 2004) will have a lasting beneficial impact on the health, safety and welfare of occupants, who are typically lower income single, often young people, including some particularly vulnerable and disabled groups.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 The Housing Renewal Policy 2014-2018 will provide help where it is most necessary to make homes in Eastbourne warm and secure. It will contribute toward improving energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

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### **Background Papers**

None