



AGENDA ITEM: 6(I)

Cabinet: 13 September 2011

Report of: Director of Transformation

Relevant Head of Service: Assistant Director Housing and Regeneration

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillors Mrs Hopley and Owens

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SUBJECT: MEANS TESTING FOR PUBLIC SECTOR DISABLED ADAPTATIONS

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek approval to means test the Council's public sector tenants when applications are made for disabled adaptations and to consult on this for an introduction from the 1st April 2012.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet approve in principle the introduction of means testing for Public Sector Disabled Adaptations subject to a consultation exercise being carried out.

2.2 That the Assistant Director Housing and Regeneration, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holders, implement the scheme subject to satisfactory consultation responses.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The background to this report is that the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 introduces a means testing mechanism whereby applicants for disabled facility grants will receive support for adaptations subject to their level of income. For the vast majority of applicants, no contribution would be necessary.

- 3.2 The means test is worked on a formula prescribed by Government and before work proceeds, applicants are advised regarding the grant that they will receive for works and the contribution they would need to make in support of the alterations.
- 3.3 When the Council introduced the policy on carrying out disabled adaptations, it made a conscious choice to implement the legislation for owners and Private Tenants but because the vast majority of Council Tenants at that time, were fully supported, that no means test takes place for Council Tenants. This would then remove unnecessary bureaucracy.

4.0 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 The budget for Disabled Adaptations has been under pressure for many years and additional resources have had to be allocated to ensure that disabled people were not waiting excessive periods for their alterations to be carried out.
- 4.2 Because of the demand for alterations, further thought and consideration has been given to whether means testing should be introduced. Some informal testing has taken place and, based on that, we believe that around 15% of applicants would potentially be eligible to make a partial financial contribution to the work. Without carrying out full assessments it is difficult to estimate exactly the amount of revenue that would be drawn in and clearly this would be based on individual circumstances at that particular time.
- 4.3 Based on assumptions that have been made and comparisons to the amount of contributions made by Private Sector Tenants and Owners, we believe that a further £2000 could be generated to the fund for disabled adaptations if Council Tenants were means tested. It is anticipated that there would be small contributions needed to be made by Tenants for the work and this would be used to “stretch” the budget to enable a further piece of work to be undertaken for someone waiting, particularly if funds are limited.
- 4.4 In order to take this matter forward, I am seeking approval from Cabinet to agree the principle of introducing means testing which would have the result of bringing extra income into the account which could be used to carry out work for those Tenants who are waiting and would mean that existing Council Tenants would be treated the same as Private Sector Tenants and Owner Occupiers. This seems a sensible and equitable way of taking the matter forward.
- 4.5 Clearly some Tenants would be disadvantaged from the present policy by having to make a contribution and because of this I am suggesting that we carry out a consultation exercise to see the reaction to this scheme.
- 4.6 Subject to the consultation exercise, if people were generally comfortable that for the greater good this should be implemented and to ensure equality between Council Tenants and Private Sector Tenants then this could be implemented from next April and a delegation be made to the Assistant Director Housing and Regeneration in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holders to implement this.

4.7 Should the consultation result in people being concerned regarding this matter, then I would bring a further report back to Cabinet for consideration.

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

5.1 The sustainability of disabled adaptations has been a concern for many years and as Tenants are living longer and work needed in their home continues to be required. The introduction of means testing will enable budgets to be stretched to meet demand which, with an aging population, is likely to increase.

5.2 This report would ensure equality between Council Tenants and Private Sector Tenants in the way that they were treated for financial contributions towards work needed to alter their home because they have a disability.

6.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct financial resource implications to the Council. There will be additional administration necessary in introducing the means testing arrangements but I believe that this can be introduced within existing resources.

6.2 The introduction of means testing will simply stretch the resources that we have available for disabled adaptations and mean that more Tenants can be assisted because the additional income derived from the contribution of Tenants who, because of their financial circumstances, are eligible to pay an element of the cost will enable those that are waiting to have their work carried out, have it completed more quickly.

7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

7.1 In these difficult financial times, reintroducing means testing would provide an opportunity to ensure that scarce resources are targeted more effectively at those most in need. However, there is a risk that the level of income generated by means testing will be so small that it would not cover the costs of completing the tests but, as this can be achieved within existing resources; there are no additional costs to the Council.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a significant direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report.

Appendices

1. Equality Impact Assessment
2. Minute of the Landlord Services Committee (Cabinet Working Group) – 5 September 2011 (To follow)