

Sevenoaks District Council
Private Sector Housing Team

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2008

The following policy was adopted
by Sevenoaks District Council on
15 May 2008

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2008

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 – an introduction

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 came into force on 6 June 2002 and repealed much of the previous prescriptive legislation governing the provision of financial and other assistance to homeowners. The mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) remained largely unchanged

Local authorities were given powers to make grants, loans or a combination of both, available to homeowners. The Order was not intended to bring about the wholesale replacement of housing grants with loans since it was accepted that loans would not be suitable in all cases. This Policy sets out the Council's position regarding the availability of financial and other forms of assistance.

The Government considers that the Council must make some provision for financial and other assistance to those who need to repair, improve or adapt their homes.

The Government's view is that the primary responsibility to maintain a property must lie with the property owner but recognises that some homeowners, including the elderly, disabled and the most vulnerable, do not have the necessary resources to repair, improve or adapt their home.

In some cases, the provision of financial assistance will continue to be the most appropriate solution, particularly: -

- for minor items of work
- where the cost of arranging equity release or other forms of loan finance cannot be justified
- where a loan or other form of financial assistance would not be suitable

The Council commissioned a Stock Condition and Energy Efficiency Survey, the results of which were finalised in 2005. The survey (based up a sample of 1300 homes) included assessments under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (which replaced the fitness standard for human habitation) and the Decent Homes standard. The survey included a physical inspection of owner-occupied, privately rented and Registered Social Landlord stock (including the stock transferred to West Kent Housing Association by Sevenoaks District Council). The survey concluded that 1,250 dwellings occupied by residents who were in receipt of benefit failed to meet the Decent Homes standard and also highlighted the need for the targeting of initiatives to tackle the poor energy efficiency of some of the rural housing stock, including those properties with solid walls, frequently lacking a mains gas supply and built with little thought given to thermal performance.

The Council is required to carry out a periodic inspection of its housing stock and intends to commission a further survey during 2011/2012, incorporating the findings within future policy reviews.

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2008

1. Introduction

This policy seeks to:

- continue to improve the condition of private sector housing in the District as stated within the Council's Housing Strategy
- continue to increase the number of properties available for occupation
- continue to increase the energy efficiency of homes and address issues of fuel poverty and affordable warmth
- continue to assist those who would otherwise not be in a position to improve or repair their homes
- continue to improve security measures, particularly for the elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups
- continue to provide adaptations for the benefit of disabled persons
- continue to encourage partnership working with neighbouring authorities and external agencies with a view to improving service delivery
- continue to develop relationships with financial institutions in order to investigate and promote the availability of suitable loan products, for example, equity release or similar schemes
- continue to develop relationships within the Council to reflect community based initiatives, including those relating to crime and disorder and area regeneration

The Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy shall come into effect on 1 June 2008.

Priority will continue to be given to dealing with enquiries and applications from older people, disabled persons and vulnerable groups.

Future policy will reflect the findings of the Council's Housing Needs, Stock Condition and Energy Efficiency Surveys.

The Council has a statutory responsibility to survey its housing stock from time to time and to take appropriate action where housing conditions fail to meet minimum standards. This may take the form of enforcement action (through the service of Notice) and/or the provision of financial or other assistance, subject to meeting qualifying conditions and the availability of funding.

The Council may specify in detail within their Housing Renewal Policy the purposes for which applications for assistance are to be invited and reserves the right to specify different purposes from time to time to reflect current priorities, strategic objectives and budgetary constraints.

2. Purpose of Housing Assistance

Housing assistance may be offered by Sevenoaks District Council (“the Council”) in accordance with this policy toward the cost of: -

- the improvement, repair or adaptation of living accommodation including mobile homes and houseboats
- the demolition of buildings comprising or including living accommodation and the construction of replacement living accommodation
- the acquisition of alternative living accommodation where the existing home is considered by the Council to be unsuitable for improvement, repair or adaptation

3. Persons eligible to apply for Housing Assistance

Any person who makes an application for assistance must: -

- live in the dwelling as his/her only or main residence (except where the applicant is a landlord who intends to let the dwelling to someone other than a family member), and
- have an owner’s interest in the dwelling, or be a tenant or licensee of the dwelling, alone or jointly with others, and
- have a duty to carry out the works in question or have the owner’s written consent to do so, and
- satisfy such test(s) of financial resources as the Council may impose from time to time

4. Applications for assistance

An application for assistance must be in a form specified by the Council and shall include:

- full particulars of the proposed works including, where relevant, plans and specifications of the works for which assistance is being sought
- at least two itemised quotations from independent building contractors unless otherwise directed by the Council
- particulars of any professional fees or other charges which relate to the preparation of the scheme, the supervision of the works or the administration of the contract
- proof concerning the ownership or tenancy of the dwelling
- written consent from all owners of the dwelling to the carrying out of the proposed works
- written consent of the mortgagees

- if the applicant is the owner of the dwelling, an undertaking that the dwelling will be occupied as their only or main residence for a period of 5 years from completion of the works and to repay any financial assistance in circumstances such as those described in section 12 upon demand.
- if the applicant is a landlord, an undertaking that the dwelling shall be let as a residence to persons nominated by the Council throughout a period of 5 years (or such other period of time as may be agreed between the applicant and the Council) from completion of the works and to repay any financial assistance in circumstances such as those described in section 12 upon demand. In exceptional circumstances, the Council may consider exercising its discretion in relation to the requirement to provide nomination rights but the general policy is that nomination rights will be required.

5. Prior Qualifying Period

The Council may specify a period of time during which the applicant must have lived in the dwelling as his/her only or main residence prior to the date of the application for assistance and reserves the right to specify different periods for different purposes. In general, a period of three years will apply to all applications for discretionary assistance. In exceptional circumstances, the Council may consider exercising its discretion in relation to this requirement if there are particular strategic reasons to do so. It is not the Council's intention to make discretionary financial assistance available to those who have recently purchased a property and have decided not to commission a full structural survey or Homebuyer's Report since this would have provided the opportunity to re-negotiate the purchase price to reflect any defects identified by the surveyor.

6. Amount of Assistance

The Council may specify a maximum amount or a formula for calculating the maximum amount of assistance which may be paid in respect of an application for discretionary assistance and reserves the right to specify different maxima for works of different purposes.

7. Exclusion of works already carried out

The Council will not approve an application for assistance if the works in question have been carried out before the application for assistance has been approved, except:

- where the relevant works have commenced but have not been completed and the Council is satisfied that there were good reasons for beginning the works prior to the approval of the application.
- where the Council decide to approve an application in accordance with the above they may, with the consent of the applicant, treat the application as varied so that the assisted works do not include any that have been completed.

8. Decision and Notification

The Council will notify an applicant in writing whether the application is approved or refused as soon as is reasonably practicable and, in any event, no later than six months from receipt of a complete and valid application for assistance.

If the application is approved, the notification will confirm the eligible works, the amount of assistance and the form that the assistance will take.

If the application is refused, the Council will explain the reasons for refusal and the procedure for appealing the decision.

If the Council are satisfied that, owing to circumstances beyond the control of the applicant or their professional advisor(s), the cost of the works has increased e.g. due to additional works being discovered upon exposure, then the Council may re-determine the amount of assistance and notify the applicant accordingly. The Council cannot guarantee that further funding will be made available and applicants must proceed on this basis. Additional funding will not be made available if the additional works could have been reasonably foreseen at the time of application.

9. Supervision of the works

The responsibility for the supervision of the works rests with the applicant or their appointed agent. The Council strongly recommends that applicants engage a suitably qualified surveyor/architect/structural engineer as appropriate to liaise with the Council, prepare a scheme, supervise the works and submit requests for payment.

The Council can accept no responsibility for the supervision of works.

10. Payments

The Council will release payment if:

- the works are completed within six months from the date of approval (twelve months in the case of an application for Disabled Facilities Grant) or such other period as the Council may allow
- the works are carried out in accordance with such specifications as the Council may determine
- the works are carried out by one of the contractors whose quotations formed part of the application for assistance
- the works are carried out to the Council's satisfaction
- the Council is provided with an acceptable invoice, demand or receipt for payment for the works and any professional fees or associated charges. An invoice, demand or receipt from the applicant or a member of the applicant's family will not be considered acceptable
- any guarantees, certificates etc relating to completed works are submitted to the Council

- the works satisfy Building Regulations, Conservation Area/Listed Buildings requirements and any statutory body e.g. Environment Agency requirements etc

The Council will normally pay the assistance direct to the applicant or the applicant's agent but, if instructed to do so, is able to release payment direct to the contractor.

The Council will pay the assistance upon satisfactory completion of the specified works. One interim payment may be considered at the Council's discretion. Further interim payments will only normally be considered for large contracts and by prior arrangement with the Council.

11. Repayment where an applicant is not entitled to assistance

If an application for assistance is approved but it subsequently appears to the Council that the applicant (or, in the case of a joint application, any of the applicants) was not, at the time the application was approved, entitled to assistance, no payment will be made. The Council may demand that any payments that have already been made are repaid together with interest from the date upon which they were made until repayment at such reasonable rate as the Council may determine.

12. Conditions for Repayment of Assistance

These conditions relate to all forms of discretionary financial assistance, including Home Repairs Assistance (please refer to section 18 for information regarding the repayment provisions relating to Disabled Facilities Grant).

If an owner of the dwelling to which the application relates ceases to be the owner before the works are completed, he/she will be required to repay to the Council upon demand the amount of any assistance that has been paid.

If an owner of the dwelling to which the application relates ceases to be the owner of that dwelling within five years from the date the works were completed, he/she will be required to repay to the Council upon demand the amount of assistance that has been paid.

If an owner of the dwelling to which the application relates, having undertaken to let the dwelling, ceases to let the dwelling in accordance with that undertaking within five years of the date upon which the works were completed, he/she will be required to repay to the Council upon demand the amount of assistance that has been paid.

Where the Council has a right to demand repayment of the assistance but there are extenuating circumstances e.g. the sale of the subject property in order to move into sheltered housing or residential care, the Council may determine not to demand repayment or to demand a lesser amount.

Any condition which creates a liability to repay the assistance in the event of a breach, shall be a local land charge and shall be disclosed to a purchaser's or vendor's solicitor in the event of a local land charges search being received by the Council.

13. Additional conditions

Where the Council considers that there are good reasons for doing so, additional conditions may be imposed with the consent of the applicant. If such conditions are considered unacceptable to the applicant, the Council reserves the right to refuse the application if it considers it appropriate to do so.

The additional conditions may include (but are not restricted to):

- the right of the Council to nominate tenants to the living accommodation
- the right of the Council to recover specialised equipment when no longer required
- the appointment of managing agents to let the living accommodation

The liability to repay the assistance may be discharged at any time by paying to the Council a sum equal to the amount of assistance or such lesser sum as the Council may agree.

14. Successive applications for assistance

Except in the case of Disabled Facilities Grant, applications for further assistance will not normally be considered unless three years have passed since the last application for assistance. This period may be reviewed by the Council to take into account the individual circumstances of a case and may be waived or reduced accordingly.

Simultaneous applications for assistance will not normally be considered unless it can be demonstrated that there are particularly good reasons for doing so e.g. those relating to health and safety.

15. Sources of external funding

The Council will continue to investigate the suitability of loan products, equity release and similar financial products, in some cases in partnership with other Kent local authorities. It is intended that these loans may be accessed by those who are ineligible for discretionary financial assistance from the Council or where some form of “top up” may be required.

As part of a Kent-wide consortium in partnership with the Home Improvement Trust, the Council has been promoting access to the “Houseproud” scheme. The scheme is currently available to those aged 60 or over, disabled persons (irrespective of their age) or those who have a disabled person living with them. The scheme can assist with the cost of repairs, improvements or adaptations and offers a variety of loans which are tailored to individual needs with a guarantee of no repossession. Further details may be obtained from the Private Sector Housing Team, by contacting Houseproud on 0800 783 7569 or via the Houseproud website www.houseproud.org.uk.

16. Regional Housing Board funding

During 2007, the South East Regional Housing Board invited local housing authorities working in partnership to bid for capital funding to promote private sector initiatives. Sevenoaks District Council, in partnership with seven other local authorities covering north and west Kent (extending to and including Ashford Borough Council), was involved in the submission of a funding bid. The bid focussed upon four main areas of activity:

- Rural housing issues, including the alleviation of fuel poverty
- Energy efficiency schemes, including those relating to renewables schemes
- Private sector landlord schemes, including those relating to the re-occupation of long term vacant properties and
- Initiatives to improve sub standard properties to meet Decent Homes standards, particularly where occupied by vulnerable households.

The Regional Housing Board is strongly urging local authorities to develop loans or “repayable grants” to complement any existing financial assistance schemes. The proposal is to develop the concept of a “repayable grant”. This would be subject to a local land charge and repayable upon the disposal of the property. This is an area which will be further developed and incorporated into future reviews of this policy.

The Council intends to utilise funds received from the Regional Housing Board in order to implement initiatives relating to the above identified priorities.

Further details regarding available funding may be obtained from the Private Sector Housing team.

17. In Touch - Home Improvement Agency

The Home Improvement Agency (HIA), which includes a Handyperson service, is administered by Hyde Housing Association and is based in Tunbridge Wells. The services of the HIA are considered fundamental to the delivery of the aims of this housing assistance policy. The scheme provides technical, administrative and practical support to those who are considering repairs, improvements or adaptations to their homes. The scheme may be accessed by those aged over 60 (although this may be subject to negotiation dependant upon the circumstances) and those considering adaptations for the benefit of disabled persons, irrespective of their age.

The HIA is also able to access financial advice and information regarding loans and equity release or similar schemes.

Home Improvement Agencies are an integral part of the Supporting People programme and from 2004, Government funding for these agencies has been made available through this means.

The potential for additional partnerships e.g. with health authorities and Primary Care Trusts continue to be investigated and developed and will link into future reviews of this Policy.

The Handyperson service offers practical assistance with a wide range of minor repairs and improvements. Typically, the Handyperson scheme includes:

- minor repairs e.g. replacing tap washers, repairing leaking gutters, minor carpentry work etc
- crime Prevention e.g. fitting window and door locks, door viewers etc
- accident Prevention e.g. fixing loose floorboards and carpets
- home safety e.g. fitting smoke detectors, fitting handrails etc
- energy efficiency e.g. accessing external funding to fit draught proofing, loft insulation etc

The scheme is not available for redecoration works and gardening. The Council is unable to offer assistance in these circumstances.

18. The application process – an overview

Upon receipt of an enquiry relating to the availability of discretionary financial or other assistance, the Council aims to supply an enquiry form, together with relevant booklets, policy etc within 5 working days. The Council will continue to use the test of resources (means test) previously associated with the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 in order to calculate the applicant's contribution (if any) until such time as an alternative mechanism becomes available and is considered suitable.

The Council will aim to advise the applicant of the result of their test of resources within 10 working days of receipt of a completed enquiry form.

IMPORTANT – it is essential that no works are carried out prior to the issue of a Notice of Approval, unless authorised in writing by the Council. Failure to observe this requirement, or removing/disturbing evidence to confirm the need for the works, will result in the works being considered ineligible for assistance

The following is intended as a brief overview of the application process and is for general guidance only. The type of housing assistance and the circumstances surrounding the application will have a bearing upon the procedures. Further details of the process are available from the Private Sector Housing Team.

- enquiry form received by the Council, the prospective applicant's contribution (if any) calculated and the applicant advised
- inspection of the property to determine the eligible works.
- schedule of eligible works prepared and sent to the applicant together with the relevant application forms, booklets, copies of conditions etc (if an agent has been engaged, this will be sent to the applicant via the agent)

- applicant/agent obtains at least two competitive quotation from building contractors and submits these to the Council together with all other application papers
- the Council registers the application as valid, processes the application (based upon the most competitive of the quotations submitted) and issues a Notice of Approval/Refusal
- works are completed
- payments request(s) received and housing assistance monies released, subject to receipt of guarantees, building control approval, satisfactory invoices etc
- entry placed upon the Council's Local Land Charges register to confirm the payment of assistance. In the event of a breach of conditions, the Council will seek recovery of all monies paid, subject to certain exemptions.

19. Mandatory Grant - Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

This is a mandatory grant. The Council is under an obligation to make funding available toward the cost of adapting a property for the benefit of a disabled person, subject to the scheme being considered "necessary and appropriate" (by Kent County Council's Occupational Therapy and Sensory Disabilities Bureau) and "reasonable and practicable" by Sevenoaks District Council, taking into account the age and condition of the subject property.

Applications are currently subject to a ceiling of £25,000 per application (this is due to be increased to £30,000 in April 2008 and is likely to be increased further in the future).

Following a review of the DFG programme by Communities and Local Government and the publication of a paper in February 2008, the Government intends to give a general consent to local authorities (with effect from April 2008) to impose a limited charge on the property. In effect, this would mean that the Council could, via a local land charge, seek to recover DFG funds (where the DFG exceeds £5000 and subject to a maximum charge of £10,000) in the event of the subject property being disposed of e.g. sold within 10 years.

DFGs are subject to a statutory test of resources (means test) in order to calculate the applicant's contribution (if any). Receipt of certain benefits will effectively "passport" an applicant through the test of resources

The Council is under a statutory duty to complete the processing of an application for DFG within 6 months of receipt of a complete and valid application. In practice, the Council seeks to complete the processing of DFG applications within a considerably shorter timescale although this will depend upon the individual officers' caseload and other commitments. The grant-aided works must be completed to the Council's satisfaction within 12 months from the date of the Notice of Approval.

The Council will consider applications for DFG from eligible applicants, including those occupying qualifying park homes and houseboats.

Unless the level of available funding permits, the Council will not normally consider exceeding the mandatory DFG ceiling. However, where it can be demonstrated that there are exceptional reasons for doing so, the Council will carry out an assessment to determine whether further funding might be made available. Any applications for discretionary assistance, for example to “top up” the mandatory grant, will be considered by the Housing Services Manager, Private Sector Housing, in consultation with the Head of Housing and the Portfolio Holder for Balanced Communities.

20. Discretionary assistance (General)

The Council will consider applications for all forms of discretionary assistance where it can be demonstrated that reasonable steps have been taken to fund the works through alternative means, for example through conventional loans, equity release or similar schemes. The Council accepts that loan products may not always be appropriate and will seek to target limited funds to those in the greatest need.

For this reason, it cannot be assumed that any form of discretionary funding will be available.

Enquiries will be prioritised to take into account the applicant’s circumstances, financial need, the nature of the work and the urgency.

In principle, the Council takes the view that the responsibility for the repair and improvement of property rests with the owner. Discretionary financial assistance will normally only be available where it can be demonstrated that other funding options have been explored and eliminated, or where the use of discretionary funding assists the Council in meeting its strategic objectives e.g. in returning long-term vacant properties into use, improving energy efficiency, addressing fuel poverty, ensuring that homes meet the “Decent Homes” standard and/or where the property is to be used for social housing purposes (i.e. housing provision for homeless persons).

Generally, applications for all forms of discretionary assistance will only be considered in the following circumstances:

- Where essential works are required to remedy Category 1 hazards (as assessed using the Housing Health and safety Rating System - HHSRS) or to assist in meeting the Decent Homes standard
- Where essential works are urgently required in order to enable a vulnerable occupant to remain in occupation or to prevent housing conditions worsening, for example through ingress of rainwater
- Where essential works are required to improve the thermal performance of a property or to address issues of fuel poverty where it can be demonstrated that other forms of funding, for example through “Warm Front” have been fully explored and eliminated. Such works will be subject to a SAP assessment (a measure of the thermal performance of a dwelling), with priority given to those properties with a SAP of less than 30.

Generally, applications for all forms of discretionary assistance will not normally be considered in the following circumstances:

- for non-essential repairs or for works which are considered desirable rather than essential (including kitchen and bathroom refurbishments to replace dated but otherwise serviceable fittings)
- for repairs to porches, conservatories, sheds, outbuildings, garden fences, boundary walls etc
- for cosmetic repairs, redecoration and cleaning works, except where necessary to facilitate hospital discharge
- for the replacement of windows and doors on grounds of energy efficiency unless considered by the Council to be in serious disrepair and beyond economical repair
- for completing DIY projects
- the funding of works which would normally be covered by a household insurance policy. Discretionary funding is not intended to be an alternative to insurance cover

21. Applications from owner/occupiers

Where funding permits, the Council will consider applications for assistance from qualifying applicants, priority being given to clients of the Home Improvement Agency.

A qualifying 3-year prior residency condition will be applied in all cases except those relating to first time buyers, key workers and where properties which have been vacant for more than 3 years. In such circumstances, the 3-year qualifying period will be waived subject to receipt of acceptable documentary proof and the approval of the Head of Housing.

In terms of the condition of the subject property, priority will be given where properties require urgent attention in order to remedy Category 1 hazards (assessed under HHSRS).

The Council will continue to use the “test of resources” (means test) associated with the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 until such time as an alternative assessment becomes available and is considered suitable.

Assistance will be subject to a ceiling of £10,000 per application and only above this level in exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Head of Housing.

Where practicable, energy efficiency measures will continue to be incorporated within schedules of eligible works although, where alternative sources of funding exist for such works e.g. through external partner agencies, applicants will be expected to investigate and access such funds before seeking financial assistance from the Council.

The Council will seek to complete the processing of applications for assistance from owner/occupiers and qualifying tenants within 12 weeks of receipt of a valid application.

All works must be completed to the Council's satisfaction within 12 months from the issue of the Notice of Approval unless the Council has formally agreed an extension in writing.

All applicants will be required to confirm in writing that they intend to occupy the subject property as their only or main residence for a period of 5 years from the completion date. An entry will be made to this effect within the Council's Local Land Charges Register.

22. Applications from Landlords

Where funding permits, the Council will consider applications for assistance from landlords where works are required to meet the statutory standard, usually subject to the Council receiving tenancy nomination rights.

Priority will be given to applicants who intend to bring a long-term vacant property back into use in the Swanley, Sevenoaks town and Edenbridge town areas and/or where the property is to be used for social housing purposes (i.e. housing provision for homeless persons).

Assistance will be subject to a ceiling of £10,000 per application and will be calculated at the rate of 75% of the eligible cost or £10,000, whichever is the lower. In exceptional cases, generally where the works will assist the Council in meeting its strategic objectives, it may be possible to exceed the ceiling with the approval of the Head of Housing.

Where practicable, energy efficiency measures will continue to be incorporated within schedules of eligible works although where alternative sources of funding exist for such works e.g. through external partner agencies, applicants will be expected to investigate and access such funds before seeking financial assistance from the Council.

The Council will seek to complete the processing of applications from landlords within 12 weeks of receipt of a complete and valid application.

All works must be carried out within 12 months from the issue of the Notice of Approval, unless the Council has formally agreed an extension in writing.

All applicants will be required to confirm in writing that they intend to let the subject property to someone other than a member of their family for a period of 5 years from the completion date. An entry will be made to this effect within the Council's Local Land Charges Register. Failure to comply with this condition will result in the Council seeking to recover all monies paid.

Further details are available upon request.

23. Home Repair Assistance (HRA)

HRA is a discretionary form of assistance, intended to be used for small-scale works of repair, improvement or adaptation to a dwelling, houseboat or mobile home.

Where funding permits, the Council will consider applications for HRA from qualifying applicants. Applicants must:

- be aged 18 or over on the date of application
- occupy the dwelling as their only residence or care for an elderly, disabled or infirm person
- have an owner's interest in the dwelling, alone or jointly with others, or occupy under a right of exclusive occupation granted for life or for a period of over 5 years
- have a duty to carry out the works in question
- be in receipt of a qualifying income-related benefit, regardless of the applicant's age e.g. income support, income-based job-seekers allowance, working families' tax credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit or disabled person's tax credit.
- have occupied the subject property as their only residence for a period of 3 years prior to the receipt of the application

The 3-year qualifying period will not apply where:

- the works are to adapt a dwelling to enable an elderly, disabled or infirm person who lives in the dwelling as their only residence to be cared for
- the works relate to the means of escape in case of fire or other fire precautions or
- where the Council considers it inappropriate to do so taking into account the circumstances of the applicant.

Priority will be given to clients of the Home Improvement Agency. Where works relate to adaptations for the benefit of a disabled person, such works must be supported by the Occupational Therapist.

HRA applications are subject to a ceiling of £5000 per application. Unless there are exceptional reasons for doing so, the Council will not consider more than one application relating to the subject property during any three-year period.

The Council seeks to complete the processing of a complete and valid HRA application within 8 weeks of receipt.

All works must be completed to the Council's satisfaction within 12 months from the date of the Notice of Approval unless the Council has formally agreed an extension in writing.

Further details concerning HRA are available upon request.

24. Fees and Charges

The Council will consider reasonable fees and charges associated with the preparation, submission and supervision of a scheme as eligible for inclusion within calculations providing that they relate to eligible works.

Typically, these might include the fees and charges relating to: -

- engaging a suitably qualified building surveyor, architect, structural engineer or managing agent to liaise with the Council, to prepare a scheme, to supervise the works and to authorise payments
- building regulations, Environment Agency or similar fees
- legal fees associated with the completion of the certificate of ownership or mortgagees consent form
- fees associated with specialist tests e.g. electrical and gas safety tests

Generally, the Council would expect professional fees and charges to fall within the scale of charges suggested by the relevant professional body. The Council reserves the right to determine the level of fees and charges it considers appropriate.

25. Energy Conservation

The Council has a duty to promote energy efficiency and to reduce harmful global emissions under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. The Council is also under an obligation to address issues of fuel poverty and affordable warmth since these are closely linked to ill health and sub standard living conditions.

The Council will continue to refer enquiries to the Kent Energy Centre (see section 29 for details) and to access energy conservation and efficiency measures via the KASH or similar schemes, in partnership with other Kent authorities and external partners.

The Council will also refer enquiries to the “Warm Front” scheme but, since this is not designed to accommodate emergency works, the Council will access other forms of discretionary funding where necessary. The Council will continue to promote the West Kent Healthy Homes Scheme.

Where funding permits, the Council will continue to make assistance available to elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups and will, where practicable, include energy conservation measures within schedules of works, priority being given to properties with a SAP rating of less than 30 (please also refer to section 16).

26. Consultation

The Council intends to consult the following in developing and implementing the renewal policy: -

- In Touch – Home Improvement Agency
- Age Concern

- Kent Social Services, Occupational Therapy and Sensory Disabilities Bureau
- Landlords' Forum
- Housing Forum
- National Landlords Association
- Community Development Team, Sevenoaks District Council

27. Cases which fall outside the Council's policy

It is accepted that there will inevitably be some cases that fall outside the scope of this policy document. Such cases, together with others that may exhibit special extenuating circumstances will be reported for consideration by the Cabinet Member for Social and Housing Services.

28. Appeals

Generally, appeals relating to the availability of financial and/or other forms of housing assistance will be considered by the Community and Planning Services Director. In the absence of the Community and Planning Services Director, appeals will be considered by the Chief Executive.

All appeals must be submitted in writing to: -

Community and Planning Services Director, Sevenoaks District Council, Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks TN13 1HG

The Council seeks to acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 5 working days and to formally respond within 15 working days. In some cases, it may be considered necessary to discuss the case with the appellant, in which case the written notification of the result of the appeal will be issued within 5 working days of the meeting.

29. Complaints

In the first instance, complaints should be made, in writing, to: -

Head of Housing
 Community and Planning Services Department
 Sevenoaks District Council
 Argyle Road
 Sevenoaks TN13 1HG

Every effort will be made to address complaints speedily and efficiently. The Council does have a formal complaint procedure, full details of which are available upon request.

30. Future policy review

This policy shall be the subject of a periodic review in order to reflect legislative changes, new initiatives, new strategic objectives and revised budgets. Such reviews

will also take into account comments made by applicants, service users and external partners. It is anticipated that the policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

31. Publication of the renewal policy

The Council intends to promote the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy via the Council's website. Copies of the policy will be available (free of charge) from the Private Sector Housing Team. A copy will be available for inspection at the Council's Offices in Sevenoaks.

32. Contact details:

Private Sector Housing Team
Sevenoaks District Council
Community & Planning Services Department
Council Offices
Argyle Road
Sevenoaks
TN13 1HG
Tel 01732 227000
Fax 01732 227191
Email privatesectorhousing@sevenoaks.gov.uk

Houseproud
Home Improvement Trust
7 Mansfield Road
Nottingham NG1 3FB
Tel: 0800 783 7569
Website: www.houseproud.org.uk

In Touch Home Improvement Agency
St Georges Centre
7 Chilston Road
Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN4 9LP
Tel: (01892) 519579
Website: www.intouchsupport.co.uk

Kent Energy Centre
Tel 0800 358 6669
Website: www.kentenergycentre.org.uk

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