
DRAFT HOUSING ASSISTANCE AND DISABLED ADAPTATION POLICY – CONSULTATION

To: **Cabinet - 11th September 2014**

Main Portfolio Area: **Housing and Planning**

By: **Cllr Richard Nicholson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning Services**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **Thanet Wide**

Summary: The draft housing assistance and disabled adaptations policy was discussed at overview and scrutiny panel on 19th August 2014. The Overview & Scrutiny Panel made a recommendation to Cabinet for a six week public consultation to be undertaken. This report asks Cabinet to consider this recommendation and decide whether a public consultation is necessary and appropriate.

For Decision

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptations Policy is required under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and provides the council with the discretion to develop new schemes for providing financial assistance to deal with issues in privately owned housing.
- 1.2 This draft policy sets out the areas of focus for any available discretionary resources in order to improve housing conditions across the district, but also provides details on the mandatory disabled facilities grant.
- 1.3 A two week consultation was proposed starting on 11th August 2014 focusing on key stakeholders. However, following representation and due to a lack of availability during the summer holiday period, this consultation was extended to five weeks to end on 15th September. The key stakeholders included:
- All Councillors;
 - Senior Management Team;
 - Managers and officers in related TDC services;
 - KCC social services
 - Family Mosaic Home Improvement Agency
- 1.4 On the 19th August 2014 overview and scrutiny panel made the following recommendation:
- “To request Cabinet to organise a well-publicised six weeks consultation period on the Draft Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy 2014-16. That this consultation is focused on reaching disabled people and their carers and includes all those organisations which represent disabled people.”

- 1.5 This report provides information to Cabinet on the potential to carry out such a consultation so that they are in position to make a decision on whether this is necessary and appropriate.

2.0 Consultation

- 2.1 Public consultation is used to provide members of the public, relevant stakeholders or a targeted group of individuals with an opportunity to comment or feed back on a proposal, project or policy. Consultations are recommended when members of the public have an opportunity to effect genuine change.

Open-ended consultation

- 2.2 Some consultations are carried out as open-ended exercises. This means that members of the public are asked to provide free comment on a proposal, project or policy. An open ended consultation is used to gather more general comment rather than specific feedback and means that the respondent can comment in any way they chose.
- 2.3 Depending on the numbers of responses received, open ended consultations can take a great deal of time to analyse and are subject to interpretation. They also mean that respondents are able to comment on parts of a policy which cannot be changed, raising expectations.

Survey

- 2.4 Surveys are used to provide more focused or specific feedback on a consultation. A survey is a useful tool to ensure that responses are consistent and easier to analyse, capturing comparable and meaningful data.
- 2.5 As there are elements of this policy which are not discretionary, a survey would identify the specific areas which the public could comment on. This would help ensure there was no confusion or opportunity to comment on parts of the policy which are mandatory and therefore could not be changed.

Online survey

- 2.6 Online surveys are the most common way for local authorities to gather public feedback. Producing an online survey is free of charge (other than the officer time required to coordinate this) and is a quick and effective way for people to provide immediate feedback on a given subject.
- 2.7 An online survey requires no printing or postage costs and means that the consultation could be open for all members of the public to complete. Online surveys can be accessed on a home, office or library PC or via any handheld mobile device.

Hard copy survey

- 2.8 Hard copy surveys are mainly used for carrying out a postal exercise targeting a specific group of individuals or groups.
- 2.9 Hard copy surveys require data-input once received and have associated printing and postal costs. This type of survey is mostly issued upon request (so a member of the public can request a copy be sent to them by post if they do not have access to a PC)

or are circulated to key public venues, for example local libraries, for members of the public to call in and collect their own copy.

Targeted consultation

- 2.10 This is a consultation exercise that is targeted to a specific group or individuals.
- 2.11 The council does not hold a specific database which identifies disabled residents and their carers. This information is maintained by other agencies but could not be shared with the council under data protection rules. The council could however target local organisations and community groups who represent or work with those with disabilities.

Open consultation

- 2.12 This is a consultation exercise open for all members of the public to respond.

Promotion

- 2.13 Depending on their scale and whether the consultation is targeted or open, public consultations can be promoted online on the council's website, to local press and media by press release and on social media using the council's Twitter account which has more than 4,000 followers.
- 2.14 Ward Councillors are also encouraged to communicate key council consultations to residents and groups within their ward.
- 2.15 For larger campaigns, full-scale communication and marketing plans are drawn up to provide a greater level of promotion.

3.0 Options

- 3.1 Option 1: Carry out a six week public consultation using an online survey that identifies the areas of the draft policy that can be consulted on. Publicise the consultation online, through local press and social media. Highlight the consultation to specific groups with an interest in the document and with access to disabled residents and their carers. This would extend the consultation with an end date of 24th October 2014. Hard copy documents could be made available to people upon request and a limited supply could be circulated to Thanet's Gateway Plus in Margate and other district libraries.
- 3.2 Option 2: Do not undertake a public-wide consultation but extend the groups consulted to target other relevant groups that have access to disabled residents and their carers.
- 3.3 Option 3: Keep the consultation process as it currently stands with the consultation groups mentioned in 1.3 above and to finish on 15th September.

4.0 Corporate Implications

4.1 Financial and VAT

- 4.1.1 The costs of undertaking a wider public consultation will depend on the different approaches that are chosen. Option 1 above is the most affordable option and if limited numbers of the survey and policy are printed the cost can be covered within the housing regeneration budget.

4.1.2 Where additional options are chosen the costs will increase. A hard copy survey is the most expensive option and a budget of between £5,000-£10,000 may be required. Currently no budget has been identified to cover this level of cost and would have to be found from within existing budgets.

4.2 Legal

4.2.1 There is no requirement under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 to consult on the policy, but it is considered good practice to do so.

4.2.2 A generic online survey is considered the best option to ensure the cabinet are not at risk of breaching the Data Protection Act in attempting to target disabled people directly.

4.3 Corporate

4.3.1 There are no risks to the council in undertaking a public consultation on this document; however there will be an impact on the document timetable.

4.3.2 The six week public consultation would need to begin on 12th September 2014 and end on 24th October 2014. This does not allow enough time for the responses to be analysed and the document amended for the 13th November 2014 cabinet meeting and this would need to be deferred to the January 2015 meeting.

5.4 Equity and Equalities

5.4.1 An equality impact assessment will be undertaken following the consultation period and once a final document has been drafted.

6.0 Recommendation

6.1 As stated in paragraph 3.1 to carry out a six week public consultation using an online survey that identifies the areas of the draft policy that can be consulted on. Publicise the consultation online, through local press and social media. Highlight the consultation to specific groups with an interest in the document and with access to disabled residents and their carers. This would extend the consultation with an end date of 24th October 2014. Hard copy documents could be made available to people upon request and a limited supply could be circulated to Thanet's Gateway Plus in Margate and other district libraries.

7.0 Decision Making Process

7.1 This is a non - key decision for Cabinet.

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Annex List

Annex 1	Draft Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy 2014-2016
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Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Nicola Walker, Finance Manager (HRA, Capital & External Funding)
Legal	Steven Boyle, Interim Legal Services Manager & Monitoring Officer