

HEALTH, HOUSING & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL REFERRAL: DRAFT HOUSING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY APRIL 2014 – MARCH 2017**REPORT OF THE LEAD SCRUTINY MEMBER FOR HEALTH, HOUSING AND ADULT SERVICES****1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide the Scrutiny Committee with the Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel's findings and recommendations in relation to the commissioned item from the committee.

2. Background

- 2.1 At its meeting on Thursday 5 December 2013 the Scrutiny Committee received a report outlining the proposed changes to the Housing Financial Assistance Policy. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Committee would commission the Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel to act as the consultative group to gather views and comments to contribute to the consultation on the policy.
- 2.2 The Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel held a meeting on 20 February 2014 to discuss the changes to the policy.

3. Feedback from the Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel

- 3.1 The council's approach to meeting the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO HA 2002), is contained within the Financial Assistance Policy. This policy ends in March 2014 and there is the need to review and establish a new policy that reflects current housing policy and the financial position in relation to housing assistance.
- 3.2 Members enquired around the target hardening initiative and the high standard of crime reduction measures that had been carried out on properties. However some properties have had little or no such measures implemented and criminals are aware of these areas which ultimately makes them vulnerable to break-ins and theft. It was acknowledged as important that in going forward consideration is given as to how this can be funded in the future.
- 3.3 Members also highlighted the wider issue of combining the various FAPs relating to information, advice or guidance (IAG) and how this would be carried out in the future. AC reported that in future IAG delivery would be at the local level and using representative groups and organisations to develop networks. By developing networks we will create the ability to gather intelligence to target IAG at potential 'hotspots' or customise the IAG to suit the needs of a specific area. It will also allow communities to develop their own support mechanisms through communities, groups and individuals providing and managing demand of their own intelligence.
- 3.4 Finally Members acknowledged that with approximately £1.1million of assets on the mortgage loan book there was the potential to explore how to be more creative with this asset in the future e.g. scoping out the potential of seeking funding using the

value of the loans book, this could increase the options for funding in the future for Decent Homes work.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 Members recognised the Housing Financial Assistance Policy as an important document to fulfil statutory obligations in relation to housing assistance as well as providing the opportunity to set out clear objectives around more discretionary issues. Members also acknowledged the policy changes reflected current housing policy as well as the financial position of the Council around housing assistance.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The Health, Housing and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel would recommend to the Scrutiny Committee that the following comments are made in relation to the Draft Housing Financial Assistance Policy April 2014 – March 2017:

- (a) That the Scrutiny Committee supports the Draft Housing Financial Assistance Policy recognising the need to make revisions in light of current housing practice and financial considerations;
- (b) That in agreeing the policy the Scrutiny Committee also acknowledges the significance within the policy of developing information, advice and guidance within local communities, including enabling local communities to gather and manage their own intelligence, to ensure that areas receive advice which is relevant to the needs and demands of that area;
- (c) That recognition is given to the importance of crime reduction measures including specialist advice and guidance within potentially vulnerable areas as a way of increasing an areas resilience against crime; and
- (d) That consideration is given to scoping potential funding options for future Decent Homes work including exploring the use of the value of the loans book within the regulatory framework of the policy.

6. Glossary of Terms

FAP	Financial Assistance Policy
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance

Background Papers

Contact Officer: **Nigel Cummings (0191 561 1006)**
nigel.cummings@sunderland.gov.uk