

## Eden District Council

## Cabinet

18 October 2022

**Empty Homes Grant Policy**

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Housing and Health Portfolio
<b>Report from:</b>	Assistant Director – Customers, Performance & Housing
<b>Wards:</b>	All Wards
<b>OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>	

**1 Purpose**

- 1.1 To seek approval for the Empty Homes Grant Policy and Procedure.
- 1.2 To seek the approval for the Policy and Procedure to spend the Empty Homes Grant funding designated for this purpose to be adopted.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet approve the Empty Homes Grant Policy and Procedure.

**3 Report Details**

- 3.1 The Council is the local housing authority for Eden district and has a statutory duty to produce a housing strategy. The draft Housing Strategy 2021 – 2026 ('The Strategy') has been prepared in order to meet this requirement.
- 3.2 The Strategy identifies three key priorities:
  - Development of good quality new housing.
  - Improving the condition of our existing housing stock.
  - Improving access to housing for all.
- 3.3 The Housing Strategy includes the following objectives:
  - Review our Housing Renewals Assistance Policy, incorporating our policy changes for Disabled Facilities Grants, empty homes, discretionary housing grants and Home Improvement Agency.
  - Explore innovative ideas for Empty Homes Assistance as part of our wider Housing Renewals Assistance Policy review.
- 3.4 As of 15 September 2022 there were 567 long term empty properties in Eden.
- 3.5 This funding is subject to certain criteria; namely it needs to be used to bring properties which have been empty for two years or more. Properties are to be free of class 1 Hazards and must be reoccupied within six months of grant funds being claimed.

- 3.6 All grants will be subject to a Legal Charge and will be recovered at the point of sale were the property is sold within a five year period of receiving the grant.
- 3.7 Applications will be assessed by Eden District Council's Home Improvement Agency Officers.
- 3.8 Eden District Council's Home Improvement Agency Officers will undertake a preliminary Housing Health and Safety Rating System assessment prior to grant approval.
- 3.9 Eden District Council's Home Improvement Agency Officers will undertake a subsequent Housing Health and Safety Rating System assessment on completion of the works to ensure relevant standards have been met and that the property is in a habitable condition.
- 3.10 This Policy replaces the current Empty Homes Grant and Empty Homes Loan schemes which have had no uptake in recent years due to difficulties in applicants meeting the criteria.
- 3.11 The Policy and Procedure to spend the funding designated for empty homes grants details how Eden District Council proposes to use the funding and contains a fair and transparent process for allocation.

## **4 Policy Framework**

- 4.1 The Council has four corporate priorities which are:
  - Sustainable;
  - Healthy, safe and secure;
  - Connected; and
  - Creative
- 4.2 This report meets the Healthy, safe and secure corporate priority.

## **5 Consultation**

- 5.1 The draft Policy/Procedure has been discussed with the Housing and Health Portfolio Holder, Legal Services, Finance.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial and Resources**

- 6.1.1 Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the Council's stated priorities, as set out in its Council Plan 2019-2023 as agreed at Council on 7 November 2019.
- 6.1.2 The amount available within Eden District Council's Discretionary Renovation Grants capital budget line is £100,000. Circa £30,000 has been allocated to Empty Homes' grants with the remaining being allocated to Discretionary Grants to improve the housing stock in Eden.
- 6.1.3 It is important to also reference Council Tax. Currently our Council Tax policy relating to empty homes states:-
- 6.1.4 An uninhabitable property that requires, or is undergoing, major works to render it habitable, or is undergoing structural alteration. This discount will apply for a period of 12 months, as long as the property remains unoccupied

and unfurnished. This is for a maximum period of 12 months, thereafter a 100% Council Tax charge applies and the homeowner cannot reapply.

6.1.5 Dwellings which are vacant (unoccupied and unfurnished) for a period of up to 6 months since the property became vacant. This discount will usually be applied to the account without the need for an application to be made.

6.1.6 The new authority Westmorland and Furness is currently reviewing their Council Tax Policies to harmonise the existing Council Tax policies, which may result in a change to the Empty Homes Policy.

## 6.2 Legal

6.2.1 Due to the nature of the report, the legal implications are considered within the body of the report.

## 6.3 Human Resources

6.3.1 None at this stage.

## 6.4 Environmental

6.4.1 None at this stage.

## 6.5 Statutory Considerations

<b>Consideration:</b>	<b>Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:</b>
Equality and Diversity	Positive implications, supporting people access accommodation by increasing the housing stock available for occupation.
Health, Social Environmental and Economic Impact	There would be positive health and social impact arising from the recommendations of the report i.e. increasing the housing stock available for occupation and reducing the number of moribund properties.
Crime and Disorder	There are no adverse crime and disorder implications arising from this report.
Children and Safeguarding	Positive implications, increasing the housing stock available for occupation.

## 7.5 Risk Management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Controls Required</b>
Demand for the fund exceeds resources.	The Council is unable to support future applications damaging its reputation.	Monitoring of spend.

## 7 Other Options Considered

7.1 The option of not offering grant assistance to help bring empty properties into use was considered. Due to the number of empty properties in Eden and the

demand for housing it was believed that utilising the funding available in the budget would be preferable.

## **8 Reasons for the Decision/Recommendation**

- 8.1 This report supports healthy, safe and secure corporate priority in the provision of a clear policy and procedure to utilise funding to assist property owners bring empty properties back into use.

### **Tracking Information**

<b>Governance Check</b>	<b>Date Considered</b>
<b>Chief Finance Officer (or Deputy)</b>	5 October 2022
<b>Monitoring Officer (or Deputy)</b>	5 October 2022
<b>Relevant Assistant Director</b>	22 September 2022

**Background Papers:** None

**Appendices:** Appendix 1: Eden District Empty Homes Grant Policy & Procedure

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Approved by:  
Date Approved:  
Review Frequency:  
Responsible Officer:

# **Eden District Council**

## **Empty Homes Grant Policy & Procedure**

August 2022

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### Urdu

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## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Eden District Council's Strategic Priorities 2021 – 2022 highlight the following:

Housing Strategy – we will develop an action plan to deliver our new housing strategy setting out our vision for affordable decent homes for our local people, and to help us retain our young people and families.

1.2 Eden District Council's Housing Strategy 2021 - 2026 identifies three key priorities:

- Development of good quality new housing.
- Improving the condition of our existing housing stock.
- Improving access to housing for all.

1.3 The Housing Strategy includes the following objectives:

- Review our Housing Renewals Assistance Policy, incorporating our policy changes for Disabled Facilities Grants, empty homes, discretionary housing grants and Home Improvement Agency.
- Explore innovative ideas for Empty Homes Assistance as part of our wider Housing Renewals Assistance Policy review.

1.4 Empty homes blight an area, causing frustration for neighbours, and those in housing need who can see a potentially good home being left to decay.

## **2.0 What the funding will be spent on**

2.1 Empty Home Grant assistance is available to owners of Long Term Empty Homes ie properties that have been empty for two years or more as per Council Tax Records.

2.2 Grants must be used to undertake works to properties to achieve a decent home standard which enable the property to be made ready for occupation ie free of Class 1 hazards in accordance with Housing Health and Safety Rating System standards (HHSRS).

2.3 The Grant funding available is limited. To enable Eden District Council to support multiple homes the maximum assistance which may be applied for in respect of any one property is £5,000. The Council reserves the right to increase the grant support dependant on 'take up' of the grant and available funds.

## **3.0 Who will be eligible to apply for funding?**

3.1 To qualify the following criteria must be met:

- The applicant must be the owner of the property and provide documentation to support this.
- Works must be completed within six months of the approval of the grant.
- A preliminary inspection must be undertaken to ensure the scope of work planned is sufficient to meet decent homes standards.
- Grants will only be paid once the works have been carried out, a relevant invoice has been received and a Housing Health and Safety Rating System review has been undertaken ensuring the relevant standards have been met. Payment will only be made once the property is in a habitable condition. Therefore the



applicant must have sufficient funding in place to enable the completion of the works in advance of grant funding being paid. Eden District Council reserve the right to request evidence of the applicant's ability to self-finance the whole of the works.

- The property must be reoccupied within six months of claiming the grant funding by either the owner or a tenant on a tenancy of no less than 6 months. Were the property not to be reoccupied within the specified timeframe, the applicant would be deemed to be in breach of the policy and action would be taken to reclaim the monies paid out. Relevant Council Tax checks will be made to ensure the property has been reoccupied.
- The applicant must agree to a Legal Charge against the property. The grant would be recovered at the point of sale were the property to be sold within a five year period of the applicant receiving the grant.
- The funding must be for new works being carried out to the Property. Funding for retrospective works will not be considered.
- Any relevant planning permission, listed building consent or building control consent must be obtained before the works start.
- The owner must ensure that insurers and any leaseholders are made aware of the proposed works.
- The owner must inform any neighbours who may be affected by noise and vibration during the course of the work prior to the start of the works in compliance with the Party Wall Act 1996.

#### **4.0 How funding will be allocated?**

- 4.1 Applicants will be required to complete and submit the application form at Appendix A.
- 4.2 Eden District Council's Home Improvement Agency will undertake an initial assessment of the application using the criteria in Appendix B.
- 4.4 Final approval will be made by the Assistant Director Customers, Performance and Housing.

#### **5.0 Monitoring & Review**

- 5.1 This Policy will be reviewed every three years to ensure that the fund is being put to best use to bring empty home back into use.

#### **6.0 Other considerations**

- 6.1 The amount of funding available is finite and will be dependent on uptake and the repayment of grants.
  - 6.2 While the funding under consideration is to bring properties to a decent homes standard applicants are asked to consider the viability of undertaking additional energy saving measures.
-



**4. Planning Permission and Building Regulation Approval**

**a) Have you applied for planning permission: Yes/No**  
If yes please include tell us the  
Application date:  
Application reference number:

**b) Have you applied for building regulation approval: Yes/No**

**5. Who will carry out the works?**

**a) Will you or a member of your family be carrying out the works: Yes/No**  
Contractors name/address/contact details:

**b) Have you already started the works? Yes/No**

**6. Ownership**

**a) Do you (or jointly with others) own the freehold? Yes/No**

**b) Do you (or jointly with others) have a lease with at Least 5 years to run? Yes/No**

## 7. Cost of works

a) What is the total estimated costs of bringing the property back to a decent homes standard?

Estimated Costs £

b) How much grant funding is being asked for?

c) Do you have available additional funds if final costs to complete the works are above the amount of grant asked for? Yes/No

d) Are you undertaking any additional works to improve the energy efficiency rating of the property Yes/No

If yes please provide details:

## 8. DECLARATION

Please read the statement below and sign if you agree to the terms of the grant application:

I/we understand that:

Long-Term Empty Home Grant funding can only be paid for new works being carried out to the Property (not retrospective works).

Payment will be paid on completion of agreed work and when the property is in a habitable state.

No payment will be made and I/we will be liable for any sums owed to the contractor if the works are not completed as agreed in the schedule of works and in the timings stated.

I/we certify that I/we will complete the works within six months and the property will be completed, in total, to a Decent Home Standard and available for occupation either by the owner or a tenant.

A local land charge will remain for a period of 5 years and will be repayable in the event of a sale or disposal of the property within 5 years of the grant being awarded.

I/we understand that it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that any relevant planning permission, listed building consent or building control consent is obtained before the works start.

I/we must ensure that the insurers and any leaseholders of my home are made aware of the proposed works if necessary.

I am/we are responsible for informing neighbours who may be affected by noise and vibration during the course of the work.

I agree to the terms and conditions of the grant application:

Signed: Name:

Dated:

Signed: Name:

Dated:

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## Appendix B – Assessment Criteria (checklist)

- Has the property been empty for a minimum of 2 years? Y/N
- Has a preliminary HHSRS inspection been undertaken? Y/N
- Does the schedule of works indicate that the property will be brought up to a decent homes standard on completion of the works? Y/N
- If planning permission is required has this been granted? Y/N
- If required has an application for building regulations been submitted? Y/N
- Is this application funding new works? Y/N
- Has the applicant sufficient funds to meet the cost of works above the grant being applied for? Y/N
- Is the property either freehold or leasehold with a remaining term over 5 years? Y/N
- Are additional energy efficiency measures being considered? Y/N

Recommended for approval Y/N

Reasons for approval/refusal:

Officer Name/Date: