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**DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL  
STRATEGY & POLICY**

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SUMMARY  
JULY 2003

## SUMMARY

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### Why a new policy?

The Government has replaced the legislation covering repair and renewal grants with wider local authority powers to provide assistance to homeowners and, where appropriate, landlords. The Government has also signalled its belief that local authorities should encourage homeowners to use their own resources (particularly the equity in their homes) and that grants should be used for only those households that are vulnerable and have no access to other resources (including the equity in their homes).

Under the new legislation, from 18<sup>th</sup> July 2003 the old grant giving powers no longer apply and the new, wider Council powers (including power to give grants) can only be used where they are in line with a published policy.

The Council's new Housing Renewal Policy provides the basis for continuing with the provision of means tested grants for the remainder of 2003/04 and for replacing some grants thereafter with practical advice and assistance and access to loans, including an Equity Release Scheme.

**Note:** Disability Facilities Grants remain largely unaffected by these changes.

### Objectives of the new policy

The new policy arises from -

- recent surveys of housing needs and of the condition of the private sector stock in Dartford (copies of these are available for inspection)
- the impact of being a part of the Thames Gateway, designated by the Government as an area of population and economic growth
- partnership developments within Kent that allow the Council to take a more strategic and enabling role to meeting the needs of individuals, communities and areas
- the need to use scarce public resources to encourage investment in homes and communities by the people who have a stake in them e.g. homeowners

The resulting policy objectives are summarised below.

#### **Summary of Dartford Council's Strategic Objectives**

- Responding to the needs of vulnerable households (particularly the elderly and disabled) through mandatory and discretionary grants and referral to Moat Care and Repair
- Responding to the needs of those who cannot afford essential repairs by provision of full or part funding with means-tested grants
- Promoting awareness of energy efficiency and providing access to partnership schemes such as insulation and boiler replacement
- Identifying empty properties and HMOs and liaising with the owners to ensure best and proper use
- Reacting to complaints with investigation and enforcement action



### **Dealing with Exceptional Circumstances**

- The Council already uses its discretion to ensure that policy is not too restrictive and can respond to exceptional circumstances. Special circumstances require a tailored response such as providing temporary accommodation for a vulnerable household while works are being undertaken.
- Under the new powers (from April 2003) the Council will consider other options including financial assistance to facilitate a disabled person's move to more suitable accommodation where this is a more cost-effective solution than adapting the current home.

### **Complaints and Appeals**

- The existing Council Complaints Procedure covers decisions made on grants (the procedure is available from the Council Reception or by post).
- This Procedure can also be used to pursue a formal Appeal against a Council decision.
- All residents have access to the Local Government Ombudsman if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the Complaints Procedure.

### **Practical Advice and Assistance**

- The Council provides advice and assistance on a wide range of renewal activity including access to grants, home energy efficiency schemes, other sources of advice and useful literature such as its own list of local building contractors suitable for homeowners undertaking minor works.
- The Council plans to extend the range of advice and make it more accessible through leaflets targeted at particular needs and through its website. These developments are planned for implementation in 2004/05.
- The Council is exploring options for more practical assistance and encouragement through explanatory booklets for commissioning works and through schemes such as discounted building materials and tool and plant hire. Subject to further evaluation of the costs and benefits, these developments are planned for implementation in 2004/05.

### **Landlord Support and Liaison**

- The Council expects private landlords to fund the required housing fitness standards from within the business resources.
- The Council recognises the importance of working with landlords in areas of complementary interest including housing fitness and renewal and making best use of homes available for Dartford residents. It has therefore set up a Landlords Forum in partnership with Gravesham Council.
- The Council's Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Officer will work with the above Forum to develop a locally appropriate HMO Licensing Scheme and voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme for implementation in line with the current Housing Bill that is going through Parliament.

### **Service Access**

All private sector housing renewal services are available at the Civic Centre and by telephone using numbers advertised on the Council's website.