



GUILDFORD
B O R O U G H

HOME IMPROVEMENT POLICY



HOME IMPROVEMENT POLICY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In July 2002, the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 was made. The Order repealed much of the existing prescriptive legislation governing the provision of renewal grants to home owners and replaced it with a new wide-ranging power to provide assistance for housing renewal.
- 1.2 The Order states that before the powers contained within it can be used, local authorities must publish a policy on how they intend to use them.
- 1.3 This document lays out how this Council, as local housing authority, intends to use the powers contained in the Order. In preparing this policy, the guidance provided in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) document, Housing Renewal Guidance (Consultative Document) June 2002 was followed.
- 1.4 The Council recognises that poor quality housing can have an impact on the health of the occupants and on the quality of life in an area. The main responsibility for maintenance of a property lies with the homeowner, however, some homeowners, particularly the elderly and most vulnerable, do not have the necessary resources to keep their homes in good repair. The Council has a role in providing assistance in these cases and also a duty to promote private sector renewal and to ensure that privately rented accommodation is safe and suitable.
- 1.5 The Council also has a commitment to meet the target set out in the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, which places an obligation on local authorities to reduce energy use in residential properties.

2.0 HOUSING REFORM ORDER 2002 – THE CHANGES

- 2.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 makes the following significant changes:
 - It introduces a new general power enabling local housing authorities to provide assistance for housing renewal.
 - It repeals the detailed legislative provisions in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 regarding Renovation Grants, Common Parts Grants, HMO Grants, Group Repair and Home Repair Assistance.
 - It repeals the provisions in the Housing Act 1985 relating to loans given by local housing authorities for housing renewal.
 - It makes minor changes to the provisions in relation to Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), but the system for providing mandatory DFGs remains largely unchanged.
 - There is a new general power to provide assistance for housing renewal. Assistance may be provided for repair, improvement, and adaptation of housing or reconstruction
 - Assistance may also be given by a local authority to provide alternative accommodation in any location where this supports the improvement of living conditions in its area. Such assistance can be made available in two specific circumstances, namely:
 - Where the authority proposes to purchase (whether voluntarily or compulsorily) the existing accommodation, or

- where the provision of alternative accommodation represents a better alternative compared to repairing, improving or adapting the existing property.
- The new power enables authorities to give assistance to persons directly, or to provide assistance through a third party such as a home improvement agency, specialist financial intermediary or other special purpose vehicle.
- The principal limitation on the use of the power is that it must be used in accordance with a policy that has been adopted and publicised. Information on the policy must also be available to the public.
- Local authorities, in offering financial assistance to any person, must also satisfy themselves that the recipient has received appropriate advice or information on any obligations arising from the assistance. If that assistance requires the person to make a contribution or repayment, the authority must also have regard to the person's ability to afford it.

3.0 LINKS WITH NATIONAL AND LOCAL STRATEGIES

3.1 The Government has stated it wishes to strengthen the strategic role of local authorities across all housing in their areas, including both the public and private sectors. The Government also aims to support sustainable home ownership. The Council very much supports these goals and is currently working to improve the sustainability of owner-occupation, whilst also ensuring there will be ongoing opportunities for people to access owner-occupation locally, through low cost home ownership options.

3.2 The Government has also set out its measures to raise the standards of private rented housing, encourage new investment and tackle problems at the bottom end of the sector and has indicated its intention to apply the decent home standard to properties in the private sector, which are occupied by elderly or vulnerable people. The Council aims to facilitate decent housing for the community.

3.3 Linking with Regional Priorities

3.3.1 The South East Regional Housing Statement 2002-2005 identifies a number of priorities relating to private sector renewal, which are relevant to the Borough of Guildford and Surrey generally. The Regional Statement highlights levels of unfit and disrepair in the private rented sector, particularly in housing in multiple occupation, as priorities. These are reflected within this Strategy. The regional statement also highlights the increasing requirement for home adaptations for the disabled and improvements and/or repairs to enable older people to live fulfilling independent lives in their own homes. The Regional Housing Statement outlines a number of key actions outlined below:-

3.3.2 Develop comprehensive private sector renewal strategies that address the significant problems in their areas in respect of all private sector properties, but particularly private rented accommodation and houses in multiple occupation.

3.3.3 Work with other partners to develop a pro-active approach to the question of maintenance, particularly in pre 1919 properties.

3.3.4 Develop programmes that address the needs of the disabled and the elderly to enable them to stay within their own homes whilst living independent and fulfilling lives.

- 3.3.5 Work in partnership with local energy providers and local home improvement agencies in tackling fuel poverty and promoting energy efficiency throughout the private sector.
- 3.3.6 Take a pro-active approach to the private rented sector, working in partnership with landlords in raising standards across the sector.
- 3.3.7 Work jointly with universities and colleges in respect of student accommodation and private sector lettings to ensure higher standards of accommodation.
- 3.3.8 Consider using resources for Purchase and Repair schemes, perhaps linked to Empty Home and Key Worker Initiatives.
- 3.3.9 Consider the potential of equity release schemes for asset rich owner-occupiers.
- 3.3.10 Develop plans based on robust stock condition information to ensure that all social housing stock meets decency standards by 2010;
- 3.3.11 Close cooperation of local authorities and housing associations with the private sector in developing strategies for tackling empty properties.

3.4 *Housing Strategy*

- 3.4.1 The Borough Council has published its Housing Strategy covering the period 2003-2008 under the auspices of the Guildford Homes Partnership. This Strategy incorporates a delivery framework/process for:

- New affordable housing
- Private sector housing action
- The Council's own stock.

- 3.4.2 The Strategy embodies the Council's Strategic Objectives and Cores Values and relevant priorities in the Community Plan. The Community Plan was in the process of development at the time that the Housing Strategy was completed, but any necessary amendments to policies or priorities will be included at its next revision. As far as the Community Plan relates to housing reform issues, the priorities relate to the need for affordable housing, support for the vulnerable and disadvantaged and sustainability. These priorities have been recognised and feature in the Home Improvement Policy.

3.5 *Private Sector Housing Strategy*

- 3.5.1 The Private Sector Strategy was considered by the Council in December 2000 following completion of the House Condition Survey. The review of the Housing Strategy provides the platform for the Private Sector Strategy to be amended to take account of any required changes. It is the aim of this Strategy to ensure that the private sector stock is sound, fit, energy efficient and in good repair.

4.0 WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- 4.1 Underpinning much of the current and future work of the Council is its belief that partnership working is essential across all areas of its activities. Details of the direct links with partners are set out in the Housing Strategy. Of particular relevance to private sector renewal are some more recent links with specific aims to improve the health and general well-being of residents, such as:

- 4.2 “Falls Project” undertaken in conjunction with the Primary Care Trust to reduce the level of falls by people having a higher level of risk from osteoporosis.
- 4.3 Joint working with Social Care Team to develop more integrated working to deliver disabled adaptations throughout the County.
- 4.4 Co-ordinated Surrey-wide group of home improvement agencies to deliver services within the Supporting People regime.
- 4.5 Extended network of energy agencies to promote and deliver new energy efficiency and sustainable energy supplies.

5.0 LOCAL HOUSING CONDITIONS

5.1 The completion of the House Condition Survey in June 2000 provided comprehensive data on physical conditions in private sector accommodation. The data gathered from the survey was used to set grant priorities within the Private Sector Housing Strategy referred to above. Information from the Housing Needs Survey provided information on need and household composition.

5.2 The Housing Market

5.2.1 74% of households in Guildford are owner-occupiers (2001 Census). 13% are social housing tenants and the remaining 13% are private rented and other types of tenure.

5.3 Household Composition and Housing Costs

5.3.1 The Housing Needs Survey 1999 revealed that older person households (defined as those with at least one person over retirement age) account for 38% of the Borough's households. Of this, 74% of older households are owner-occupiers.

5.3.2 34% of households are adult groups, without children and under pensionable age. (these include households with three or more adults, families with grown up children aged 16 years plus, still living at home).

5.3.3 28% of households are made up of families with children. Of this, 3% are lone parent families. This is considerably lower than the UK average of 9%.

5.3.4 Results show that, nearly one in three households (29%) of residents in Guildford are in receipt of some kind of benefits.

5.3.5 27% of households have a low annual income of under £10,000.

5.4 Physical Housing Conditions

5.4.1 3% of the housing stock is unfit (approximately 1,315 houses). The national rate of unfitness for all stock is 7.6%. Therefore, the level of unfitness in Guildford can be considered low.

5.4.2 11.2% of vacant dwellings (76 properties) are unfit and 8.7% (341 properties) in the private rented sector are unfit.

5.4.3 Of those on low income (under £10,000), 15% have housing which is unfit or in need of repair.

5.4.4 The situation relating to properties in need of repair in the private sector is as follows:-

25% dwellings (11,535 properties) are in need of no repair
46% dwellings (20,857 properties) are in need of under £1,000 of repairs
18.7% dwellings (8,396 properties) are in need of £1,000-£2,500 of repairs
7.0% dwellings (3,155 properties) are in need of £2,501-£5,000 of repairs
2.1% dwellings (962 properties) are in need of £5,001-£10,000 of repairs

5.4.5 To remedy unfitnes in the Borough, the estimated cost would be in excess of £5 million.

5.4.6 Other important statistics obtained from the survey included:

- 3,358 dwellings (7.55 %) are in poor repair, but not unfit
- An energy efficiency rating of 47 on the Standard Assessment Procedure scale (SAP), which is comparable with the national average
- 7% of households experience difficulty in meeting winter fuel bills
- 5% of households contain at least one member with a disability
- There are 680 empty homes in the Borough

5.4.7 The Stock Condition Survey did not identify any particular areas within the Borough where there are serious and concentrated problems of rundown private sector housing. Nor did it identify the existence of large numbers of “problem” properties, such as system-built properties not covered by the Housing Defects Act, houseboats or park homes in a very poor state of repair.

5.4.8 The policy priorities of the Council are, therefore, mainly client-based, focusing on the needs of older people, disabled people and vulnerable groups, such as those on low incomes or means-tested benefits who cannot afford to carry out essential repairs or improvements. In addition, the Council recognises the need to deal with privately rented accommodation, which is in a poor state of repair, and to identify particular homes to which assistance will be targeted.

5.4.9 In order to meet its obligations under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, the Council has set itself a target to reduce energy use by 28% over a 10 to 15 year period. Various initiatives are being pursued and, in particular, the Council is recognised as the lead authority for raising awareness in respect of photo-voltaic technology.

6.0 FEATURES OF HOME IMPROVEMENT POLICY

6.1 The new legislation has provided the Council with flexibility to offer additional assistance to private owners and tenants. There is a need to continue to provide assistance to owners to maintain their homes. The level of demand for assistance far exceeds the available resources and innovative solutions are needed if help is to be extended to a wider section of the population. As the policy is limited by resources, eligible applications may not all be successful if the resources available in a financial year have been allocated.

6.2 A questionnaire was sent to some 300 former grant applicants and the results are attached at Appendix 1. The survey revealed that interest free loans are likely to be the most acceptable form of financial assistance in the absence of a grant aid. It is not surprising that this is the favoured option. Many older people had indicated that were unlikely to have works carried out if they had to take out a repayment loan or some other form of equity release.

6.3 This policy, therefore, favours a system of repayable grants, which are simpler to administer and are repayable on the sale or transfer of the property. These grants will have a 25 year condition period attached to ensure that any sale or transfer within this period would trigger a demand by the Council for repayment of the original grant. This condition may be varied where hardship to the applicant could be caused. Monies repaid could be recycled to supplement the budget and assist with developing an expanded programme.

6.4 In addition to these grants directed at owner occupiers, the policy would focus on the following identified priorities:

- adaptations for disabled persons
- energy efficiency measures including greater use of renewable energy
- fire precautions in Houses in Multiple Occupation
- bringing empty properties into use

6.5 These priorities are incorporated in this policy and details of the different forms of assistance have been set out later in this document.

6.6 **Resource Implications**

6.6.1 Provision has been made in the Housing Capital Programme for 2003/04 in the sum of £510,000 for home improvement grants. In 2004/05, a sum of £530,000 has been identified in the Programme. No additional funding is sought over and above the budget contained in the capital programme. There are no additional revenue consequences. The introduction of repayable grants will result in some additional income in the longer term and support an enlargement of the programme.

6.7 **Form Of Assistance**

6.7.1 **Disabled Facilities Grants**

6.7.2 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants are available to assist with the cost of carrying out adaptations to a dwelling to meet the needs of a disabled occupant. They are available to owners and tenants in the private sector and tenants of Registered Social Housing. The Council must consult with the Social Services authority to determine whether the work is necessary and appropriate to the needs of the disabled occupant. All applicants are subject to test of financial resources to determine the level of contribution they would have to make towards the cost of work. The type of work includes stair lifts, level access showers, ramps and the provision of ground floor bathrooms and toilets. Mandatory Disabled Facilities are extended to cover the occupants of mobile homes.

6.7.3 Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants will not normally be available but will be considered, as exceptions to policy, on their merits by the Director of Housing and Health Services.

6.7.4 The detailed conditions relating to the administration of this scheme are set out later in this document.

6.8 **Discretionary Assistance**

6.8.1 Grants to Landlords

6.8.2 Assistance to landlords is limited to three specific areas that support the objectives set within the Private Sector Housing Strategy. These are:

- fire precautions in Houses in Multiple Occupation
- affordable warmth initiatives e.g. insulation, improved heating etc
- works to bring empty homes back into use with nomination rights offered to the Council

6.8.3 Grants for 50% of the cost of the works up to the specified maximums are available.

6.9 Assistance to Owner Occupiers and Tenants

6.9.1 Minor Works Grant

6.9.2 A small grant of up to £2,000 is available to carry out eligible works, which generally relate to the need to protect the health and safety of the occupant. Applicants will need to be over 60 or have a long-term disability and, in either case, be in receipt of a means-tested benefit (excluding family tax credits).

6.9.3 Renovation Grants

6.9.4 Grants will be offered, which are to be repaid upon the future sale of the property. The maximum grant is £12,000 and applicants have to satisfy a means-test. Eligible works include essential repairs and improvements, affordable warmth measures or works to make a dwelling fit for human habitation.

6.9.5 The detailed conditions and procedures relating to discretionary assistance are set out later in this document.

6.10 Solar Technology Loans

6.10.1 The Council actively encourages the use of renewable energy sources. In order to develop this initiative and encourage further take up of solar technology, interest free loans are available to assist with the cost of installation of such technology. Loans of 50% of the cost of eligible works up to a maximum of £2,000, to be repaid over 5 years, will be available. This will be reviewed periodically.

6.10.2 The detailed conditions relating to these loans are set out later in this document.

HOME IMPROVEMENT POLICY: ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND CONDITIONS

General Matters Relating to Grant Applications

Applications must be made in writing to the Director of Housing and Health Services at the Council Offices, Millmead House, Millmead, Guildford.

The Private Sector Housing Team will provide advice and assistance to potential applicants on how to access financial assistance from the Borough Council.

Applicants may be specifically advised to obtain independent financial advice when applying for grants.

Applicants must be over the age of 18

Payment of grant will normally be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of works.

Applications which fall outside the policy will be dealt with in accordance with the exceptions policy set out in this document.

7.0 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants

7.1 Eligible Mandatory Works

7.2 Access to dwelling

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to and from the dwelling or the building which the dwelling or, as the case may be, flat is situated

7.3 Eligible works will include:

- Ramps
- Handrails
- Widening external doors
- Creating manoeuvring space for wheelchairs
- Stairlifts to common stairs
- Widening of steps
- Modification of steps
- Provision of access into the garden

7.4 Access to family room

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to a room used or useable as the principal family room.

7.5 Eligible works will include:

- Widening internal doors
- Creating manoeuvring space for wheelchairs
- Remote control to doors and windows

7.6 Sleeping arrangements

Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room used or useable for sleeping.

- 7.7 Eligible works will include:
- Widening internal doors
 - Creating manoeuvring space for wheelchairs
 - Through floor lifts
 - Stairlifts
 - Handrails
- 7.8 The provision of a new bedroom will only be considered if the adaptation of an existing room is unsuitable and, if required, should be of sufficient size to maintain normal sleeping arrangements.
- 7.9 Sanitary arrangements
Facilitating access by the disabled occupant to, or providing for the disabled occupant, a room in which there is a lavatory, bath or shower (or both), wash hand basin or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such facility.
- 7.10 Eligible works will include:
- Widening doors
 - Through floor lift/stairlift
 - Replacement of bath with shower
 - Over bath shower
 - Downstairs WC/Bath/Shower/WHB
 - Thermostatic Control for shower
 - Raising of WC pedestal
 - Hoists and other fixed bathing aids
- 7.11 Food preparation & cooking
Facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled person. In considering such work, it is essential that the disabled person constantly cook for the household. If this is not the case, facilities will be limited to the strict needs of the disabled person.
- 7.12 Eligible works will include:
- Modification of work units
 - Alteration of kitchen for wheelchair use
 - Enlargement of a kitchen
 - Alterations of gas, electric and plumbing installations
 - Purposely designed cooker
- 7.13 Heating
Improving any heating system in the dwelling to meet the needs of the disabled occupant or, if there is no existing heating system in the dwelling or any such system is unsuitable for use by the disabled occupant, providing a sufficient heating system suitable to meet his/her needs. Where additional rooms are provided and the existing boiler cannot cope with the extra demand, separate local heating for the extension will be provided.
- 7.14 Eligible works will include:
- Replacement of coal fire with gas fire
 - Provision of central heating for those parts of the accommodation normally used by the disabled person.
 - Relocation of power sockets
 - Electric radiators

- 7.15 **No provision will be made for heating facilities in rooms not normally used by the disabled occupant.**
- 7.16 Access to services
Facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of a source of power, light or heat by altering the position of one or more means of access to or control of that source or by providing additional means of control.
- 7.17 Eligible works will include:
Relocation of heating, lighting or power controls
Relocation of prepayment meters
Relocation of light switches
- 7.18 Movement
Facilitating access and movement by the disabled occupant around the dwelling in order to enable him/her to care for a person who is normally resident in the dwelling and is in need of such care.
- 7.19 Eligible works will include:
Stairlift to enable a disabled occupant to have access to upstairs bedroom to look after children.
- 7.20 Safety
Making the dwelling or building safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with them
- 7.21 This is intended for adaptations designed to minimise the risk of danger where a disabled occupant has particular behavioural problems, which may put them or their family at risk.
- 7.22 Eligible works will include:
Toughened or shatterproof glass
Fixed fire/radiator guards
Fixed stair/access guards
Protective wall coverings
Alarm systems
- 7.23 Eligibility of Applicant
- 7.24 The following may apply for mandatory DFG's:
- 7.25 Owner-occupiers, tenants, licensees or occupiers who are able to satisfy the criteria in Sections 19 to 22 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
- 7.26 A certificate relating to future occupation of the property must accompany all applications for DFG's. There are three types of certificates – Owner Occupiers, Tenants and Occupiers Certificate (in relation to houseboat and park home applications).

7.27 Application

7.28 The Council is unable to approve an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant unless an application has been submitted in writing in accordance with the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The application must contain:

Particulars of work for which grant is sought.

At least two estimates from different contractors of the costs for carrying out the work.

Particulars of any preliminary or ancillary service and charge.

Such other particulars as may be prescribed.

7.29 Collaboration and Consultation

7.30 The Council must consult with the Social Services Authority on all Disabled Facilities Grant Application on whether the adaptation is “Necessary” and “Appropriate” for the needs of the disabled person.

7.31 Determination of whether works are reasonable and practicable

7.32 The Council must be satisfied that it is reasonable and practicable to carry out the work having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling.

7.33 Financial Assessment

7.34 The disabled person and any partner are “means tested” to determine any contribution they need to make towards the cost of the work. If the disabled person is a child, the parents are means tested. Where a contribution towards the cost of the work is required, the applicant will be referred to Social Services for a “top up” loan.

7.35 Maximum Amount of Grant

7.36 The maximum amount of grant is set by Central Government and is currently £25,000.

7.37 Conditions

7.38 It is a condition of the grant that the eligible works are carried out in accordance with a schedule of approved work, which will be issued with the notice of approval.

7.39 The applicant must take reasonable steps to pursue any relevant insurance or legal claim and to repay the grant, so far as is appropriate, out of the proceeds of such a claim.

7.40 The work must be completed to the satisfaction of the Council within twelve months from the date of approval unless the Council agrees to an extension of that time.

7.41 The work must be carried out by one of the builders whose estimate accompanied the application unless the Council agrees to the appointment of an alternative builder.

7.42 No payment will be made unless the Council has been provided with suitable invoices.

- 7.43 The aggregate of interim or staged payments must not exceed nine-tenths of the amount of the grant.
- 7.44 No grant will be paid if the works begin before the date of approval.
- 7.45 The Council may impose a condition requiring the recovery of specialist equipment when no longer required.

8.0 Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants

8.1 Eligible Discretionary Works

- 8.2 The Council will consider discretionary disabled facilities as an exception to policy. It will be a prerequisite of any grant offer that an application has been made and refused for top up finance from the Social Services Authority.

- 8.3 Eligible works might include:

- Sterile facilities for dialysis
- Wheelchair storage
- Bedroom sufficient size for use by the disabled person's partner

- 8.4 Works which may qualify may include;

- Provision of a safe play area for a child
- Adapting a room for use as an office
- Access to the garden
- Exercise facilities

8.5 Eligibility of Applicant

- 8.6 The following may apply for discretionary DFG's:

- 8.7 Owner-occupiers, tenants, licensees or occupiers who are able to satisfy the criteria in Sections 19 to 22 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

- 8.8 A certificate relating to future occupation of the property must accompany all applications for DFG's. There are three types of certificates, Owner-occupiers, Tenants and Occupiers Certificate (in relation to houseboat and park home applications).

8.9 Application

- 8.10 The Council is unable to approve an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant unless an application has been submitted in writing in accordance with the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The application must contain:

- 8.11 Particulars of work for which grant is sought.

- 8.12 At least two estimates from different contractors of the costs for carrying out the work.

- 8.13 Particulars of any preliminary or ancillary service and charge.

- 8.14 Such other particulars as may be prescribed.

8.15 Collaboration and Consultation

8.16 The application must be supported by the Social Services Authority.

8.17 Determination of whether works are reasonable and practicable

8.18 The Council must be satisfied that it is reasonable and practicable to carry out the work having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling.

8.19 Financial Assessment

The disabled person and any partner are “means tested” in accordance with the criteria for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to determine any contribution they need to make towards the cost of the work. If the disabled person is a child the parents are means tested. Where a contribution towards the cost of the work is required, the applicant will be invited to apply for a loan from the Council if a home owner. If not a home owner the applicant would be referred to Social Services for a “top up” loan.

8.20 Maximum Amount of Grant

8.21 The maximum limit for discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants is £10,000.

8.22 Conditions

8.23 It is a condition of the grant that the eligible works are carried out in accordance with a schedule of approved works.

8.24 The applicant must take reasonable steps to pursue any relevant insurance or legal claim and to repay the grant, so far as appropriate, out of the proceeds of such a claim.

8.25 The work must be completed to the satisfaction of the Council within twelve months from the date of approval unless the Council agrees to an extension of that time.

8.26 The work must be carried out by one of the builders whose estimate accompanied the application unless the Council agrees to the appointment of an alternative builder.

8.27 No payment will be made unless the Council has been provided with suitable invoices for the works.

9.0 Minor Works Grant

9.1 Minor works assistance is a discretionary grant available to certain owners of dwellings in the Guildford Borough Council area for the repair, improvement or adaptation of their dwelling. Tenants with a repair obligation are also eligible for assistance with repairs, as well as improvements or adaptations. The grant is available for works to dwellings, mobile homes and house boats.

9.2 Eligibility

9.3 The following requirements will need to be met in order to qualify for a minor works grant:

- All applicants must be aged 60 or over and they or their partner must be in receipt of a means-tested benefit (e.g. Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit or Pensioner's Credit).
- The dwelling must be their only or main residence.
- The applicant must have an owner's interest or be a tenant of the dwelling alone or joining with others.
- The applicant must have a power or duty to carry out the works.
- No other person is responsible for carrying out the works.

9.4 Eligible works

9.5 The grant is intended to remedy serious defects, which ensure the health and safety of the occupants, or to fund adaptations, which it would not be reasonable to assist under the Disabled Facilities Grant.

9.6 The maximum grant is £2,000 in any three year period. Works which may be considered for Minor Works Grants include:

9.7 Repairs

Repair to defective flooring
Repair/renewal of windows which are in an unsafe condition
Repair/renewal of doors which are in an unsafe condition
Repair/renewal of ceilings which are in an unsafe condition
Repairs to unsafe electrical installation
Repairs to roof to prevent water ingress
Repairs to the drainage or disposal system to maintain the system in working order
Repair/renewal of other essential services, including hot water and heating

9.8 Adaptations

Works to promote access to and around the home, including grab/hand rails etc.
Provision of equipment to promote independent living (e.g. bathing aids, safety equipment).
Energy efficiency measures.
Insulation measures to walls and roof.
Improved heating controls.
Draught proofing to windows and doors.
Limited solar lighting.

9.9 Home Security Measures

Replacement door locks.
Window locks.
Door chains and in viewers.

9.10 **Conditions Of Grant**

9.11 The applicant must take reasonable steps to pursue any relevant insurance or legal claim and to repay the grant, so far as is appropriate, out of the proceeds of such a claim.

9.12 The work must be completed to the satisfaction of the Council within twelve months from the date of approval unless the Council agrees to an extension of that time.

- 9.13 The work must be carried out by one of the builders whose estimate accompanied the application unless the Council agrees to the appointment of an alternative builder.
- 9.14 No payment will be made unless the Council has been provided with suitable invoices.
- 9.15 The aggregate of interim or staged payments must not exceed nine-tenths of the amount of the grant.
- 9.16 No grant will be paid if the works begin before the date of approval unless agreed by the Director of Housing and Health Services.
- 9.17 The Council may impose a condition requiring the recovery of specialist equipment when no longer required.
- 9.18 The dwelling or home must be occupied as the applicants main residence.

10.0 Renovation Grants

- 10.1 Financial help will be considered for owner-occupiers and tenants within the Guildford Borough Council area, where this is agreed to be the most satisfactory course of action and where the Council's financial resources are adequate.

10.2 Eligibility

- 10.3 The following requirements will need to be met by applicants in order to qualify for assistance:

- 10.4 All applicants must have lived in the dwelling as their only or main residence throughout a qualifying period of at least twelve months;

and

Either

the property must be in Council Tax Band E or below; or

be unfit for human habitation.

10.5 Eligible Works

- 10.6 The following will be regarded as eligible works:

- 10.7 Works of repair or improvement to make a property fit for human habitation and to bring it up to a reasonable standard of repair*. Such works can include non structural items, such as windows or doors and electrical or gas installations;

* Note: Reasonable Repair - In determining this, the Council shall have regard to the age and character of the dwelling, house or building and the locality in which it is situated and will disregard the state of internal decorative repair.

- 10.8 Works to put a property into reasonable repair externally, in particular the roof, walls, windows and doors and any other major elements of the property, either internally or externally.

10.9 Works to provide affordable warmth to households in receipt of a low income benefit. Such works to cover the provision of central heating for the first time, improvements to an existing central heating system and appropriate roof insulation and wall insulation (where applicable). On completion, the dwelling must have at least 200mm of roof insulation (where practicable), cavity wall insulation (where applicable), an effective heating system and must be fit for human habitation.

10.10 Amount Of Grant

10.11 Financial assistance will be restricted to a maximum of £12,000 for works to remedy unfitness and disrepair.

10.12 Financial assistance for works to provide affordable warmth will be limited to a maximum of £6,000.

10.13 All applicants will be subject to a test of resources, which closely follows the statutory test for Disabled Facilities Grants.

10.14 The test has regard to an applicant's income and capital and their ability to meet the cost of the works from their own resources.

10.15 Conditions Of Grant

10.16 The conditions relating to Minor Works Grants will extend to Renovation Grants and, additionally, the grant will be subject to a condition requiring repayment of the grant should the home be sold or transferred within 25 years from the date that the works have been certified as being complete.

10.17 Exceptions To The Policy

10.18 If an applicant considers that there are exceptional circumstances which fall outside of the Council's grant policy, they may present to the Director of Housing and Health Services such details as appropriate for consideration by him. In considering such applications, the Director of Housing and Health Services will have regard to the cost of repair, the nature of the works, the suitability of the accommodation, the ability of the applicant to meet their needs through alternative accommodation and the availability of available finance.

11.0 Grants To Landlords

11.1 Grants for landlords will generally be encouraged in the following circumstances:

11.2 Fire precaution works in HMOs, subject to a maximum grant of 50% or £12,000, whichever is lower.

11.3 Works to bring long-term empty properties (2 years) back into use, where the Council can exercise nomination rights for a minimum 5 year period, subject to the maximum grant being set at £20,000 or 50% of the cost of the works, whichever is the lower. The Council would exercise a nomination right for a period of 5 years from completion of the works. The detailed requirements are set out in a specimen nomination agreement.

11.4 Affordable warmth initiatives (as set out under 11.5 below).

11.5 Grants for affordable warmth will be available as a pilot initiative to the value of 50% of the costs of works or £3,000, whichever is the lower amount, to undertake the following works to an individual dwelling:

The provision of central heating for the first time

Appropriate roof and wall insulation

Replacement of old inefficient boilers

The provision of heating controls to an existing central heating system

The extension of an existing heating system to the entire house

Other cost effective energy saving measures

On completion, the dwelling must be provided with cavity wall insulation (where applicable), 200mm roof insulation (where practicable), an effective heating system and be fit for human habitation.

11.6 Conditions Of Grant

11.7 The conditions relating to Minor Works Grants will extend to Landlord Renovation Grants, except insofar as they relate to residency.

11.8 The grant is subject to a condition requiring the dwelling to be let as a main residence for a period of 5 years from the date that the works have been certified as complete.

11.9 Exceptions To Policy

11.10 If an applicant considers that there are exceptional circumstances which fall outside the Council's grant policy, they may present to the Director of Housing and Health Services such details as appropriate for his consideration. In considering, such an application, the Director of Housing and Health Services shall have regard to the following matters:

the value of the works;

the type of tenancy;

the increase in the capital value of the property;

the age of the property;

the rent level and rental income from the property;

whether enforcement action has had to be taken;

whether the works will fulfil the Council's aims and objectives for the private sector or its wider corporate objectives;

the number of properties the landlord owns; and

the applicant's equity in the property

12.0 Solar Loan Scheme

12.1 The Council will offer interest free loans to install solar heating or power in residential properties. The applicant will be advanced a proportion of the cost of the eligible works as set out in the scheme.

12.2 Eligibility Criteria

- Applications will be considered from owner-occupiers, landlords and tenants of private residential property.
- Applicants must have the right or power to carry out works to the dwelling
- The works must be carried out in accordance with the relevant codes of practise by certified installers. Where the applicant has carried out works, the installation will need to be commissioned by a certified installer.

12.3 Level Of Assistance

The loan will be calculated at 50% of the eligible cost, subject to a maximum loan of £1,500. Applicants will not be means-tested. The loan will be repaid over a period of 5 years from the date of installation on the basis of one fifth of the loan per completed year.

12.4 Eligible Works

12.5 Solar Heat - provision of a solar panel hot water system in accordance with the Council's specification

12.6 Solar Power - provision of solar PV unit and ancillary works in accordance with the Council's specification

12.7 Other Conditions

12.8 Applicants must complete a written application form agreeing to the terms and conditions set out in the policy

12.9 The loan will be registered as a charge on the property. Where the due amount is not repaid on the due dates, the Council will be entitled to recover the loan, together with interest at an appropriate rate over the base rate.

12.10 Applicants will, if required, be expected to participate in promotions to raise public awareness of the benefits of solar energy and provide monitoring information on their installation.

12.11 The scheme is cash limited and applications will be accepted in date order of being received

Breaches of Grant Conditions- All grants

Applicants are expected to comply with conditions attached to the approval of grants. The Director of Housing and Health Services will give consideration to waiving or varying recovery of grant following a breach of grant conditions where an applicant would suffer severe hardship. Conditions attached to grants will normally be recorded on the local land charges register

Ancillary Charges

The reasonable cost of ancillary charges will be included as eligible works. Such charges may include professional and technical support in making an application or organising works, statutory fees and other relevant charges as agreed with the Director of Housing and Health Services or such person as is appointed on his behalf.

13.0 CUSTOMER SERVICES

- 13.1 The Council aims to provide excellent customer service and provide services in an open, fair and consistent manner. This section outlines the key service standards and performance indicators established to ensure that the Strategy is fully implemented, as well as details of how to complain about the service received and to appeal against any decision made in conjunction with the adopted Strategy.

The agreed customer service standards are

We will be courteous whenever we communicate with people

Be fair, open, honest and consistent

Promote equal opportunities and access

Respect confidentiality

Avoid the use of jargon

Consult customers about their expectations of future service

Continuously seek to improve our service

Use complaints as an opportunity to improve our service

Ensure staff are properly trained so that the advice and information needs of customers are properly met

- 13.2 Service standards specific to Private Sector Housing

- 13.3 Subject to the availability of resources, the Council aims to:

Approve grants within 3 weeks of receiving a valid completed application.

Make payments where required within 30 days

Respond to correspondence within 10 days

- 13.4 **Performance Indicators**

- 13.5 National Performance Indicators

BVP1 62 – The proportion of unfit private sector dwellings made fit or demolished as a direct result of action by the local authority. This is assessed, reported and published annually.

BVPI 64 – The number of empty properties brought back in to use

BVP1 166 – Score against a checklist of Enforcement Best Practice for Environmental Health. This is assessed, reported and published annually.

- 13.6 Local Performance Indicators:

Number of renewal grants processed.

Number of Disabled Facilities grants processed.

Annual assessment of energy use

13.7 Complaints about the policy and its implementation

13.7.1 Complaints regarding the Home Improvement Policy will be investigated in accordance with the Council's customer complaints procedure.

