

Harborough District Council

Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy May 2025

Introduction

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 introduced a wide range of discretionary powers to local authorities to enable them to develop a range of financial and other assistance to carry out repairs and improvements in the private housing stock. The intention of this legislation was to give the local authorities the flexibility and discretion to tackle specific local housing issues.

The Government's view is that primarily the responsibility for maintaining privately owned property should be the responsibility of the homeowner. However, it is mindful that in some circumstances, additional help through grants or other financial assistance is necessary to enable essential repairs and improvements to be carried out. The legislation enables local authorities to tackle the poorest housing occupied by the most vulnerable groups.

Whilst in October 2017 Harborough District Council delegated its disabled facilities grants and certain private sector renewal functions to the host authority of the Lightbulb programme, certain assistance remains with the Council as set in this policy.

Lightbulb have developed a common Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) to cover Leicestershire which provides a wider housing offer for the most vulnerable residents in the district. Further details on the offer through Lightbulb is available through the [website](#)

The priorities of Lightbulb and Harborough District Council's Private Sector Renewal Policy are:

- To ensure vulnerable people live in decent accommodation.
- To ensure disabled occupants live in suitable accommodation to enable them to live as independent lives as possible.
- To provide low-income households financial assistance to carry out essential repairs to their homes.
- To encourage long term empty properties to be brought back into use.

2 - Types of Assistance Available.

The types of assistance available can be broken down into three areas

- Education
- Financial
- Enforcement

2.1 Education

Wherever possible, officers will work with homeowners to raise awareness of their responsibilities and the benefits of maintaining their own homes. The Council will provide advice and information on targeted areas such as home energy conservation.

The Council will work with Private Landlords to ensure their properties are safe and complies with all relevant legislation and standards however where there are serious concerns or failure to engage for example, we will consider appropriate enforcement action.

2.2 Financial

The framework details a range of assistance which the Council is currently providing. In addition the Council will direct homeowners to other sources of funding available through third parties such as Lightbulb.

- **Empty Property Grants.** Available to accredited landlords to bring long term empty properties (empty for longer than 12 months) back into use and made available to support accommodation needs in the district.
- All forms of assistance will be dependent on the financial resources available at the time. Where the applicant is eligible for financial assistance, the Council will not be liable and will not be required to provide assistance if the funding is not available.

2.3 Enforcement.

Subject to legislative requirement, enforcement action will not be the first response to minor contraventions of legislation and will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's enforcement policy. The need for formal enforcement may be brought about by various factors such as the severity of the problem, imminence of risk and public interest.

3 Financial Assistance

Empty Property Grants

Harborough District Council proposes to offer 50% discretionary grant up to a maximum of £10,000 for Empty Property Grants. These grants are available to accredited landlords to bring long term empty residential properties back into use to be made available supporting accommodation needs across the district through Council tenant nominations. For the purposes of this form of assistance the property must be empty for at least 12 months prior to application. Exceptions may be given to properties that have been empty for less than 12 months if there is high demand for accommodation in the area. The grant is 100% repayable if the property is sold or no longer made available for letting within 5 years of the final payment of the grant.

Applicant Eligibility

The applicant must have an owner's interest, either as a Freeholder or Leaseholder (with over ten years of their lease still to run) in the property and the application must be accompanied by a certificate of future occupation confirming that the property will be made available for letting to someone other than a family member. The property must be registered with the Land Registry before the grant is approved.

Applicants must not have a criminal conviction in respect of any offence relating to Housing Benefit, Council Tax or Private Sector Housing legislation within five years prior to the application. For offences of serious fraud, this period will be extended to ten years. There must also be no significant debts to the Council

(for example, Council Tax arrears or charges in relation to works carried out in default for the owner)

Following completion of the works the dwelling must be free from Category 1 hazards as defined by the Housing Act 2004.

The applicant must be accredited through a recognised Landlord Accreditation Scheme or the applicant could enter into an agreement with the Council to manage the property through the Council's letting agent. All costs and administration fees would be deducted from the rental income. The applicant would be responsible for ensuring adequate insurance is in place throughout the lifetime of the agreement.

Eligible Properties

The aim of this policy is to bring long-term empty properties back into use and the focus will be on properties that have been empty for 12 months or more. However, properties empty for less than 12 months but longer than 6 months, can be considered subject to availability of funds, if the property is suitable to accommodate households in need in the district.

Properties must have planning for residential usage.

For a property to qualify for a grant, the owner must agree to rent it out through the Council for households on the Council's housing waiting list or for Temporary Accommodation for at least 5 years following final payment of the grant.

Grant assistance will not be awarded for works that are subject to an insurance claim, unless the applicant can demonstrate that the claim has not been successful.

Types of Improvement Works

Properties are eligible for this grant if they have been empty for more than 12 months and assistance will be provided to remove Category 1 hazards as defined by the Housing Act 2004.

Eligible works can include:

- Disrepair and structural issues
- Damp and mold growth remediation
- Electrical rewiring
- Thermal upgrade such as windows, boiler work and insulation
- Improvements to kitchens and bathrooms
- Major health and safety hazards

Grant aid will not be available for works such as:

- Redecoration (unless floor covering and tiles are necessary for a kitchen or bathroom)
- Cosmetic works
- Garden improvements (unless a category one hazard is present)
- Construction of extension, conservatory etc.

Work started before the grant has been awarded will not be eligible.

Application Process

The property will be inspected by an officer of Harborough District Council and a schedule of eligible works will be agreed.

The application must be submitted using Harborough District Council's application form and be accompanied by the following information:

- At least 3 quotes for the agreed schedule of work
- Proof of ownership/leasehold agreement
- Proof of planning permission (if applicable)
- Proof of current membership of Landlord Accreditation Scheme

- Certificate of intended letting confirming availability of the property for rent by tenants on the Council's waiting list or as Temporary Accommodation for five years.

The grant will be awarded based on the cheapest quote, however on agreement with the Council, the applicant can choose to use one of the more expensive quotes and will pay the difference.

The applicant will have 6 months from approval to commence the work and it is expected that the work will be completed within 12 months of approval. The Council may agree a longer term in exceptional circumstances.

Following commencement of the grant, if unforeseen work is identified, the applicant must arrange with the Council for an inspection to be carried out and where there is scope, the grant may be redetermined to include the unforeseen work, provided that the total grant does not exceed the maximum grant allowed.

Maximum Grant

The grant will cover 50% of the total costs of works up to a maximum of **£10,000**.

Payment of the Grant

The grant may be paid in whole after completion of all of the eligible works or in parts as work progresses and the balance on completion.

The Council must be satisfied with the works, and payment will only be made following receipt of an acceptable invoice, demand or receipt regarding payment for eligible works/expenses and professional fees or other charges, which has not been given by the applicant or a member of his family.

Work must be carried out by one of the contractors whose quotation the grant was based. Under exceptional circumstances an alternative contractor may be appointed following the approval of the Head of Regulatory Services.

The payment will only be made following the completion of a certificate of satisfaction with the works of the applicant unless the completion certificate is unreasonably withheld.

On final payment of the grant a land charge will be registered against the property in line with conditions attached to the grant approval.

Repayment of the Grant

In the case of a grant, for which part or complete payment has been made, where the applicant disposes of the property of the grant or the property is no longer made available for letting within 5 years of the certified date of completion of the grant, the applicant shall repay the Council on demand 100% of the amount of grant that has been paid.

If the property is not covered by adequate insurance from the approval of the grant and for 5 years following completion of the grant the applicant shall repay the Council on demand 100% of the grant that has been paid.

The grant conditions will remain in place until discharged or they have passed the expiry date.

If in exceptional circumstances, repayment of the grant would result in significant financial hardship, the Director of Communities and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Sec 151 Officer may consider waiving some or all of the conditions attached to the grant if the property is sold or no longer available for letting for 5 years from completion of the grant.

Appeals and Complaints

All applicants have the right to make a complaint or appeal against any condition attached to the grant. The applicant should complain to the Council using the formal complaints process about any aspects of the service received.

<https://www.harborough.gov.uk/comments-and-complaints>

Review of the Policy

The Policy will be reviewed every 5 years as a maximum or more frequently if necessary.