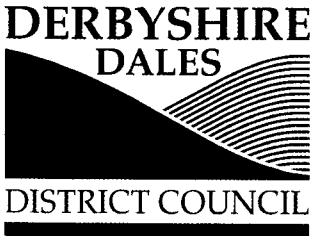


Sep Agenda



Parish Council/Parish Meeting  
Contacts

Please ask for:  
Direct Dial No  
Fax No  
Your Ref.  
My Ref.  
E-mail

Tim Braund  
01629 761118  
01629 761165  
  
CMS/TJB  
tim.braund@derbyshiredales.gov.uk

Date as Postmark

Dear Sir/Madam

**REVIEW OF HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY**

Derbyshire Dales District Council is currently undertaking a major review of its Housing Renewal Policy. This document sets out the way in which the District Council uses its powers to work with the private sector to ensure that housing throughout the district meets the requirements of our residents. In order to make sure that the new Policy takes account of the views of interested parties I would be very pleased to receive comments on the existing Policy, the ways (if any) in which it should be developed or changed and on the emphasis given to the various parts of the District Council's service within it.

In order to assist with this process the Environmental Health Section has prepared a number of questions that should help to focus views on those areas of the existing Policy that we consider may need attention. Replies to these specific questions would be very welcome, but so would comments about any other part of the Policy: the questions are there simply to assist you.

Broadly speaking the Policy explains that the District Council's principles in working with private sector housing are:

- The provision of affordable housing;
- Providing decent homes for vulnerable households;
- Addressing category 1 hazards under the housing health and safety system;
- Removing households from fuel poverty;
- Bringing empty and under-used properties back into use;
- Dealing with local housing problems, such as radon;
- Adapting homes for disabled residents.

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The ways in which the District Council goes about meeting these principles include the provision of grants, taking enforcement action where rented accommodation fails to meet basic standards, and providing advice and support services. Discretionary grants are available to bring homes up to the Decent Homes Standard, to bring empty properties back into use, to combat fuel poverty, to remedy high radon levels and to support the landlord accreditation scheme. All of these grants are open to this consultation, but disabled facilities grants are prescribed nationally and are not open to change at this stage.

### **Decent Homes Grants**

Decent Homes Grants are available to owner-occupiers and tenants for their only or main place of residence. In order to be eligible applicants must be in receipt of a qualifying benefit. This being the case the grant is intended to cover 100% of the qualifying costs up to a maximum of £15,000. Grants are subject to conditions that require them to be repaid if the property is sold within 5 years of the works being completed. Funding for this scheme comes from the Regional Housing Group and the total budget for the current year is £250,000.

#### **Questions about Decent Homes Grants include:**

Do you think it is correct that Decent Homes Grants are available to owner-occupiers and tenants, particularly bearing in mind that local authorities can require landlords to bring their properties up to a minimum standard using enforcement under the Housing Act 2004?

Do you think that the grant limit of £15,000 is correct?

Do you think that eligibility should be based on the receipt of qualifying benefits?

Do you agree that grants should be subject to conditions requiring their repayment in the event of sale?

### **Empty Property Grants**

Empty Property Grants are available to people wishing to bring dwellings that have been empty for 6 months or more back into use. They are available to potential owner-occupiers subject to a test of resources and a maximum grant of £10,000, or to potential landlords subject to maxima of £20,000 where the property is to be let at social rent levels or £10,000 where the property is to be let at market rent levels. These grants are not available to registered social landlords and are subject to repayment conditions as per Decent Homes Grants. The budget for the current year is £60,000.

#### **Questions about Empty Property Grants include:**

Should these grants be more widely available in order to target empty properties *per se*, or should they be more targeted at providing affordable housing?

Do you think the grant limits are correct?

Do you agree that registered social landlords should be excluded from these grants?

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## **Affordable Warmth Grants**

Affordable Warmth Grants are available to assist those people who do not qualify for Government Warm Front grants but who nevertheless spend more than 10% of their income on fuel, defined as fuel poverty. They are targeted at those parts of the district that have the highest proportions of households in fuel poverty and are subject to a maximum of £3,000. They are available to owner-occupiers and tenants and are subject to repayment conditions. The budget for the current year is £75,000.

### **Questions about Affordable Warmth Grants include:**

Do you think that targeting these grants at the areas with the highest proportions of fuel poverty is sensible?

Do you think that £3,000 is the correct level at which to set the grant maximum?

## **Radon Grants**

Radon Grants are available to reduce high levels of radon below the Government's action level of 200 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>. These grants are not means tested and are available for those properties where the radon level exceeds 800 Bq/m<sup>3</sup>. The maximum grant is £1,000. These grants are subject to repayment conditions as above.

### **Questions about Radon Grants include:**

Do you think it is correct that these grants are available without a means test?

Should there be some other way of targeting these grants?

## **Accreditation Grants**

Accreditation Grants are available to assist landlords who have already registered properties on the District Council's landlord accreditation scheme to move from the basic accreditation standard to the premier standard. Typically grants are used to improve fire warning and protection systems and the maximum grant is £1,500. The budget for the current year is £40,000.

### **Questions about Accreditation Grants include:**

Is it correct that grants are limited to landlords moving properties up to the premier standard or should they support the accreditation scheme more generally?

Should other grants, such as Decent Homes Grant, be limited so that private rented properties would only be eligible if the landlord is on the accreditation scheme?

Is the grant limit of £1,500 appropriate?

Are there other actions that should be taken to promote and support the landlord accreditation scheme? If so, what are they?

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## **Private Sector Housing Enforcement**

The Housing Act 2004 introduced a new minimum standard for housing called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This standard lists 29 different categories of hazards that may exist in houses and requires councils to take action to reduce any risks that these hazards may present to an acceptable level. At the moment this standard is usually invoked when a private sector tenant makes a complaint about housing standards, at which point a District Council officer will visit and assess the property. If serious defects exist action may be taken to remedy these defects and legal action may be taken against the landlord.

### **Questions about Private Sector Housing Enforcement**

Do you think sufficient emphasis is given to the positive role of enforcement in securing decent quality housing in the private rented sector?

Do you think more information should be given about tenants' rights to decent housing?

Do you think more information should be given about landlords' access to advice and assistance from the District Council?

Do you think more information should be given about protection from harassment and illegal eviction?

### **Advice and Support**

The District Council provides a wide variety of advice and support services to tenants in private rented accommodation. These services are generally facilitated through the District Council's Community Housing Section, rather than Environmental Health. These services are not currently explained in detail in the Housing Renewal Policy.

### **Questions about Advice and Support**

Do you think that detailed explanations of the various advice and support services provided by the District Council should be included in the Housing Renewal Policy?

If not in the Housing Renewal Policy, where else would you expect to see information on these services?

### **General**

As the District Council is undertaking a wide reaching consultation on this matter paper copies of the Policy are not being sent with all letters. The current Policy is available to view on the Housing pages of the District Council's website at [http://www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk/Images/Housing%20Renewal%20Policy\\_tcm19-84451.pdf](http://www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk/Images/Housing%20Renewal%20Policy_tcm19-84451.pdf) If any consultee would like a paper copy of the Policy please contact me and I will arrange for one to be sent.

Yours faithfully



**TIM BRAUND**  
**HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**