

Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2009-13



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Summary



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Introduction

Our Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy sets out Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's plans for improving the quality of the County Borough's private sector housing stock. It identifies priorities for action and sets out how the Environmental Health Section intends to deliver the vision of 'decent quality housing' for all of Blaenau Gwent's residents.

The strategy reflects policies relating not only to housing conditions but also health and welfare issues at a national, regional and local level, whilst contributing to the Council's wider Housing Strategy. The policy outlines the assistance available to privately owned property owners in Blaenau Gwent and the terms and conditions of that assistance.

This is a summary of the policy. The full version can be found on the Blaenau Gwent CBC website at www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Priorities for Action

The formulation of the Housing Renewal Policy has been driven by the key issues raised. As a result, the Authority will seek to address the following key priorities:

- To Regenerate the Most Deprived Areas in the Community;
- Support the Elderly and People with a Disability to Live Independently In Their Own Homes;
- Secure the Repair and Improvement of Existing Housing Stock;
- Reduce Fuel Poverty and Increase Energy Efficiency;
- Monitor and Improve Conditions in the Private Rented Sector;
- Reduce the number of Long Term Empty Properties.

In addressing these priorities the Council will:

- a) Target financial assistance towards improving housing standards and the quality of life of people living in the most deprived communities. This will be spearheaded through the use of Renewal Areas.
- b) Assist disabled occupants with the costs of adaptations in their homes to facilitate independent living.

- c) Assist elderly and vulnerable persons with the costs of repair works, personal support and advice.
- d) Enable good quality and affordable housing by bringing empty properties back into use.
- e) Provide assistance with improving energy efficiency and affordability.
- f) Provide general advice on home repairs and improvements.
- g) Provide private tenants with a comprehensive Housing Advice Service and give support, where necessary, to ensure that landlords meet their statutory responsibilities.
- h) Use enforcement and Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO's) powers, where appropriate, in order to tackle the worst privately owned housing stock, and assist displaced occupants with relocation.
- i) Ensure that the services provided are equitable and transparent.
- j) Work alongside colleagues in the Regeneration Department to ensure the wider regeneration of renewal of target areas within the County Borough.

Financial Assistance

The Council, as Local Housing Authority, will make the following forms of financial assistance available:

GROUP REPAIR SCHEMES (within Renewal Areas)

1. Who can participate?	Owner-Occupiers, Landlords, Tenants with repairing obligations, within Renewal Areas, at the invitation of the Council
2. Eligible Works	External works to buildings and some necessary internal works, as identified by the Council
3. Participant's Financial Contribution	Owner-Occupiers & qualifying tenants are means-tested (25% maximum contribution). Landlord's – 25% contribution.
4. General Conditions	No prior qualification rules. Participants must comply with owner-occupation, letting and disposal (sell-on) conditions for 3 years following completion of works.

RENOVATION ASSISTANCE (within Renewal Areas)

1. Who is eligible?	Owner-Occupiers, Landlords, Tenants with repairing obligations, within Renewal Areas.
2. Eligible Works	Internal & External Works, as identified by the Council, to achieve a healthy and safe dwelling for at least ten years and to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.
3. Applicant's Financial Contribution	Owner-Occupiers & qualifying tenants are means-tested (25% maximum contribution). Landlord's – 25% contribution.
4. General Conditions	No prior qualification rules. Applicants must comply with owner-occupation, letting and disposal (sell-on) conditions for 3 years following completion of works.

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFGs)

1. Who is eligible?	Owner-Occupiers, Landlords, Tenants, certain licensees and service employees.
2. Eligible Works	Works, as identified by the Council, to facilitate access and to enable a disabled person to move freely into and around their dwelling and to enjoy the facilities and amenities in and around it.
3. Applicant's Financial Contribution	Relevant persons are means-tested. Applicants may also need to contribute extra monies if the cost of works exceeds the maximum level of assistance. Where the relevant person is a minor (child), the means-test will not apply.
4. Maximum level of Financial Assistance	£36,000
5. General Conditions	Applicants must own or reside at the property where the works are to be carried out.

DFG PLUS

1. Who is eligible?	Owner-Occupiers and Tenants with Repairing Obligations with approved Disabled Facilities Grants.
2. Eligible Works	Minor essential works, as identified by the Council, to protect and ensure the sustainability of disabled adaptations.
3. Applicant's Financial Contribution	No additional contribution required unless the cost of works exceeds the maximum level of this assistance.
4. Maximum level of Financial Assistance	If the relevant person is an owner-occupier or Tenant with Repairing Obligations - £4,000 If the relevant person lives with relatives/other persons or is a private tenant - £1,000.
5. General Conditions	Applicants must own or reside at the property where the works are to be carried out.

DISABLED PERSONS RELOCATION GRANT

1. Who is eligible?	Owner-Occupiers and Tenants with Repairing Obligations who are eligible to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant in respect of their existing home.
2. Eligible Costs/Works	The difference between the cost of purchasing a suitable home and the value of the existing home (where applicable) Reasonable legal and valuation fees incurred, removal and other incidental costs The cost of minimal adaptations that would have been necessary regardless of the dwelling occupied (e.g. small ramps, stairlift etc.).
3. Applicant's Financial Contribution	Relevant persons are means-tested. Applicants may also need to contribute extra monies if the costs exceed the maximum level of assistance. Where the relevant person is a minor (child), the means-test will not apply.
4. Amount of Financial Assistance	The amount of grant will be calculated as the eligible costs incurred, as described above, up to a maximum figure equivalent to that which would have been offered as a Disabled Facilities Grant to adapt the existing home to meet the needs of the disabled occupant, had that been practical. This will be determined by the Authority. Regardless of the above the maximum grant payable is £36,000.
5. General Conditions	Occupancy – Relevant Person must reside in the property for a minimum of 10 years following grant completion, or such shorter period as agreed with the Authority. Applicant must comply with disposal (sell-on) conditions for 10 years following grant completion.

LIVING INDEPENDENTLY HOME REPAIR SCHEME (in partnership with Blaenau Gwent Care & Repair)

1. Who is eligible?	Persons aged 65 or over (who have owned and occupied their property for a minimum of 3 years) and who are in receipt of any of the following state benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Council Tax Benefit ii. State Pension Credit iii. Disability Living Allowance iv. Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance v. War Disablement Pension vi. Attendance Allowance vii. Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit <p>Persons aged 80 or over (who have owned and occupied their property for a minimum of 3 years). (Over 80s will <u>not</u> need to be in receipt of any benefits to qualify.)</p> <p>In all cases, persons who are assessed as having capital savings in excess of £12,000 will not be eligible for grant assistance</p>
2. Eligible Works	Repair works necessary to ensure that a dwelling is wind and weatherproof, has essential amenities, sufficient heating and is generally free from significant health and safety hazards.
3. Applicant's Financial Contribution	Applicants may have to contribute where the costs of the works exceed the maximum grant below.
4. Maximum level of Financial Assistance	£4,000
5. General Conditions	Applicants must reside at the property where the works are to be carried out.

MINOR ADAPTATIONS/SAFETY AT HOME WORKS (in partnership with Blaenau Gwent Care & Repair)

1. Who is eligible?	Owner-occupiers or private tenants who are assessed as being in need of assistance by the Council's Social Services department.
2. Eligible Works	Small Adaptations works including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal Handrails• External Handrails• Key Safes• Grab rails• Ramps to aid access to reduce the risk of falls and slips• Installation of electrical sockets for community alarm systems• Small works to enable easier access
3. Applicant's Financial Contribution	Applicants may have to contribute where the costs of the works exceed the maximum grant below.
4. Maximum level of Financial Assistance	£1,000
5. General Conditions	Applicants must reside at the property where the works are to be carried out.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY ASSISTANCE

Householders in Blaenau Gwent are eligible for a myriad of different types of assistance from private companies to improve the energy efficiency of their home. In partnership with the Mark Group the Council will ensure that all residents are aware of and have the information they need to access all the various forms of financial assistance available to them funded through the sources mentioned in paragraph 7.4 of the policy.

The Council will also continue to improve the energy efficiency of properties improved as part of a group repair scheme in the Renewal Area. As technology develops new means of improving the energy efficiency of these properties will be monitored and, where appropriate, improvements such as solar panels, air source heat pumps and wind turbines will be incorporated as part of group repair schemes.

RELOCATION ASSISTANCE

1. Who is a qualifying person?	Owner-Occupiers & Tenants with repairing obligations who are to be displaced as a result of Slum Clearance action or property acquisition in a Renewal Area.
2. Eligible Expenses	The cost of acquiring a suitable replacement dwelling (qualifying dwelling) less the acquisition cost of the dwelling to be cleared.
3. Applicant's Financial Contribution	As a minimum, the applicant will be required to continue to service existing borrowing (mortgage) commitments. Applicants may also need to raise extra funding if the total acquisition costs of a suitable replacement dwelling cannot be fully met utilising the maximum level of Relocation Assistance.
4. Maximum level of Financial Assistance	£10,000
5. General Conditions	Qualifying Persons must comply with owner-occupation and disposal (sell-on) conditions for 10 years following completion of acquisition of the qualifying dwelling (3 years in Renewal Areas).

Advice and Enforcement

Advice is available from the Environmental Health Section on the following matters:

- Appointing a builder;
- Fire Safety in single and multiple occupancy homes;
- Diagnosis of defects within private dwellings causing issues such as damp, mould, rot and condensation;
- Home insulation and energy efficiency advice;
- SAP rating and Energy Performance Certificates;
- General home improvement advice;
- Appointing an architect or draftsman;
- Advice on bringing empty properties back into use, including conversion from commercial to domestic and single occupancy to multi occupancy.

Members of the public can call the Environmental Health Section for advice over the phone or to arrange for a Housing Surveyor or an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) to visit their property to receive the free impartial advice.

Advice is also provided to all residents on a range of matters through the Council website and various documents and publicity provided by the Council and its partner organisations. All residents approaching the service for assistance will be given a broad package of advice on matters that appear to be relevant to their needs and, where appropriate, will be directed to other organisations for assistance such as Communities First.

The Environmental Health Section also offers advice and assistance to those applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant when completing application forms and Tests of Resources documentation.

Where necessary and appropriate, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council will take enforcement action as detailed in the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy. Enforcement may be used alongside other forms of assistance where it is appropriate so to do.

Resourcing the Policy

For a number of years, the Authority has been faced with significant challenges and competing priorities which have unfortunately limited the amount of capital funding directly available for private sector housing renewal. These challenges are set to continue throughout the lifespan of this policy. Nevertheless, the Authority is committed to meeting its statutory duties and, as far as possible, making funding available to support the key priorities outlined in this policy.

Capital funding for private sector housing renewal is usually drawn down from 2 main sources:

- i. The Authority's General Capital Fund (GCF)(Single Pot)
- ii. Specific Capital Grant (SCG) from the Welsh Assembly Government (ring-fenced funding for Renewal Areas).

Funding for the Minor Adaptations/Safety at Home Scheme is sourced from the Authority's Social Services (SS) – Equipment & Adaptations Revenue Budget. Social Services has also made funding available from the residential Home Closure Programme to support repair grants in 2009/10.

For Further Information Contact:

**Neighbourhood Services Team
Environmental Health Section
Blaenau Gwent County Borough
Council
Abertillery District Office
Mitre Street
Abertillery
NP13 1AE**

Tel: 01495 357813

Fax: 01495 355834

Email: grants@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk