

To: Cabinet
Date: 16 March 2022
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy report
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Diko Walcott, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020 - 2024
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 02 March 2022, the Scrutiny Committee considered the Cabinet Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy report.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Diko Walcott, Cabinet portfolio holder for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless, for attending the meeting, and Becky Walker for authoring the report and supporting the meeting.

Summary and recommendation

3. Becky Walker, Home Improvement Agency Team Manager introduced the report and outlined the proposed changes to the Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy set out in the Cabinet report. The Committee's areas of discussion traversed relocation grants, issues amongst housing associations, and ways to improve communications as to the availability of this support.
4. Just one recommendation is made on the report, seeking to improve support to disabled tenants in private rented accommodation.

Support for Disabled Tenants in Private Rented Accommodation

5. Whilst a range of support is available by the Council for those in need of adaptations to properties whilst living in the private rented sector, a barrier to providing this support is the need to have permission from the landlord for any works undertaken. Given the high proportion of residents who live in the private rented sector in the city, unwillingness of landlords to adapt properties causes more people to be in need of adaptations and unable to access them in Oxford than elsewhere.
6. The Committee's discussion in this area focused on the opportunity presented by the Council's Selective Licensing proposals. The Committee understands that, if implemented, the Selective Licensing framework will not give the Council the power to compel landlords to accept adaptations to their property. However, even though compulsion may not be available, it is the Committee's view that Selective Licensing will provide opportunity for the Council to identify, advise and persuade landlords. The Council, as part of this adaptation service, provides a guarantee to landlords that it will return the property to the way it was at the end of the tenancy. This is a very reasonable offer, and the Committee's view is that there will be opportunity to share it and other relevant information when officers are making licensing inspections. To work effectively, this would require training. Similarly, as part of the communication between the Council and private sector landlords over Selective Licensing, information outlining best practice and the Council's offer on disabled adaptations should be made available.

Recommendation 1: That the Council assuming the Selective Licensing application is approved, develops guidance for landlords on best practice around disabled adaptations for tenants in the private rented sector, and ensures officers making inspections are trained and encouraged to identify and provide advice about disabled adaptations when relevant

Further Consideration

7. The Committee does not anticipate revisiting this topic until the Policy is next refreshed.

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 02/03/2022 concerning the Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy

Response provided by Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless, Councillor Diko Walcott

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council, assuming the Selective Licensing application is approved, develops guidance for landlords on best practice around disabled adaptations for tenants in the private rented sector, and ensures officers making inspections are trained and encouraged to identify and provide advice about disabled adaptations when relevant	Yes	The Home Improvement Agency webpages have been updated to include guidance for landlords on adaptations in the private rented sector and training for officers inspecting properties in the private rented sector will be developed and delivered in 2022/23