

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
2. Date	14th July, 2014
3. Title	Installation of Wood Burning Stoves or other solid fuel appliances in Council Properties
4. Directorate	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

This report seeks to formalise the policy of the Council in regard to the installation of Wood Burning Stoves or other solid fuel appliances in Council Properties. Current custom and practice is to decline permission for any such installations by Tenants in Council owned properties. This report sets out the reasons for this approach and seeks adoption of this a formal policy.

6. Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods agrees that the policy of the Council is to decline applications for Tenant alterations in regard to the Installation of Wood Burning Stoves or other solid fuel appliances in Council Properties.

7. Proposals and details

Background

For some years now it has been the custom and practice of the Council to decline any requests for the installation of Wood Burning Stoves or other solid fuel appliances in Council properties that are brought forward by Tenants as a request for an approved alteration.

Following on from a small number of recent incidents in respect to requests to install Wood Burners and issues arising from the current approach it would be prudent for the Council to have a formally adopted policy in regard to this matter.

While acknowledging these Wood Burners and other solid fuel appliances have moved on in recent years and are in some cases a relatively efficient form of heating there are significant risk with the appliances in respect to Health & Safety if they are not correctly installed, maintained and used.

A myth appears to exist that these are “cheap” to run and are therefore a good alternative in times of fuel poverty. For these units to gain DEFRA approval (required to meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act 1993) the fuels used must meet certain standards. This means that suitable and compliant fuel is relatively high in cost and although these units can burn this efficiently the actual running costs overall are high. If you add to this the installation costs which run from £1,500 upwards (this assumes you do not line the flue or make structural alterations to accommodate the unit) then this becomes an expensive option.

The Energy Saving Trust state:

“The installation cost of wood-fuelled heating starts at around £2,000 for a log stove”

They go on to say:

“that switching to wood-fuelled heating saves around £100 annually for gas-heated homes”.

(However this assumes you can heat the whole house and hot water which is not the case for a simple stove installed in the living room).

The current approach developed through custom & practice has sought to decline these installations for the following reasons:

Health & Safety:

Solid Fuel Appliances have a higher risk of CO (Carbon Monoxide) output if not maintained and appropriately ventilated. This includes maintenance of the unit itself and the Chimney used to vent fumes

While consideration has been given to passing the maintenance responsibility to the Tenant at time of request for installation the view is that the council cannot divest itself of its Duty of Care as a Landlord. As such this liability cannot be passed on.

Therefore in granting any permission the council would be duty bound to maintain the appliance and the infrastructure required. This would involve:

- Regular sweeping of the chimney – twice a year
- Annual inspection of the appliance and carrying out any maintenance work
- Maintenance of the CO detector (required by law in these installations)

Other factors

It is likely that any Tenant requests would be for differing appliances which makes stock holding of parts difficult for maintenance purposes. If we did seek to standardise installed appliances this would not be possible as not all fire places and chimneys are the same and as such modifications would be needed to the property structure further increasing costs.

Currently where ever possible the Council has been moving properties on to Gas Central Heating supported by an Electric Fire. For example in a void with a solid fuel appliance we would seek to replace the fire with an electric unit and ensure Central Heating was installed where ever practical.

This approach has resulted in the Council ceasing to maintain the chimney as a flue – if however we then allow the installation of a Class One solid fuel device maintenance of the chimney is critical to safety of both the occupants of the property concerned and possible their neighbours as chimney stacks are often shared. The cost of a Chimney maintenance programme would be prohibitive and could involve a retrospective review of all Chimneys to make good years of dilapidation which again would be extremely expensive.

Our current stock of properties that still have solid fuel is 150 in number. As such we do ask our R & M partners to employ specifically trained and qualified HETAS engineers. This work when required is sub contracted – if we allow more installations we would need to review this position and provision, this has the potential to bring further costs.

The installation of such appliances would need to be policed from an environmental point of view and compliance with the Clean Air Act 1993. This would require resources and therefore cost. The report referred earlier to recent incidents and one of the issues here was in respect to an appliance installed without permission brought to the Councils attention by complaints from Neighbours about fumes and smoke nuisance.

Summary

Installations of such appliances carry the following risks:

- Health and Safety Risks – Poisonous fume related
- Structural Risk to the property if alterations are needed to accommodate the appliance and these are not done properly.
- Maintenance Risk – an unacceptable ongoing maintenance burden and cost to the HRA
- Enforcement Risk - cost of enforcement re correct use
- Nuisance Risk – to neighbours and noncompliance with legislation in respect of the Clean Air Act.

When the above factors are added to the fact that these appliances are relatively expensive to run in a compliant manner it is recommended that the Council formally adopts a policy declining installations of such units across the council housing stock.

Policy review for the future

We are aware that bio-mas boilers, providing central heating and hot water, may become more popular in future and the approach to these options will be kept under review. However, at present it is thought the cost of installation (in excess of £4000 for the boiler alone) significantly outweighs the long term savings meaning it is unlikely that unless there is a significant change in cost bio mass is not currently seen as a cost effective option for small scale installations.

8. Finance

There are no specific financial issues in relationship to this report unless the policy is not adopted in which case the costs would need to be assessed formally.

9. Risk

The following risks have been highlighted in the report:

- Health and Safety Risks – Poisonous fume related
- Structural Risk to the property if alterations are needed to accommodate the appliance and these are not done properly.
- Maintenance Risk – an unacceptable ongoing maintenance burden and cost to the HRA
- Enforcement Risk - cost of enforcement re correct use
- Nuisance Risk – to neighbours and noncompliance with legislation in respect of the Clean Air Act.

10. Background papers and consultation

The Performance and Quality team have reviewed the implications of the proposals in this report and concur with this course of action agreeing it does not breach the Tenants' rights in respect of choice.

11. Contact name

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