

EMPTY HOMES TEAM

ADVICE TO GRANT APPLICANTS



Your property may be one of your biggest assets and therefore, taking good care of it makes sense. Carrying out a scheme of repairs or major improvements may involve you in a great deal of expenditure, as well as requiring time and careful consideration. It is important that you are aware, at the outset, what is involved. These notes are intended to give guidance on various aspects of the grant system, to assist you in making decisions and prevent possible misunderstandings.

PLEASE READ THESE NOTES CAREFULLY BEFORE GOING ANY FURTHER

1. Contractual Obligations

You should be aware from the start that if you engage a builder to carry out a scheme of improvements, or repairs to your property, it is you who has entered into a contract with the Builder/Contractor and not the Council. This means that legally, you have a duty to meet all proper requests for payments and you are responsible for ensuring that all works are carried out to your satisfaction.

For our part, we do endeavour to inspect works in progress to ensure that they are being carried out properly, but the Council's primary duty is to ensure that grant monies have been properly employed and to ensure value for money.

The Council do attempt to make grant payments as promptly as possible, but in some instances this may not be possible.

YOU SHOULD THEREFORE, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO HANDLE THESE MATTERS AND BE ABLE TO FINANCE YOUR PORTION OF THE COSTS, BEFORE YOU ENGAGE ANYONE TO WORK FOR YOU.

2. Specialist Services/Advice

In many cases (excepting those where the scale or complexity of the proposed works is limited) you may be advised to engage the services of an architect, or a building surveyor. There are a number of advantages to this:

- They are able to advise you on the best ways to achieve your objective(s), best materials to use etc.
- They can give specialist, or technical advice about particular problems, or at least know where to get such help.
- They can draw up plans and obtain any necessary permissions e.g. planning, listed building, or building regulations.
- They can oversee the works, organise builders and suppliers, handle paperwork and generally 'take the strain'.

Reasonable fees for these services may be included within the grant eligible costs, but you may be required to meet these fees if grant is not eventually approved.

In most cases, a member of the Empty Homes Team will inspect the property and issue a schedule of works. In some cases however, this will not be done and you will be required to engage the services of an architect/surveyor to draw up a detailed specification of works for you.

In addition to this, it may be necessary to have a full survey of the property carried out by a Structural Engineer/Surveyor, as well as reports on dampness and timber infestations. Again, reasonable fees for these surveys can be included for grant.

3. Estimates

You will normally be asked to submit two competitive estimates with your application. If you have engaged an architect/surveyor this may be done by putting the works out to tender. If not, you are responsible for choosing the builders to quote for the required works. The Council does not “recommend” any particular builder and cannot be deemed liable for any failing on the part of the one(s) you choose. You should check that the builder/contractor has third party liability insurance and check with your own insurance company as to your own cover and liabilities.

It is essential that at least the lower of the two estimates is fully broken down into a detailed estimate, showing the price against each separate item of work. Where this is not done, grant approval may be delayed.

Where you wish someone else to carry out certain parts of the works only, e.g. rewiring, then you should submit separate estimates for those particular items.

It is a condition of the grant that you use one of the contractors who supply the estimates, which form part of the application. The grant paid will usually be based on the lowest estimate submitted. If you wish to use the contractor submitting the higher estimate, you will be responsible for paying the difference in cost.

4. Do-it-Yourself

If you wish to carry out some, or all of the works on a D.I.Y. basis, then you will need to satisfy the Council that you, or whoever you propose to get to do the works, are competent to carry out the works. You will be entirely liable for any damage or accidents which occur and you should be aware that the Council will only pay the grant if they are satisfied with the standard of workmanship.

Where you do propose D.I.Y. works, then you should submit estimates on the basis of the cost of materials only. Grant will not include the cost of labour in such cases.

5. Formal Grant Approval

On receipt of the application form, estimates and all supporting paperwork, they will be checked to ensure that they are in order. Grant Approval will not be issued until all of the information has been received and any necessary planning and building regulation permission has been granted.

The formal grant approval will set out the amount of grant you will receive and if appropriate, how much you will have to pay towards the cost of the works.

YOU MUST NOT START ANY OF THE WORK FOR WHICH GRANT AID IS BEING SOUGHT UNTIL YOU HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED, IN WRITING THAT YOUR APPLICATION HAS BEEN APPROVED

6. Commencement

A commencement certificate will be included with your grant approval documents. You should complete this form and return it to the Empty Homes Team before the work commences.

7. Unforeseen Works

The Council will expect your contractor to survey the property before providing an estimate, to ensure that all necessary works are included.

There are occasions however, where during the course of the scheme, unforeseen work is uncovered.

The Council may award grant towards the unforeseen work providing:

- a) It is necessary as part of the approved scheme;
- b) It could not have been reasonably foreseen prior to commencement of the work;
- c) The Housing Assistance Team is informed immediately;
- d) The work is not started until a member of the Housing Assistance Team has inspected the work and given approval for it to be undertaken;
- e) An estimate for the work is forwarded without delay.
- f) The maximum grant limit is not exceeded.

GRANT WILL NOT BE PAID FOR UNFORESEEN WORK, UNLESS THE ABOVE PROCEDURE IS STRICTLY ADHERED TO.

8. Stage Payments

Some contractors will make it clear to you that they will require payment for the work in stages. Payment of grant can usually be made in stages, however, it is possible that at times the Council may not be able to make stage payments and you are advised to check at the commencement of the works, what the up-to-date situation is.

Where you have engaged an architect/surveyor, this can be done on the basis of any interim valuation/invoice. Alternatively, a member of the Empty Homes Team will inspect to assess the extent of the works carried out to date. Your contractor should request payment by means of an interim invoice.

Where you are making a contribution towards the cost of the works, you are expected to pay your contribution towards the first invoice. Non payment, or late payment of your share could cause your builder difficulties and could jeopardise the continuation of the work.

Grant monies will not be paid before works commence and at no stage will grant be paid to a sum higher than the assessed value of the works completed, or 90% of the approved grant, whichever is the lower.

9. Final Payments

Final payment will only be made where:

- a) all of the grant-related works have been completed and the dwelling certified as being suitable for habitation;
- b) all necessary regulations have been satisfied e.g. Building Regulations etc.
- c) a full, detailed, final account/invoice has been submitted,

or

where some, or all of the works have been done on a DIY basis, copies of all bills/invoices for materials have been submitted;

- d) copies of all necessary guarantees etc. have been provided e.g. timber/damp guarantee, electrical completion certificate;
- e) a Completion Certificate has been completed and signed by the applicant.

Useful Contacts

Empty Homes Team Public Protection Shropshire Council Shirehall Abbey Foregate Shrewsbury SY2 6ND Tel. 01743 251811 emptyhomes@shropshire.gov.uk	Building Control Team Development Services Shropshire Council Shirehall Abbey Foregate Shrewsbury SY2 6ND Tel. 0345 6789004 buildingcontrol@shropshire.gov.uk	Planning Team Development Services Shropshire Council Shirehall Abbey Foregate Shrewsbury SY2 6ND Tel. 0345 6789004 planningdmc@shropshire.gov.uk
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