

Subject:	Housing Disabled Facilities Grant Policy		
Date of Meeting:	20 September 2017		
Report of:	Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Communities & Housing		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Martin Reid / Sarah Potter	Tel: 29- 0789
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 Our cross tenure integrated Housing Adaptations Service (HAS) helps promote independent living, contributing to the health and well being of residents in the City, by enabling people to remain in their own home and delivering significant benefits to Health & Social Care. Our focus is on a prevention led approach, reducing re-active assessments and improving value for money. Our integration within Housing helps promote a housing options based approach, making the best use of existing adapted homes and commissioning of new accessible housing. In addition the service is responsible for the significant investment in major housing adaptations in council and private sector housing. In the last financial year (2016/17) the Housing Adaptations Service invested £2.5m (Housing Revenue Account & Disabled Facilities Grant) and delivered over 400 major housing adaptations to council and private sector homes while continuing to reduce the average cost of an adaptation.
- 1.2 This report outlines proposals for a policy under the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) 2002 Housing Renewal to fund a wider range of housing interventions to more pro-actively help people living in the private sector with renewals, repairs and adaptations in their homes funded through Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That committee adopt the draft policy attached at Appendix 1 to introduce a programme of innovative housing interventions while also maintaining our statutory requirement to provide a Disabled Facilities Grant.
- 2.2 Note that the housing interventions will be delivered primarily in partnership with the local Home Improvement Agency (HIA).
- 2.3 Note the contribution to the wider strategic aims and promotion of independent living and well being for older and disabled adults and disabled children and their families.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Housing Adaptations Service is an integrated team of Housing Occupational Therapists (OTs) and technical officers, Home Improvement Officers (HIOs). It is responsible for the specialist assessment for all major housing adaptations (those costing over £1,000) and the administration of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), a mandatory Housing grant subject to means testing that helps toward the funding adaptations in the private sector, and the delivery of major adaptations funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in council homes.
- 3.2 In 2016/17 the Service received 146 new DFG applications and completed 222 grants investing £1.3m in private sector housing adaptations. In council homes, accounting for 10% of all households in the City, the Service invested £1.13m, completing 183 major adaptations, funding some minor adaptations and equipment and working with a number of capital programmes to ensure an inclusive design approach.
- 3.3 The Service has significantly speeded up and simplified the access to OT assessment reducing waiting times and improving customer satisfaction overall. In addition, and with the focus on prevention, the Service dedicates Housing OT resources to work with Homemove and Re-housing teams to ensure the existing already adapted social housing stock is re-let to those with a matching need and works with Registered Provider partners, private developers and New Homes for Neighbourhoods on the specification and delivery of new wheelchair user and accessible homes
- 3.4 Demographic trends and an ageing population increase the demand for housing adaptations and highlight the importance of building on the preventative work we already do. Enabling disabled adults and children to live as independently as possible at home for as long as possible can significantly improve people's quality of life, deliver direct savings in relation to care costs, deferred entry into residential care and prevent unnecessary hospital admissions (*Better Outcomes, lower costs – ODI/University of Bristol*).
- 3.5 The RRO gives local housing authorities a general power to introduce policies for assisting individuals with renewals, repairs and adaptations in their homes through the DFG and to expand the scope of adaptations available under DFG to make use of the RRO the authority must have a formally adopted policy in place. The Government guidance can be found in: *ODPM circular 5/2003 Housing Renewal*.
- 3.6 In 2008 the Government made a number of changes to the way DFG is administered and ways it could be used including the removal of the ring fence in 2010 allowing the DFG to be used more flexibly and as part of wider strategic projects to keep people safe and well at home and to reduce bureaucracy. The full paper of the cross departmental review can be found in: *DFG: The Package of Changes to Modernise the Programme 2008*.
- 3.7 Although local authorities have had this power since 2008 Housing have had limited resources to make use of it. Housing previously topped up the DFG budget and under the Private Sector Renewal Policy (2008 – 11) *Warm, Safe,*

Health Homes funded a number of discretionary schemes including assistance to move and minor adapts grants. This capital programme ended in 2011/12.

- 3.8 Nationally the mandatory grant programme has been significantly increased from £220m in 2015/16 to £431m in 2017/18. The Autumn Statement 2015 contained a commitment to provide £500m by 2019/20 for DFGs, which it was estimated will fund 85,000 home adaptations in that year and giving local housing authorities the means to offer other forms of assistance to DFG applicants.
- 3.9 The DFG is a non-ring-fenced capital grant paid via the Better Care Fund, under the governance of the Health & Wellbeing Board, to local housing authorities. In 2017/18 the DFG capital grant in the City is £1.7m of which the Better Care Board has confirmed £1.53 m is transferred to Housing.
- 3.10 Good practice examples up and down the country are collated in a report by Foundations, the national body for home improvement agency and handyperson services: *Preparing a policy under the RRO Housing Renewal (V 1.10 December 2016)*.
- 3.11 The West of England Care & Repair case study *Reducing Delayed Transfers of Care Through Housing Interventions: Evidence of Impact (2007)* evidences the difference that funding for critical minor works, such as clutter clearance/deep cleaning, urgent home repairs, hazards removal, repairing heating systems /emergency heating, can have in enabling patients to be discharged from hospital to home more quickly, safely, freeing up hospital beds and saving time and money for health and care services.
- 3.12 It is proposed the local policy adopts a wide range of housing interventions to be delivered primarily in partnership with the local Home Improvement Agency, Mears Home Improvement Services, and potentially some services delivered using council services for private sector work with funding via the DFG.
- 3.13 The policy contributes to strategic aims of the council's Fuel Poverty & Affordable Warmth Strategy, developed in response to National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance and Housing Strategy 2015 priorities: improving housing quality and improving housing support. It aligns to the Better Care Plan and its vision for our frail population to help them stay healthy and well by providing more proactive preventative services that promote independence and enable people to fulfil their potential.
- 3.14 The draft policy is attached at Appendix 1. Below is an extract setting out the local housing interventions proposed:

Relocation Grants - to support people eligible for a DFG where it is more suitable for them to move rather than remain in their existing property; relevant costs to be treated as eligible would be reasonable legal, estate agents fees, removal costs, necessary utility and service set up costs, and minor adaptations to make the property suitable. This would be applied in owner occupier and private tenant cases. Grant funding up to £20,000.

Hospital Discharge Grants – to support any older or disabled person being discharged from hospital, the grant is not specified, so any work that supports the discharge from hospital to home is eligible under the criteria. The West of

England Care & Repair study suggests minor works, such as clutter clearance/deep cleaning, urgent home repairs, hazards removal e.g. falls risks, heating systems repaired/ emergency heating can significantly reduce delayed transfers of care. Hospital discharge grants would not be subject to a means test. Grant funding up to £2,500.

Dispensing with the means test - to cover the most common adaptations carried out i.e. stair lifts and showers, the grant would not be subject to means testing. Grant limit set at £5,000. Any application above this would be means tested.

Warm, Safe Homes Grants - to help low income home owners and private tenants to quickly access financial assistance for a wide range of minor adaptations and repairs to reduce risks of accidents in the home, including electrical and gas safety, repairs or modifications to stairs, floors and steps, safety and security repairs, and boiler repairs or replacement, loft/cavity wall insulation, including loft clearance. Grant up to £5,000. In this case there is potential to use Housing's approved gas and electrical contractors to carry out safety checks, boiler repairs or replacement, recharged to the DFG

Handyperson services – to help with small building repairs, minor adaptations, general home safety checks and remedial actions, falls and accident prevention checks and remedial actions such as repairing floor coverings, security checks, installing locks, chains and spyholes. Grant limit £2,500. In this case there is potential to use Housing's Estate Services Team to deliver some handy person services in the private sector, recharged to the DFG.

Fast – track adaptations - to fund adaptations up to £5,000 assessed by other housing professionals such as housing options, Private Sector Housing Officers, typically straight forward adaptations that do not need the specialist assessment of a Housing Occupational Therapist (OT) and can be designed and delivered with the technical support of the Home Improvement Agency. Grant up to £5,000.

Making homes dementia friendly – the Prime Minister's Challenge suggests the DFG should be used to help people with dementia, to make changes to the home that would support them to live in their own home safely and for longer. Grant up to £2,500.

DFG fees - this proposed provision ensures fees, such as a structural engineer's input, for example, can be paid promptly, even if works do not go ahead and a mandatory DFG is therefore not approved. Grant up to £2,000.

Funding in Excess of the Maximum Amount - in the past Housing has "topped-up" where costs have exceeded the grant limit in England of £30,000. With DFG now forming part of the Better Care Fund it makes sense to consider amounts in excess of £30,000 as part of a single process. A maximum of £20,000 additional funding will be available considered on a case-by-case basis.

- 3.15 In addition while the vast majority of DFG applications are for people with physical disabilities we already use the DFG to fund works such as making homes safer for people with a learning disability with challenging behaviour.
- 3.16 In Brighton & Hove we already accept referrals from private Occupational Therapists (OTs) and on occasion other professional assessments such as specialist technical advice about the practicality of complex, major housing adaptations. The cost of these services and charges that relate to the application and the preparation for and the carrying out of works are already recoverable under the grant.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 It is a requirement under the RRO the local authority has a formally adopted policy in place which sets out how the authority intends to use its powers.
- 4.2 Without an adopted policy the authority is unable to assist people to meet their needs without going through the full DFG process.
- 4.3 Without a wider range of housing interventions being made available the DFG allocation transferred to Housing may not be fully utilised to the benefit of eligible residents. This is in part because of the improved value for grant and savings achieved as a result of measures put in place in 2015/16 to:
- re-focus on housing options as an alternative to costly and disruptive adaptations in appropriate cases, better managing the demand for retrospective major housing adaptations and the spend on mandatory grants.
 - achieve better value for grant by using the council's Adaptations Framework for the majority of all private sector, grant assisted works and significant reduce the average grant (from £8,557 in 2015/16 to £5,790 last year, 2016/17).
 - seek a greater contribution from Registered Provider partners in the City toward the cost of adaptations in their tenants' homes (In 2016/17 Registered Provider partners contributed £127k toward overall costs of grant assisted adaptations in their tenants' homes).
- 4.4 Not using the greater flexibility that allows the DFG to be used for associate purposes fails to make the greater contribution toward the health and well being of residents in the City and the potential savings to Health and Social care.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation about the range of proposed interventions within the Housing Adaptations Service and Children's Disability Service has been positive with OTs and grant administrators welcoming proposals to speed up and simplify the grant application process and include a wider range of interventions.
- 5.2 Consultation with the local HIA (August) has been positive with the HIA welcoming the opportunity to offer a wider range of services. The HIA contract specification includes the provision of up to date housing advice and support and expressly encourages the HIA to look at ways of providing a wider range of services to service users and to broaden its service user base acting as a coordinator for services not provide directly.
- 5.3 A consultation with other housing authorities within the East Sussex partnership is planned for August - September.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 An adopted DFG Housing policy is necessary to us being to deliver a wider range of interventions clearly linked with Housing and other relevant strategies.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The 2017/18 capital budget for DFG is £1.530m and is funded through a government grant to the Better Care Fund which is passed over to the Housing General Fund Adaptations service. This grant has increased for both 2016/17 and 2017/18. The recommendations of this report to introduce a policy for assisting individuals with renewals, repairs and adaptations in their homes, will allow the grant to be used in a more flexible way, broadening the assistance given and ensuring that this new funding can be fully spent on contributing to the health and well being of residents in the City. This budget is monitored on a monthly basis as part of the council's Targeted Budget Management (TBM) process

Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks

Date: 16/08/17

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 The Housing and New Homes Committee has delegated powers to discharge the council's functions as a housing authority. Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 authorises a local housing authority for the purposes of improving living conditions in their area, to provide assistance to any person

a) to acquire living accommodation

(b) to adapt or improve living accommodation (whether by alteration, conversion or enlargement, by the installation of any thing or injection of any substance, or otherwise);

(c) to repair living accommodation;

(d) to demolish buildings comprising or including living accommodation;

(e) where buildings comprising or including living accommodation have been demolished, to construct buildings that comprise or include replacement living accommodation.

The power to provide assistance in Article 3 cannot be exercised unless the authority have adopted a policy for the provision of assistance, they have given public notice of adoption of the policy and they have made a copy of it available for inspection, free of charge at their principal office at all reasonable times. The power must also be exercised in accordance with the policy.

The proposed policy falls within the limits of the 2002 Order. The Committee is empowered to adopt the proposed policy on behalf of the council.

Lawyer Consulted:

Name Liz Woodley

Date: 18/08/17

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 The significant increase in funding and the introduction of a wider range of forms of assistance will positively benefit more older and disabled people, their carers

and families. It helps to promote choice, the choice to remain living at home as independently as possible for as long as possible, and supports independent living, providing financial assistance where old age and disability coincide with lower household incomes

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 The aims and objectives of the strategy have a significant impact on improvements to the health and wellbeing of some of the city's most vulnerable residents.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.5 These are included in the body of the report where possible.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.6 None.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.7 The total amount of capital funding committed to the policy is up to £400, 000 in 2017/18. This funding comes from the central DFG allocation via the Better Care Board. Because long term commitments are not known there will be an annual review of the policy. Assistance is available subject to funding.
- 7.8 The contract and case review management of the local Home Improvement Agency is managed by the Operational Manager Housing Adaptations through quarterly performance and management reports. The spend against agreed budgets is monitored on a monthly basis as part of the council's Targeted Budget Management (TBM) process.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.9 Strategically addressing the needs of older and disabled people will contribute to the prevention of falls and accidents in the home, ill health and excess winter deaths, reduce health and social inequalities and improve wellbeing and quality of life.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.10 The policy contributes to strategic aims of the council's Fuel Poverty & Affordable Warmth Strategy, developed in response to National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance and Housing Strategy 2015 priorities: improving housing quality and improving housing support. It aligns to the Better Care Plan and its vision for our frail population to help them stay healthy and well by providing more proactive preventative services that promote independence and enable people to fulfil their potential.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. full DFG Housing Policy document

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. full DFG Housing Policy document

Background Documents

none