

Draft Housing Assistance Policy

Overview & Scrutiny Panel **18 July 2019**

Report Author **Bob Porter, Head of Housing and Planning**

Portfolio Holder **Cllr Lesley Game, Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods**

Status **For Recommendation**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Key Decision **Yes**

Reasons for Key **Significant effect on communities**

Ward: **All**

Executive Summary:

The Council's Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptations Policy 2019 - 2024 is the framework governing the award of Disabled Facilities Grants and other types of grants and loans to householders. The proposed policy aims to maximise the use of the available funding and offer more appropriate kinds of assistance to local residents to stay in their homes and live independently.

The draft policy will be considered by the council's Cabinet on 25 July 2019 and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel are invited to comment in advance of this.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel are:

1. Invited to consider the Cabinet report and proposed Housing Assistance Policy attached as annex 1 and annex 2 to the committee report.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money	<p>The cost of funding Disabled Facilities Grants and associated assistance is met primarily by an annual grant from the Better Care Fund, supplemented by receipts from the repayment of grants given in earlier years on the sale of adapted properties.</p> <p>The funding for other types of financial assistance is already in the budget and derives from capital receipts from the sale of properties which were the subject of repayable grants and loans in earlier years.</p> <p>The proposals enable the available funding to be properly used and re-invested to benefit local residents.</p>
Legal	<p>Legal comments are shown in the draft Cabinet paper attached at annex 1.</p>

Corporate	<p>The proposals set out in this report provide significant support to vulnerable residents and residents with physical disabilities in the district. They contribute to the council's Corporate Objectives to support neighbourhoods and communities.</p> <p>The proposals present a low risk to the Council.</p>						
Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty	<p>The aim of Disability Facilities Grants is to adapt the homes of people with disabilities so that the occupant is able to remain in the property and have the facilities adapted to meet their needs and enable them to live independently.</p> <p>The Housing Assistance Policy enables the advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.</p> <p>Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.</p> <p>Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="432 1234 1396 1458"> <tr> <td data-bbox="432 1234 1310 1305">Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,</td> <td data-bbox="1310 1234 1396 1305"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="432 1305 1310 1377">Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it</td> <td data-bbox="1310 1305 1396 1377">X</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="432 1377 1310 1458">Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.</td> <td data-bbox="1310 1377 1396 1458"></td> </tr> </table> <p>An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached at annex 3.</p>	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,		Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it	X	Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.	
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CORPORATE PRIORITIES (tick those relevant) ✓	
A clean and welcoming Environment	
Promoting inward investment and job creation	
Supporting neighbourhoods	✓

CORPORATE VALUES (tick those relevant) ✓	
Delivering value for money	
Supporting the Workforce	
Promoting open communications	✓

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Council has a statutory duty to award Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to people who qualify for assistance, subject to means testing. The only way to offer any additional types of financial assistance for adaptations, repairs or improvements to residents' homes is by including the provision in a Housing Assistance Policy, which has been adopted and published by the Council.
- 1.2 The council's current Housing Assistance Policy requires an update to better reflect current government policy which offers more of an integrated care approach. Times have changed; the council no longer holds a waiting list, government funding for adaptations has increased significantly and there is now an opportunity to expand our policy to provide additional assistance. The draft Housing Assistance Policy (2019-2024) seeks to align the available funding better with the care needs of residents.

2.0 The Current Situation

- 2.1 In 2014 the Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) became part of the Better Care Fund, a pooled health and social care budget managed by Kent County Council, with local authorities continuing to administer the grant. The aim of the Better Care Fund (BCF) is to provide a more joined-up and customer focused services to reduce hospital admissions, enable people to leave hospital more quickly and to delay entry to residential care. In recognition of the rising need for adaptations central government funding for the DFG has increased considerably, with Thanet being in receipt of one of the largest allocations for a non-metropolitan authority.
- 2.2 Through the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002 there are freedoms and opportunities for the Local Authority to address housing issues. The Order enables councils to remove the test of resources to speed up DFG delivery, provide a loan instead of a grant, use a discretionary grant to top up if work costs over £30,000, provide adaptations for another property to help someone move home, and deal with repairs and heating problems. This flexibility is particularly important if it helps someone return from hospital, or keeps them independent at home rather than going into residential care. The adoption and publication of a policy for housing assistance is a requirement of the Order before assistance can be offered.
- 2.4 Currently mandatory DFGs are used to improve bathroom facilities and to provide access inside and outside the home via ramps and stairlifts. The average grant for Thanet District is just over £10,000, although this varies depending on the complexity of the needs of the individual. The scope of the Order is very wide and allows the Council to decide within its own Housing Assistance Policy, whether it provides grants, loans, advice for the purpose of repairing, improving, extending, converting or adapting housing accommodation.
- 2.5 The current Housing Assistance Policy provides for some assistance to be offered to owner occupiers and private sector landlords to improve their homes. There is however an opportunity to review the arrangements and offer some additional support with the available resources, on a repayable grant basis.

2.6 The draft Housing Assistance Policy (2019 - 2024) seeks to go further by giving the Council greater flexibility within the fund to better support those most at need by allowing discretionary grant to address issues on a wider preventative basis, that would not be covered using a mandatory DFG.

2.6 The Cabinet report (25 July 2019) and the draft Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptations Policy at Annex 1 sets out a package of different kinds of assistance to be offered to householders in the district which will supplement the mandatory grants currently on offer and contribute towards some of the BCF aims.

3.2 The proposed Policy is very similar to those which have been adopted by neighbouring councils. Having a common Housing Assistance Policy across East Kent will potentially facilitate greater joint working with neighbouring councils and ensure that people can receive similar services wherever they live in East Kent, with similar qualifying criteria.

3.0 Next steps

3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the content of this report and the draft policy and comment. Any comments made by the panel will be reported to Cabinet when it considers the proposals.

3.2 The draft Housing Policy will be submitted to Cabinet for approval on 25 July 2019.

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Reporting to:	Tim Willis, Deputy Chief Executive

Annex List

Annex 1	Cabinet report
Annex 2	Draft Housing Assistance Policy
Annex 3	Equalities Impact Assessment

Background Papers

Title	Where to Access Document
None	N/A

Corporate Consultation

Finance	Chris Blundell, Head of Finance
Legal	Sophia Nartey, Interim Head of Legal