

Heating Assistance Scheme

Cabinet	17th November 2022
Report Author	Bob Porter (Acting Corporate Director of Place)
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Jill Bayford, Cabinet Member for Housing
Status	For Decision
Classification:	Unrestricted
Key Decision	No
Ward:	All wards

Executive Summary:

This report proposes to allocate £480k of remaining funding from the previous Regional Housing Board backed schemes to create a new Heating Assistance Scheme as part of the Housing Assistance and Disabled Facilities Grant policy adopted in 2019.

Following a successful grant application to the Regional Housing Board (RHB) in 2007 the Council were awarded funding for 2008-11 for private sector housing renewal.

It was essential that the bid made by the East Kent partnership met the aims and objectives of the RHB and the priorities of local councils.

These objectives were:

- Increasing the number of Decent Homes occupied by vulnerable occupiers. These are households that are in receipt of relevant means tested or disability benefits.
- The reduction of fuel poverty and excess winter deaths by improving the heating and insulation of homes especially for those on low incomes.
- Increasing energy efficiency and a reduction in carbon emissions to tackle climate change.
- Ensure that most of the assistance is by loans so that monies can be recycled into further private sector renewal.
- Reduce Health inequalities which are linked to poor housing conditions and deprivation and the lack of housing choice for people with low incomes

TDC have £480k remaining of repaid Regional Housing Board funds. The report is seeking approval to allocate this specifically to reducing fuel poverty and excess winter deaths. There will be a range of activities available within this scheme which includes improving the heating and insulation of homes of those on low incomes.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is being asked to:

1. Agree to allocation of remaining Regional Housing Board funds to create a Heating Assistance Scheme to enable households to access funding who are experiencing fuel poverty.

Corporate Implications

Financial and Value for Money

The allocation of the existing Regional Housing Board monies is classified as capital expenditure and is included in the 2022/23 capital programme as Housing Assistance Policy (additional support for home owners and private sector landlords).

The reallocation of this funding to a new Housing Assistance scheme will therefore have no overall implication on the Council's financial position, on the assumption that spending continues to be of a capital nature.

Legal

In 2002 the government brought in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 which provide freedom and opportunities for the Local Authority to address housing issues. In 2008/09 the government extended the scope of the RRO to include use of the Disabled Facilities Grant money. This enables the authorities to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes. The Council has discretionary powers under "the Order" to provide assistance in any form for the purpose of improving living conditions.

This Heating Assistance Scheme complies with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO), the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 whereby the local authorities are granted powers to enable and give assistance to persons directly, or to provide assistance through a third party.

The RRO also provides local authorities with a degree of flexibility in devising both its strategy for dealing with poor housing conditions and the policy tools available. In order to use the powers provided in the RRO the Council must adopt a policy for the provision of the assistance.

Corporate

TDC is aware of the challenges facing its residents and in 2019 our Corporate Statement committed to supporting residents through effective partnership working with both the public sector agencies and the community. We will provide leadership and direction across the District and the region to ensure everyone is working to the same goal. Delivering high-quality housing, safer communities and enhancing the health and wellbeing of our residents. Specifically we committed to improve standards and safety in homes across all tenures.

Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty

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.

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.

This report relates to the following aim of the equality duty: -

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- To advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

This report relates to the following corporate priorities: -

- *Communities*

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Following a successful grant application to the Regional Housing Board (RHB) in 2007 the Council were awarded funding for 2008-11 for private sector housing renewal.

1.2 It was essential that the bid made by the East Kent partnership met the aims and objectives of the RHB and the priorities of local councils.

These objectives were:

- Increasing the number of Decent Homes occupied by vulnerable occupiers. These are households that are in receipt of relevant means tested or disability benefits.
- The reduction of fuel poverty and excess winter deaths by improving the heating and insulation of homes especially for those on low incomes.
- Increasing energy efficiency and a reduction in carbon emissions to tackle climate change.
- Ensure that most of the assistance is by loans so that monies can be recycled into further private sector renewal.
- Reduce Health inequalities which are linked to poor housing conditions and deprivation and the lack of housing choice for people with low incomes

1.3 Essential deliverables of the fund are:

- Use of loans / equity release scheme
- Action on Climate change
- Independence and Well Being

- Tackling fuel poverty
- Addressing category 1 hazards
- Bringing empty homes back into use

TDC undertook a number of projects with the funding including Unfit Property Grants, Landlord Home Safety Loans, Decent Homes Grants, Heating and Insulation repayable grants and Fire Safety Grants. We have £480k of Regional Housing Boards funding remaining, these funds have been accumulated from the repayment of loans attached to some of the aforementioned schemes.

2.0 Heating Assistance Grants

- 2.1 Of the 68,400 homes in Thanet, 19.2% (13,000 homes) are in fuel poverty. This is against 12.9% for the rest of South East. Fuel poverty is the condition by which a household is unable to afford to heat (or cool) their home to an adequate temperature. It is caused by low income, high fuel prices, poor energy efficiency, unaffordable housing prices and poor quality private rental housing.
- 2.2 Since the winter period of 2020/21 energy prices have soared to an average £1,042.
- 2.3 It is predicted gas and electricity bills for British households will rise to £2,500 a year in 2022 as a result of high wholesale gas and power prices and jump further to more than £5,000 in January.
- 2.4 National Energy Action (NEA), the lead in UK fuel poverty analysis, estimates that due to the energy price rises and the reductions in household income, there has been an increase in fuel poverty of 50%. For Thanet, this represents 19.2% of all homes in Thanet facing fuel poverty (12,300 homes).
- 2.5 This is evidenced on the ground by the number of households that are calling TDC energy advice and referral service and are self-disconnecting from their domestic energy. From June to August in 2021 we had 76 clients approach us for advice and assistance. This has risen to 250 for the same period in 2022. This is an increase of over 200%.
- 2.6 TDC's Housing Assistance and Disabled Facilities Grant policy, includes both Discretionary Housing Grants (DHG) and Urgent Repair Grants (URG). These are intended to contribute towards the policy objective to reduce the number of homes with category one hazards. Category 1 hazards are those where the most serious harm outcome is identified, for example, death, permanent paralysis, permanent loss of consciousness, loss of a limb or serious fractures. DHG's and URGs might be used to tackle dangerous situations that come to light following referrals or inspections from outside agencies for example, Occupational Therapy at KCC, GP, Social Services. From time to time when a serious hazard suddenly becomes apparent, but the property owner cannot afford to repair it. It has been the case for approximately ten households to date that households who have applied to us for these grants to repair boilers and heating systems have not been eligible for DHG's and URG's. This could be due to complications regarding home ownership or simply they do not qualify for benefits and do not have any savings or the ability to pay for a boiler or repairs on top of the increased costs of living. We have been approached

by applicants who have not been the homeowners and to this day remain without heating.

2.7 The new Heating Assistance Grants will form part of the council's overall Housing Assistance and Disabled Facilities Grant policy, last reviewed and adopted in 2019. Details of the new grants are set out below:

2.8 Eligible Works

The purpose of the proposed Heating Assistance Grants will be to assist households and residents of Thanet who are experiencing financial hardship to repair, or replace heating systems or any other energy efficiency products which will support them to reduce their living costs. Specific eligible works will include:

- Repair of defective space heating and hot water systems.
- Installation of replacement or new space heating and hot water systems.
- Increased insulation to improve thermal efficiency.

2.8 Eligible Applicants

To be eligible for this scheme, you must

- Be a resident in Thanet and in receipt of a means tested benefit.
- Or have an Income is below £31,000 and the property is below the Government's Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) for Energy Rating of Dwellings D,E,F,G

Or

- SAP E, F, G and two of the following:
 - Homes in England in Lower-layer Super Output Area 1-3 (LSOA)⁷
 - Householders receiving a Council Tax rebate (rebates based on low income only, excludes single person rebates)
 - Householders vulnerable to living in a cold home as identified in the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidance:
 - A householder receiving free school meals for low income,
 - A householder supported by a LA run scheme, that has been named and described by the LA in their Statement of Intent as supporting low income and vulnerable households for the purposes of NICE Guideline,
 - A household referred to the LA for support by their energy supplier or Citizens Advice because they have been identified by the referrer as struggling to pay their gas and electricity bills,
 - Households identified through supplier debt data.
 - Non-PPM customers- customers who have been in debt for more than 13 weeks and are in a debt repayment plan with their energy supplier or repaying their fuel debt through 3rd party deductions. - PPM customers - Suppliers may also identify PPM households who have either self-disconnected or

received supplier Discretionary/Friendly credit within the last 13 weeks; or are in a debt repayment plan with their energy supplier; or repaying their fuel debt through 3rd party deductions

2.9 Repayment of Grants

Grants less than £1,000 are not required to be paid back.

Grants over £1,000 will be required to be paid back in line with the Winter Warmth Grant protocol, which is within the adopted Housing Assistance and Disabled Facilities Grant.

- The grant is subject to repayment conditions for 10 years from the date of payment.
- During the 10 year condition period, the grant becomes repayable in full if the property is sold, and/or the applicants no longer occupy the property.
- This is normally only available to owner occupiers, but in certain cases, where there is no prospect of getting the landlord to carry out the work, a tenant may apply and if successful may be awarded a grant. This will be down to the discretion of the Director of Housing and Planning.

3.0 Options

- 3.1 Create the Heating Assistance Scheme recycling the remaining Regional Housing Board monies that are not currently allocated to any projects. Assist households and residents of Thanet who are experiencing financial hardship to repair, or replace heating systems or any other energy efficiency products which will support them to reduce their living costs.
- 3.2 Allocate the remaining Regional Housing Board funds to other private sector housing renewal initiatives, inline with the original objectives of the funding, as set out in the executive summary.
- 3.3 Do not allocate the remaining Regional Housing Board funds.

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Reporting to: *Bob Porter (Acting Corporate Director of Place)*

Corporate Consultation

Finance: *(Insert name and job title)*

Legal: *Sameera Khan (Interim Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer)*