

Subject:	DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) HOUSING POLICY UPDATE 2018		
Date of Meeting:	19 September 2018		
Report of:	Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Communities & Housing		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Sarah Potter	Tel: 01273 290789
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

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

- 1.1 The Housing Adaptations Service implemented a new Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Housing policy under the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) 2002 with Housing & New Homes Committee approval 20 September 2017. The policy provides greater flexibility in how the DFG is spent. The key priorities are to better meet the needs of older and disabled people and families with disabled children and to target accident prevention, relieving fuel poverty and assisting with hospital discharge. The housing interventions are delivered in partnership with the local Home Improvement Agency (HIA) and make a significant contribution to our wider strategic aims, to promote independent living and wellbeing and to relieve fuel poverty.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the outcomes of the new housing interventions delivered in partnership and seeks the Committee's approval to make some changes to the eligibility criteria and amount available under some forms of assistance being offered to improve the delivery and make the best use of the resources available.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Committee notes the work done under the policy to date, the outturn to date and difference it has made to people's lives from the customer feedback received.
- 2.2 That Committee approves a variation to the *hospital discharge grant* eligibility to include any older person or disabled person being discharged from intermediate care (such as Craven Vale & Knowle House)
- 2.3 That Committee approves the proposal to fund a dedicated Community Link Specialist within the Link Back Service to co-ordinate a small pool of early intervention volunteers to deliver the hospital discharge grant assisted support.
- 2.4 That Committee approves a variation to the *dispensing with the means test* from dispensing with the means test altogether for works costing up to £5,000, to

making a contribution of up to £5,000 toward the cost of works where the disabled person has an assessed contribution to pay.

- 2.5 That Committee approves an increase to the maximum amount of assistance available under the *warm, safe homes assistance* from £5,000 to £7,500.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Housing Adaptations Service is an integrated team of Housing Occupational Therapists (OTs) and technical officers responsible for the assessment for major housing adaptations across housing tenures and the administration of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), a mandatory grant available from the Housing authority to help toward the cost of adaptations in private sector homes (private rented, owner-occupier and Registered Provider homes).
- 3.2 Nationally the DFG programme has been significantly increased from £220m in 2015/16 to £431m in 2017/18 and £468m in 2018/19. The Autumn Statement 2015 contained a commitment to provide £550m by 2019/20 recognising the contribution this funding makes to promoting independent living and wellbeing with all of the associated cost benefits to Health and social care services.
- 3.3 The DFG is a non-ring fenced capital grant paid via the Better Care Fund under the governance of the Health & Wellbeing Board. This year, in 2018/19, the capital grant for Brighton & Hove City is £1.890m of which £1.660m is transferred to Housing, the remainder contributing to other social care capital programmes.
- 3.4 The £1.660m transferred to Housing will enable us to deliver and sustain the programme of innovative housing interventions and at the same time maintain our statutory requirement to provide a Disabled Facilities Grant to eligible households.
- 3.5 In 2017/18, 146 mandatory DFGs were completed (compared to 177 in the previous year), the average grant being £6.5k (down from just under £9,000 in 2015/16) In addition, under the new policy launched in October, 16 *warm, safe homes grants* and 1 *handyperson services* grant were completed, bringing the total DFG investment to £1.175m.
- 3.6 Activity in the first quarter of this year, April to June 2018, shows we have made 112 referrals to the local Home Improvement Agency and a total of 67 grants have been completed, of which 37 are mandatory DFGs, 12 are *warm, safe homes grants* and 18 are *handyperson grants*. In addition, looking at the new grants pipeline the Home Improvement Agency report (28 June) a further 51 jobs are in the pipeline, estimated value £171,817, and a further 31 in the process of being priced with an estimated value in region of £104,055. The type of works are fairly wide ranging but include funding extended warranties on equipment such as stair lifts, window and door replacement or secondary double glazing, boiler, heating and plumbing repairs, providing rails, removing trip hazards, electrical repairs and loft insulation.

- 3.7 Customer satisfaction with the service is high. For the 67 grants completed April to June 2018, 37 satisfaction returns have been received (55%), of these 97% rated the service as excellent, 3% as good.
- 3.8 Anecdotally clients have fed back about the impact on their quality of life and independence. Mr E from Brighton, a wheelchair user who lives in a ground floor flat with a shared entrance, was struggling with getting into and out of the property and could only go out with assistance until an automatic door opener was installed giving Mr E the freedom to go out whenever he chooses. This has helped tackle his growing feeling of Isolation. Mr E said *“having the freedom to get in and out my house has vastly improved the quality of my life”*. Mrs B from Hove, an older person on benefits and suffering from severe fuel poverty, by utilising the new warm safe homes grant was able to install energy saving devices and insulation to the home that will significantly reduce her fuel costs going forward. Mrs B said, *“A fantastic job. All marvellous. Thank you”*.
- 3.9 While there is a significant volume of work in the pipeline there have been no referrals for the hospital discharge grant, to support any older or disabled person being discharged from hospital. Work with Possability People suggests that this assistance should be extended to include older and disabled people being discharged from intermediate care such as Craven Vale and Knowle House and that dedicated staff member within the Link Back Service, commissioned in May 2015 to support hospital discharge at the Royal Sussex County Hospital, would be ideally placed to identify those in need of short term practical support on discharge from hospital. The Link Back Service worked closely with the Red Cross Home and Settle team who provided the urgent support for vulnerable older people being discharged home however the Red Cross service was decommissioned June 2018 due to cuts. The current Link Back Service does not have capacity to respond to short term, urgent Housing related support needs. An additional staff member with focus on early identification of needs to the home environment would provide a more responsive service, avoiding delayed transfers of care through provision of minor adaptations and equipment, identifying essential repairs and provision of short term practical support with the transfer. A proposal for funding a dedicated member of staff within the Link Back Service is attached **App 1**
- 3.10 Dispensing with the means test is intended to cover the most common adaptations e.g. stair lifts, level access showers, where the adaptation is supported with a Housing Occupational Therapist recommendation and eligible for Disabled Facilities Grant assistance. In practice, as it is currently approved, the policy has had the unintended consequence of encouraging people to decline other necessary and appropriate adaptations in order to keep the cost of works within the £5k limit. In response it is proposed, to avoid a cliff edge for those with an assessed contribution toward the cost of adaptations, to offer a contribution of up to £5k to those eligible for DFG and assessed as having a contribution.

- 3.11 The *warm, safe homes grant* has proved most popular. This contributes to the strategic aims of the Council's Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth Strategy, developed in response to National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance, the Housing Strategy priorities around improving housing quality, and 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. In practice, the amount available to cover the cost of boiler repairs or replacement for example has been reached and costs have exceeded the maximum amount of £5k. To ensure, in eligible and appropriate cases, this form of assistance is able to fund qualifying works it is proposed to increase the amount available from £5k to a maximum £7.5k.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The DFG allocation and resources available this year and up to 2019/20 provide the opportunity to genuinely better meet the needs of older and disabled adults and children and their families. By delivering and improving the wider range of housing interventions we can make a real difference to the quality of people's lives, improve housing quality and are able to make a significant contribution to promoting independent living and wellbeing with all of the associated cost savings to Health and social care.
- 4.2 Not allocating sufficient funding to the DFG and wider housing interventions, not investing in proactive, preventative services, risks not managing the demand for DFG assistance for more major housing adaptations, the risk of falls and injury in the home, and the health implications for older and disabled adults and children and their families who are not able to afford to keep their homes warm.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation within the Housing Adaptations Service, Children's Disability Service, the local Home Improvement Agency and with Possability People has identified the areas for development and helped frame the recommendations outlined above
- 5.2 Customer feedback via the local Home Improvement Agency (see para 3.8) highlights the positive impact the wider range of Housing interventions can have on promoting independent living and relieving fuel poverty.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Adopting the proposed amendments to the adopted policy will improve delivery and ensure the best use of resources via the disabled facilities grant capital allocation this year and up to 2019/20

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The 2018/19 capital programme includes £1.660m budget for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) expenditure. This expenditure is subject to scrutiny through an annual declaration of usage to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which is certified by the Chief Finance Officer and Chief Internal Auditor to ensure that expenditure meets the criteria of the grant.
- 7.2 The costs of employing a dedicated Community Link specialist as recommended in paragraph 2.3 is estimated at £0.038m (see Appendix 1). This will be financed by the DFG grant.

Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks

Date: 07/09/18

Legal Implications:

- 7.3 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, amongst other things to provide assistance to any person to acquire living accommodation, to adapt or improve living accommodation (whether by alteration, conversion or enlargement, by the installation of anything or injection of any substance, or otherwise) and to repair living accommodation. The assistance may be provided directly or indirectly and in any form. The proposed amendments to the policy fall 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: 09/09/18

Equalities Implications:

- 7.4 The significant increase in funding via the disabled facilities grant and implementation of a wider range of funded Housing interventions will positively benefit more older and disabled adults, children and their families. It helps to promote choice and independence, promotes dignity and wellbeing. The new forms of assistance are provided in addition to us maintaining our statutory requirement to provide a disabled facilities grant

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.5 The total amount of capital funding committed to the adopted policy is up to £400,000 per annum. This funding comes from the central Government disabled facilities grant allocation via the Better Care Fund and will be reviewed annually and at the end of the current Spending review period, in 2020. The assistance offered is available subject to funding
- 7.6 The aims and objectives of the policy and the proposed changes recommended have a significant impact on improving the health and wellbeing of some of the

City's most vulnerable residents, primarily older and disabled people, their families and carers.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.7 These are included in the body of the report

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Link Back Project Proposal (Early Intervention) 2018/2019.
2. DFG Housing Policy 2017 – 2020.

Appendix 1

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 1.1 none

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 1.2 The amount of capital funding committed to the policy will be reviewed annually and all forms of discretionary assistance are available subject to funding.
- 1.3 The contract and case review management of the local Home Improvement Agency is managed by the Housing Adaptations Service through regular face to face contract and performance and review meetings. Spend against agreed budgets is monitored monthly as part of the council's Targeted Budget Monitoring process.

Public Health Implications:

- 1.4 Strategically the policy and proposed amendments help address the needs of older and disabled people, promoting independent living and wellbeing, and targeted at prevention of falls and injury in the home, ill health and excess winter deaths associated with cold homes and fuel poverty.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 1.5 The policy with proposed amendments makes a significant contribution to the delivery of the council's Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth Strategy, it aligns to the Better Care Plan and its vision for our frail population to help them stay healthy and well by providing more and better Housing related support and by

investing in preventative measures to reduce falls and injury, avoid delayed transfers of care and relieving fuel poverty so preventing higher needs arising

