

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date 25 March 2021

Report of: Head of Environmental Health

Subject: **POLICY ON ASSISTANCE WITH HOME ADAPTATIONS, REPAIRS, AND IMPROVEMENTS**

SUMMARY

This report sets out the rationale for publishing the policy on Assistance with home adaptations, repairs, and improvements (“the policy”) attached as Appendix A to this report, so that the Council can use central government funding to provide a service to more residents of the Borough requiring assistance to remain in their own homes.

The policy establishes the criteria for issuing mandatory disabled facility grants (DFGs) as well as the circumstances under which a discretionary grant will be offered and other procedural matters.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Housing Scrutiny Panel consider and comment on the draft Assistance with Home Adaptations, Repairs and Improvements Policy, attached to this report as Appendix A, in advance of it being presented to the Executive for approval.

INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE

1. There is good evidence of the benefits of home adaptations. A review of the research evidence found that home adaptations improved quality of life for 90% of recipients as well as resulting in reduced costs to health and care (Haywood and Turner, 2007; cited by Care & Repair England, 2019). The Council is committed to improving the quality of life for its residents and assisting them to remain in their own homes.
2. In 2015, responsibility for funding DFGs was transferred to the Department of Health & Social Care, who introduced the Better Care Fund (BCF) for this purpose. All BCF monies are paid to the upper-tier authority which then allocates specific amounts to the district councils.
3. Since 2008-09, the scope for how DFG funding can be used includes to support any local authority expenditure incurred under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 ("RRO"). This enables Councils to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes.
4. The Council has no published RRO Policy. The Deputy Director of the Housing Support Division in a letter from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government dated 28 February 2020 said: "At present we are aware that around 85% of authorities have a locally published RRO policy, but we would like to see this rise to closer to 100% uptake."
5. The RRO gives Councils a general power to introduce local policies for assisting individuals with renewals, repairs, and adaptations to their homes. In 2020-21 £757,036 has been made available to the Council from the BCF to provide such assistance. In a recent email from Hampshire County Council Adults' Health and Care it has been announced that a further payment of £101,938 will be made to the Council this financial year to support people to live independently. RRO policies need to be adopted by all local authorities to provide more flexible use of the grant.

POLICY CONTENT, AIMS, AND EVIDENCE

6. This discretionary use of the funding can help improve delivery and reduce the bureaucracy involved in the DFG application process, helping to speed up the process. For example, local authorities could use an alternative means test, increase the maximum grant amount, or offer a service which rapidly deals with inaccessible housing and the need for quick discharge of people from hospital (MHCLG and NHS England, 2019).
7. In addition to mandatory grants, adoption of this policy will enable the Council to spend a portion of the funding on helping more people in need. Most local authorities only deal with a handful of large and complex adaptations every year where the cost of fully meeting the needs of the disabled person exceeds the current limit of £30,000. Therefore, discretionary payments will include a top-up of the mandatory grant.
8. Means testing will also be removed for repairs/ improvements below £6000. Of the people who are assessed as needing an adaptation around a third drop out along the way, usually due to financial reasons; and most work to install level access showers, stair lifts or ramps, which account for 90% of adaptations, is under this amount. Falls represent 10-25% of ambulance callouts to older adults. (Source: DFG and Other

Adaptations: External Review, 2018).

CONSULTATION

9. Consultations on the policy in draft form have been held with Foundations – the national body for Home Improvement Agencies and lead on the transformation of DFGs – as well as Brian Bull at Portsmouth City Council who has responsibility for discharging on behalf of Fareham Borough Council our duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Hampshire County Council and the Council's Housing Occupational Therapist have also been consulted. A copy of their comments can be found as an appendix to this report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

10. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report. The Council has a statutory duty to issue DFGs and adoption of this policy entails no additional financial cost to the Council. The funding from the BCF is sufficient to meet the current demand for DFGs and therefore no additional contribution is required from the Council.

CONCLUSION

11. There is a clear rationale for publishing the policy to improve the quality of life for Fareham residents and assist them to remain in their own homes.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Policy on Assistance with Home Adaptations, Repairs, and improvements (Version 1.3. December 2020)

Appendix B: Consultation comments

Background Papers:

Reference Papers:

- Letter to Local Authority Chief Executives from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government dated 28 February 2020
- 'Better Care Fund Planning Requirements for 2019-20', Dept. of Health and Social Care, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and NHS England (2019) GOV.UK.
- 'DFG and Other Adaptations: External Review', November 2018; Summary; Mackintosh, Smith, Garrett, Davidson, Morgan, and Russell.
- 'Help with home adaptations: Improving local services', Care & Repair England (2019).

Enquiries:

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