

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision

17 May 2021

Portfolio:	Housing
Subject:	Policy on Assistance with Home Adaptations, Repairs, and Improvements
Report of:	The Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Corporate Priorities:	Providing housing choices; Strong, safe, inclusive and healthy communities

Purpose:

This report sets out the rationale for publishing a Policy on Assistance with Home Adaptations, Repairs, and Improvements ("the policy").

Executive summary:

The draft policy, attached as Appendix A, enables a more flexible approach to helping residents, irrespective of tenure, remain in their own homes improving their quality of life and reducing costs to health and care.

In addition to the mandatory disabled facility grant (DFG) funding up to £40,000 of work including top-up and aimed at adapting an occupant's accommodation to better suit their particular needs, the policy is effectively open-end in how assistance can be given. If adaptations to their current home through a DFG are determined not to be feasible then a relocation grant can be paid.

Any repairs or improvements supported by an Occupational Therapist or other health and social care professional, such as level access showers, stair lifts or ramps, costing less than £6000, will have the requirement for means testing waived, which can otherwise represent a significant bureaucratic barrier. Funding can also be used for essential repairs to reduce injury and accidents in the home, as well as property deep cleans. This might include, but is not limited to, cases for facilitating timely hospital discharge or reducing admissions to hospital (e.g. fall prevention measures) and residential care homes. Includes those in palliative care living at home with family.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Executive agrees that the Policy on Assistance with Home Adaptations, Repairs and Improvements, attached as Appendix A to this report, be approved.

Reason:

So that the Council can use central government funding to provide a better service to more residents of the Borough requiring assistance to remain in their own homes.

Cost of proposals:

Cost neutral

Appendices:

Appendix A: Draft Policy on Assistance with Home Adaptations, Repairs, and Improvements

Appendix B: Consultation comments

Background papers: None

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).

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Executive Briefing Paper

Date:	17 May 2021
Subject:	Policy on Assistance with Home Adaptations, Repairs and Improvements
Briefing by:	The Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Portfolio:	Housing

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 2021-22 £858,974 has been allocated to be paid to Fareham Borough Council by end of June 2021 from the BCF to provide such assistance. 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. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and no barriers or adverse impacts have been identified.

SCRUTINY

11. The draft policy was considered by the Housing Scrutiny Panel on 25th March 2021.

CONCLUSION

12. 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.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Ian Rickman, Head of Environmental Health. (Ext 4773)