

**PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING GRANTS ASSISTANCE POLICY**

Report of the:	Head of Housing & Community
Contact:	Debbie Firmo
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Annexes/Appendices (attached):	<u>Annexe 1</u> - Private sector housing grants assistance policy document
Other available papers (not attached):	

**REPORT SUMMARY**

**This report sets out the proposed private sector housing grants assistance policy. The policy relates to discretionary assistance that will be made available to vulnerable residents to enable them to remain healthy and safe within their own homes.**

**RECOMMENDATION (S)**

- (1) That the Committee approves the private sector housing grants assistance policy.**

**1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy**

- 1.1 Establishing this policy would support the key priority of supporting our community by maintaining and improving the health and well-being of vulnerable residents. Improving housing conditions will have a positive impact on those residents who are vulnerable and may not be able to carry out necessary repairs or adaptations to their home to keep them safe, warm and independent.

**2 Background**

- 2.1 The Council operates mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) which is a statutory function contained within the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.

- 2.2 The Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO) gives the Council a general power to introduce a policy for assisting individuals with renewal, repairs and adaptations in their home. The Council is required to set out and adopt a Housing Assistance Policy, outlining any discretionary grant assistance to be made available to residents.
- 2.3 Capital funding for DFGs is now included in the Surrey Better Care Fund (BCF) allocation. Unlike previous years, the DFG budget is now at a level where additional grants can be offered and the proposed discretionary policy costs will be met from this budget alone. It is therefore proposed that the committee agrees to adopt a housing grants assistance policy (attached at Annexe 1).
- 2.4 The provision of grant assistance to vulnerable households will strengthen and improve partnership working with internal and external partners, such as Surrey Police, Social Services, Citizen Advice Bureau, Age Concern (Epsom & Ewell) and our community services. It will enable us to assist residents most in need and to help them remain in their own homes without risk to their health and safety.
- 2.5 Although we have had the power to provide discretionary grants since 2008, we have not had the resources to develop the DFG programme and expand grant delivery. Now that the mandatory grant programme has been considerably expanded nationally from £220m in 2015/16 to £421m in 2017/18, we are in a position to assist those vulnerable residents in need of help who do not fall within the mandatory DFG criteria, whilst maintaining our statutory requirement to provide a DFG.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 This policy sets out in greater detail our priorities and how we intend to accomplish them. It outlines a summary setting out four priorities for providing financial assistance to residents across the borough. Appendix D of Annexe 1 outlines the existing mandatory DFG and the five new proposed discretionary grants that the Council intends to offer and sets out specific eligibility criteria and conditions relating to each grant.
- 3.2 The policy's starting point is that, in relation to discretionary assistance, responsibility for maintaining private property rests initially with the owner. The Council's resources will be targeted at vulnerable occupiers where it can be demonstrated that other financial options are not available.
- 3.3 A full definition of vulnerable households is set out in Appendix A of Annexe 1.
- 3.4 All applications will be considered on their merits and there will be discretion by the Licensing, Grants and HIA Manager, in exceptional circumstances to provide assistance to those who fall outside the prescribed criteria.

#### 4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 The discretionary grants will be run at no capital cost to the Council. The funds will be met from the DFG budget which is now met from the Surrey Better Care Fund allocation.
- 4.2 The DFG budget for 17/18 is £729,709.00 which includes this year's allocation of DFG grant of £588,304 plus any amounts carried forward from last year as the grant is not restricted by financial year. The Council's Capital Programme will be adjusted for the 2017/18 allocation to reflect the underspend from 2016/17. For information the actual expenditure in 2016/17 was £458,000. Where works under the programme are subject to fees being levied from the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) then the revenue will be recycled to future grant programmes.
- 4.3 Chief Finance Officer's comments: Funding for these grants will be provided externally via the Surrey Better Care Fund allocation. There are no resource implications for the Council apart from officer support which is from existing approved Council budgets.

#### 5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 5.1 The Council has a general duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
- 5.2 Having 'due regard' means consciously thinking about all three aims of the general duty as part of the decision making process at all levels. This means that equality issues must influence the decisions the Council takes both as an employer and as a deliverer or commissioner of services.
- 5.3 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 ("RRO") give local authorities powers to provide assistance to any person in order to adapt, improve and repair living accommodation. Assistance can be provided in any form and may be either unconditional or subject to conditions. Before exercising this power, the Council must adopt and publicise a policy. The policy must be followed when exercising the Council's powers under the RRO. If officers use any discretionary powers, these should be clearly documented. Where assistance is provided under the RRO, a legal charge can be registered at the Land Registry to secure repayment of the assistance given if the property is sold within a set period. All owners will need to sign a legal charge document and the charge should be registered at the Land Registry prior to any assistance being provided in order to protect recovery of the grant. A legal charge document will need to be drawn up by Legal Services prior to any assistance being granted in excess of £1,000 as per the proposed policy.

#### 6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 None directly related to this report.

## **7 Partnerships**

- 7.1 Existing partnership arrangements would not be impacted.

## **8 Risk Assessment**

- 8.1 Enhanced funding under the BCF will run into 2019/20. From April 2020 the situation is not known, however budgets will be consistently monitored throughout to ensure financial constraints are adhered to and policy reviewed as appropriate.

## **9 Conclusion and Recommendations**

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee agree to establish a private sector housing grants assistance policy, as detailed within this report.

**WARD(S) AFFECTED: (All Wards);**