

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING GRANTS ASSISTANCE POLICY

Head of Service:	Rod Brown, Head of Housing & Community
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision:	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1: Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy

Summary

This report proposes a revised version of our existing Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy which was originally agreed by the Community & Wellbeing Committee in June 2017. Minor amendments have been made and approved by committee since, but this is the first significant review.

Using the increased funding from the Better Care Fund (BCF) for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), the policy aims to provide a more pragmatic and holistic approach and to better reflect the symbiotic relationship between housing and social care needs.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Approve and adopt the revised Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy as set out in Appendix 1, in response to central government guidance to utilise grant funding more flexibly and to proactively assist more households.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 Increased funding for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) programme through the Better Care Fund, enabled the Council to use powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO) to introduce a Discretionary Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy to provide assistance for vulnerable residents.
- 1.2 The policy has been very effective to date but is now being revised as the Council has a significant level of DFG funds available to spend and is therefore in a position to expand the assistance we provide.

Community and Wellbeing Committee

10 October 2023

- 1.3 In March 2022, new guidance around local DFG delivery was provided by central government. This guidance directs the Council to use the discretionary powers contained within the RRO to respond to the needs of disabled and vulnerable people in the community when delivering their grants programme. For example, this can relate to flexibility around the means test requirements and the maximum amount of grant allowed under the DFG. It also extends to other discretionary financial assistance to meet other needs such as home safety and hospital discharge.
- 1.4 The Council wishes to ensure that a wide range of residents are reached through accessible and equitable financial support.
- 1.5 It is proposed that in order to provide assistance to an increased number of vulnerable residents, a revised policy is approved.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Council's obligations, powers and duties in relation to the provision of financial assistance for repair and adaptations are contained within the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO)
- 2.2 The Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy was first effective in 2018.
- 2.3 Central Government funding is received annually and is ringfenced for DFGs. The allocation for the past 3 years has been £785,282. Local authorities are directed to make full use of their discretionary powers under the RRO to offer greater flexibility and respond to local need. A published policy is required to achieve this.
- 2.4 In 2022/23, the Home Improvement Agency has looked to build on relationships with other organisations to better promote the service and available grants, through promotional literature and talks. During 2022/23 £616,000 was spent on the completion of 43 DFGs for a variety of works. The works for both adults and children included adaptations such as level access showers, stairlifts, ramps and wheelchair accessible extensions. The handyman service completed 241 jobs with works such as grab rails, minor repairs and garden clearances to improve independence and security around the home. Discretionary grants assisted with works such as supporting vulnerable residents who hoard and need help with de-cluttering and deep cleans, and residents without basic amenities such as hot water and heating.
- 2.5 Housing, Social & Adult Care and the National Health Service are delivering increasingly integrated services for vulnerable households that recognise the benefits of enabling people to stay in their homes wherever possible.

Community and Wellbeing Committee

10 October 2023

- 2.6 Poor housing can be a barrier for vulnerable, older and disabled people, contributing to immobility, social exclusion, ill health and depression. Housing assistance policies can contribute by enabling people to live with greater independence in secure, safe and well maintained, warm and suitable housing.
- 2.7 The Policy sets out how the Council will provide financial assistance to enable residents to remain independent at home for as long as possible through disabled adaptations and improvements to their homes.

The changes to the policy will increase flexibility and enable more residents in need to access services.

The most significant changes are as follows:

- Widen the eligibility criteria, including the means test requirements. For example, for prevention grants means test requirements have been removed and for other services, council tax support has been added as a passporting benefit which will further support more residents and streamline the process.
- Allow for a versatile approach to the application process and forms required.
- Cases can be treated on a more individual basis with an exceptions clause now incorporated into the policy.
- The maximum grant level has been increased to allow for increased costs in the construction industry and in response to the more complex needs of some residents.
- Assistance will be available to those with a terminal illness and dementia.
- Loans will be available from the Parity Trust for cases where additional funds are needed, or where the resident does not meet the grant requirements.
- Accessible housing grants will meet a rising need in the housing market for disabled persons who are either homeless or need to move to a more suitable property.
- Prevention is key in supporting health and safety in homes as well as the NHS and Social and Adult Care. The prevention grant has been added with this in mind.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

Community and Wellbeing Committee

10 October 2023

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

3.1.1 Assisting vulnerable residents to stay safe, secure and independent in their homes will have a positive impact on their wellbeing. This can be achieved through grants such as the safe and secure assistance.

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 Assisting vulnerable residents with security measures through our handyperson service and grants can deter criminal activity such as theft and cuckooing practices. This can be in the form of clearing overgrown gardens and providing locks and improved outside lighting.

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 Assisting vulnerable residents to stay safe, secure and independent in their homes will have a positive impact on safeguarding. This can be achieved through grants such as the safe and secure assistance.

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 The budget will continue to be closely monitored to ensure it is not exceeded. Should there be a risk of the budget being exceeded, the priority would focus on progressing Mandatory Disabled Facilities grants only.

3.5 Other

3.5.1 None for the purposes of this report.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 The revised Policy would be implemented and administered using existing staffing resources. Funding for the scheme comes through the Better Care Fund allocation via central government.

4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** None arising from the contents of this report.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 The Council's obligations, powers and duties in relation to the provision of financial assistance for repair and adaptations are contained within the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO)

Legal Officer's comments: None arising from the contents of this report

Community and Wellbeing Committee

10 October 2023

Policies, Plans & Partnerships

5.2 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

Safe and Well – Ensuring vulnerable residents have safe and secure homes to promote wellbeing and security. All the grants in the policy work towards this outcome.

5.3 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

5.4 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:**

This policy will support delivery of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan, specifically on the action to 'provide practical help to vulnerable and disabled people to improve energy efficiency in their homes'. By addressing energy efficiency measures and fuel poverty, this in turn will have a positive effect on CO2 emissions and the environment. The warm at home grant includes partnership working with Action Surrey who work with all Surrey boroughs on providing energy efficiency advice.

5.5 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:**

This policy would have a positive impact on community safety by ensuring its vulnerable residents feel safe in their homes with access to assistance such as telecare equipment or security measures should they need it.

5.6 **Partnerships:** To fully utilise the benefits available from this policy, forging strong partnerships is vital. The council works with core agencies such as mental health, social service professionals, Housing Associations, hospitals, Action Surrey, and the voluntary sector.

6 Background papers

6.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- [Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy – Community and Wellbeing Committee, 13 June 2017](#)
- [Review of Discretionary Grants Policy - Community and Wellbeing Committee, 20 March 2018](#)
- [Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy Review - Community and Wellbeing Committee, 22 January 2019](#)
- [Review of private sector housing grants assistance policy – Community and Wellbeing Committee, 12 July 2022](#)

Other papers:

Community and Wellbeing Committee
10 October 2023

- [Private Housing Grants Assistance Policy \(2022\)](#)
- [Disabled Facilities Grant \(DFG\) delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)