

THE HARDSHIP FUND

<u>Report of the:</u>	Head of Housing & Environmental Services
<u>Contact:</u>	Karen Ordoyno
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	N/A
<u>Annexes/Appendices (attached):</u>	None
<u>Other available papers (not attached):</u>	Report to, and Minutes of, the meeting of the Social Committee held on 7 April 2011

REPORT SUMMARY

This report sets out proposals to revise the current Home Improvement Agency Hardship Fund by combining it with the Disabled Facility Grant Hardship Fund. The fund would provide support to vulnerable residents who are at immediate risk of harm or hospitalisation.

RECOMMENDATION (S)

- (1) That Committee agrees that a Home Improvement Agency Hardship Fund is established.**

Notes

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

- 1.1 Establishing a Hardship Fund would support the Key Priority of supporting our community by promoting a healthy and active lifestyle especially for the young and elderly. In this case, elderly and vulnerable residents could be provided assistance to enable them to stay warm or avoid harm in their home.

2 Background

- 2.1 We have operated a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) since 2010. In April 2011 the Social Committee approved two new schemes:

- 2.1.1 i) a paid for service to project manage housing adaptations for residents who were not eligible to receive mandatory grant assistance and;

- 2.1.2 ii) a property charge on adapted properties which benefited from the mandatory grant programme.
- 2.2 The Committee agreed that funds from the two schemes be ring-fenced to the HIA Service or recycled into the Housing Grant programme.
- 2.3 The balance of funds is now at a level where it is feasible to implement a scheme to enable the recycling of the funds. It is therefore proposed that Committee agree to adopt a new HIA Hardship Fund.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed that a new Hardship Fund be introduced which would enable urgent assistance to be provided to vulnerable residents to avoid immediate risk to health and safety, or to avoid hospitalisation. The fund would not replace the existing Handyman Scheme, but would run alongside it. However, should funding for the Handyman Scheme cease which is a distinct possibility in 2017/18, then it could possibly be used to assist clients in exceptional cases.
- 3.2 The scheme would provide assistance where it has not been possible to secure funding through other channels or sources of funding for those on a means tested benefit. Works eligible under the scheme could include; contributing towards essential maintenance repairs; addressing extreme cold such as providing portable heating or boiler repairs and providing home security measures such as window and door locks to those considered at risk. In exceptional cases, the fund could assist clients who have a small contribution to make towards the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant, but have no other source of income to meet the contribution.
- 3.3 The Licensing, Grants and HIA Manager would have discretion to approve grants up to £500, although it is expected that most works would not cost in excess of £200.
- 3.4 The Licensing, Grants and HIA Manager will monitor budgets periodically with the Service Accountant.
- 3.5 To apply for funding a resident would need to complete the same enquiry form currently used to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant. The form requests information relating to any disability, finances and sign a declaration allowing the HIA to check receipt of any means tested benefit. There is also a section to complete relating to equal opportunities.

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 Previously the Social Committee agreed in April 2011 that income generated via the HIA private works and property charges should be ring-fenced to the HIA Service and recycled into the housing grants programme. The scheme will be administered using existing staff resources.

- 4.2 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** The existing HIA Hardship Fund has a balance of £5,734 which has been built up since April 2013 from fees on private Home Improvement Agency Works. There is also a Disabled Facilities Grant Hardship Fund which was set up to "recycle" DFG grant expenditure through the redemption of Charges on Property. The current balance on this account is £6,055.
- 4.3 Expenditure on the revised HIA Fund will be monitored to ensure it does not exceed the value of the funds held.

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.

Having 'due regard' means consciously thinking about the 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 a deliverer or commissioner of services.

Monitoring Officer's comments: The Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities the power to do anything that individuals may do. This would include the establishment of a hardship fund. If a fund is established, the process for applying for a grant and the criteria against which the application will be assessed must be clear and applied to all applications to ensure the scheme is administered fairly.

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 The Council's HIA was awarded The National Foundations Quality Mark in 2013, and the report commented on exploring ways to promote preventative work already being carried out, and the ways in which it could be expanded in future, and one of the recommendations was to consider a Hardship Fund. The Authority could be seen to be disregarding the recommendations should a Fund not be established.
- 8.2 The HIA can not continue to rely on external funding to deliver programmes such as the Handyman Scheme funded through Surrey County Council Adult Social Care, and the Hardship Fund would ensure that the most vulnerable residents continue to receive essential/urgent assistance.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee agree to establish a HIA Hardship Fund, as detailed within this report.

WARD(S) AFFECTED: (All Wards);