



## CABINET

8<sup>th</sup> May 2019

**Subject Heading:**

Private Housing Health Assistance Policy.

**Cabinet Member:**

Councillor Jason Frost, Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Care Services.

**SLT Lead:**

Barbara Nicholls, Director of Adult Social Care & Health.

**Report Author and contact details:**

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**Policy context:**

This report asks Cabinet to approve the Private Housing Health Assistance Policy.

**Financial summary:**

The financial resources to fund this policy will be from the Central Government provided Grant (Disabled Facilities Grant), administered through the Better Care Fund (BCF), valued at £1.679m for 2018/19. The allocation for 2019/20 is imminent and an uplift of approximately 8% is expected. The estimated additional cost of delivering discretionary housing grants is within the financial resources available. Discretionary grants are only available to residents within available funds.

**Is this a Key Decision?**

Yes. The estimated additional minimum expenditure of £0.640m will be met from the BCF Funds. The policy will have benefits for older people, disabled people, and people with chronic health conditions living in all Wards.

**When should this matter be reviewed?**

The policy will be reviewed in March 2023.

**Reviewing OSC:**

Individuals

**The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives:**

Communities making Havering	[X]
Places making Havering	[ ]
Opportunities making Havering	[ ]
Connections making Havering	[ ]

## **SUMMARY**

The Private Housing Health Assistance Policy sets out the Council's proposed policy in relation to the provision of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants, and to enable the Council to make best use of funds available through the Better Care Fund to provide discretionary housing grants to vulnerable people. The discretionary grants will be more flexible and will increase the level and range of assistance the Council can provide to vulnerable people to help them make improvements to their homes. This will help people retain their independence and carry on living in their own home in the community, and to live in homes that are safe and healthy for them.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Cabinet:

- Approve the Private Housing Health Assistance Policy set out at Appendix 1.
- Note the expected positive impacts of the policy and the improvements in the health and wellbeing of the residents of Havering as outlined in the Equalities & Health Impact Assessment for the Private Housing Health Assistance Policy.

## **REPORT DETAIL**

1. Funding for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and discretionary housing grants now comes through the Better Care Fund (BCF). In combination with powers in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 (the RRO) this gives the Council the opportunity to use DFG funding more flexibly in the future through the use of discretionary housing grants in addition to DFGs.
2. The Council currently provides mandatory DFGs (where home adaptations are needed to meet the needs of disabled individuals and are reasonable and practicable) but not discretionary housing grants. In order to provide discretionary housing grants to people in need the Council must approve an RRO compliant policy which confirms the types of discretionary grants that will be provided and the conditions attached to these.
3. Officers in the Council have engaged with other local authorities, and Foundations (the Government's appointed advisory agency for best practice in the delivery of housing grants) to inform the development of the Private Housing Health Assistance Policy (the Policy). The Policy is compliant with the RRO and meets the Government's central aim therein to create greater

flexibility in the delivery of housing grants and address housing issues on a wider preventative basis.

4. The Policy describes what the Council already does to deliver mandatory DFGs, this will not change. It also confirms how the Council will use powers under the RRO in relation to the provision of discretionary housing grants to people in need (i.e. older people, people with disabilities [adults & children], and people [adults and children] with chronic health conditions). The main aims of the policy are to help people in need through the use of housing grants to help them improve their housing conditions in order to:
  - reduce the risk of injuries and ill health;
  - help people maintain their health and wellbeing;
  - enable people to remain independent for as long as possible;
  - minimise pressures on local health and social care services.
5. The discretionary Grants that will be made available through the policy are:
  - 5.1 **DFG Top-Up** (maximum Grant - £15,000): To facilitate adaptations that exceed the maximum funding limit for DFGs. Grants in excess of £5,000 (up to a maximum of £10,000) will be registered as a charge on the title register or a local land charge. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required.
  - 5.2 **Discretionary Disabled Adaptation Assistance** (maximum grant - £10,000): To simplify grants and provide fast track arrangements without the need for means testing for grants under £5,000. Also to provide assistance for more complex adaptations in cases where contributing to a mandatory DFG would cause financial hardship. A charge on the title register/local land charge may apply as in the DFG Top Up grant.
  - 5.3 **Moving On Assistance** (maximum grant - £12,000): To be considered where it is not reasonable or practicable to adapt an existing property. A charge on the title register/local land charge may apply as in the DFG Top Up grant.
  - 5.4 **Hospital Discharge Assistance** (maximum grant - £5,000): To facilitate quick discharge from hospital.
  - 5.5 **Safe, Warm and Well** (maximum grant - £12,000): To facilitate essential repairs and work to help people make their homes safe, warm, healthy, and free from hazards that present a health and safety risk to the people living in the home. A charge on the title register/local land charge may apply as in the DFG Top Up grant.
  - 5.6 **Dementia Aids, Adaptations, and Assistive Technology** (maximum grant - £750): To supplement existing services where an unmet need is identified. This grant can be used to replace gas, electric cooking facilities with microwaves and specialist assistive technology such as GIS tracking devices where appropriate.

- 5.7 **Sanctuary Scheme** (maximum grant - £1,000): To provide an occupier, who is at risk of domestic abuse, assistance to improve the security arrangements of their home.
6. The funding arrangements for the DFG transferred to the BCF in 2015, including an increase in available funding to support the annual housing programme. The comprehensive spending review in November 2015 announced that the Government allocation for the grant would more than double to over £500 million by 2019/20. As a result the Council's allocation for housing grants (which is ring-fenced for these purposes) is now £1.679m for 2018/19, of which £0.800m has been set aside for mandatory DFGs, leaving £0.879 for other spend in support of the prevention strategy, including the discretionary elements in the Policy. The additional estimated minimum annual spend of £0.640m on discretionary grants to deliver the policy will consequently be deliverable within the available funds.

## REASONS AND OPTIONS

### **Reasons for the decision:**

7. To provide a written policy describing what the Council already does to provide mandatory DFGs.
8. To make best use of the financial resources for housing grants provided by the Better Care Fund the Council must have a written policy that is consistent with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002. This will enable the Council to provide discretionary housing grants to vulnerable people to improve their health and wellbeing, and to reduce pressures on local health and social care services.

### **Other options considered:**

The Council could choose not to have a written policy for housing grants. This was rejected because:

9. A written policy is needed to ensure people living in Havering are aware of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants they are entitled to if their needs are eligible for housing grant assistance.
10. The Council cannot provide discretionary housing grants unless it has an RRO complaint policy to inform people about the discretionary grants available and the conditions attached to these.

**IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

**Financial implications and risks:**

11. The provision of the discretionary housing grants proposed within the policy will be at the discretion of the Council and will be subject to the availability of financial resources, which may be directed by the Council's strategic priorities.
12. Being a demand led initiative, activity through the programme will be monitored in line with the Council's Financial management framework, ensuring management action is taken to maintain spend within available budgets. The annual grant allocation is expected to increase in line with inflation and government policy, there may be further opportunities to increase the activity in support of the prevention strategy when additional funds are granted.
13. Although both the mandatory and discretionary policy form the bulk of the commitments for the annual DFG, there are other supplementary activities for which the DFG is expected to contribute. The financial risk associated with the Housing Policy is limited however, a holistic approach will be required to ensure all initiatives are considered as part of the monitoring arrangements.

**Legal implications and risks:**

14. The content of the policy is consistent with the requirements of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002.
15. As stated within the Report the Council cannot distribute discretionary grants without a policy in place setting out what grants are available, the criteria for an award and the processes applicable.

**Human Resources implications and risks:**

16. Any changes in activity as a result of this policy will be managed within the service and in line with the appropriate HR policy if applicable.

**Equalities implications and risks:**

17. The Policy will have a positive impact on older people living in Havering as well as disabled people (adults and children), and people with chronic health conditions, by enabling discretionary housing grants that will:
  - reduce the risk of falls and injury;
  - reduce the risk of ill health;
  - minimise time spent in acute hospitals;
  - help people maintain independence and avoid the need for long term care.

18. The Equality & Health Impact Assessment for the Policy is attached as appendix 2. No negative impacts have been identified. However, landlords may choose not to give permission for adaptations for disabled people living in rented accommodation. This can be mitigated by supporting people to move to more suitable accommodation through the Moving On Grant.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

19. None.