

HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report To: Cabinet
6 February 2018

Subject: REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

All Wards
Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health, Waste and Recycling: Councillor S Watson

1.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to feedback on the outcome of the consultation on the Council's Housing Assistance Policy and to seek Cabinet approval for the new policy to go to Council on 27th February 2018 for formal adoption.
- 1.2 As a housing authority the Council has a statutory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants to eligible households which are currently administered on the Council's behalf by Swale Home Improvement Agency.
- 1.3 In September 2017, Cabinet approved consultation on a revised Housing Assistance Policy which seeks to widen the scope of the Disabled Facilities Grant and to include a remit to explore funding opportunities to improve the thermal efficiency of private sector homes.
- 1.4 A number of changes are proposed to the Council's Housing Assistance Policy to improve customer service, ensure properties support safe and healthy longer term occupation and maximise the effectiveness of the grant funding.

Changes to the Policy

- 1.6 The following policy changes are proposed:
 - The removal of the Means Test for all recommended works that have a value of less than £5,000. This represents approximately 30% of total applications. (Chapter 6, p11, para 6.1).
 - For cases, confirmed by a health or social care specialist, where urgent adaptations are required, certain 'emergency' works to be fast tracked through the system and a 'means' test not applied (Chapter 6, p13, para 6.2.5).
 - The introduction of additional discretionary assistance up to £5000 per property by broadening the scope of work that can be covered by a Disabled Facilities Grant to include works to alleviate hazards linked to excess cold and falls or other significant hazards that would prevent the grant proceeding. (Chapter 6,p14 para 6.3).
 - To provide discretionary assistance in the form of a 'top up' loan of a maximum of £10,000 where a maximum mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant of £30,000 has been awarded but there is still shortfall on the actual cost of the eligible works. This will be interest free and means tested (Chapter 6, p13, para 6.2.6).
 - Under certain circumstances, works not normally eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant to be funded. For example, facilities to help the carer of the disabled person such as soundproofing, safety rooms or highly specialised bathing equipment (Chapter 6, p13 para 6.2.4).

- To allow the use of Private Occupational Therapists and trusted assessors for assessments and referrals (Chapter 6, p15, para 6.4).
- The agency fee levied against capital works undertaken by the Home Improvement Agency to be increased to 15% (Chapter 6, p11, para 6.1).
- Within the separate policy area to improve the thermal efficiency of private sector homes, the Council will work with other partners to undertake further work to increase customer access to external funding opportunities for energy efficiency measures (Chapter 9, p20, para 9.1-9.3).

1.5 The revised policy is attached at Annex 1. It has now been subject to formal consultation and only one response was received. This sought clarification on aspects of the policy. It did not raise any issues that warranted any changes to be made to the proposed policy wording. The policy can therefore be formally adopted.

2.0 LINK TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

2.1 The Housing Assistance Policy contributes to the delivery of four key Council priorities: Providing a Special Place to Live, Enhancing Health and Well Being, Caring for the Environment and Driving Economic Vitality. Extending Disabled Facilities Grants to include prevention work around falls and excess cold and including a provision to obtain grant funding for energy efficiency works for private sector homes, will support residents to live independently for longer within their own home and help prevent winter deaths.

3.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

3.1 There is no risk associated with implementing the recommendation.

3.2 The key risks in not approving the recommendation(s) as shown below:-

Risk	Implication	Prob*	Imp*	Total	Preventative action
Disabled Facilities Grants will not be able to be used more broadly.	Negative impact on the health and well-being of residents. Spending of grant funding could also be negatively affected.	4	3	12	Approve policy
Applications for Disabled Facilities Grants will be processed more slowly.	Customers will have longer to wait for work to be completed which will impact negatively on their health and well-being. This presents a risk to the Council as it has a legal duty to determine an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant within six months of receipt.	4	3	12	Approve policy
Not working collaboratively with local authorities and other partners.	Loss of funding opportunities. Preventing customers access funding. Deterioration of housing stock.	4	3	12	Approve policy

Prob = Probability, Imp = Impact, Score range is Low = 1, High = 5

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 The costs of the broader Disabled Facilities Grant works are capped. Any costs will be covered by the Council's annual grant allocation and the programme will be reviewed quarterly.
- 4.2 It is anticipated that the use of a private Occupational Therapist shall be less than £5,000 per year.
- 4.3 The increase in agency fees will generally be covered by the grant. Occasionally the cost will need to be met by the applicant or the Council or the Council may be required to provide assistance to customers for discretionary work. A fund of £20,000 has been made available for this purpose.
- 4.4 Where appropriate the Council will make provision for the recycling of grant and loan funding where a land charge has been applied.
- 4.5 The costs to the Council of energy efficiency work will be proportional and will be part of a 'blended pot' of money utilising other available funding from energy providers or energy efficiency scheme providers.
- 4.6 'Top up' provision will be in the form of a means tested grant and registered as a land charge, repayable if the property is sold within a ten year period.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 In respect of grant for Disabled Facilities Grant and discretionary 'top up' payments the Council is required to give a statement in writing of the conditions to which the grant is to be subject.
- 5.2 The Council must also satisfy itself that the applicant has received appropriate advice and information about the extent and nature of any obligation in consequence of provision of the grant.

6.0 EQUALITY/DIVERSITY ISSUES:

- 6.1 The proposed changes to the policy including bids for national and regional funding will assist vulnerable residents who wish to live independently by making their homes warmer, safer and more accessible. It is intended that the policy will improve service delivery for vulnerable clients.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION:

- 7.1 That Cabinet approves the policy and recommends to Council that it is adopted on 27 February 2018.

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Background papers: Housing Assistance Policy 13 December 2016
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