

## **Hambleton District Council**

**Report To:** Chief Executive

**Date:** 2 June 2020

**Subject:** **Review of the Housing Assistance Policy**

**Portfolio Holder:** Environmental Health, Waste and Recycling  
Councillor S Watson

**Wards Affected:** All Wards

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### **1.0 Purpose and Background**

- 1.1 The Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy was last presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 5 September 2017. Changes are now proposed to the policy related to Disabled Facilities Grants, discretionary assistance and energy efficiency measures.
- 1.2 The aim of the policy is to support vulnerable households to enable healthy and long term occupation of their homes and maximise the effectiveness and access to grant funding; reducing fuel poverty and winter deaths; and improving energy efficiency.
- 1.3 As a housing authority the Council has a statutory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants to eligible households which are currently administered by Richmondshire District Council and delivered by Swale Home Improvement Agency. The Council also employs a Disabled Facilities Grants Officer to co-ordinate this function.
- 1.4 Government funding for Disabled Facilities Grants is incorporated in the Better Care Fund which is administered by North Yorkshire County Council. Hambleton's funding allocation for 2020-21 will be £477,134 which represents the first static allocation in recent years having increased steadily from £219,821 in 2015-16.
- 1.5 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and Technical Guidance issued with the Better Care Fund allow local authorities the flexibility to offer discretionary assistance linked to Disabled Facilities Grants.
- 1.6 The main changes proposed to the Housing Assistance Policy are as follows:
  - Increase in the threshold for non-means tested Disabled Facilities Grants from £5,000 to £6,000 (Chapter 5, page 10, paragraph 5.4).
  - Applications for discretionary non-means tested Disabled Facilities are limited to one grant in any three year period (Chapter 5, page 10, paragraph 5.4).

- Clarification is given to applications for assistance made on behalf of a disabled person under the age of 18 years old being non-means tested (Chapter 5, page 10, paragraph 5.4).
- ‘Emergency Works’ has been replaced with ‘Prioritisation of Works’. In cases where immediate intervention is required to assist with a hospital discharge, Disabled Facilities Grants are not always the most appropriate means of assistance and as such Occupational Therapists will work directly with the client to provide any measures needed to allow the client to return home. When an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant is recommended, priority will be given based on advice from the Occupational Therapist (Chapter 5, page 11, paragraph 5.6).
- In response to the Prime Minister’s Challenge on Dementia 2020 and given that public health statistics available at [datanorthyorkshire.org](http://datanorthyorkshire.org) depict dementia prevalence in Hambleton as above the national average (0.9% compared with 0.8% nationally) the revised policy provides scope for discretionary assistance to fund the cost of aids and adaptations to help people with dementia continue to live in their own homes (Chapter 6, page 12, paragraph 6.1).
- Further discretion is now available where a top up is required to a Disabled Facilities Grant if the required works are over £30,000. The top up facility is £10,000 however this can be increased in certain circumstances at the discretion of the Director of Economy and Planning (Chapter 6, page 13, paragraph 6.3).
- Provision (pending approval from Management Team) of a discretionary fund to be available where there is a shortfall in grant funding which prevents energy efficiency measures going ahead or the energy efficiency works required are not included in any current schemes (Chapter 8, page 18, paragraph 8.4).
- Energy Repayment Loans have been removed due to lack of take up.

1.7. The revised policy has been subject to consultation in March 2020 and the responses are provided with this report. The policy will be published on the Council’s website and intranet and awareness of the policy will be raised internally and externally with partner organisations. The Council’s approach to empty properties will be reviewed in due course to facilitate a collaborative approach suggested in the responses.

## **2.0 Link to Council Priorities**

2.1 The Private Sector 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.

### 3.0 Risk Assessment

3.1 The key risk is in not approving the recommendation as shown below:

Risk	Implication	Gross Prob	Gross Imp	Gross Total	Preventative action	Net Prob	Net Imp	Net Total
Absence of a Housing Assistance Policy	The Council will not have an overall approach to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants and other measures would not be available to support vulnerable residents.	3	4	12	That the Housing Assistance Policy is approved by Cabinet.	2	2	4
Not working collaboratively with local authorities and other partners.	Loss of funding opportunities. Preventing customers access funding. Deterioration of housing stock.	4	3	12	That the Housing Assistance Policy is approved by Cabinet.	2	2	4

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

Overall the risk of agreeing with the recommendations outweighs the risks of not agreeing them and is considered acceptable.

### 4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The cost of Disabled Facilities Grant works are met by the Council's annual grant allocation and the programme is reviewed quarterly. There are safeguards in place to ensure that grants are awarded in accordance with the legislation and the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy.
- 4.2 Any discretionary measures to tackle excess cold, collective falls and provide dementia support will come from the Better Care Fund.
- 4.3 There are currently no capital costs related to energy efficiency measures as the utility companies or scheme providers hold the funds and customers will apply directly to them for assistance. The Council may determine that it is appropriate to provide a fund for additional works to ensure energy efficiency measures go ahead.
- 4.4 The Council and partners will endeavour to blend grant and other funding to enable measures to take place.
- 4.5 The costs of facilitating schemes are met within service budgets.
- 4.6 Where appropriate the Council will make provision for the recycling of grant and loan funding where a local land charge has been applied.

## **5.0 Legal Implications**

5.1 As a housing authority the council has a statutory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants to eligible households.

## **6.0 Equality/Diversity Issues**

6.1 Equality and Diversity issues have been considered and the proposed changes to the policy 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 It is recommended that the Chief Executive uses his delegated authority to approve the changes to the Housing Assistance Policy.

Paul Staines  
Director of Environment

Helen Kemp  
Director of Economy and Planning

**Background papers:** Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy March 2020  
Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy Consultation Responses

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