

# CABINET

Monday, 13 September 2021

## PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

### Report of the Executive Head of Health and Wellbeing

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#### Recommendation(s)

**It is recommended that Cabinet notes the changes and approves the updated Public Sector Housing (PSH) Financial Assistance Policy.**

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#### Summary

The Council has a statutory duty to administer disabled facilities grants (DFGs) to pay for adaptations that will allow residents to remain living in their homes for longer. For adults, this is means tested. The Council is required to have a policy on how grants (and other financial assistance) are provided and as the current policy was approved in 2014, it is now due for review.

This updated policy attached (appendix 1), consolidates the previously separate Financial Assistance Policy and Disabled Facilities Grants Eligible Works Policy into one. It also simplifies and clarifies the language relating to eligible works and brings in the additions of extending criteria for discretionary grants, charging for project assistance on self-funded adaptations, and one new condition to those that are attached to any DFGs which gives the Council the ability to apply any additional condition(s) where considered necessary on individual cases.

#### Statutory Powers

- Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
- Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002
- DCLG Circular 05/2003 - Housing Renewal
- Housing Act 2004

#### Strategic Implications

1. This proposal outlines how the Council will meet its statutory duty. The quality and safety of housing and the ability to use it independently and with dignity is a significant determinant of a person's physical and mental health and wellbeing and those in socio-economic deprivation often have limited access to accommodation of an appropriate standard or means by which to independently adapt it as required. The health and wellbeing of all residents in

the borough is a strategic priority, and this policy will contribute towards the following objectives:

- To enable health and wellbeing
- To tackle health inequality and deprivation

## **Introduction**

2. The Council has a statutory duty to deliver DFGs. These grants are given to provide adaptations that fall within one of 11 specified categories to allow disabled or elderly residents to remain living safely in their own homes.

The principle behind the DFG service is that relatively small preventative measures can have broader positive effects. By providing preventative adaptations to peoples' homes you:

- Reduce the risk of falls or injuries and thereby potential hospital admissions.
- Help residents to maintain independence by reducing the risk of falls or injuries, which can reduce the need for expensive social care packages.
- Help to maintain independence which can also help prevent loss of confidence and social isolation, with their associated mental health impacts, that can often follow as a result of falls/injuries in the elderly and disabled.

The Council provide other forms of financial assistance, some of which are discretionary provisions. However, they continue to be provided as they all directly support the Council's aim of helping to improve healthier lifestyles/wellbeing through quality and safe housing for residents.

This policy consolidates the previously separate Financial Assistance Policy and Disabled Facilities Grants Eligible Works Policy into one place. It also broadens the criteria for discretionary grants to now include an option for mental health related works that fall outside the remit of DFGs. This reflects the broader acknowledgement and conversations around mental health that are now happening in society.

This policy additionally brings in administrative charges for the discretionary service of project assistance for self-funded adaptations. The charges proposed have been calculated based on estimated time for the average activities that would be included at the hourly rate for the respective officer level for that activity, with the intention being that the charges are set so as to allow provision of this service to be cost neutral. The cancellation costs have considered the time and resources that may still have been expended prior to this point are balanced by the inclusion of a 14-day cooling-off period.

Finally, an additional condition has been added to those that are attached to DFGs is one that gives the Council the ability to apply any additional

condition(s) where considered necessary on individual cases. This condition strengthens the Council's ability (where needed) to ensure the budget for adaptations is spent in a sound and efficient manner which ensures that clients are seriously considering the longer-term requirements and appropriateness of such adaptations.

## **Consultation**

3. Internal consultation was made with the relevant Corporate Director, Portfolio Holders and the legal services team.

An external consultation was undertaken between 7 December 2020 and 15 January 2021. The consultation was targeted to key stakeholder organisations. Draft copies of the updated policy were sent to those below for any comments. No comments were received from this external consultation.

- Eastleigh and District Disability Forum
- Age UK (Eastleigh Branch)
- Abri Housing Association
- VIVID Housing Association
- Hampshire County Council (Child Services – OT Team)
- Hampshire County Council (Adults Health and Care – OT Team)

Unfortunately, due to the combination in the early part of the year of the Senior Leadership Team restructure, the period with the Strategy Lead post vacant and a legislative change in another area of the teams work which due to the very short time window for implementation had to take priority, the policy has not been able to be brought forward until now

## **Financial Implications**

4. There is no immediate financial implication from the approval of this policy.

The intention with the charges is to operate on a 'cost neutral' basis for this discretionary provision and as the service is caveated to only be provided when capacity within the team allows, it is not appropriate for any income target to be stipulated. If any income should get generated it will be ring-fenced to be rolled back into the main DFG budget.

## **Risk Assessment**

5. If this policy is not approved the Council would be failing to ensure it meets the statutory duty in the most efficient and effective manner. The Council needs to periodically review its policies to ensure they reflect current best practice and, including changes in society and technology, for the benefit of its residents.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

6. The Equality Act is relevant to the decision in this report as the decision relates to advancing equality of opportunity.

The Council is committed to ensuring good housing conditions for its residents. Approval of the policy will result in anticipated improvement for people in social deprivation and/or those with protected characteristics, particularly for age and disability.

A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out when the policy was first developed. This EIA has been updated in line with the policy amendments to ensure the Council has had due regard to any changes which could impact people with a protected characteristic. This is attached at appendix 2.

## **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

7. This policy does not have any direct impact on climate change or environmental implications.

## **Conclusion**

8. The Council has a statutory duty to provide DFGs. By approving this policy, it ensures clarity for the public and Councillors on how this duty is met. It also ensures that changes in wider society and technology since the previous policy was written have been considered and so provide confidence that the Council is providing the services.

### **SENIOR DFG AND HOUSING ENFORCEMENT OFFICER**

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Appendices Attached:

- Appendix 1 – Updated Private Sector Housing Financial Assistance Policy
- Appendix 2 – Updated Equality Impact Assessment

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D**

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

List Background Papers: None.