

To: EXECUTIVE
Date: 14 DECEMBER 2021

Housing Assistance Policy

Director of People

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for an updated Housing Assistance Policy to offer wider financial support to older and disabled people to carry out adaptations and essential repairs to enable them to live independently at home for as long as possible.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the policy as set out in Appendix A, be approved and that officers review the policy at 5-year intervals.

- 2.2 That authority is delegated to the Executive Director (People) in consultation with the Executive Member Adult Services, Health and Housing to:

(a) Make minor amendments to the policy to comply with legislation and guidance

(b) Suspend the approval of any discretionary housing assistance offered in this policy

(c) Introduce new assistance to help vulnerable, disabled and older residents should funding become available

(d) Set the annual level of funding to be made available for discretionary assistance offered under this policy, in the first year of implementation to be set at a maximum of 15% of the annual DFG budget

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Council is required by law to adopt and publish a policy detailing any assistance it wishes to offer which exceed the mandatory disabled facilities grant.
- 3.2 The focus of the Housing Assistance Policy is one of prevention and is to enable independent living, by supporting those whose independence may be at risk to access housing (including their current home), which meets their needs.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 To not develop or approve a policy which would limit Bracknell Forest to being able to deliver Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants only.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 Bracknell Forest Council has a general power to assist households with the improvement of living conditions. To do this it must adopt a policy to exercise those powers. This allows the Council to decide what grants and other services it provides to residents in the Borough. The policy attached as Appendix A sets out the mandatory and discretionary assistance that the Council will offer including conditions and eligibility criteria.
- 5.2 Bracknell Forest Council is committed to supporting older and disabled people to remain living independently in their own homes for as long as safely possible. In order to achieve this we have reviewed our Housing Assistance Policy which outlines the grant support we can offer to eligible people to provide aids and adaptations and carry out essential repairs to their homes to support them.
- 5.3 The mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is seen as one of the main support packages that both older people and people with long-term health conditions are able to access to support this ambition but it is also acknowledged that the DFG is an 'old' grant based on legislation¹ which is over 30 years old and which in modern society can be limiting in terms of the support it can offer. Therefore the Council has decided to use the powers available to extend the support it offers using the DFG funding to ensure that all allocated funding is spent and ensure that support is available to as many people as possible.
- 5.4 The enhanced grant provision outlined within this policy supports this priority and will enable older and disabled people to remain living independently in their own home for longer. The policy includes support for people who require more extensive works that the current mandatory DFG limit allows through discretionary 'top-up' funding, as well as potential funding support for those people whose means test result would previously have excluded them from receiving support, and support for those whose home cannot be adapted to meet their needs to move to a more suitable property. There are also a range of smaller, bespoke grants to support specific aims such as enabling faster hospital discharge and supporting people with dementia. Table 8 in the attached policy provides a summary of the new forms of enhanced assistance proposed.
- 5.5 The expected benefits of the adoption of the policy include people staying in their homes longer through the provision of flexible support; an increase of suitable accommodation for older and disabled people in the Borough and an increase in the health and well-being of residents.
- 5.6 It is proposed that the policy, if approved, is fully implemented from 1st April 2022 at the start of next financial year. This will allow time for officers across Housing, Adults and Childrens Social Care to develop the necessary governance, procedures, application forms and public information. This includes developing a comprehensive information pack for those applicants wishing to complete all elements of the process and building management themselves. In such instances the applicant will arrange for their own architect and contractors to plan, develop and build their scheme. Should this option be chosen it is essential to ensure that the Scheme meets all the requirements of the needs specification and is able to demonstrate best value. A detailed information pack will therefore be provided to any applicants who wish to pursue their own application which outlines the information required to make a DFG

¹ Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996: [Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

application and the requirements that any contractors must fulfil in order to receive DFG funding.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

- 6.1 The policy has been developed by the Housing DDG Service and Social Care Occupational Therapy teams.

Legal Advice

- 6.2 The provision of a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFGs) is regulated by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. This places a statutory duty on the Council to provide grant assistance to qualifying disabled people to undertake a range of adaptations to their homes which are deemed “necessary and appropriate” to meet their needs and it is “reasonable and practicable” to undertake the adaptations having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling. The grant is subject to a means test (except in the case of children) and works must be eligible as defined by the Act and Regulations.
- 6.3 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gives the council the power to assist (either directly or indirectly) any person to improve living conditions in the area provided this is given under a published policy.

Financial Advice

- 6.4 The policy operates within existing budgets, approving it will place no new demands on Council budgets. Funding is received annually in the form of a government grant (The disabled facilities capital grant determination 2020-21 was £853,469). All grants within the policy will be funded from this allocation plus ‘underspend’ carried forward from previous years capital awards.
- 6.5 It is proposed that initially a maximum of 15% of the annual disabled facilities capital grant determination may be allocated for the discretionary schemes. This will need to be monitored to ensure that there remains sufficient funding available to meet the demands for mandatory DFG applications.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.6 The assistance outlined in the policy are given to improve the housing standards of elderly and disabled people and therefore assists those who are in the greatest financial need.
- 6.7 The policy targets support towards supporting older residents, disabled residents of all ages and other vulnerable people and therefore it has a positive impact on these groups. No other protected characteristics are impacted by the policy or its contents.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.8 Implementation of the policy and new forms of assistance will be phased to smooth resourcing of the changes.

Background Papers

Housing Assistance Policy 2021-2026

Contact for further information

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