

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 10 July 2017

Report Title: Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy

Report By: Andrew Palmer, Assistant Director Housing and the Built Environment

Purpose of Report

The Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy sets out the financial tools available to the Council for providing housing renewal help to households in the Borough. This report introduces a revised policy for 2017 to 2020.

Recommendation(s)

1. Cabinet is asked to approve the revised Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy 2017 – 2020.
2. Delegated authority is given to the Assistant Director Housing and the Built Environment in consultation with the Housing and Leisure Portfolio Holder to introduce and develop new types of assistance that enable existing and new sources of funding to be targeted at eligible clients.

Reasons for Recommendations

In order to provide financial assistance for housing renewal the Council must have an adopted policy.

To be able to respond promptly to new freedoms provided by the provision of Disabled Facilities Grant funding through the Better Care Fund delegated authority is requested to develop and adopt new funding tools.

Introduction

1. The Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy sets out the financial tools available to the Council for providing financial assistance to households in Hastings for housing renewal. The Council is required to have such a policy under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.
2. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are also included in this policy and are given to vulnerable clients to allow them to remain in their own home and remain independent.

Housing Renewal Loans

3. Given the limited resources available for Housing Renewal when the Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy was last reviewed (March 2013) it was proposed to only offer loans for housing renewal. These loans were to be delivered through the councils existing partnership with Parity Trust (previously South Coast Money Line). This new policy continues this approach.
4. Parity Trust is a not for profit organisation established in May 2000 which has Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI) status. The core objective of Parity Trust is to deliver fair finance for vulnerable groups via loan or equity release products to help people improve/carry out repairs to their homes. Further information on the company can be found at the following link <http://www.paritytrust.org.uk>

Disabled Facilities Funding and the Better Care Fund

5. From April 2015 funding for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) ceased being paid directly to local housing authorities from DCLG and instead DFG funding forms part of the wider Better Care Fund (BCF) paid to health and social care authorities who then allocate to housing authorities. In 2016/17 DFG funding was ring-fenced within the Better Care Fund and the same was true for 2017/18.
6. At the last comprehensive spending review it was announced that there was to be £ 1.5 billion uplift to the Better Care Fund by 2019-20. Indeed nationally the DFG allocations through the Better Care Fund increased on average 80% into 2016/17. In 2016/17 the DFG allocation to Hastings Borough Council was **£ 1,407,313** (this is compared to £ 766,643 in 2015/16). This was the tenth highest allocation to a second tier authority (91st of all 327 authorities in the country). The allocation for 2017/18 is **£ 1,543,547** (9th highest allocation to a second tier authority).
7. The expenditure on DFG's in 2016/17 was £1,013,000. This was up on the previous year but still below the budget allocated through the BCF.
8. Whilst the need for mandatory DFG's in Hastings remains high it is restricted by the number of referrals for adaptations made by ESCC Occupational Therapists (OT's). During 2016/17 ESCC, as part of the integration of health and social

care through the Better Together programme, the OT's service was reviewed and as a consequence waiting times for assessments in Hastings were significantly reduced and backlogs eliminated

9. Senior OTs are now working with Housing Authorities in developing complementary solutions to mandatory DFGs that might extend options for independent living and prevent people from unnecessarily accessing much higher cost care services
10. The increased allocation of Central Government DFG funding allocated through the Better Care Fund presents an opportunity to make better use of the discretionary powers granted to the Council by the Regulatory Reform Order and support innovative projects that can improve the lives of our disabled residents.
11. Over the past year the countywide 'Joint Approach to Housing Solutions' officer group has been working in partnership with the East Sussex County Council and Clinical Commissioning Groups East Sussex Better Together (ESBT) programme to look at options for using grant more flexibly. As a result of this districts and boroughs in East Sussex are recommending that their financial assistance policies are revised to allow for such innovation of new and to ensure that the increased level of funding available through the Better Care Fund is committed for the purposes allocated. It is important to note however that any Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant demand will take priority in all funding allocations.
12. Innovations discussed to date include ;
 - Top up of mandatory DFG.
 - Assistance towards costs of moving to adapted properties.
 - Incentivise construction to lifetime homes standard.
 - Fast track adaptations to expedite hospital discharge.
13. Not all of the above innovations will necessarily be developed for Hastings and spend towards mandatory DFG's will be monitored to ensure these receive priority for any funding.

Conclusion

14. The new Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy at appendix 1 sets out how the Council proposes to use the powers conferred by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. Within the policy is freedom to be able to develop new and innovative forms of assistance to meet the wider Better Care Fund aspirations.

Wards Affected

All

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	No
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	No
Local People's Views	No
Anti-Poverty	No

Additional Information

Appendix – Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy 2017

Appendix – DFG allocations through Better Care Fund

Background Paper – Planning for the Better Care Fund (National Audit Officer, 2014)

Officer to Contact

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