

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 4 November 2019

Report Title: Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy

Report By: Andrew Palmer
Assistant Director Housing and 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 2019.

Recommendation(s)

- 1. Cabinet is asked to approve the revised Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy 2019 at Appendix 1.**
- 2. Delegated authority is given to the Assistant Director Housing and Built Environment in consultation with the Lead Member to introduce new types of assistance that enable existing and new sources of funding to be targeted at eligible clients**

Reasons for Recommendations

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

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 enable 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 reviewed in 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.
5. Loans have been administered recently for essential roofing works to a property and for modernisation of a property. In the past loans have been provided to bring empty homes back into use however with the availability of other affordable finance this has become less popular through Parity Trust.

Disabled Facilities Grant Funding and the Better Care Fund

6. 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.
7. Whilst DFG funding is not specifically ring fenced in the BCF the DFG allocations for housing authorities are set out by central government and social care authorities are required to pay the identified allocation to housing authorities unless otherwise agreed between the authorities. The DFG allocation for Hastings in 2019/20 is £ 1,812,584.
8. The nature of allocating DFG through the BCP means councils are able to use the DFG funding more flexibly as long as the expenditure meets the principles of the Better Care Fund. The main change to the policy is set out in paragraph 5.15 of the policy under discretionary disabled facilities assistance. The additional types of discretionary assistance are introduced to embrace the increased flexibility set out above and includes provision for use of the DFG allocation to fund 'discretionary' works which would prevent clients from being admitted to (or released from) hospital as a result of their housing conditions (for instance as a result of a fall).

Seconded Occupational Therapists

9. Throughout 2018 officers from East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and the East Sussex districts and boroughs have worked together to develop an innovative scheme whereby Occupational Therapists are seconded into housing. In Hastings we have one seconded Senior Practicing Occupational Therapist and two seconded Occupational Therapy Assistants. Alongside the funding of these three posts the DFG allocation is also being used to fund a shared (with other East Sussex district and boroughs) Occupational Therapist Practice Manager to provide medical supervision for the project.
10. The 'in-house OT' project has already reviewed the workflow of the DFG. This review has resulted in the (albeit small) waiting list for DFG being cleared. In addition to the improving the local delivery of DFG the project has already created a number of added benefits such as;
 - Being involved in the design of new build projects to advise on lifetimes homes standards
 - Being able to access equipment, telecare and minor adaptations to reduce the need for ongoing services and reduce the risk of falls
 - Reviewing housing bandings where there is a dispute regarding physical disability housing need
 - Developing pathways with hospital teams, ensuring referral to housing at the earliest possible time
11. In November 2018 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published an independent review of the DFG. The 'in-house' OT project puts us ahead of the curve in relation to a number of the recommendations of the review. It is planned to expand the project over time as it develops; discussions are already underway with colleagues in Children's Services in relation to the DFG process for disabled children

Wards Affected

All

Implications

Relevant project tools applied? Yes/No

Have you checked this report for plain English and readability? Yes/No

Climate change implications considered? Yes/No

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

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness – Policy takes into account equalities issues, in particular in relation to access to services for disabled people.

Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17) - None

Risk Management - None
Environmental Issues - None
Economic/Financial Implications – Policy takes into account DFG grant allocation through Better Care Fund
Human Rights Act - None
Organisational Consequences - None
Local People’s Views - None
Anti-Poverty - None

Additional Information

Appendix 1 – Housing Renewal Financial Assistance Policy 2019

Independent review of DFG - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-and-other-adaptations-external-review>

East Sussex Better Care Fund Narrative Plan - <https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/documents/s16417/Appendix%201%20-%20East%20Sussex%20HWB%20Integration%20and%20Better%20Care%20Fund%20Narrative%20Plan%202017-19%20...pdf>

Parity Trust – <https://paritytrust.org.uk/>

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