

Executive Committee

9 August 2016

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

For Decision

Portfolio Holder

Cllr Timothy Yarker, Housing

Senior Leadership Team Contact:

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Statutory Authority

Housing Grants Construction & Regeneration Act 1996

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

Purpose of Report

- 1 To adopt a revised Housing Assistance Policy, to be delivered consistently across Dorset and funded totally from government allocations.

Officer Recommendations

- 2
 - a) The Housing Assistance Policy attached to this report, designed to deliver a more integrated customer focussed service for disabled people, be adopted;
 - b) The policy be reviewed at the conclusion of the 2016-17 financial year, with any necessary revisions being the subject of a further report for consideration.

Reason for Decision

- 3 The government has announced significantly increased Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) allocations to Housing Authorities for 2016-17, with a commitment to further increases leading up to 2019-20. The DFG allocations form part of the Better Care Fund paid initially to Dorset County Council, with specific reference made to a DFG element for each district or borough council. In providing the additional DFG funding the government has encouraged local areas to implement an integrated approach to improving outcomes across health, social care and housing, stating that all funding pooled through the Better Care Fund, including DFG funding, should be allocated on the basis of plans that are jointly developed and agreed with relevant local authorities. The additional DFG funding provides an opportunity for housing authorities to devise new housing assistance policies to introduce a wider range of discretionary assistance, designed to

better meet the local housing and adaptation needs of disabled, older and vulnerable residents.

- 4 The Dorset Accessible Homes Service (DAHS) was commissioned in 2015 to deliver a more integrated aids and adaptations service across Dorset. This new policy will serve to further develop the DAHS in line with the original vision for the service and fulfil the government's objective for an integrated approach to improving health, housing and social care outcomes.

Background and Reason Decision Needed

Government Funding

- 5 In November 2015 the government published its Autumn Statement, which committed to an increase in DFG funding nationally from £220 million to £394 million in 2016/17, rising to £500 million by 2019/20. This DFG funding is now initially paid to Dorset County Council as part of the Better Care Fund with a requirement that minimum amounts are allocated to the district or borough councils acting as local housing authorities.
- 6 In 2016-17 the DFG allocations for each housing authority are:

Christchurch:	£457,760
East Dorset:	£647,517
North Dorset	£373,492
Purbeck:	£340,687
West Dorset:	£785,706
Weymouth and Portland	£734,577
Total 2016/17 Dorset allocation:	£3,339,000

- 7 The allocations to local authorities are calculated by the use of a funding formula based on criteria such as the number of claimants for disability related benefits, means tested benefits, and the proportion of the population aged 60 or over.
- 8 The 2016-17 allocation for Dorset represents a 70% increase on 2015-16 funding levels (£1.9m) with an expectation that further increases will lead to a county wide DFG budget of £4.9m in 2019-20.
- 9 The Government announcement of this increase encouraged areas to think strategically about the use of home aids and adaptations, use of technologies to support people in their own homes and to take an integrated approach to improving outcomes across health, social care and housing. The Government stated that all funding pooled through the Better Care Fund, including DFG funding, should be allocated on the basis of plans that are jointly developed and agreed with relevant local authorities. As a local housing authority this council has a statutory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grant and therefore assumes responsibility for expenditure under that heading. The County Council as the

welfare authority is responsible for a wide range of health and social care services many of which are closely aligned to housing.

- 10 To that end a report was presented to the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board on 8th June 2016 seeking their support for proposals to develop a county wide Housing Assistance Policy taking advantage of the increased government DFG funding. The Board duly agreed their support for an integrated policy that seeks to improve adaptation services for people with disabilities and meets the government grant conditions. (See Appendix 1.)
- 11 In order to implement the proposals it is necessary for each district and borough council in Dorset to formally adopt a Housing Assistance Policy detailing the different forms of assistance that will be made available. (attached as Appendix 2). The Overview and Scrutiny Committee of this council considered the policy on the 12th July and welcomed the improved provision of services for disabled residents. The committee resolved to support the adoption of the new policy.

Historical Activity

- 12 In recent years assistance for householders with disabilities has been restricted to the national mandatory DFG provisions (discretionary grants having been discontinued following the loss of specific government funding for such assistance in 2010). DFGs provide financial assistance for disabled and older residents enabling them to carry out adaptations and arrange safe access to facilities in and around the home. The list of grant eligible works and the application process is prescribed in legislation.
- 13 The council's DFG expenditure and activity in recent years is depicted in the table below:

Year	Number of DFG's completed	Total Cost of DFGs completed	Government allocation	Council contribution/top up
2016-17	?	?	£785,706	Nil
2015-16	137	£575,000	£470,000	£105,000
2014-15	144	£677,789	£362,433	£315,356
2013-14	141	£789,907	£647,321	£142,586
2012-13	147	£678,448	££378,448	£300,000
2011-12	142	£553,000	£404,000	£149,000

Note: The Council operated a Safe & Secure Grant and handivan until 2015/16

- 14 Members will be aware that in previous years, in addition to the Government allocation for DFG, the council has contributed a 'top up' to the DFG budget from its capital programme. The increased government allocation will enable the current provision of assistance to residents to be extended and developed and at the same time ensure that the council will not need to commit its own capital funds to meet the costs of aids and adaptations to residents homes in this and future years.

Local delivery

- 15 In April 2015 Dorset County Council and the local housing authorities commissioned Millbrook Healthcare Ltd to deliver a Dorset Accessible Homes Service (DAHS). DAHS provides aids, adaptations, Handyvan services and assistive technologies for disabled people across Dorset. It also administers Disabled Facilities Grants on behalf of District and Borough housing authorities, which has enabled the councils to reduce resources dedicated to the delivery of that function. The revenue cost of DAHS to each district and borough council is £30,000 per annum. The DAHS model is considered innovative and is receiving considerable interest from other councils seeking to deliver aids and adaptations in a more integrated, efficient way.
- 16 The proposed policy seeks to use the increased funding to develop the DAHS service in order to improve outcomes for disabled and older people and to reduce admissions and help facilitate more efficient discharge from hospital. It acknowledges that, “housing plays a critical role in enabling people to live independently and in helping carers to support others more effectively. Poor or inappropriate housing can put the health and wellbeing of people at risk, whereas a suitable home can reduce the needs for care and support and contribute to preventing or delaying the development of such needs. Housing services should be used to help promote an individual’s wellbeing in order that those in need of care and support, including carers can build a full and active life. Suitability of living accommodation is one of the matters local authorities must take into account as part of their duty to promote an individual’s wellbeing.”
- [Source: Care and Support Statutory Guidance, 2014.]
- 17 The procurement of DAHS is governed by a Partnership Agreement between Dorset County Council as lead commissioner and the district and borough councils. Although through the Better Care Fund, minimum DFG allocations are still prescribed for each district and borough area, the Partnership Agreement allows for the redistribution of DFG funds between areas, where for example at the end of the financial year, varying demand exists between local authority areas.

Proposed Policy

- 18 The Councils are able to use powers under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002 to provide a wider range of assistance, fully funded by the government allocation, to better meet local resident’s needs.
- 19 It is proposed to introduce a local discretionary grant to be used in place of the mandatory DFG. This discretionary grant will build upon the existing mandatory DFG to meet a range of locally identified needs, delivering quicker outcomes for applicants through the removal of procedures that have been found not to deliver any value or are unduly time consuming.

- i) Streamline the Application Process**
One ongoing concern of the existing national DFG process is the time taken from identifying the need through to delivery of the adaptation. Experience of administering DFGs has revealed a number of processes and requirements that offer little, if any benefit, but are time consuming and stressful for the applicant. Removing or refining such processes, combined with a simpler single application form, will create an improved application process.
- ii) Use of “Trusted Assessors”**
DAHS caseworkers and surveyors have already received training to enable them to assess the lower level needs of disabled people. While more complex cases will still need the involvement of an Occupational Therapist. It is intended that the revised, streamlined grant process will begin to accept referrals from ‘trained assessors’ for lower level, routine adaptations, with the intention of speeding up the delivery time for such adaptations.
- iii) Reduce bureaucracy**
It is proposed that the Test of Financial Resources currently applied to all applicants not receiving a means tested benefit, will be removed for adaptations costing less than £5,000. Approximately 80% of applications relate to referrals for necessary shower installations or stair lifts for disabled people which can be delivered within this cost. The number of households captured by the existing means test is very small, rendering the cost of conducting the test disproportionate to the saving on the total grant spend.
- iv) Increase the maximum grant**
The maximum DFG permitted is currently £30,000. Maximum grants of this amount are infrequent, generally relating to the construction of extensions to accommodate the complex needs of disabled children within the family home. In 2015-16 there were just three grants of £30,000 or above in the district. However, where extensions are required the current maximum grant is often insufficient to fund the cost of all of the works, necessitating a separate application to Dorset County Council’s Major Adaptations Panel (MAP). The MAP process, involving time consuming and complicated duplicate applications to separate local authorities, has led to delays in progressing what are already the most complex of DFG cases. Given that the £30,000 maximum DFG has not been increased since 2008, it is proposed to use the increased DFG allocation and existing MAP funding to enable an increase in the maximum grant to £45,000. This will enable the timely delivery of essential adaptations for even the most complex cases.
- v) Increase the range of eligible works.**
The range of eligible works permitted by the mandatory DFG generally covers access to the property and the facilities within it. Interpretation of the permitted works is not consistent across the country, although locally much work has been undertaken to provide a degree of consistency across Dorset. The introduction of a new discretionary grant has provided an opportunity to review the local

interpretation and to consider the inclusion of essential adaptations that may have been excluded from grant aid in the past.

- 20 While the new discretionary grant proposed in the policy extends the range and scope of the existing mandatory DFG, the increased government allocation enables the delivery of the revised grant without the need for additional funding from this council.
- 21 In addition to the revised adaptations grant it is considered possible to reintroduce a form of assistance formerly referred to as the 'Safe and Secure Grant' (S&S). The S&S grant would be available to householders that are in receipt of an income related benefit, over 50 years of age or disabled. It enables assistance with a wide range of work necessary to enable continued independent living up to a maximum grant of £2,000. The S&S Grant was often found to compliment assistance afforded through DFG and is viewed as an integral part of the housing and social care prevention agenda. It is proposed to 'ring-fence' £50,000 per annum from the councils DFG allocation for this initiative.
- 22 To complete the suite of assistance provided, the policy proposes the extension of the existing Handyvan service to lower income, vulnerable households. DAHS currently provides a chargeable Handyvan service for householders over 50 years of age or disabled. The charge for the service is currently a disincentive for those on the lowest income, who are likely to be in most need of help with essential small works of repair and help around the home. The range of works undertaken by the Handyvan service is wide ranging but generally limited to those works that can be undertaken within two hours. A service free for householders in receipt of income related benefits and also addressing the needs of clients awaiting discharge from hospital is proposed, which will in combination with the S&S grant and Dorset adaptation grant provide a truly comprehensive suite of assistance for disabled households in the county. Each council is proposing to allocate £10,000 of its 2016-17 DFG allocation to this particular initiative.
- 23 It is estimated that the cost of the above mentioned additional measures could be £100,000 per annum.
- 24 It is intended to review this new policy within a short time frame and no later than the end of 2016/17 so that demand for the revised assistance can be assessed and the policy amended accordingly to account for funding changes in 2017/18.
- 25 The revised policy does not affect the Loans scheme funded by the council and administered by Wessex Reinvestments CIC.

Implications

Corporate Plan

- 26 Priority: B2. Working with partners to improve public health and wellbeing
Priority: D1. Deliver the benefits of the shared service partnership between WDDC and WPBC
Priority: D2. Adapting service delivery to the changed financial environment
Priority: D3. Ensuring the delivery of efficient and economic services which are shaped by customer needs

Financial

- 27 The revised policy should be funded from increased government allocations. A review of the policy in April 2017 will include an assessment of the likely annual spend.

Equalities

- 28 The revised policy will be accompanied by an Equalities Impact Assessment.

Consultation and Engagement

- 29 The Dorset health and Wellbeing Board have been advised of the proposals and have written to confirm their support. See Appendix 1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee support adoption of the revised policy.

Appendices

- 30 Appendix 1. Letter from the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board
Appendix 2. Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

Background Papers

- 31 Report to the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board
Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 12th July 2016.

Footnote

- 32 Issues relating to financial, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

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