

REPORT TO: Executive Management Team 13th February 2019
Scrutiny & Overview Committee 21st March 2019
Cabinet 3rd April 2019

LEAD CABINET MEMBER Councillor Hazel Smith

LEAD OFFICER: Julie Fletcher – Head of Housing Strategy

Disabled Facilities Grants and the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to agree the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy and note the funding arrangements with Cambridgeshire County Council relating to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG).
2. This is a key decision because it is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the relevant local authority and it was first published in the August 2018 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees:

Option A – To approve the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy. (Appendix A)

Option C – To note the budget arrangements with Cambridgeshire County Council in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy has been prepared as part of the overall countywide review of the use of Disabled Facilities Grants and is in line with the aims and aspirations of the Better Care Fund (a joint budget to help health and social care services to work more closely together on delivering health priorities). The Policy seeks to provide greater flexibility in terms of the interventions that the Council can fund through the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) capital allocation and aims to provide a consistent approach across the county.
5. The development of a county-wide policy was commissioned by the Integrated Commissioning Board.
6. The budget arrangements for the DFG allocation with Cambridgeshire County Council will ensure that the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency remains financially sustainable and supports the principles of the Adaptations & Repairs Policy to support wider partnership projects or other services where it can be clearly

demonstrated that they would help to meet the Policy's objectives (see point 16 below).

Background

7. The funding for Disabled Facilities Grants and other grants was historically awarded to the district housing authorities directly from the Department of Communities and Local Government. In 2008/09 the Government extended the scope of the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) (2002) to broaden the use of the DFG Capital Allocation. This allowed authorities to use the capital allocation on other types of adaptations, repairs and assistance so long as it is clearly defined within each Council's policy. Until the review of the policy (attached at Appendix A) SCDC did not have the flexibility within its existing policies to allow the capital allocation to be used in this way.
8. For South Cambridgeshire, the DFG Capital Allocation continues to be spent on mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants, with the Council funding their RRO initiatives through separate capital funding (via generally available RTB receipts) which includes a Discretionary DFG (relocation & hospital discharge grant) and Home Repairs Assistance Grant (such as boiler replacement, electrical works, etc).
9. In 2014 the Government recognised the contribution good, accessible, warm and safe housing makes to improved health and social care outcomes and passed the DFG Allocation capital funding to the Department of Health to be included in the Better Care Fund. This was then passed down to the housing authorities by the County Council as required by BCF regulation.
10. Since 2015, the allocation for DFG's through the Better Care Fund has increased, with a further anticipated increase in 2019/20. The table below sets out the funding provided to facilitate DFGs and other grants over the last four years.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (estimated)
BCF Allocation	£312,241	£566,013	£591,109	£636,268
In Year Additional BCF Allocation	0	0	£65,609	£80,215
Underspend b/fwd	0	0	£5,279	£46,008
SCDC Contribution	£347,759	£93,987	£0	£0
Overall DFG Budget	£660,000	£660,000	£661,997	£762,491
DFG Spend	£663,223	£560,734	£615,989*	£554,907*
Discretionary SCDC Grant	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000
Spend	£212	£1,606	£7,202	£0
Home Repairs Assistance Grant	£100,000	£100,000	£100,000	£100,000
Spend	£72,102	£67,625	£54,547	£77,869

*Includes additional in year allocation paid over to Huntingdonshire DC

11. The table above illustrates how the contribution SCDC has made towards DFGs has reduced over the three years following the increase in the BCF allocation. Since 2016/17 the Council has continued an upward trend of underspending on DFGs.
12. Whilst it is difficult to pinpoint why there is a decrease in spend for South Cambridgeshire, it should be noted that there is not a backlog of cases within the CHIA, and the number requiring major works has reduced. During 2018/19 a marketing plan was implemented to ensure that residents and organisations were aware of the grant funding available. This included contacting voluntary groups, village wardens, community navigators, visiting support officers, GP practices, parish and district councillors and an article in the South Cambridgeshire magazine.

Considerations

13. The inclusion of the DFG Capital Allocation within the BCF has given a new focus for health and social care to work more closely with housing. It was agreed by the five district housing authorities, the County Council and the CCG to carry out a review of DFGs and adaptations in Cambridgeshire led by the County Council. The DFG Review was completed in September 2016 and resulted in three key findings:
 - New services are needed that consider people's needs in context, including early conversations around housing options including and planning for the longer term.
 - Existing services will need to adapt to support a growing population
 - Funding arrangements across the system will need to change to support a shift in focus
14. A key recommendation of the Review was to develop a joint policy across the partners to allow the more flexible use of the increased DFG Capital Allocation in line with the BCF focusing on delivering health priorities and outcomes. The allocation cannot be spent more flexibly without the adoption of a policy. All councils in Cambridgeshire signed up to the Joint Housing Adaptations Agreement in 2017 that provided a framework for developing the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy and budget arrangements.
15. Over the past year, the councils have been working together to review their existing policies with a focus to provide greater flexibility in terms of the interventions that can be funded through the DFG capital allocation and to provide a consistent approach across the county.
16. The key objectives of the policy are:
 - To support healthy, safe and independent living
 - To help prevent hospital, care home or residential school admission
 - To facilitate a patient being discharged from hospital and enabling them to live safely and independently at home, including making it easier for carers to provide support
 - To prevent the need for higher expenditure elsewhere in the health and/or social care system
 - To improve housing conditions and remove hazards in the home (i.e. category 1 hazards under the Health & Safety Rating System)
17. For South Cambridgeshire District Council, its existing policies needed to be reviewed and brought up to date to take into account inflationary costs of works, as well as

aligning wherever possible with a countywide approach and updated national guidance.

18. The table below outlines the changes that are proposed within the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy from the Council's existing policies.

New Joint Policy	
<p>Mandatory DFG – Local land charge applies where the value of grant to an owner occupier exceeds £10,000 (previously £5,000 in existing policy). This is in accordance with the Regulations, which have not changed, the minimum charge registered will be £500, the maximum will be £10,000 which is repayable upon property disposal within 10 years of completion of works.</p>	
<p>Comments: The value of grant has been increased to £10,000 to take into account the increased costs for more minor works, such as level access showers and stair lifts. On balance the benefits to the Council in terms of payback on the more minor works is negligible to the resources required to implement the local land charge and can sometimes be a barrier to getting the works done.</p>	
<p>Discretionary Top Up Assistance - The provision of a top up loan is an additional element to our existing policy which will take the form of a maximum loan of up to £15,000 repayable upon disposal. This loan is discretionary and will be applied at the Council's discretion subject to availability of funding.</p>	
<p>Comments: In some cases the cost of works eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant amounts to more than the maximum amount of grant (currently £30,000). The County Council and some district housing authorities have previously provided top-up grants or loans in certain circumstances in order to provide funds to enable the works to go ahead and therefore meet client's need. Given the additional funding through the BCF it was agreed within the Housing Adaptations Agreement that district councils would make provision within their policies that funding from the DFG Capital Allocation is available to pay for Top Up Assistance where applicants qualify.</p>	
<p>Discretionary Disabled Persons Relocations Grants – There is already provision within the Council's existing policy to provide grants of up to £5,000 towards reasonable costs of moving to more appropriate housing. This grant is discretionary and will be applied at the Council's discretion subject to availability of funding.</p>	
<p>Comments: This grant was previously funded from the Council's own capital budget, but in future can be provided for through the BCF allocation as part of the new policy.</p>	
<p>Discretionary Special Purpose Assistance – There is already provision within the Council's existing policy to provide funding through its Home Repairs Assistance. The maximum amount of grant available has increased from £5,000 to £10,000 to take account of increased costs of work. The new policy gives greater flexibility to use the funding to meet its key objectives set out at point 16 above. This grant is discretionary and will be applied at the Council's discretion subject to availability of funding</p>	
<p>Comments: This grant was previously funded from the Council's own capital budget, currently set at £100,000 for 2019/20, but in future can be provided for through the BCF allocation as part of the new policy.</p>	
<p>Discretionary funding of partnership work and other services – this is a new element to the policy that gives flexibility to fund wider partnership capital projects or other services where it can be clearly demonstrated that it would help to meet the objectives of the new policy set out at point 16 above. This is discretionary and will be applied at the Council's discretion subject to availability of funding.</p>	
<p>Comments: Given the significant underspend of the DFG allocation for South Cambridgeshire, this gives the Council the opportunity to use the funding more widely to improve outcomes for vulnerable residents. For 2019/20 a pilot project is being</p>	



implemented to employ an Occupational Therapist within the Home Improvement Agency with a view to improving integration between health and housing and to simplify and speed up the customer journey.

Budget arrangements

19. The increase in DFG funding and the shift in focus from social care and health partners, resulted in the revenue funding previously awarded to the Home Improvement Agency by the County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group being withdrawn in 2017/18. Since that time there has been an agreement with the County Council that the increased DFG capital allocation will be top sliced for other capital spend and that the County Council will instead transfer revenue funding. This ensures that the Home Improvement Agency remains financially viable. The amount top sliced in 2018/19 was £37,600.
20. The Occupational Therapist pilot project will also be funded in this way by top slicing the DFG capital allocation estimated at £26,000.

Options

Option A – To approve the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy (Appendix A)	Reasons for Approval – This proposal is in line with the aims and aspirations of the Better Care Fund. A Joint Policy will provide consistency across the districts and the flexibility to enhance services where funding is available
Option B – To reject the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy	Reasons for Refusal: This would not be in the spirit of the wider remit of the Better Care Fund. The Council's existing policies are outdated and no longer fit for purpose given the increased DFG allocation and the flexibilities provided in the scope of the Regulatory Reform Order.
Option C – To note the budget arrangements with Cambridgeshire County Council in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants.	The funding arrangements of top slicing the DFG allocation ensures that there is sufficient revenue funding for the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency to be financially viable and sustainable.

Implications

21. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

Financial

22. Whilst there are no adverse financial implications for the Council in terms of the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy, it does give the opportunity for the Council to have greater flexibility in terms of how the DFG allocation (through the Better Care Fund) can be spent to support people to live independently and safely in their home.
23. It should be noted, however, that the Council has a mandatory responsibility to fund Disabled Facility Grants and therefore priority will always be given to these above the discretionary elements of the Policy.
24. In using the funding more flexibly, this may also release some of the Council's capital funding currently being spent on Home Repairs Assistance to be spent on other initiatives.

Legal

25. No legal implications have been identified. The Policy has been reviewed by 3C Shared Legal Service.

Staffing

26. No staffing implications have been identified.

Risk Management

27. Having greater flexibility within the policy will enable the Council to management risk better in terms of underspending the DFG allocation.

Equality and Diversity

28. An Equality Impact Assessment (attached at Appendix B) has been undertaken and no adverse impacts have been identified. The Cambridgeshire Adaptations & Repairs Policy identifies positive outcomes, in particular to the protected characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Low income households

Climate Change

29. Having greater flexibility within the policy will provide an opportunity for the Council to target households in terms of improving energy efficiency, which would support the Climate Change Agenda.

Consultation responses

30. A Project Board was established to develop the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy. The Board consisted of Officers from the five Cambridgeshire local authorities, Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge & Peterborough CCG and the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency.
31. The following key stakeholders were consulted as part of the development of the Policy:

Integrated Commissioning Board
Public Services Board
Adaptations Pathways Steering Group
Older People's Accommodation Board
Citizens Advice Bureau
Age UK

Carer's Trust
Older People's Partnership Board
Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment Partnerships Board
Wheelchair Service
Ageing Well Strategy Board
Integrated Community Equipment Service
Assistive Technology & Environmental Controls Service
Peterborough City Council
Foundations

32. A copy of the responses is available upon request. The majority of comments were around making the policy more flexible, with some comments being more detailed in terms of the technical aspects and wording.
33. All comments have been taken into account and where appropriate the Policy has been amended. This has resulted in the additional section to the Policy for discretionary funding of partnership work and other services (section 2.5 of the Policy).
34. A Member workshop was held on 4th March 2019 to explore further the flexibilities and potential new initiatives that could be taken forward under the new policy. The consensus at the workshop was that the Council should target households who are in fuel poverty to help improve the energy efficiency of homes.

Effect on Strategic Aims

- Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in**
35. Enabling residents to live healthy and independently in their own homes.

- Being green to our core**
36. Helping existing homes to be more energy efficient.

- A modern and caring Council**
37. Providing a high quality service that helps residents to live independently that supports the Better Care Fund prevention agenda.

Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations Agreement – October 2017 :
<http://moderngov/documents/s102845/Appendix%20A%20-%20DFG%20Report%20Joint%20Adaptations%20Agreement.pdf>

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