

CABINET MEMBER DECISION

KEY DECISION: YES

Approval of a revised Housing Assistance Policy 2023

1. Decision:

- 1.1 To approve the amendments to the updated Housing Assistance Policy which includes:
- 1.1.1 Increasing the value of Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Assistance to £30,000
 - 1.1.2 Inclusion of a second residence grant
 - 1.1.3 Amendments to the Discretionary Contributions Grant criteria to bring them in line with social care funding eligibility criteria.
 - 1.1.4 The policy also introduces a defined mechanism through which exceptional cases which exceed the policy-based funding might be considered, in line with best practice as outlined in the DFG Guidance 2022¹.

2. Statement of Reasons:

- 1.2 The previous Housing Assistant Policy was approved in April 2021 and included discretionary top-up assistance of £15,000. However, since that time the cost of building works, both materials and labour, has increased significantly and several adaptations have either not been able to be completed due to a lack of available funding or have taken considerably longer than would be considered appropriate whilst alternative funding was found. This has left vulnerable and disabled residents in inadequate housing conditions or with adaptations that have not fully met their needs. The funding will be awarded for tenant applications only where the landlord is also contributing towards the works.
- 1.3 When the DFG legislation² was introduced in 1996 it stated that DFG funding could only be used for the main residence of an individual. Today, where more families live in separated homes this presents significant challenges and can result in contributing to relationship breakdowns where children are unable to spend time with both parents due to a lack of funding to adapt both homes. This was acknowledged in the 2022 DFG Guidance published by Government as an area that local grant awarding authorities should consider including discretionary support. Therefore, the updated policy includes a grant of £30,000 to adapt the home of a parent or guardian where there is a court order in place specifying that the disabled child should live with both households. The conditions of award include a consideration regarding the percentage split to ensure that appropriate adaptations are made to facilitate the level of contact or residency required. Each case would be considered individually as these are circumstances which often require sensitive consideration. As this is a discretionary grant the full cost of the works would be placed as a 10-year land charge against the property where possible. This

¹ DFG Guidance 2022 : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england>

² The Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/53/contents>

would mirror the timescale of the Mandatory DFG land charge but for the full value of the works/grant award.

- 1.4 The eligibility criteria for contribution assistance have been amended to mean that those with below the social care capital threshold of £23,250 would be automatically eligible for £5,000 support towards any assessed contribution. Those with savings above this level or where works cost in excess of this would be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- 1.5 The policy follows the Best Practice outlined in the 2022 DFG Guidance to include a mechanism by which exceptional cases can be considered and how that funding would be approved and who is eligible for it.

3. Any Alternative Options:

- 1.6 To not increase the Discretionary DFG. This would result in significant delivery challenges for the new DFG Support service operated by LWMTS from April 2023 due to the increased and continued increasing costs of building works.
- 1.7 To not introduce a Second Homes Grant which would result in the Service and the Council having to individually consider each application without a policy mechanism through which to fund the works which would be time consuming.
- 1.8 To not amend the contribution assistance grant criteria, which would mean that fewer people would be eligible for support than is currently proposed.
- 1.9 To not include an exceptional cases funding award mechanism. However, the Council would still have a duty to consider these and therefore this would result in the Service and the Council having to individually consider each application without a policy mechanism through which to fund the works which would be time consuming.

Cabinet Member for Housing, Ecology and Climate Change