

REPORT TO: PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING: 7 JUNE 2018

REPORT TO: EXECUTIVE
DATE OF MEETING: 12 JUNE 2018

REPORT TO: COUNCIL
DATE OF MEETING: 24 JULY 2018

REPORT OF: Environmental Health and Licensing Manager
TITLE: Financial Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The report presents a revised Financial Assistance Policy under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 to ensure policies are in place to maximise grant spending of the Council's Better Care Fund Allocation. The policy has been developed by both the County and district Councils to ensure a consistent approach across Devon.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 People Scrutiny Committee supports the recommendation to approve the proposed Financial Assistance Policy in order to ensure increased funding provided via the Better Care Fund is delivered to those who have not previously been able to obtain financial assistance.

2.2 Executive supports the recommendation to Council to approve the proposed Financial Assistance Policy in order to ensure increased funding provided via the Better Care Fund is delivered to those who have not previously been able to obtain financial assistance.

2.3 Council adopts the Financial Assistance Policy.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 Funding for Disabled Facilities Grants, which is administered through the Better Care Fund, has been increased by central government to ensure that vulnerable individuals can remain safe and healthy in their homes.

3.2 This policy allows the Council to broaden its ability to provide financial assistance to those disabled persons who do not qualify for the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant system, provide financial assistance to undertake preventive measures reducing hospital admissions and demand for social care and reduce delayed hospital discharges by working in collaboration with health services to provide funding to remove housing related obstacles preventing discharge.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

- 4.1 The assistance detailed in the policy will be fully funded by the Council's national allocation received through the Better Care Fund managed by Devon County Council.
- 4.2 Exeter City Council is not expected to provide its own capital towards the delivery of the assistance as the national allocation through the Better Care Fund is currently sufficient to cover existing demand.
- 4.3 Future allocations of the Better Care Fund for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants from Devon County Council will be made to each District Council on a demand basis. This is to ensure that mandatory demand for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) is met throughout the County before any remaining funding is distributed to the district councils for the other forms of assistance.
- 4.4 There is an ability for the Council to suspend all or parts of the discretionary elements of the policy if funding is not adequate within any given year to meet statutory demand for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

- 5.1 The funding and financial assistance is allocated from Better Care Funding. Exeter City Council is awarded funding from Devon County Council and presently provides no additional top up funds. Any recovered funds under the policy would be used to provide additional grants or assistance and as such there are no financial implications affecting the Council to consider.

6. What are the legal aspects?

- 6.1 In formulating this policy reference has been made to The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and Better Care Fund guidance.
- 6.2 The impact of the proposed Financial Assistance Policy is one of providing a greater level of financial and other interventions by the Council for those with a disability, are vulnerable or have a specific health condition. The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 makes it clear assistance is primarily based on need of the individual, although the health and safety concerns of carers and other family members are also considered.
- 6.3 Procedures have been put in place in an attempt to avoid fraud and misappropriation of funds.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

- 7.1 This report raises no issues to concern the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

- 8.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 [the RRO] came into force on the 18 July 2003 giving local authorities discretion to tailor the financial assistance that they make available to householders to suit local needs. The Regulatory Reform Order also encourages local authorities to move away from

awarding grants for assisting with the maintenance of the private sector stock to either awarding loans directly or enabling home owners to take up loans through a third party.

- 8.2 Since 2010 Exeter City Council has been offering home improvement loans through a partnership with Wessex Reinvestment Trust, and have awarded 131 loans with a value of over £900,000 which has been recycled to fund further loans. Following a recent independent review which highlighted the potential for more households to benefit from this loan offer, improved branding and marketing of the scheme is underway.
- 8.3 The Council continues to have a mandatory duty to award Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to applicants who need to adapt their homes due to a disability. The purposes for which grants can be awarded and the method of delivery are proscribed in legislation.
- 8.4 In addition to mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants, the Regulatory Reform Order allows local authorities to develop their own discretionary grants to assist householders with flexibility on the method of their delivery
- 8.5 In 2015 the Government changed the way in which Disabled Facilities Grants are funded by introducing the Better Care Fund (BCF) in an attempt to bring health and social care together in an integrated way. The fund is a combination of government funding from the Department of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government and includes the grant allocation for disabled facilities grants.
- 8.6 The Better Care Fund allocation for all second tier councils in the county is paid directly to Devon County Council who are obliged to passport the entire allocation granted to each district. Unlike the previous method of allocation the funding is not ring fenced for Disabled Facilities Grants but can be used flexibly to meet the Better Care Fund objectives. The 2017/18 allocation for the City Council was £660,128 with the 2018/19 allocation likely to be more.
- 8.7 The 2017-19 Integration and Better Care Fund policy framework document sets out the objectives for which Better Care Fund monies can be used. These objectives include:
 - Objective 1 - Assist disabled residents to remain in their own homes through supporting the provision of adaptations (so far as this is necessary, appropriate and reasonably practicable) to prevent admissions to care and to assist with delayed transfers where possible.
 - Objective 2 – Safeguard the health and well-being of vulnerable residents by removing unnecessary hazards to health and safety in the home to reduce avoidable emergency admissions
 - Objective 3 – Provide adaptations that are suitable for the future by ensuring the scheme of works is dementia aware.
 - Objective 4 – assist vulnerable people to afford to heat their homes through appropriate energy efficiency and heating measures.
- 8.8 The Better Care Fund currently provides more funding than is required to meet the demand for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants. A recent independent review highlighted that for Exeter, the demand is lower than expected and plans are underway

to provide more accessible information and marketing to provide better information to residents and health and care workers to increase the number and success of applications. In addition a flexible policy allowing assistance to a wider range of households, beyond the scope of Disabled Facilities Grants, which meets the Better Care Fund objectives will allow the City Council to fully utilise the Better Care Fund allocation.

- 8.10 The proposed new policy can be found in Appendix A to this report. The policy will provide the flexibility and discretion for the council to provide appropriate assistance to residents who could benefit and meet the objectives of the Better Care Fund.

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

- 8.11 The Disabled Facilities Grant programme is mandatory and a statutory function of the local housing authority undertaken by the Private Sector Housing Team within Environmental Health and Licensing.
- 8.12 Disabled Facilities Grants will continue to be operated in line with the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, with a maximum of £30,000 being available and means testing being undertaken on all applicants except for child applications. Conditions will also be placed on all grants over £5,000 requiring repayment in certain specific circumstances. Given their mandatory status funding Disabled Facilities Grants will take precedence over any discretionary funding, so if in the future allocations are reduced then certain discretionary funding would, as a necessity, reduce or cease.

Accessible Homes Grant

- 8.13 The Accessible Homes Grant enables an enhanced offer in addition to the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant subject to available funding. This grant is available in the following circumstances:
- To top up a mandatory grant where the cost of the work exceeds £30,000 (in certain circumstances)
 - To fund works beyond the scope of a Disabled Facilities Grant to make a property safe for the disabled occupant.
 - To fund a Disabled Facilities Grant clients contribution (in certain circumstances) identified as a result of the means test.
 - To fund the cost of moving house where moving is more appropriate than adapting the existing property.

Healthy Homes Grant

- 8.14 The Healthy Homes Grant will provide urgent/essential repairs to the home to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the occupier. The grant is only available where a Home Improvement Loan is unavailable.

Home Improvement Loans

- 8.15 Wessex Resolutions Community Interest Company currently administers loans within the requirements of this policy and the local policies of each district council within Devon. The Home Improvement Loan is a flexible product that can be used for the following purposes:

- Home repairs and improvements
- Adaptation works where a grant is not available
- To cover a client contribution to a grant
- To cover the cost of the work over the grant maximum.
- To bring empty homes back into use
- For landlords to carry out repairs or improvement to rented accommodation
- For energy efficiency improvements

Warm Up Grants

- 8.16 Warm Up Grants aim to provide top up funding for energy efficiency measures, e.g. loft and cavity wall insulation or boiler replacement, where funding from energy companies under their Energy Company Obligation (ECO) have been awarded but the available funding does not cover the full cost of the work.
- 8.17 Funding will also be given for energy efficiency measures not currently funded through Energy Company Obligation, for example insulating mobile homes, fuel switching (from electricity to gas) and first time central heating installations

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

- 9.1 The Financial Assistance Policy relates to the key actions of 'Help me find somewhere suitable to live' and contributes to 'a healthy and safe city.' Addressing housing conditions contributes not only to the objective within the Council Corporate Plan but also more widely as:-

- Good quality housing attracts companies and workers - leading to an economically prosperous city
- Children and young people are better able to benefit from education if they are well housed – leading to a city of excellence in learning
- Good quality housing promotes community safety – leading to a safer place in which to live, work and visit
- High quality, affordable, warm homes promote health and wellbeing – leading to a healthy city

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

- 10.1 There are no major risks associated with the policy which only slightly amends the existing policy which has been fully funded by the Better Care Fund. Not having a policy could mean that the Council would be unable to utilise the Better Care Fund for anything other than the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants.

12. Are there any other options?

- 12.1 It could be decided not to adopt the new policy, however given the current policy does not reflect the current situation and solutions for the demands placed upon Private Sector Housing Team by the Better Care Fund, this option would prevent assisting vulnerable customers.

Originating Officer: Simon Lane, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

- The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002
- Technical Guidance Annex 4: Better Care Fund Planning Requirements for 2016/17
<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/technical-guidanceannex--bf0.pdf>

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