

## **REPORT TO EXECUTIVE**

Date of Meeting: 1 September 2020

## **REPORT TO COUNCIL**

Date of Meeting: 20 October 2020

Report of: Director – Communities, Health and Wellbeing, Sport and Leisure

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 Council's Environmental Health and Community Safety Team has statutory responsibility under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to eligible residents.
- 1.2 The Better Care Fund is a programme spanning both the NHS and local government which seeks to join-up health and care services, so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.
- 1.3 Councils are required to produce a policy stating the basis on which they will allocate Better Care Fund resources, including financial assistance falling outside the mandatory DFG requirements.
- 1.4 In formulating the policy, reference was made to the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and Better Care Fund guidance.
- 1.5 With this in mind, the policy is reviewed regularly so that the assistance available is appropriate to ensure that those vulnerable individuals, both inside and outside of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant system, are able to access appropriate help.

#### **2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 That Executive supports the adoption of the revised Financial Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund; and
- 2.2 That Council adopts the revised Financial Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund

#### **3. Reasons for the recommendation:**

- 3.1 Local authorities are required to publish a policy setting out their approach to the provision of financial assistance.

3.2 This revised policy (Appendix A) is updated to ensure consistency within the County Council area (where appropriate) and to reflect the priorities of the service in the context of the annual financial settlement received through Devon County Council as the Upper Tier Authority.

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

4.1 The introduction of this policy will enable the Council to focus on those areas that contribute toward the overall aims of the Better Care Fund, including (but not limited to):

- Avoiding delayed hospital discharge
- Providing adaptations to improve independence and care
- Improving private housing stock to reduce ill-health and potential hospital admission
- Working proactively to reduce the future burden on services

#### **5. Section 151 Officer comments:**

5.1 There are no additional financial implications for the Council contained in this report.

#### **6. What are the legal aspects?**

6.1 The policy is compliant with the general principles and objectives of appropriate regulations and national guidance.

6.2 The policy clearly states that the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant has priority over other discretionary funding.

#### **7. Monitoring Officer's comments:**

It is imperative that Exeter City Council has a clear Policy setting out what assistance is available for members of the public and the terms under which such grant assistance is given. This policy is clear on both matters and therefore recommended to Members for approval.

#### **8. Report details:**

8.1 The key changes in this updated policy are as follows:

- The introduction of the discretionary 'stairlift grant'. The process of approving a grant for a stairlift has been streamlined, with the removal of the financial test of resources. This has almost doubled the number of stairlift installations, ensuring that this vital adaptation is accessible to all ECC residents. A pilot of this grant conducted under delegation led to the doubling of the number of stairlifts installed within a 12 month period.

- A widening of the assistance available to tackle delayed hospital discharges from hospitals. There has always been provision to provide adaptations and equipment for this purpose. The policy is now extended to cover a wider range of property conditions, including infestations and neglect.

8.2 Where appropriate, the policy compliments regulatory enforcement activities, particularly those around private rented accommodation, where loans are available to landlords where an officer from the service identifies a defect with the dwelling.

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

9.1 The Financial Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund contributes to all aspects of the Council's Corporate Plan.

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

10.1 The revision of the Financial Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund ensures the Council is able to effectively discharge its statutory functions and that discretionary aspects are tailored to support the goals of the service.

10.2 The policy will enhance the certainty and consistency of the Council's activities around the provision of financial assistance and will reduce the risk of process failures and will manage expectations around eligibility, available funding and the extent of funded measures.

## **11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)**

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act, and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

## **12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:**

12.1 In addition to the Warm Up Grant, funding traditional insulation projects which reduce fuel poverty and energy consumption, there has been a focus over the last 12 months on funding renewable energy adaptations. This has particularly been the case in those properties where electricity is the only source of heating, which has allowed solar panels to be installed.

12.2 There has also been a change in policy which means the Council funded Wessex Loans scheme can now be utilised for renewable energy/energy efficiency works such as:

- Solar Panels
- Solar Thermal Systems
- Air Source Heat Pumps
- Ground Source Heat Pumps
- Biomass Heating Systems
- Solid Wall Insulation

## **13. Are there any other options?**

13.1 The Council is required to have a Financial Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund. The council could decide not to accept the changes to the policy proposed and therefore keep the existing policy that is in place.

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

- 1) Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006
- 2) Food Law Code of Practice
- 3) Standard for Health and Safety Enforcing Authorities
- 4) HSC Enforcement Policy Statement
- 5) The Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008
- 6) Regulator's Compliance Code

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