

## PROCESS UNDERTAKEN TO ALTER DISCRETIONARY GRANT MAXIMUMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

### Health and Housing Advisory Committee

Report of	Chief Officer, Environmental and Operational Services
Status	For Decision
Also considered by	Cabinet - 6 December 2018
Key Decision	Yes

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**Executive Summary:** To reduce the grant maximums for the Accelerated Facility Grant from £7,500 to £6,500 and the specific situation funding from £50,000 to £0.00. To allow the Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing to consider and agree any future changes to discretionary funding associated with the Housing Assistance Policy going forward allowing better control of financial resources.

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**This report supports the Key Aim of the Community Plan** by ensuring caring communities via providing the right support at the right time, reducing poverty and social exclusion; providing a healthy environment by reducing health inequalities and improve health and wellbeing for all

**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Michelle Lowe

**Contact Officer** James Cox, Ext. 7312

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**Recommendation to Health and Housing Advisory Committee:** It be recommended to Cabinet that

- (a) a reduction of the maximum Accelerated Facility Grant from the current £7,500 to £6,500 and reduction of the Specific Situation Funding from the current £50,000 to £0.00 be approved; and
- (b) the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health (and any successor with responsibility for Housing) be delegated authority to amend all discretionary grant maximums.

**Recommendation to Cabinet:** That

- (a) a reduction of the maximum Accelerated Facility Grant from the current £7,500 to £6,500 and reduction of the Specific Situation Funding from the current £50,000 to £0.00 be approved; and
  - (b) the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health (and any successor with
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responsibility for Housing) be delegated authority to amend all discretionary grant maximums.

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**Reason for recommendation:** To allow Private Sector Housing to better manage demand against available resources for all discretionary assistance ensuring sufficient resources remain for the core services especially Mandatory Disabled Facility Grants

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## Introduction and Background

- 1 The current Housing Assistance Policy (HAP) adopted in December 2017 deliberately provided a wide range of discretionary assistance to improve the health and wellbeing of Sevenoaks residents along with providing financial support for preventive measures reducing demand on primary health and social care. The change in approach was to ensure housing provided more services to prevent use of primary and social care services.
- 2 Private Sector Housing has two types of financial support, these being mandatory Disabled Facility Grant and discretionary funding. Mandatory DFGs are the core provision and must at all times be protected. Over recent years the Better Care Fund has provided substantially more money to Sevenoaks District Council to provide new innovative ways to reduce demand upon primary health and social care and discretionary funding has been designed to meet these demands.
- 3 However, as a result of the HAP providing a wider range of discretionary services and Private Sector Housing funding initiatives such as Your Home and Sevenoaks Living Independently project in collaboration with the CAB demand for discretionary funding has dramatically increased, this has meant the ability to better manage current budgets is required to ensure statutory Disabled Facility Grants are not adversely effected and by extension Sevenoaks residents in most need.
- 4 The current HAP clearly states maximums for all discretionary grants including Accelerated Facility Grants of £7,500 and specific situation funding of £50,000. After a recent review of current and future expected demand verses financial resources it is necessary to reduce the availability of both of these grants.
- 5 It is therefore proposed the current maximums for the Accelerated Facility Grant is reduced from the current £7,500 to £6,500 and reduces the specific situation funding to £0.00.
- 6 Going forward, with demand for both mandatory and discretionary funding being unpredictable, it is necessary to undertake regular assessments of present and future commitment to ensure budgetary control. The current HAP has specific maximums for all discretionary grants and these can not be changed without going through the Cabinet decision making process. Following such a process doesn't allow changes to the discretionary maximums to be made quickly if demand suddenly changes. To ensure

Private Sector has the ability to manage resources, rapid changes to discretionary maximums will be required it is proposed therefore for the Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing to be able approve such changes.

### **Other Options Considered and/or Rejected**

Option 1 - To continue with the current discretionary assistance limits. If this occur then there is a risk of being unable to meet our obligations given the financial resources available.

### **Key Implications**

#### Financial

There are no significant financial implications for Sevenoaks District Council as funding for all mandatory and discretionary grants is obtained via an annual allocation from central government.

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

There are no significant legal implications arising from this report.

#### Equality Assessment

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The results of this analysis are set out immediately below.

There will be a very limited impact upon the customer because of these changes. All disabled customers, once they have been assessed by an Occupational Therapist, are eligible to apply for assistance. Reductions in the discretionary Accelerated Facility Grant maximum will reduce slightly the number of customers able to apply for this discretionary grant, however for those customers falling out of this discretionary route, are still able to apply for a mandatory Disabled Facility Grant (DFG).

All DFG applications are means tested so customers on the lowest incomes including those receiving a passported benefit (Guaranteed Pension Credit) will obtain a 100% grant. For those customers who are unable to receive financial assistance this will be because of their financial situation (income and savings) and not related to disability.

Specific Situation Funding has a limited type of applicant, and given the current increasing demand the availability needs to be withdrawn. However, the applicant will still be able to apply for other discretionary and mandatory adaptation grants.

All mandatory and discretionary grants aimed at funding adaptations and prevention works are provided by an annual allocation from central government via the Better Care Fund. By reducing the availability of discretionary funding we still enable more customers to obtain assistance when compared against the mandatory system but controls need to be put in place to ensure financial management is maintained.

### **Conclusions**

It is recommended that the maximums for the Accelerated Facility Grant be reduced to £6,500 and for the Specific situation funding be reduced to £0.00. In addition to ensure a more responsive grant policy the Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing in future has the ability to either increase or decrease maximums for all discretionary funding.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Housing Assistance Policy 2017

### **Background Papers**

[The Regulatory Reform \(Housing Assistance\) \(England and Wales\) Order 2002.](#)

**Richard Wilson**

**Chief Officer Environmental & Operational Services**