

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 22 November 2022

Report of: Sarah Robson, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer People and Places

Status: For information

Also considered by:

- Cabinet - 8 December 2022

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: The Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2017 sets out how the Council will provide assistance to homeowners and private tenants to enable them to keep their homes in good repair and free of hazards and enable them to live as independently as possible. The Policy sets out the assistance available to disabled people to help them adapt, improve or repair their homes.

The levels of discretionary grant assistance contained within the Policy are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose. The last review was undertaken, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, in June 2022.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Housing Strategy 2022-2027

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Kevin Maskell

Contact Officer: Sharon Donald, Housing Strategy Manager, Extension 7131

Recommendation to Housing & Health Advisory Committee:

To note the updated levels of discretionary grant assistance available under the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy. That comments on recommendation (a) below are passed to Cabinet.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

- a) To note the updated levels of discretionary grant assistance available under the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

Reason for recommendation:

The report is for information only.

Introduction and Background

1. Poor quality housing has an impact on the health of the occupants and on the quality of life in an area. Improving the condition of private sector properties contributes to the regeneration of the District and towards the target for increasing the number of decent homes occupied by vulnerable households in the private sector.
2. Raising standards in these properties contributes to safer, stronger and more sustainable communities, improving health and wellbeing and improving the environment, and by allowing people to remain living in their own homes reduces the financial pressure on the Council by reducing costs of long term care.
3. The current Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy was adopted at Full Council in November 2017. The Policy sets out the way in which grant assistance provided by the Better Care Fund, both mandatory and discretionary, is administered by the Private Sector Housing Team. The levels of discretionary grant assistance contained within the Policy are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose. The last review was undertaken, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, in June 2022.
4. From its introduction in 2013, the Better Care Fund has sought to create a local, single pooled budget to help the NHS and local government to work more closely together to place wellbeing as the focus of health, housing and care services for residents. The fundamental principles of the Better Care Fund are to:
 - Instigate and formulate links with health and third sector organisations to provide opportunities to improve the lives of vulnerable people, to give them control and place them at the centre of their own care and support, and in doing so, provide a better service and quality of life
 - Ensure households reside in properties that are free from Category 1 hazards
 - To provide not only financial assistance but help through a combination of education and encouragement and direct/indirect financial assistance

5. Grant Assistance

Grant assistance can be provided in the following ways:

- Mandatory Disabled Facility Grant (DFG)

In addition, the Council can offer discretionary grants as detailed below provided budgets allow, although mandatory DFG applications will take precedence over any discretionary applications:

- Discretionary Disabled Facility Grant (DDFG)
- Top Up Grants
- Relocation Funding
- Specific Situation Funding
- Accelerated Facility Grant (AFG)
- Hospital Discharge Grant (HDG)
- Safe and Secure Grant (SSG)
- Housing Assistance Grant (HAG)

6. Interim Review of Discretionary Grants

The non-means tested discretionary Accelerated Facilities Grant was introduced in November 2017 with a limit of £6,500 per grant. This grant has helped many customers to obtain much needed adaptations. However, since the introduction of this grant facility we have seen substantial increases in overall costs associated with adaptations, particularly during the last 2 years. The increase in overall costs is linked to the increase in material costs due to a short supply of materials along with rising fuel costs and labour shortages. We are seeing a number of our customers with more complex needs, meaning that adaptations can be more costly.

Similarly, since the introduction of the Safe and Secure Grant, we have seen an increase in the number of referrals for hoarding and filthy and verminous cases requiring clearance and minor repairs. We found that the maximum limit of £1,000 was not always sufficient to carry out all the remedial work required to ensure our customers can remain safe and live independently in their own home.

A review of the levels of Accelerated Facilities Grants and Safe and Secure Grants was undertaken in January 2021 with the following increases agreed and approved by the Portfolio Holder, Housing and Health:

- Accelerated Facilities Grant - increased from £6,500 to £8,000
- Safe and Secure Grant - increased from £1,000 to £3,000

A further review of discretionary grants was undertaken in June 2022 and a further increase in the Accelerated Facilities Grant level from £8,000 to £10,000 was agreed and approved by the Portfolio Holder, Housing and Health.

7. As set out in the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 Action Plan, the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy will be subject to full review, including public consultation, in 2025. A new 5 year Policy will be developed and subject to approval at Full Council, adopted.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

None.

Key Implications

Financial

The Better Care Fund is allocated from central government on an annual basis. The fund supports delivery of both mandatory and discretionary grants to eligible households. The budget is managed and monitored by the Private Sector Housing Team Leader.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

Not applicable.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Conclusions

Sevenoaks District Council has had a Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy for many years detailing the types of assistance available. By increasing the grant levels in line with price rises in materials and labour, we can ensure that we are able to continue providing Sevenoaks District's residents access to assistance to repair, improve and adapt their properties to enable them to live safely and independently in their own homes. By investing in maintaining properties enables our residents in the private sector to remain living independently, and therefore negates the high cost of temporary accommodation and the pressure on social care budgets. This report has been submitted to refresh Members regarding the forms of assistance available.

Appendices

Appendix A - Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

Background Papers

None

Sarah Robson

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - People and Places