

To: Cabinet
Date: 11 March 2020
Report of: Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety
Title of Report: Update of Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy

| Summary and recommendations | |
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| Purpose of report: | Minor changes to allow clarification around discretionary grant and joint custody arrangements. |
| Key decision: | No |
| Cabinet Member: | Councillor Mike Rowley, Board Member for Housing |
| Corporate Priority: | Meeting housing needs, Strong and active communities, An effective and efficient council. |
| Policy Framework: | Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-2021 |
| Recommendation: That Cabinet resolves to: | |
| 1. Approve the proposed changes to the current Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy attached at Appendix 2. | |
| Appendices | |
| Appendix 1 | Current - Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy 2019 |
| Appendix 2 | Proposed - Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy 2020 |
| Appendix 3 | Risk register |
| Appendix 4 | Equalities Impact Assessment |

Introduction and background

- The Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy was introduced on 24th January 2018, after being agreed by the then City Executive Board in January 2018. Minor changes were made to this policy by Executive decision in January 2019. The policy is made under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 which gives general power to introduce policies for assisting individuals with renewals, repairs and adaptations in their homes through grants or loans.

2. The main funding for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) now comes from pooled budget arrangements between top tier local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) via the Better Care Fund (BCF). The County Council holds the budget and provides DFG funding to each district council. As funding is now received from the BCF, the policy reflects the BCF's aims of achieving better health and wellbeing outcomes and helping with the prevention agenda.
3. The Council's Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy has been held up nationally as an example of good practice. The Council's in house Home Improvement Agency (HIA) ran sessions at the Better Care Fund Thematic National Workshop Events in Bristol and Birmingham in February 2019. The idea of which was to share the Council's learnings and best practice with other local areas that might be facing similar challenges. Other District Councils in Oxfordshire are using Oxford City Council's Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) policy to develop similar policies in their areas.
4. The Council's national mandatory DFG programme has been considerably expanded from £220m in 2015/16 to £431m in 2017/18. Oxford City Council's DFG Budget allocation from the government has increased from £501,000 in 2015/16 to £1,252,746 in 2019/20.
5. The policy is delivered by the Council through its HIA who are also contracted by the Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to deliver additional services that enable people to remain in their home. These services include the handyman service that provides low cost small repairs for elderly people and a Caseworker who advises vulnerable people on the best options for remaining at home and how to access funding. The new 3 year contract HIA contract with Oxfordshire County Council started on 1st April 2019.

Proposed Changes to Policy

6. The proposed policy is attached as Appendix 2 and the main changes that are highlighted in the draft are to include the following:

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

7. Mandatory DFG's are provided to disabled children at their main residence and clarification is needed what would happen in the case of joint custody arrangements. After discussion with the County all the districts have agreed to add the following clarification to the DFG policy:

"Both carers will be allowed to apply for Disabled Facilities Grants for Adaptations for Disabled children who have formal joint custody arrangements, confirmed by the Occupational therapist referral"

Discretionary DFGs

8. DFGs are funded by the Better Care Fund (BCF) which is a crucial part of delivering the aims of the Care Act 2014, especially on the prevention agenda and reducing hospital discharge delays. DFGs are provided as an essential part of meeting this criteria as they are a proven method of reducing falls and hospital admissions. However sometimes the Council encounters problems with extremely vulnerable, low income clients where they either cannot use their adaptation provided under a DFG as they need repairing or they need repairs carrying out initially in order to facilitate the adaptation.

9. This can already be achieved using this section in the policy:
“Other works to provide a solution for vulnerable and disabled applicant’s needs. This would be subject to authorisation by the Head of Service”
10. However to clarify this, the Council is proposing to expand the section by including the following two sentences:
Essential repair of adaptations fitted under a DFG in order to keep a disabled person safe after the warranty period.
Essential Repairs/Works to the client’s property in order to either enable a DFG to take place or to enable Hospital Discharge.
11. The HIA is also proposing to amend the Discretionary DFG so instead of only being able to award one Discretionary DFG every year, there is a maximum amount of £10,000 per year. This would allow greater flexibility for clients should their personal circumstances change.

Other implications

12. The works carried out under this policy often result in property improvements which contribute to carbon reduction.

Financial implications

13. By approving the policy all the additional spend will be funded using BCF money so there will be no direct cost to the Council. Any additional funds for the HIA contract, once agreed, will be additional income for the service.

Legal issues

14. As set out in the Policy the Council has a duty to approve applications made under section 23(1) of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 that satisfy the requirements of that Act. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) provides freedom and opportunities for the Council to address housing issues. The Council has discretionary powers under the RRO to provide assistance in any form for the purpose of improving living conditions.
15. No legal issues have been identified from the proposed amendments to the Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy.

Level of risk

16. A risk register is attached as Appendix 3.

Equalities impact

17. An EIA has been completed and attached as Appendix 4. The impacts are positive as the policy directly relates to assisting vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community.

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Background Papers: None