

To: Cabinet
Date: 16 March 2022
Report of: Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety
Title of Report: Update of Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy

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Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present an updated Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Diko Walcott, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless.
Corporate Priority:	Foster an inclusive economy, Deliver more affordable housing, Support thriving communities & Pursue a zero carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:	
1. Approve the proposed Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy attached at Appendix 2.	
Appendices	
Appendix 1	Current Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy 2020 – Coronavirus
Appendix 2	Proposed - Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy 2022
Appendix 3	Risk register
Appendix 4	Equalities Impact Assessment

Introduction and background

1. 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. The policy is made under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 which gives the 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 reducing avoidable admissions to hospital agenda.
3. The Council's Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy has been held up nationally as an example of good practice as shown by the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) winning the Foundations Adaptation service of the year in December 2020. Other district councils, including those in Oxfordshire, are using Oxford City Council's Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) policy as a template 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 £505m in 2020/21. Oxford City Council's DFG Budget allocation from the government has increased from £501,000 in 2015/16 to £1,421,433 in 2021/22.
5. Minor changes were made to the policy by executive decision in January 2019 and in response to Covid-19 emergency minor changes were made in March 2020 to the policy under executive decision to increase the maximum Safe & Secure Grant limit from £1,000 to £2,000. This enabled a wider scope of safety works to be carried out to help support hospital discharge and also reduce falls leading to hospital admission which has been very successful.
6. The policy is delivered by the Council through its HIA who are also contracted by Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group to deliver additional services that enable people to remain in their home. A new three plus two year HIA contract with Oxfordshire County Council is due to start on 1st April 2022.

Proposed Changes to Policy

7. The proposed policy is attached as Appendix 2 and the main changes that are highlighted in the draft are detailed below.

Adapted Homes Grant

8. Increase the maximum amount of the Adapted Homes Grant from £8,000 to £10,000. Many HIA's around the country who introduced this grant after Oxford City Council now use this amount, including the councils in Oxfordshire. The proposed increase will benefit our residents and improve consistency in the county.

Disabled Facility Grants – Top up Grant

9. This is a new grant. The cost of extensions and major works have increased significantly and many of these are now well above the £30,000 DFG limit set by the government. Many councils including the other districts in the county offer a top-up grant of an additional £30,000 for those with the greatest need. Currently the maximum assistance is £10,000 via a Discretionary DFG so the new Top up Grant will significantly increase the assistance available for applicants where the works exceed the government's £30,000 limit. The financial impact will be limited as the number of extensions undertaken is small because lower cost interventions are always offered if they meet the need.

Discretionary DFG

10. Currently the Discretionary DFG is subject to the client having a “nil contribution” from the mandatory DFG prescribed test of resources, but it will be made eligible to all applicants in need of adaptations for palliative care. The Discretionary DFG will no longer be required for recipients of the new Top up Grant as they are benefitting from the additional £30,000.

Relocation Grant

11. Currently this assistance is limited to owner occupiers and the proposal is to extend this assistance to help disabled tenants (who are not Oxford City Council tenants) to re-locate to more suitable premises.

Essential Repair Assistance

12. The funding for this grant is provided by the Council and the maximum award is £5,000. The proposal is to amend the conditions to allow one quote for the works and remove the 10 year residency limit for repayment so that every grant is repayable on the sale of the property to improve the recycling of Council funds.

Other implications

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

Financial implications

14. By approving the policy all the additional spend will be funded using BCF money so there will be no direct cost to the Council.

Legal issues

15. 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 the Council with discretionary powers to provide assistance in any form for the purpose of improving living conditions. This is an opportunity for the Council.
16. No legal issues have been identified from the proposed amendments to the Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy. As the policy states any exceptional cases, which fall outside the criteria laid down in the policy, can be referred to the Head of Service for approval.

Level of risk

17. A risk register is attached as Appendix 3.

Equalities impact

18. An Equalities Impact assessment (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