

Report to: **South Hams Executive**
Date: **6 June 2019**
Title: **Devon Wide Housing Assistance Policy**
Portfolio Area: **Health and Wellbeing/Homes**
Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: **Council 25 July 2019**

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Recommendations:

1. That the Executive **RECOMMEND** to Council that the existing 2018-19 Homes Assistance Policy is updated with the revised 2019-2021 Devon Housing Assistance Policy.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Central Government provides funding to Local Authorities through the Better Care Fund (BCF) so that Local Authorities are able to provide disabled facilities grants and other grants to eligible residents within their area. The aim of the grants are to enable vulnerable individuals to remain safe and healthy in their own home. The way in which Local Authorities in Devon allocate this funding to residents is determined by the Devon Housing Assistance Policy. This report provides an outline of proposals to change elements of the existing policy to better utilise this budget.

- 1.2 It is proposed to update the current policy, adopted in 2018, with a more flexible assistance packages that will be available to a greater number of vulnerable residents.

2. Background

- 2.1 In 2015 the Government introduced the Better Care Fund (BCF) in an attempt to bring health and social care together in an integrated way. The fund is a combination of government funding from the Department of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government. The BCF includes the grant allocation for disabled facilities grants (DFG). The 2017-19 Integration and Better Care fund policy framework document lists the conditions that the better care fund must be used to address and in particular this includes Local Authorities working together on a jointly agreed plan.
- 2.2 The development of the Devon Housing Assistance policy is in response to the condition to work together on a jointly agreed plan. The policy allows the Council to fully utilise the Better Care Fund allocation to meet specific needs in its area, including those that may fall outside of the scope of the statutory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).
- 2.3 The Better Care Fund provides more funding to the Devon Local Authorities than is currently required to meet the demand for mandatory DFGs. A wider Devon policy was developed to allow the Devon councils to spend the BCF on grant assistance that helps a wider range of households and meets more of the BCF objectives.
- 2.4 The current assistance packages are:
- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)
 - Accessible Homes Grant (including house move)
 - Home Improvement Loan
 - Healthy Homes grant
 - ECO flex top up
- 2.5 The delivery of the disabled facilities grant programme is mandatory and a statutory function of the local housing authority. The delivery of this function is governed by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Referrals can only be made from Devon County occupational therapists after the resident has had a social care assessment.
- 2.6 **The Accessible Homes Grant** enables the Council to provide additional grant funding in addition to the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant subject to the conditions in 2.7.
- 2.7 This grant is currently available in the following circumstances:

- Where a mandatory grant has been approved but the cost of the work exceeds £30,000
- Where there are works that may not be covered by the DFG in relation to adapting the home and making it safe.
- Where the means test identifies that a contribution is required.
- Where moving house more appropriate than adapting the existing property.

2.8 **The Healthy Homes grant** is a flexible grant to provide urgent/essential repairs to the home to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the occupier. The grant is only available where a loan is unavailable (see below) and for over 65's.

2.9 Wessex Resolutions CIC currently administers loans on behalf of the council within the requirements of this policy. The **Home Improvement Loan** is a flexible product that can be used for the following purposes:

- Home repairs and improvements
- Adaptation works where grant is not available
- To cover a client contribution to a grant
- To cover the cost of the work over the grant maximum.
- To bring empty homes back into use
- For landlords to carry out repairs or improvement to rented accommodation
- For energy efficiency improvements

2.10 This grant is to provide top up funding for energy efficiency measures where Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Flex funding and the HHCRO scheme ("Home Heating Cost Reduction Obligation", also known as the "the Affordable Warmth Obligation") have been provided by energy providers (via installers) but the available funding does not cover the full cost of the work.

2.11 The eligibility for ECO Flex funding itself is subject to a separate Statement of Intent issued by each Local Authority setting the local criteria. ECO funding is not provided by the Local Authority. It is accessed through the national Energy Company Obligation scheme and normally through installers.

3. **Outcomes/outputs**

3.1 The revised policy aims to provide a consistent approach to the delivery of the Better Care Fund across Devon that satisfies the terms of the funding agreement.

3.2 The policy will provide the flexibility and discretion for the councils to provide appropriate assistance to meet the following objectives:

Objective 1 - Assist disabled residents to remain in their own homes through supporting the provision of adaptations (so far as this is necessary, appropriate and reasonably practicable) to

prevent admissions to care and to assist with delayed transfers where possible.

Objective 2 – Safeguard the health and well-being of vulnerable residents by removing unnecessary hazards to health and safety in the home to reduce avoidable emergency admissions

Objective 3 – Provide adaptations that are suitable for the future by ensuring the scheme of works is dementia aware.

Objective 4 – assist vulnerable people to afford to heat their homes through appropriate energy efficiency and heating measures.

3.3 These objectives meet the priorities detailed by the BCF and the Devon Local Authorities.

3.4 The measure of success will be the number of DFG's provided and the total spend of the BCF allocation.

4. Options available and consideration of risk

4.1 Council could decide not to adopt the new policy and carry on only providing statutory/mandatory DFG's. This would be difficult to justify as the Government have made extra funds available based on assessment of local need and a missed opportunity to assist some of our more vulnerable residents.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1 Changes to Disabled facilities grants

5.1.1 The Council will be able to accept referrals from NHS Occupational therapists as well as the Devon County Council Occupational Therapists. This will enable an increased speed of discharge from hospital.

5.1 Changes to Accessible Homes Grant

5.1.1 To include non-means testing for stair lifts. This will allow quicker installation of stair lifts for residents. There is currently a stair lift pricing agreement in place, which ensures value for money.

5.1.2 Feasibility work can now be included in the grant.

5.1.3 Works associated with dementia can now be included.

5.2 Changes to Healthy Home Grant

5.2.1 The requirement of a mandatory application for a loan is removed. The council will now have discretion when works are urgent or essential to offer the grant without a loan application.

5.2.2 The removal of the "only residents over 65 years can apply" rule.

5.3 Changes to ECO flex top ups

5.3.1 Maximum grant raised from £1000 to £2000

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance		<p>The council has a statutory duty to provide DFG's</p> <p>Article 3 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gives a local housing authority power to provide financial assistance for the purpose of improving living conditions in their area. Such assistance may not be given unless the local housing authority has adopted a policy for the provision of such assistance and they have given the public notice of such adoption.</p> <p>The legislative provisions governing disabled facilities grants (DFGs) are contained in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended) (HGCRA 1996).</p>
Financial Implications		<p>Currently the BCF is administered through Devon County Council and funds are allocated to the eight Devon Council Districts in line with a Devon Allocation Formula. In previous years there had been an underspend in the total Devon allocation, so the District Councils and Devon County Council have agreed a policy of allocating funding depending on the demand in the Local Authority area. If some Councils spend their initial allocation they can be topped up with underspend from other Councils. The revised policy will give flexibility and ability to spend the better care fund allocation. There is currently no direct capital contribution made into the budget by the councils.</p> <p>Although highly unlikely there is a risk that the funding from the better care fund will stop and thus stopping DFG function.</p>
Risk		<p>There is a risk that with reduced performance that applications are not processed in the require timescale, failing to process applications quickly may result in a backlog of applications Councils are permitted to claim a percentage of the BCF capital</p>

		that can be put into the revenue budget to cover staff costs. This means that the Council will have the capacity to deal with an increased demand without an increase in the staffing budget.
Supporting Corporate Strategy.		The revised policy supports the Wellbeing and Homes strategy by improving homes and supporting residents living independently in their own homes.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		<p>The grant funding will become more accessible and benefit more households.</p> <p>Residents from vulnerable groups can sometimes have limited housing choices. In particular, families with young children, older persons and those with a disability can find themselves in poor quality accommodation. The existing policy may restrict funding and services available and there may be some households on low income who do not meet the qualification criteria and therefore are unable to access the funding despite still being in need. The option of a Home Improvement Loan is available to such households. This is a necessary restriction due to the amount of funding available which must be targeted on a priority basis and the funding criteria imposed by the BCF.</p>
Safeguarding		The policy specifically identifies disabled residents as a beneficiary of assistance. The policy also aims to safeguard disabled residents by making their homes safer for them to live in.
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		This report has no impact on crime and disorder reduction
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		<p>The policy will have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. Increased allocation of grant funding to allow residents to live longer and more safely in their own homes will have a direct impact upon numbers of GP appointments, social care and numbers of hospital admissions.</p> <p>For example, removing the means testing requirement for eligibility for a stair lift means that more vulnerable residents can access the help. Having a stair lift can drastically reduce the risk to</p>

		falling on stairs and consequently reduce the number of admissions to hospital. It is estimated that an average cost of a stair lift (between £1500-2000) could save the NHS £30,000 in care costs.
Other implications		<p>The proposal will enable an increased number of adaptations and number of people that will benefit from the service.</p> <p>Reputation – This proposal demonstrates the Council’s commitment to improve the DFG service by making it more accessible to residents.</p>

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Appendix one Devon Wide Housing Assistance Policy 2019-21 for the Better Care Fund

Background Papers:

Devon Wide Housing Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund 2018-19