

Housing Assistance Policy



Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	11 July 2024
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Joel Charles, Portfolio Holder for Public Protection
Lead Officer:	Tanusha Waters, Assistant Director Planning and Environment (01279) 446595
Contributing Officers:	Sally Haggerstone, Environmental Protection & DFG Manager (01279) 446165 Norah Nolan, Environmental Health & Corporate Safety Manager (01279 446132)
Key Decision:	No
Forward Plan:	Forward Plan Number I017169
Call In:	This item is subject to call in procedures
Corporate Mission:	Deliver High Performing Council Services
Wards Affected:	None specifically

Executive Summary

- A** This report sets out the proposed amendment to the Housing Assistance Policy which increases the maximum award for discretionary disabled facilities grants.

Recommended that:

- A** Cabinet approves the revised Housing Assistance Policy attached as Appendix A to the report.
- B** Subject to recommendation A, delegates authority to the appropriate Assistant Director – Planning and Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Public

Protection to minor and inconsequential amendments to the policy and to approve for giving it effect as may be necessary from time to time.

Reason for decision

- A** Adopting the proposed policy will give the Council authority to provide greater flexibility to help with home adaptations that is not currently available through statutory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and existing policy.

Other Options

- A** Do not adopt the policy. This would prevent the council from delivering some of the higher cost adaptations and therefore could disadvantage some of our most vulnerable disabled residents. It would also restrict the council's ability to accelerate and increase the delivery of grants.

Background

1. Adapting homes for disabled people is greatly valued as a way of increasing their independence from more formal social care settings and can ensure that individuals receiving treatment can be discharged safely.
2. Adaptations to the Council's own housing stock is not governed under the provisions of this policy. The Council has its own budget, and internal policy and procedure, for dealing with necessary and appropriate adaptations in Council owned homes.
3. National policy designed to better join-up health and social care services led to the pooling of funding streams from the NHS and local government into the Better Care Fund. This is administered by Health and Wellbeing Boards to help more people manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. Government funding for DFGs was a part of the pooled resource, but that has now changed and funding for home adaptations is now provided through the Better Care Fund.
4. The Government, recognising the value of home adaptations to support the further improvement of outcomes for people with care and support needs, has increased the funding allocated in recent years. For 2024 to 2025, the allocation to the Council for home adaptations is £987,813.
5. The Council, subject to resources, has discretion to take forward plans to assist with home adaptations to improve the independence of disabled people, if it does so in accordance with published policy. Increased funding now permits the Council to offer assistance that could complement or extend the help available under the mandatory

DFG regime to make adaptations more flexible, rapid and affordable. The priority is to ensure that as far as practicable, the available funding is used to help Harlow residents stay well, safe and independent at home for longer.

Issues/Proposals

6. The current Housing Assistance Policy, approved in December 2023, capped the Fast Track Grant to a maximum of £15,000 towards the cost of providing safe access to a home, and between levels in a residence, helping to increase the likelihood of prompt discharge from hospital, reinforcing the aim to avoid the risk of a more prolonged admission in a formal care setting. It also introduced a discretionary grant enabling any adaptation costing £15,000 or less to be provided without a means test if it has been: assessed as necessary and appropriate by an Occupational Therapist; signed off as meeting all the other criteria and considerations; and gone through an assessment that confirms sufficient funds will be available to proceed. Since the introduction of the new policy, there have been an increase in grant applications that exceed the £15,000 threshold for both fast track and discretionary grants, and costs for materials have continued to rise. There has been an increase in recommendations for through floor lifts, for example, that cost an average of £21,000. The revised policy increases the Fast Track Grant and Discretionary Grant cap to £30,000. This £30,000 cap will reduce existing barriers and potentially speed up the grant process and can be financed within the existing fund allocation.
7. The current discretionary relocation assistance grant is capped at £10,000. This grant can be used towards the costs of moving to a more suitable home, if an applicant's current home does not meet their needs and cannot be adapted to fulfil the number of reasonable adjustments required. The average cost of moving home in 2024 is £14,458. The revised policy increases this grant to £20,000 to reflect this rise in costs.
8. In accordance with the DFG Guidance, the Council is permitted to charge a fee from the Beter Care Fund for specific costs, for example, the use of occupational therapists and surveyors. The Council will continue to charge a fee of 12% on top of the aggregate final spend for that financial year on all housing assistance grants, as agreed in the previous Housing Assistance Policy. The 12% fee is deducted quarterly from the Better Care Fund allocation. Subject to approval, for the 2024 to 2025 financial year, the 12% fee will be met from within the existing fund allocation.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

An Equality Impact Decision Tree has been completed and attached as appendix B. A full Equality Impact Assessment is required but not as a priority and can be scheduled for later in the year.

Climate Change

There are no relevant implications.

Finance

The council receives a Government Grant called the Better Care Fund, administered by the Health and Wellbeing Board which facilities DFG, that can be distributed to residents to adapt their homes. The grant for 2024/25 is £987,813. The revised Housing Assistance Policy does not have any direct financial implications on the council, but allows increased flexibility for DFG to be passed onto residents.

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Governance

The proposed amendment is permitted under statute, and the commissioning of works remain subject to contract standing orders.

Author: Julie Galvin, Legal Services Manager and Monitoring Officer

Appendices

Appendix A – Housing Assistance Policy

Appendix B – Equalities Impact Decision Tree

Background Papers

Existing policy: Housing assistance policy | Harlow Council -

<https://www.harlow.gov.uk/policies/housing-assistance-policy>

Core guidance: Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England (publishing.service.gov.uk) -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6245b9ac8fa8f527744f0683/DFG_Guidance.pdf

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

DFG – Disabled Facilities Grant