



**Prosperous Communities
Committee**

**Tuesday 10th September
2019**

Subject: Housing Assistance Policy Review

Report by:

Executive Director of Operations

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To seek approval from Prosperous Communities
Committee for the revised Housing Assistance
Policy.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- 1) To approve the revised Housing Assistance Policy 2018-2022**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

None noted.

Financial : FIN/59/20

The grant received for the Better Care Fund is paid directly to the Council via Lincolnshire County Council. This policy proposes amendment in relation to how the policy allocates this funding. All proposals are in line with the Better Care Fund guidance.

The funding drawdown for revenue is addressed within this paper and it is proposed that the drawdown is increased to the 15% maximum as explained within the report. This will enable the Council to ensure it can deliver the requirements of the policy and carry out the works associated with it.

Staffing :

There are no direct staffing implications.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

Data Protection Implications :

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities :

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations :

Health Implications:

The delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants contributes to the wider health improvements of residents within the district. The additional aspects of the policy are aimed at addressing various housing and health related needs across the District, mainly via the improvement of housing conditions.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

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Risk Assessment :

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Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

x

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

x

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The West Lindsey Housing Assistance Policy was approved in 2018. The policy has two different elements; the Independent Living Grants which are funded through the Better Care Fund Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) that is received from Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), and the Capital Grant works which are funded via the Council's Private Sector Renewal Capital Budget.
- 1.2 When the policy was originally devised, criteria was included to ensure that funding was allocated to the most in need for both grant types. Now the policy is a year down the line, a review is required to ensure that the criteria is still relevant and to look at how more can be done to assist those in need.

2 Independent Living Grants

- 2.1 The independent living grants were originally devised through consultation with Occupational Therapists (OTs) and LCC to understand how expanding out the remit of DFG's could assist with improving the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in society and assisting with meeting the outcomes of the Better Care Fund around hospital admissions, length of stays in hospital and delayed transfers of care.
- 2.2 There was concern when offering discretionary grants through DFG funding that this could result in DFG funding being allocated too soon and the Council being financially responsible for undertaking mandatory DFG's when no funding is available.
- 2.3 However, West Lindsey underspent DFG funding in 2018/2019 by £187,955. This funding has been carried forward and is now being utilised within the 19/20 financial year.
- 2.4 For 19/20, £699k has been received and this figure has increased year on year – a trend which is expected to continue.
- 2.5 Since the policy has been implemented, the following discretionary grants have been completed:

Grant type	Applications	Spend
Discretionary DFG	12	£8989.20
Discretionary Top-up	0	£0
Contributions Grant	3	£2,867.16
Healthy Homes Grant	6	£7,016.96
Hospital Discharge Grant	0	£0
Re-location Grant	0	£0

- 2.6 When it was agreed a review would be undertaken of this policy, the above information along with material from LCC and the OT's was all

taken into consideration. It is clear from the above table that the criteria for applying for discretionary grants is too restrictive, and that through a review the criteria could be amended to increase the numbers of discretionary grants that can be delivered and ultimately increase the help and support available to disabled people.

- 2.7 The revenue funding required to deliver DFGs will continue to be drawn down from the capital grant required in line with the agreement in place with LCC.

3 Capital Grants

- 3.1 The main aim of the capital grants is to bring empty properties back into use. The Gainsborough South West Ward has a high proportion of problematic empty properties and the grants have initially focused on that area.

- 3.2 The original capital budget within this program was £627k. To date £84k has been spent. A review of this overall budget is being undertaken with Finance colleagues to ensure it is profiled in the appropriate way based on this policy review. The speed of spend had been impacted by some initial issues relating to a staff absence; however this has now been addressed.

- 3.3 Grants that have been delivered under this policy so far are as follows:

Grant type	Applications	Spend
Empty Property Grant	34	£84,433.00
Empty Property Purchase	2	£0
Empty property owner occupier grant	1	£0
Owner occupier grant	2	£0
Landlord incentive grant	0	£0

- 3.4 Of the above application for empty property grants, 9 have been fully completed, resulting in 8 properties being brought back into use to date. The amount of long term empty properties in the Gainsborough South West ward is the lowest it has been in 3 years at just 95. That number is expected to drop even further once all the current grants that have been applied for are complete.

- 3.5 Based on feedback received in the last year about the capital grants, some amendments have been made to expand out the eligibility criteria to ensure grant uptake can be maximised.

4 Amendments to schedules

- 4.1 The below amendments have been made to expand out who is eligible for grants, what grants can be awarded for and to ensure that the grants that are awarded will both meet the outcomes of the Better Care Fund and bring empty properties back into use.

- 4.2 The amendments have been made based on feedback from all of the delivery partners detailed in the policy along with officer experiences and issues and barriers that have arisen as part of the grant processes.
- 4.3 The impact of the changes will be an increase in the amount of residents who are eligible for assistance through both types of grants. The changes will increase spend and in turn reduce underspend of the DFG budget, whilst still ensuring the grants are assisting those most in need.
- 4.4 Financial ineligibility is one of the main reasons residents are unable to access grant funding. The Government commissioned an external review of DFG's, the findings of which were published in December 2018. These findings offered 45 recommendations on DFG reform. One of the areas requiring review included the existing means test for mandatory grants. The report highlighted the issues with the current means test and how modernisation of this area could help more people in need. As no action has been taken on this for mandatory grants, a West Lindsey financial assessment has been devised which takes those issues raised by the review and goes some way to addressing the fairness of the means test through the discretionary grant. The West Lindsey financial assessment is attached as an appendix to the policy.

4.5 **Independent living grant changes**

Discretionary DFG

- Grant maximum increased from £10,000 to align with Mandatory DFG to £30,000
- Financial eligibility – now West Lindsey Financial assessment
- Eligibility works – remove the statement that details the grant cannot be used for equipment. This will ensure that if a need can be met through equipment that cannot be provided by LCC due to budget constraints, it can be applied for through the grant process.

Healthy Homes Grants

- Grant maximum increased from £5,000 to £10,000 to ensure all works that are required can be covered.
- Eligibility applicant – expand out so other professionals can make referrals to include but not limited to Environmental Health and Housing enforcement officers and Wellbeing Service to ensure exposure to the grant is maximised.
- Eligibility works – expand out to works that remedy any category 1 hazard or where environment presents risk to public health
- Eligibility financial – remove means tested and replaced with WLDC financial assessment.

Capital works grants

Empty Property Grant

- Eligibility works, Schedule previously provided by contractor. This will now be provided by WLDC with a cost associated to each item from SOR with a maximum value.
- Addition of offering grants outside of Gainsborough - where the Council has received valid complaints about a property or are considering a Compulsory Purchase Order a grant could be considered. This is at the discretion of the council.

WDLC Empty Property Purchase

- Eligibility works – removed requirement for Landlord to have had no previous enforcement action taken against them
- Conditions - Property must have been advertised on the open market for 3 months for a fair market price.

Empty Property owner occupier grant

- Grant maximum has been increased from 5% to 10% deposit with a maximum of £10,000 to encourage take up.
- Removed the need for a deposit match
- Eligibility - Applicant must reside in the property once it has been brought back into use. If they move out WLDC will seek to recover the grant monies. This has the effect of encouraging owner occupiers further

Owner Occupier Grant

- Eligibility - Grant has been extended out to cover the whole of WLDC, not just Gainsborough. This is due to identified properties causing serious health concerns outside of Gainsborough.
- Grant maximum increased from £5000 to £10,000

Landlord incentive

- Amended to only include Bluetooth interlinked smoke alarms for Landlords who do not have interlinked smoke detection as identified through the Selective Licencing scheme.
- A full fire inspection will be carried out and smoke alarms installed as part of the incentive.

5 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants

- 5.1 The delivery of mandatory DFGs is not impacted by these changes and the Council will continue to deliver these in line with the relevant legislation.

5.2 The ongoing performance of the mandatory DFGs is monitored within the progress and delivery reporting process, which is presented to Prosperous Communities Committee separately.

5.3 For information, the main performance highlights from 18/19 are as follows:

- 131 grant referrals received
- 71 grants approved
- 79 day average from receipt of referral to approval of grant
- 127 day average from receipt of referral to completion of grant
- £7,391 average grant spend
- £533k spent over the course of the year