



**Prosperous Communities  
Committee**

**Tuesday 2 June 2020**

**Subject: Housing Assistance Policy Update**

Report by:

Chief Executive

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To provide Elected Members with an update on the Housing Assistance Policy and its delivery.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

**Elected Members are asked to:**

- a) Note the update in regards to delivery and budget spend.**
- b) Support the proposal that the remaining Private Sector Renewal Grants are completed in line with the current policy, after which this part of the Policy will no longer be available.**
- c) Support the proposal that no further applications for the grant are accepted until the existing applications are finalised.**

## IMPLICATIONS

### **Legal:**

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 provides the framework for the Council to provide a wider range of discretionary assistance. The Council has a statutory duty to provide mandatory DFGs and there is no intention to amend this duty.

The aspects of the policy that relate to private sector renewal are entirely discretionary. Additional procurement advice will be sought in regards to the specific aspects of this policy to ensure that the legal risk is minimal. Given that the offers being made are positive it is not expected that any legal issues will be identified.

### **Financial : FIN/11/21/SL**

Section 4 details the spend to date in relation to the Private Sector Renewal aspect of the Policy.

The main financial implication is that the budget remaining is £198k, which is spread across 20/21 and 20/22 (£100k for 20/21 and £98k for 21/22).

It is proposed that this budget continues to be utilised in line with the Policy in its current form.

### **Staffing :**

### **Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :**

*NB: Please explain how you have considered the policy's impact on different groups (for example: young people, elderly, ethnic minorities, LGBT community, rural residents, disabled, others).*

### **Data Protection Implications :**

### **Climate Related Risks and Opportunities :**

### **Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations :**

**Health Implications:**

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

West Lindsey Housing Assistance Policy and supporting documents  
<https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/my-services/housing-and-home-choices/housing-strategies-and-policies/west-lindsey-housing-assistance-policy-2018-2022/>

**Risk Assessment :**

Delivery of Mandatory DFGs – the current Covid 19 pandemic has resulted in work relating to mandatory DFGs ceasing. It is not clear how and when this work will be resumed at this stage. When it is resumed, there will be a backlog of cases that will need to be delivered. There will also be a smaller timeframe in which to spend the allocated grant.

Mitigation – Non-discretionary grants will not be prioritised during this period and any additional resources required to deliver the mandatory DFGs will be taken from the budget provision made via the Better Care Fund at the level agreed with Lincolnshire County Council previously.

**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**

**Key Decision:**

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

**Yes**

**No**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Housing Assistance Policy was introduced in August 2018, it includes discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and Private Sector Renewal grants to assist in reduction of empty homes and improve housing conditions. It is thought the Lincolnshire Housing Assistance Policy will replace the Discretionary DFG'S element in the future.
- 1.2. Prosperous Communities Committee have requested that a review of the grants be undertaken and reported back to them. This paper provides information and updates in regards to the grants offered.
- 1.3. It should be noted that due to the current Covid-19 pandemic the delivery of all grants have been temporarily suspended, unless there is an immediate high risk of harm that requires the works to be completed. Two DFGs have been completed during this period to enable individuals to be discharged from hospital and enable them to be cared for in the community.

## **2. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants**

- 2.1. The Council continues to deliver its mandatory obligations in relation to DFGs and has worked across the County with colleagues to provide a more consistent approach to delivery. The funding to delivery DFGs comes via the Better Care Fund and in 19/20 £708k was spent across 106 grants. Annually the Council continues to spend all of the allocation it is given and seeks to work with customers and healthcare professionals to ensure that the right grants are provided.
- 2.2. In terms of performance, the work area received its highest number of DFG referrals over the course of 19/20, 158 and continues to deliver this with a high level of customer satisfaction. In 19/20 an agreed countywide procurement framework was put in place and is now embedded. Collectively work is ongoing towards a shared Countywide policy for DFGs, which is expected during 20/21. The District Council is only responsible for certain aspects of the process in relation to DFGS and we have no control over any initial referral waiting times that may occur.
- 2.3. The average days between receipt of referral and completion of the grant has increased on average during the year, however during the last quarter this has reduced. The annual average for this was 162 days. It is expected that this will decrease again during 20/21 as the contractors and processes become more streamlined under the new procurement framework. It should be noted that there are currently 86 applications in the system that are at a standstill due to the Covid-19 pandemic and performance figures will be impacted by this.

## **3. Discretionary DFGs**

3.1. During 19/20 £65k has been spent on discretionary DFGs. These are where decisions are made to provide assistance to persons that fail the means test but demonstrate an inability to meet the contribution required. 12 grants were delivered in this way.

#### 4. Private Sector Renewal Grants

4.1. All of the grants provided within this part of the policy are discretionary and have been funded via the Council's own capital programme. A summary of the grants provided to date are below:

Grant	No. Delivered 19/20	Spend 19/20	Total Spend to Date
Empty Property	15 (17 in pipeline)	£134k	£170k
Owner Occupier	4 (12 in pipeline)	£19k	£19k
Empty Property Purchase	6 apps received	£0	£0
Landlord Grant	0	£0	£0
EP Owner Occ Grant	0 apps received	£0	£0

4.2. The Empty Property Grant has proved to be the most popular of the discretionary grants offered. There has been a steady flow of applications since the scheme was introduced. There are currently 17 grants in progress. The maximum grant that can be paid is £10k. The number of long term empty properties in the South West Ward is at its lowest level (since we have records for). During this quarter 4 of 19/20 there has been a general increase in long term empties across the District, which will be noted in progress and delivery.

4.3. The owner occupier grant has mainly dealt with boiler breakdowns and has been a useful tool to address issues where Housing Act enforcement is not necessary or justifiable. 4 of these grants have been completed and 12 are in the pipeline. Various agencies have referred into this grant.

4.4. Some of the benefits associated with the completion of these grants are as follows: reduced number of empty properties within the SWW; improvement of stock condition; reduced complaints in relation to the problem empty properties returned to use; improved living conditions for owner occupiers; improved health outcomes; improved energy efficiency and reduction in fuel poverty.

4.5. Empty property purchase has not been successful to date, mainly due to the number of persons that have wished to access the empty property grant. Given the scheme now being developed with P3, there will be little justification for utilising this aspect of the policy moving forward, unless where a Compulsory Purchase Order is pursued.

4.6. No applications have been received for the landlord grant. There have been some procurement complications, which have impacted upon the Councils ability to deliver this. These relate to the procuring of one supplier as opposed to the purchase of a number of units of the item,

without having a clear understanding of the volumes required for delivery.

4.7. The owner occupier empty property grant is effectively providing a deposit for any persons wishing to buy a long term empty property in the South West Ward. This has not been accessed and feedback locally is that there is not a demand for a scheme such as this within this area.

4.8. In summary, there has been mixed success to date. The empty property grant has proved very popular and as a result, this was the focus of officers in terms of engagement. The number delivered and the number in progress demonstrate this. Owner occupier grants, whilst not as popular, have served to assist some of the districts more vulnerable owner occupiers. The remaining grants, as proposed within the policy have not been accessed to date.

## **5. Moving Forward**

5.1. Initially, it was intended to review this policy and amend some of the options provided within it. However, due to the development of the Viable Housing Solutions Project, the budget available for the discretionary aspects of the policy has been reduced.

5.2. £300k of the original budget has been transferred over to the Viable Housing Solutions (VHS) Project. After the spend outlined above there is a budget of £100k for 20/21 and £98k for 21/22 available.

5.3. The transferring of this budget has been agreed on the basis that the VHS project will be a more effective tool for ensuring a greater impact across the wider area of the South West Ward. The VHS also brings with it property management tools, which the current grant scheme does not. There is also a saturation point that will be reached in relation to the empty property grants due to it offering a specific resolution, that may not suit all empty property owners.

5.4. There are 17 empty property grant applications and 12 owner occupier grants currently in progress, therefore it is proposed that these be completed under the current policy. As a result, once the above grants are completed there is unlikely to be any significant budget remaining to complete any further works.

5.5. Subject to the above grants being completed, this will mean that the allocated capital budget for Private Sector Renewal will be spent and there are currently no further plans to extend this scheme. Within the South West Ward the scheme will be replaced by the Viable Housing Solutions Project.

5.6. An added resource implication for this area of work is that there is likely to be a large backlog of mandatory DFGs to complete during 20/21 and 21/22 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Limiting the Private

Sector Renewal Grants available will enable the officers to focus on delivering the mandatory grants.

## **6. Recommendations**

Elected Members are asked to:

- 6.1. Note the update in regards to delivery and budget spend.
- 6.2. Support the proposal that the remaining Private Sector Renewal Grants are completed in line with the current policy, after which this part of the Policy will no longer be available.
- 6.3. Support the proposal that no further applications for the Private Sector Renewal Grant are accepted until the existing applications are finalised.