



**Prosperous Communities
Committee**

Date 1st May 2018

Subject: Housing Assistance Policy 2018 - 2022

Report by:

Head of Paid Service
Mark Sturgess

Contact Officer:

Andy Gray
Housing and Environmental Enforcement
Manager

Purpose / Summary:

To provide elected members with an updated
Housing Assistance Policy and to seek approval
for the financial assistance provided within it.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

Elected Members are asked to:

- a) Approve the Housing Assistance Policy as set out in Appendix 3 to come into effect on 1st June 2018.
- b) Recommend to Corporate Policy and Resources Committee that the earmarked reserve allocated for private sector renewal is released to fund the assistance offered within the policy.

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 Ref: FIN/18/19

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

The Council currently delivers Disabled Facilities Grant (DFGs) and receives a grant allocation from Lincolnshire County Council as part of the Better Care Fund on an annual basis. The existing allocation in 17/18 was £602,000 and this is scheduled to increase to £648,000 in 18/19. A capital budget is approved as Business As Usual (BAU), with some element of the grant funding supporting the revenue cost of administration of the scheme.

In terms of the DFG scheme the discretionary elements will be funded from the capital budget already approved in the capital programme. No additional funds are requested within this report and will therefore be managed within the existing budget.

There is the proposal to create a relocation grant from the DFG allocation, this would not constitute capital expenditure and therefore would be a charge to Revenue. Therefore an element of the DFG funding will need to be moved to Revenue to cover any expenses incurred and the Capital budget reduced.

This policy does meet the extended powers under The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002.

PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL

The Private Sector Renewal capital budget sits within the Capital Programme as a Pre-Stage 1 scheme as there has not been a policy or business case developed to enable the allocation of this budget to date. The overall budget for this capital programme is £1,439,000 (as detailed at paragraph 6 below). This will be financed initially by £825,000 from the Investment for Growth Earmarked Reserve and £614,900 from Capital Receipts.

The proposals highlighted for Private Sector Renewal are in the main compliant with the CIPFA Code for Capital expenditure. However, one element poses potential challenges, the Landlord incentive grant (£2,500), which will be

classified as Revenue Expenditure and therefore would utilise the Investment for Growth Earmarked Reserve, and thereby reducing the capital budget.

Staffing :

There are no staffing implications within this report.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights : None.

Risk Assessment :

Private Sector Renewal

Lack of Capital Receipts – capital receipts are required in order for the scheme to be able to continue beyond the three year funded period. A lack of these receipts will mean that no further funding can be offered.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities :

None noted

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

None.

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

X

No

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of the revised Housing Assistance Policy (Appendix 3). This policy details how the Council will provide financial assistance in a statutory and discretionary manner in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and Private Sector Renewal (PSR).
- 1.2. The policy revisions seek to amend the existing approach to DFGs and enhance their scope and impact. Alongside this the policy introduces a completely new offer of assistance for PSR.

2. Disabled Facilities Grants

- 2.1. DFGs have been successfully delivered by the Council for a number of years. The funding for DFGs is now drawn down from the wider budget labelled “The Better Care Fund”, which is managed by the County Council and provides the funding for a wide range of health related services.
- 2.2. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 removed most of the prescriptive housing renewal grant legislation in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, and introduced new wide ranging discretionary power to local housing authorities to develop different forms of financial assistance to meet local needs.
- 2.3. The Council has not previously utilised its extended powers under the 2002 RRO due to its focus on providing solely the DFG obligation. This revised policy brings into use these powers and enhances our ability to make discretionary offers based on local needs.

3. DFG Financial Information

- 3.1. The Council currently seeks to allocate all of its DFG budget within each year to ensure that adaptations are installed into homes and that the health of individuals who receive the grants is improved and their risk factors are reduced.
- 3.2. In 17/18 the Council received £602,000 in Better Care Fund allocation. This is expected to increase to £648,000 in 18/19.
- 3.3. The Council currently recovers an element of its staffing budget from the Better Care Fund. This arrangement will continue.

4. Policy Amendments Relating to DFG

4.1. The housing assistance policy will now contain the following types of assistance: (further detailed in appendix 1)

- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant
- Discretionary DFG
- Discretionary Top-up Grant
- Discretionary Contribution Grant
- Relocation Grant (Revenue)
- Healthy Homes Grant
- Hospital Discharge Grant

4.2. Where assistance provided is land charged and then recovered, it is intended any funds received would be directed back into the capital programme to deliver DFGs.

5. Private Sector Renewal

5.1. The West Lindsey Housing Strategy 2018 – 2022 sets out West Lindsey's vision for housing. Within this there are three key aims, one of which is improving homes and transforming places. Alongside this it is specifically noted that a key project is to deliver financial assistance in the private rented sector to improve property standards, energy efficiency and fuel poverty.

5.2. The profile of and issues facing the private rented sector within the district have been elevated since the introduction of the Council's Selective Licensing scheme in 2016. This scheme has enabled poor standards to be addressed and has created a wealth of knowledge and information about the sector and what can be done to improve it locally.

5.3. In line with the Council's wider approach to growth in Gainsborough, this policy seeks to address issues within the existing housing stock to ensure that it is maintained and improved.

5.4. It should be noted that the approach to this aspect of the policy is an enabling one. The PSR initiatives within this policy do not seek to ensure that a commercial gain is sought. The reasons for this are as follows:

- The policy seeks to, in its purest form, provide assistance and improve property standards and bring empty properties back into use;
- The ability to gain commercially, in regards to the housing market, within the areas in which this applies is limited;

- A range of statutory punitive measures are in place and effective (i.e. selective licensing), this policy provides a positive offer;
- The policy (with the exception of empty homes) seeks to assist those that are compliant with statutory obligations (i.e. non fit and proper or unlicensed landlords)
- Provision is made for purchasing long term empty properties to enable those owners who wish to leave the market an opportunity to do so;
- Empty property owners (when surveyed) and landlords are reluctant to enter into commercial type arrangements with the Council.
- The overall benefit to the Council in long term in regards to social and economic regeneration believed to be positive.

5.5. The Council has continued to be proactive in dealing with long term empty properties and the proposals made within the policy seek to enhance this work and provide a positive solution for property owners.

6. Private Sector Renewal Financial Information

6.1. A capital budget has already been allocated for PSR. This budget was allocated in 16/17 and due to resource issues and competing priorities officers were unable to develop the policy prior to now. As a result, the current allocated spend is shown below. There is a total of £1,439,000 over three years.

XG14	18/19	19/20	20/21	Total
Private Sector Renewal	£500,000	£500,000	£439,000	£1,439,000

6.2. In light of the proposed policy it will be necessary to re-phase the capital scheme to ensure that it can be spent in line with the policy and in accordance with the resources available. As a result the proposed budget is shown below:

XG14	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	Total
Private Sector Renewal	£225,000	£300,000	£300,000	£614,900	£1,439,000
Financed by					
EMR (investment for Growth)	-£225,000	-£300,000	-£300,000	£0	-£825,000
Capital Receipts	£0	£0	£0	-£614,900	-£614,900

6.3. It is not proposed to allocate any of this resource to cover the officers costs incurred in delivering the scheme. Existing resources will be used to enable these aspects of the policy and this will be reviewed accordingly within the work area.

6.4. Where assistance provided is land charged and then recovered, it is intended any funds received, via property changes of ownership will finance future PSR initiatives.

7. Policy approach relating to PSR

7.1. For each financial offer specific conditions have been set and these have been put in place to ensure that the specific offer available is either restricted to the specific group it is aimed at or to ensure that there is a sufficient level of uptake. Not all offers will be means tested and in most cases the assistance provided will be land charged for a time period relevant to the particular assistance provided.

7.2. It is proposed to include the following types of assistance within the policy (further detailed in appendix 2)

- Empty Property Grant
- Empty Property Purchase
- First time buyer initiative
- Owner Occupier Grant
- Landlord Incentive Grant

7.3. The initiatives for Private Sector Renewal will only be available within Gainsborough or within the specific selective licensing area.

8. Contractors and Schedules

8.1. Specific schedules will be drawn up for each of the offers of assistance. This will outline the conditions attached to any of the specific offers and ensure that any applicant is fully aware of matters relating to eligibility and repayment of the assistance.

8.2. The current procurement arrangements for DFGs will continue, whereby works are completed via list of competent contractors held by the Council. Further advice will be sought in regards to the procurement of PSR works, however the applicant, in most cases will be responsible for ensuring that an appropriate contractor is sought. For example, if a homeowner wishes to improve dangerous electrics in their property, the Council will check that the contractor is competent and then its sole role

to be to check the relevant works and then make payment to the contractor.

8.3. Contracts will be procured for specific aspects of the PSR work which are the completion of electrical and gas certification and energy performance certificates.

9. Budget Management

9.1. The Council is obliged to meet its statutory duties in relation to the mandatory DFG provision and this aspect of the policy will always be given priority from a financial perspective.

9.2. For PSR there is no mandatory or statutory provision therefore the approach to the provision of assistance will focus on the applications that have the highest social and economic impact.

9.3. Officers will reserve the right to cease the assistance offered (where it is not mandatory) should there be a financial requirement to do so. No applications would be accepted during times when assistance was not available.

10. Review and Monitoring

10.1 The Policy would be reviewed on an annual basis and the assistance within them reviewed for effectiveness. There is also scope to include wider areas within the policy (e.g. Hemswell Cliff), subject to there being specific evidence in regards to any improvements required.

10.2 A set of performance measures will also be developed alongside the policy in order to demonstrate the impact that it has had and to enable to be reviewed effectively.

Appendix 1 – Overview of DFG Related Grant

Assistance	Funding Max.	Financial eligibility	Objective	Land Charge	Other Information
Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant	£30,000	Means tested – contributions may be required	To assist disabled people to remain independent in their own home.	Max £10,000 for grants over £5,000, 10 years	
Discretionary DFG	£10,000	Means tested – including children's cases	To adapt homes of disabled people who fall outside of the mandatory DFG but require adaptations to remain safe and independent at home.	10 years	Requires OT referral. To be used to address specific issues that cannot be addressed via mandatory provision
Discretionary Top-up Grant	£10,000	Means tested – including children cases	To provide additional funding when the mandatory grant does not cover the full extent of the adaptation required.	10 years	
Discretionary Contribution Grant	£5,000	Not means tested – depends on WLDC assessment	To assist with paying a contribution when a contribution would be the reason a mandatory DFG would not progress.	10 years	Available within existing policy.
Relocation Grant (Revenue)	£2,000	No means test –	To assist a disabled person to move to a more suitable property.	Perpetuity	Available to anyone who has an OT referral for re-location
Healthy Homes Grant	£5,000	Available to anyone eligible for a mandatory DFG	To improve the property standards of vulnerable people who own their own home.	10 years	To address damp and mould, excess cold and falls on stairs and levels
Hospital Discharge Grant	£5,000	Non means tested	To assist anyone unable to be discharged from hospital due to their home conditions.	None	For minor adaptations

Appendix 2 – Overview of Private Sector Renewal Grants

Assistance	Funding Max.	Eligibility	Objective	Land Charge	Other Information
Empty Property Grant	£10,000	Not Means tested	Bring long term empty properties back into use through home ownership and owner occupying	5 years	No existing debts permitted. Must be brought back into use within 6 months.
Empty Property Purchase	Market value at point of sale	Property must have been empty for over 6 months.	Bring problematic empty properties back into use	N/A	To address market failure and the worst empty properties. Market value to be offered. Cost of any refurb to be considered.
First time buyer initiative	£5,000 Deposit match up to 5%	Property must have been empty for over 6 months. First time buyers only.	Assist first time buyers to get onto the property ladder. Bring long term empty properties back into use. Encourage home ownership	5 years	Can be used in conjunction with empty property grant. Occupancy to be monitored.
Owner Occupier grant	£5000	Home owner for 12 months or more. Means tested.	To improve health, improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty	10 years	To remove category 1 hazards from owner occupied property
Landlord Incentive Grant	£2,500	Property must be licensed and tenanted. No previous enforcement action undertaken.	Improve the standards of the properties in the Selective Licencing area.	10 years	Focussed on: improved extraction, interlinked fire alarms and burglar alarms

Housing Assistance Policy 2018 - 2022

1. Introduction

West Lindsey Housing assistance Policy sets out the financial assistance available for residents of West Lindsey in order for people to remain living independently in safe and healthy homes

There are 2 main elements to this policy: Disabled Facilities Grants funding through the Better Care Fund and how West Lindsey intend to implement their powers under the Regulatory Reform Order; and a capital program of funding that aims to return long term empty properties to use, improve property standards and incentivise home ownership focusing on the Gainsborough area.

2. Strategic context

2.1. West Lindsey Housing Strategy 2018 – 2022

This strategy sets out West Lindsey's vision for Housing. The strategy aims to deliver these 3 key themes:

1. Driving housing growth to meet housing need
2. Improving homes and transforming places
3. A partnership approach to support choice, wellbeing and independence

Within those themes, a clear project plan has been set out, in which this policy can contribute. These are as follows:

2.1 to deliver financial assistance in the private rented sector to improve property standards, energy efficiency and fuel poverty

2.4 to actively tackle poor quality housing standards and rogue landlords across the district

3.3 To develop a policy in line with the Better Care Find objectives which enables independent living and improves health and wellbeing

2.2. West Lindsey Independent Living Policy 2016-2018

This existing policy goes into detail on how West Lindsey were interpreting the Housing, Construction and Regeneration Act 2006 in relation to mandatory DFG's.

The independent living policy allowed West Lindsey to improve the way in which DFG's are administered in West Lindsey and has been an important building block to ensure West Lindsey is now in a position to offer additional assistance under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002.

2.3. West Lindsey Housing Enforcement Policy

The enforcement policy aims to ensure that all citizens of West Lindsey have a home that is safe, secure, dry and not overcrowded. This policy, alongside the Corporate Enforcement Policy, outlines how the council will use appropriate enforcement powers to ensure that all owners comply with their statutory obligations. This housing assistance policy compliments the enforcement policy with the objectives of improving housing standards, focusing on the Gainsborough area.

2.4. West Lindsey Corporate plan 2016-2020

The West Lindsey Corporate Plan sets out West Lindsey priorities for the district to ensure that services being provided will meet the varied needs of the residents of the district. This policy relates to the following themes of the corporate plan:

- Theme 1 – People First
This policy aims to outline what is available to the residents of West Lindsey in a manner that is accessible to all.

3. Independent living

3.1. Legal context

- 3.1.1.** The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 removed most of the prescriptive housing renewal grant legislation in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, and introduced new wide ranging discretionary power to local housing authorities to develop different forms of financial assistance to meet local needs.
- 3.1.2.** To be able to give financial assistance under the Act, the local housing authority must adopt and publish a policy setting out how it intends to use this general power to give assistance.
- 3.1.3.** Funding for Disabled Facilities Grants is now received from Lincolnshire County Council through the Better care Fund. The Better Care Fund (BCF) is a program spanning both the NHS and local government. It has been created to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our society, placing them at the centre of their care and support, and providing them with 'wraparound' fully integrated health and social care, resulting in an improved experience and better quality of life.
- 3.1.4.** West Lindsey District Council's grant allocation received for DFG's has increased over the past year, with the projection that this budget will remain for at least the next 3 years and potentially further.
- 3.1.5.** Until now, West Lindsey have not extended the grant using powers under the RRO as the funding allocations would not have been enough to cover the additional demand.

3.2. Objectives

- 3.2.1.** This policy aims to assist disabled people to live safely and independently in their own home. This Policy sets out how this will be done in line with the legislation, good practise guidance, the Better Care fund plan and through offering good value for money.
- 3.2.2.** West Lindsey District Council will work with the following key partners in order to deliver this policy:
- Housing Associations

- Occupational Therapist and Customer Care officers
- Private Landlords
- Home Owner
- Local contractors and specialist equipment providers
- Better Care fund leads
- Other districts within Lincolnshire

4. Disabled Facilities Grant Funding

4.1. Below is a summary of all grant assistance that is available through DFG funding. Further details on the grants can be found in the Grant Schedules document which sets out the terms and conditions of the individual grants. West Lindsey District Council have a statutory duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to provide Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants. All other grants will be subject to available funding.

Assistance	Funding Max.	Financial eligibility	Objective
Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant	£30,000	Means tested	To assist disabled people to remain independent in their own home.
Discretionary DFG	£10,000	Means tested – including children’s cases	To adapt homes of disabled people who fall outside of the mandatory DFG but require adaptations to remain safe and independent at home.
Discretionary Top-up Grant	£10,000	Means tested – including children cases	To provide additional funding when the mandatory grant does not cover the full extent of the adaptation required.
Discretionary Contribution Grant	£5,000	Not means tested – depends on WLDC assessment	To assist with paying a contribution when a contribution would be the reason a mandatory DFG would not progress.
Relocation Grant	£2,000	No means test – available to anyone who has an OT referral for re-location	To assist a disabled person to move to a more suitable property.
Healthy Homes Grant	£5,000	Available to anyone eligible for a mandatory DFG	To improve the property standards of vulnerable people who own their own home.
Hospital	£5,000	Non means	To assist anyone unable

Discharge Grant		tested	to be discharged from hospital due to their home conditions.
-----------------	--	--------	--

4.2. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant

4.2.1. Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a mandatory entitlement to help fund the provision of adaptations to enable people with disabilities to achieve independent living in their own home. The primary legislation covering Disabled Facilities Grants is the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and applies to all Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants.

DFG is a means tested grant which is determined by a national formula, the amount of grant that can be is determined by:

- Household income through earnings and benefits
- Household savings over £6,000
- Disabilities
- Household composition
- Tenure

4.2.2. The maximum grant amount that can be awarded will be worked out using a means test, but is subject to a maximum of £30,000. Depending on the outcome of the means test an applicant may be required to pay a specified contribution towards the adaptation.

4.2.3. Under the current legislation, applications for disabled children are not subject to a means test. All other aspects of the DFG application process remain the same for both child and adult applications.

4.3. Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant

4.3.1. Discretionary DFG is available when the works that are recommended by the OT are not eligible to be funded through a mandatory DFG – this grant does not cover financial ineligibility. This aim of this grant is to assist people to remain living at home outside of the remit of a mandatory DFG.

4.3.2. The request from an OT will go to a pre-determined panel to decide whether or not the request is necessary & appropriate.

4.3.3. An example of when this grant could be applied for is as follows:
A disabled child can only have the property that is their 'main residence'

adapted, this does not then allow for a parent with shared custody to have any adaptations and could result in them not being able to offer respite care.

4.3.4. The grant will be fully land charged for owner occupiers for a 10 year period and means tested in all cases – including children’s applications. All referrals from OT will be considered by The Council.

4.4. Discretionary top-up grant

4.4.1. Discretionary top-up grants are available to applicants who are eligible for a mandatory DFG and the suitable scheme cannot be achieved within the £30,000 grant maximum.

4.4.2. It will be fully means tested for all cases including parents/guardians of disabled children.

4.4.3. Grant maximum of £10,000 which will be fully land charged on owner occupier applications for a 10 year period.

4.5. Discretionary contribution grant

4.5.1. Discretionary Contribution Grants are available when an applicant has a contribution to make towards a mandatory DFG based on a financial means test.

4.5.2. The current means test for mandatory DFG’s looks at many factors affecting an applicant’s financial situation including, income, capital, disability, dependents and tenure. The means test then calculates the amount that, based on these factors, the household could either afford to pay or afford to borrow towards their adaptations works. It doesn’t however, take into account that the family may not be able to borrow or could not afford to borrow based on their circumstances. This could lead to an essential adaptation not being undertaken and ultimately, leave a disabled person very vulnerable in their own home.

4.5.3. The grant maximum is £5,000 and will be based on evidence of not having the capital available to cover the contribution. The grant will be fully land charged on owner occupier applications for a 10 year period.

4.6. Relocation grant

4.6.1. Relocation grants will be available for anyone who is currently living in a property that is unsuitable due to their disability, whereby a move to a suitable property would be more beneficial to the applicant than having their current property adapted.

4.6.2. This will be available for both home owners and tenants and will not be means tested. The OT must be involved in the move to assess the new property for suitability. Referral for this grant will come from the OT.

4.6.3. Maximum of £2,000 available as a grant, land charged for home owners at the new property.

4.7. Healthy Home grant

4.7.1. This grant is for minor repairs to properties based on health needs. Available to anyone who is eligible for a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (financial eligibility) and own their own home whereby their home situation is contributing to their health issues. Referral from health care professional or doctor required. Can help with the following Housing Health and Safety Rating system (HHSRS) hazard:

- a) Damp and mould - spores of many moulds and fungi (including timber attacking fungi) can be allergenic. The spores can also be carcinogenic, toxic and cause infections; the potential health effect varying with species.
- b) Excess cold – There are approximately 40,000 more deaths between December and March than in other months of the year due to the cold.
- c) Falls on the stairs and falls on the level – Fall's on stairs account for around 25% of all home falls (fatal and non-fatal). Although fewer falls occur on stairs than on the level, stair falls are much more likely to lead to a class I outcome)

4.7.2. The Grant maximum is £5,000 and the grant is only available to home owners. Fully land charged for a 10 year period.

4.8. Hospital discharge grant

4.8.1. This assistance will allow the discharge from hospital or move on from care to happen much quicker by having a fast-track process for undertaking adaptations - if the reason they are not able to return home is down to their home environment.

4.8.2. Available for minor adaptations to the home to allow for further community OT involvement once the applicant is home. The grant maximum is £5,000 and the grant will not be subject to a financial means test and not land charged in any cases.

5. Eligibility Criteria and Key Facts about Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants

5.1. Applications

5.1.1. All applications for both mandatory and discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants are determined by West Lindsey District Council. Mandatory

DFG's can only be provided to cover the cost of adaptations that are deemed to be *essential* for meeting the disabled person's needs. These are typically any adaptations that the disabled person is wholly dependent upon in order to remain living independently within the property. The council will determine how best to carry out any adaptations, considering both Occupational Therapist recommendations and an assessment of the applicant's home. All alternative means of providing assistance within the home must be trialled before a DFG application will be considered. As a minimum this will include asking for evidence that equipment has been trialled (and is no longer a suitable long term solution) and that the suitability of the property for the disabled person has been assessed.

5.1.2. The council will always seek the most cost effective solution to meeting the disabled person's essential needs. Adaptations will be designed, and grants offered, on this basis. If an applicant makes a specific request for additional work that is not considered to be essential by the council, or makes a request for adaptations to be carried out in a different way to that proposed by the council, the council will limit the amount of grant offered to cover only the essential elements of the request.

5.1.3. Grant applications will only be considered to be 'valid applications' when all of the requested information has been supplied to the council. Failure to provide the necessary financial information, or any other supporting evidence as requested by the council, will result in the closure of a DFG application and applicants will be referred back to their Occupational Therapist to discuss alternative means of support.

5.2. Eligible Applicants:

5.2.1. An applicant is only eligible for a mandatory DFG if a recommendation is received from an Occupational Therapist which will state what is required for the disabled person to remain living independently in the property. Eligibility for all other assistance will be detailed in appendix 1

- Homeowners – an application can be made by the homeowner if the disabled person is living in their house, for example, partner, child, sibling etc.
- Private and socially rented – an application can only be made by the person who holds the tenancy, this can be on behalf of the disabled person. The landlord or owner of the property must give consent for the adaptation.
- Landlords can make applications for a Disabled Facilities Grant on behalf of the disabled tenant.
- Means tests are undertaken on the "relevant person" and their partner for mandatory DFG's. Where the discretionary means test are

undertaken, these will be on either the relevant person and their partner, or, the parent/guardian of the disabled child and their partner

5.3. Eligible properties:

- Dwellings, houseboats and park homes on authorised permanent sites are eligible for assistance. Mandatory grants will only be awarded to adapt the only or main residence of the disabled person.
- The council must be satisfied that the work is necessary and appropriate for the disabled person's needs. It must also be deemed reasonable and can be carried out given the age and condition of the property.
- The council must be satisfied that the disabled person is living suitably within the home (i.e. has permanent use of a suitable bedroom and washing facilities) before allowing any grant work to commence. Grants will not be provided if the council considers that the disabled person would remain at risk, even with adaptations being provided. In such cases the reasons will be provided by the council in writing on the reasons the property has been deemed unsuitable.
- Where the cost of the adaptations is less than £1,000 (usually minor adaptations, such as installing hand rails) the work will be completed by Social Services and the grant application closed.
- Where the cost of the adaptations requested is extensive and beyond what can reasonably be provided within the scope of DFG then the application will be assessed to see if a discretionary grant could be offered.
- A condition of the grant is that the disabled person must intend to occupy the property for at least the full grant period, which is 5 years from the date works are completed. This applies to **all** properties. For landlords, this means that they must accept this 5 year term as a condition of permitting the adaptations.
- Grants for tenants in rented properties (including social rented properties) cannot be awarded if the relevant landlord does not consent to the property being adapted.
- **No grant funding will be awarded if work has started at a property before the council has approved an application.**

6. Approval of grant

6.1. For the application to be approved by West Lindsey District Council, the following must be complete:

- Application
- Determination of financial eligibility
- Quote and plan (if appropriate)
- OT confirmation the adaptation will meet the need of the disabled person

- Consent from landlord or joint home owner
- Any planning permission required

Only at the point all of the above is complete will the application be deemed valid. From the date the application becomes valid, West Lindsey District Council have 6 months to approve the grant

7. Local Land charge

7.1. Where the value of a mandatory grant awarded to a home owner exceeds £5,000 a local land charge will be applied to the property. The land charge will be up to a maximum charge of £10,000 and will remain in place for a 10 year period. If the house is sold during this 10 period, the land charge will be required be repaid in full at the point of sale. Anyone wishing to purchase the property in this time would be made aware of the charge when they, or their solicitor, undertake a Local Land Charge property search.

7.2. Any land charge to be placed onto a property for discretionary grants are detailed in the grant schedules document.

8. Contractors

8.1. Disabled Facilities Grants

8.1.1. All applicants have the choice of which contractor to use to undertake their adaptation. This option will be given to the applicant once the application process is complete.

8.1.2. If the applicant would prefer West Lindsey to select the contractor, adaptations arranged by West Lindsey will be carried out by the council's approved contractor list. This list is updated annually and requires the contractors to provide the following information:

- Insurance Policies
- CRB checks for all employees
- Certificates for membership of any professional bodies
- Signed application forms which details company information
- References
- Signed form agreeing to timescales for providing quotes and undertaking work.

8.1.3. West Lindsey reserves the right to withdraw any contractor from this list at any point throughout the year if there is just reason to do so. Under the

terms of the grant there are limitations on the amount of grant that can be awarded if the applicant wishes to use a family member to complete the work for them. Applicants must discuss this with the council before any work commences and obtain consent in writing if they wish to appoint a family member, to complete the work for them. Failure to do this may result in a grant offer being refused or withdrawn.

8.1.4. Where an applicant asks a contractor to carry out any additional work on-site, the applicant will become fully responsible for both the cost and quality of that work. Contractors are aware that any additional work or agreements to alter an approved scheme must be cleared by the council.

8.1.5. Professional technical fees, up to a maximum of 10% of the total value of the adaptation/building work requested, can be included in the grant application. This amount can cover items such as the production of technical drawings, completing applications for any additional permissions that are needed (such as Planning or Building Control applications) and other professional fees for surveys etc. that are agreed in advance with the council.

9. Completion and Payment

9.1. Adaptations will be considered to have been completed when the necessary work has been completed to an acceptable standard, appropriate for the user. The customer must sign to confirm they are happy with the works that have been undertaken.

9.2. The council will pay the grant once all work has been completed to the satisfaction of both the council and the grant applicant and the following documentation has been received, grants cannot be paid until all documents are returned:

- Invoice (addressed to the customer)
- Signed customer completion form
- Any relevant certificates including electrical
- Building regulation certificate (if required)
- Any warranty documents

10. Maintenance, repairs and warranties

10.1. Applicants should consider purchasing or negotiating extended warranties for any work carried out in their properties or for any specialist equipment installed. This is a matter for the applicant to discuss directly with the contractor and will not affect the council's decision on whether or not to offer grant assistance.

10.2. All stair lifts and through floor lifts come with an extended 5 year warranty

10.3. All works are guaranteed for 12 months, should any problems arise within 12 months of the works being completed, the cost of repair can be covered by West Lindsey. Outside of 12 months, no repairs can be undertaken by West Lindsey and the responsibility will lay with the home owner.

10.4. In addition, the council is not responsible for returning a property to its original condition in the event that any adaptations are removed or no longer required. Applicants and landlords are advised to consider how they will meet any future maintenance and repair costs when applying for and accepting a DFG.

11. Adaptations different to what is recommended

11.1. If an applicant would like a different adaptation to what is recommended by an OT, there is a procedure for undertaking this.

11.2. West Lindsey will have the scheme recommended by the OT drawn. The OT will then have to agree that this plan will meet the needs of the disabled person. At this point, West Lindsey will request 3 quotes for this work from 3 different contractors. West Lindsey will make a financial grant offer based on the quotations received within the limitations of DFG. This grant offer will last for 1 year. Within that year, it is up to the applicant to provide West Lindsey with the following information in order for the grant to be approved:

- Drawings for the adaptation they wish to undertake along with OT approval of these drawings
- All relevant building regulation and planning approval
- Quotation for the work
- Details of the contractor undertaking the works to include company name, address, and registration number (it is down to the applicant to do all relevant checks on the contractor as West Lindsey will accept no responsibility for their work)
- Consent from the landlord if applicable
- CDM action plan

11.3. Once all the above has been received, West Lindsey will formally approve the grant. This grant will be directly paid to the contractor once the works are complete and the above information is provided as detailed in completion and payment.

12. Further DFG information

- 12.1.** On accepting a DFG, the applicant will not be eligible for inclusion on the Housing Register in West Lindsey for at least the full grant period (5 years). Any applicant already on the register will have their application for housing suspended once their DFG application is complete. If the grant application is refused, an applicant's housing register status is not affected.
- 12.2.** The council will always seek to recover in full any grants that are obtained with false or incorrect information. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that the council is made aware as early as possible if they believe that any information they have submitted contains errors or omissions. If the council becomes aware that any false or incorrect information has been supplied before work commences the grant offer may be withdrawn, or put on hold pending additional investigation.
- 12.3.** Applicants that experience a change in their financial circumstances during the application process or after a grant amount has been approved must notify the council immediately. This is to ensure that a reassessment of resources (a revised means test) can be carried out to ensure that the applicant remains eligible for the grant.
- 12.4.** For all grants, except mandatory DFGS any persons who have other debt with Council and/or have been subject to previous property related enforcement action will not be eligible

13. Capital Program for Private Sector Renewal

- 13.1.** Improving the quality of the housing stock and bringing empty properties back into use are major priorities for West Lindsey District Council. With the implementation of the Selective Licensing Scheme in the Gainsborough South West Ward in 2016, the Council recognises that work needs to be undertaken alongside this to assist with problems that arise outside of the private rented sector and assist with recurring problems in the private rented sector.
- 13.2.** Poor housing standards and long term empty properties can have a detrimental impact on the neighbourhood, problems that can occur include:
- Reduction in the value of the property and the neighbouring properties.
 - Environmental health risks from vermin and waste.
 - Hazards to the public through unsafe structures.
 - Focal points for illegal and anti-social behaviour such as fly tipping, vandalism and arson.
 - A strain on other agencies such as Fire and Rescue and Police.
 - A wasted resource when so many people are in need of housing.
 - Increased risk of squatters.

14. Empty Homes

14.1. In West Lindsey, there are currently 971 empty properties. 521 of these are classed as long term empty properties which means they have been empty for 6 months or more. 168 of these long term empty properties are in the Gainsborough area and 83 within the SL area. DCLG classify these as 'problematic empty properties' and these are the properties that this policy aims to tackle.

14.2. There are many reasons that properties are left empty for a long period and West Lindsey recognise this is not always the fault of the home owner. Currently, work is undertaken with empty property owners to assist with bringing empty properties back into use. This policy sets out how West Lindsey aim to develop on from existing work to have a greater impact in the Gainsborough area.

14.3. Private Sector Renewal Policy Objectives

14.3.1. Through the financial assistance outlined in this policy and alongside the on-going statutory and regulatory duties that the Council undertakes this policy aims to:

- Bring long term empty properties back into use
- Improve housing standards in the Gainsborough area
- Increase the supply of good quality private rented properties
- Encourage home ownership
- Prevent properties from falling into a state of disrepair
- Assist land lords to maintain their priorities and offer financial assistance when needed.
- Assist homeowners to maintain their properties to a safe and healthy standard.

14.3.2. These objectives will be monitored through the number of properties brought back into use and the number of housing disrepair and anti-social behaviour complaints that are reported to West Lindsey.

15. Housing Standards

15.1. West Lindsey received 220 housing disrepair complaints in the last 12 months. 76 of these were found to have a category 1 hazard. Many of the complaints received related to damp and mould.

15.2. Through incentives in this policy, West Lindsey aims to reduce the number of housing disrepair cases that are reported by working with landlords to prevent damp and mould occurring through improved ventilation systems.

15.3. Ensuring that properties have the right smoke detection in rented properties is the responsibility of the landlord. However, due to the

design/layout of the properties in the Gainsborough area, assisting with installing systems that can detect earlier and be interlinked throughout the household will reduce the likelihood of death or injury by fire. In some cases these systems would be above and beyond what the usual requirements would be, however they will ensure an increased level of safety to occupants.

16. Summary of assistance

16.1. This table summarises what financial assistance is available to home owners, landlords and potential home owners of current empty properties. The grants are subject to availability of funding and all terms and conditions are set out in the attached grant schedules.

Assistance	Funding Max.	Eligibility	Objective
Empty Property Grant	£10,000	Not Means tested. Property must have been empty for over 6 months.	Bring long term empty properties back into use through encouraging home ownership and owner occupying
Empty Property Purchase	Market value at point of sale	Property must have been empty for over 6 months.	Bring problematic empty properties back into use
First time buyer initiative	£5,000 Deposit match up to 5%	Property must have been empty for over 6 months. First time buyers only.	Assist first time buyers to get onto the property ladder. Bring long term empty properties back into use. Encourage home ownership
Owner Occupier grant	£5000	Home owner for 12 months or more. Means tested	Remove category 1 hazards from owner occupied property to improve health, improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty
Landlord incentive Grant	£2,500	Property must be licenced under Selective licencing, rented out and have no previous enforcement action undertaken.	Improve the standards of the properties in the Selective Licencing area.

16.2. Empty Property grants

- 16.2.1. Assistance available to home owners when the property has been empty for 6 months or more to bring the empty property back into use. The property must be brought back in to use within six months of the grant allocation or the grant has to start to be repaid. This grant will not be subject to a financial means test.
- 16.2.2. A standard specification will be provided to builders to ensure the property can be let, free from hazards, upon completion and ensure the property will be compliant under a selective licensing inspection.
- 16.2.3. No empty property owner will be eligible for a grant if they have any outstanding debts to be owed to the council. The grant maximum is £10,000 and it will be fully land charged for a 5 year period.

16.3. Empty property purchase

- 16.3.1. This assistance is available for West Lindsey District Council to purchase properties that have been empty for 6 months or more. Applications should be submitted by landlords where alternative empty property incentives are not feasible.
- 16.3.2. Properties may also be selected by West Lindsey and will be led by number of complaints received, debts attached to the property or if the council is considering a Compulsory Purchase Order.

16.4. First time Buyer initiative

- 16.4.1. Available to first time buyers purchasing a long term empty property. A grant of up to 5% deposit match can be obtained and the grant maximum is £5,000. It will be fully land charged for a 5 year period.
- 16.4.2. Additionally, this grant can be used in conjunction with the Empty Property Grant, terms and conditions to this apply and are detailed in the grant schedules.

16.5. Owner occupier grant

- 16.5.1. This grant is available to homeowners who have lived in their properties for 12 months or more to assist with rectifying problems in their homes associated with identified category 1 hazards, energy efficiency or improving the visual appearance of the property where they can't afford to resolve these problems themselves.
- 16.5.2. All eligible applications will be subject to a property inspection to identify category 1 hazards based on the current HHSRS assessments (Housing Health and Safety Rating System)

16.5.3. The grant maximum is £5000 and the works must lead to the identified category 1 hazards being removed. This grant is subject to a financial means test and will be fully land charged for a 10 year period.

16.6. Landlord incentive grant

16.6.1. This grant is available to current landlords to assist them in improving the property standards of their rented properties. The intention of this grant is not to take the responsibility away from landlords but to further improve the housing standard. For example, an improved ventilation systems to prevent the house incurring any further damp and mould, interlinked fire alarms or burglar alarms to improve safety and security

16.6.2. The property must be licensed under Selective Licensing and the landlord can have had no previous enforcement action taken against them by West Lindsey District Council.

16.6.3. The grant maximum is £2,500 and this grant will not be subject to a financial means test. The grant will be fully land charged for a 10 year period.

17. Private Sector Renewal

17.1.1. Within the PSR elements of this policy, choice will be available (where appropriate) to the applicant. Where an applicant selects a contractor to carry out scheduled works eligible under the policy the Council will seek to ensure that the chosen contractor has the relevant certification and competency.

17.1.2. Where the Council is providing the works via the grant, contracts will be procured with specific suppliers who will then undertake the relevant works.

17.1.3. Applicants will not be able to use contractors who do not meet the Councils requirements.

18. Decision

18.1. The Council reserves the right to refuse any applications where the assistance provided is discretionary. There will be no right of appeal in regards to decisions that are made and each decision will be explained clearly to the applicant.

18.2. The budget available to support this financial assistance policy will be reviewed on an on-going basis. Where the remaining budget is not sufficient

to support individual applications the offer of assistance will not be available until sufficient budget is available again. Applicants will be made aware of this position should it impact upon their ability to receive assistance.

- 18.3.** All applications must be submitted by the home or land owner and any applicant that has current debt with the Council and/or has faced previous property related enforcement action will not be eligible.

19. Complaints

- 19.1.** Applicants wishing to submit a complaint about the service, challenge a decision issued or to raise a dispute about any work completed, will be referred to the adopted corporate complaints procedure.

20. Policy Review

- 20.1.** This policy will be reviewed annually or as required based on the availability of finance to provide the necessary assistance.