

Item

CAMBRIDGESHIRE ADAPTATIONS & REPAIRS POLICY



To:

Councillor Richard Johnson, Executive Councillor for Housing

Housing Scrutiny Committee 12/03/2019

Report by:

Suzanne Hemingway, David Greening

Tel: 01223 - 457461 Email: suzanne.hemingway@cambridge.gov.uk

Wards affected:

All

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The proposed Cambridgeshire Repairs and Adaptations Policy is aimed at helping people to live safely and independently at home. It stems from requirements for housing, health and social care services to work more closely together to enable people to manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.
- 1.2 It would replace Cambridge City Council's current Grants & Loans Policy. It proposes four categories of financial assistance for eligible residents, together with the option to fund additional partnership projects or other services to meet the objectives of the policy.
- 1.3 This version of the policy is aimed at Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Council residents, to support the delivery of adaptation and repair works through the shared service Home Improvement Agency.

- 1.4 Separate arrangements are in place for council tenants for interventions funded through the Housing Revenue Account.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 2.1.1. Approve the draft Adaptations & Repairs Policy shown at Appendix A to this report; and
- 2.1.2 Give delegated authority to the Strategic Director to make decisions - in consultation with the Executive Councillor, Chair & Vice Chair of Housing Scrutiny Committee, and Housing Opposition Spokesperson - around whether to convert capital DFG grant to revenue, should the DFG grant conditions allow; to fund partnership projects or other services to meet the objectives of the draft Adaptations & Repairs Policy shown at Appendix A to this report.

3. Background

Page: 2

- 3.1. Government grant has historically been paid to district councils in two tier authorities to help meet their statutory obligations around providing home adaptations for disabled people. Cambridge City Council currently uses this money to provide mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants to older and disabled people (other than those living in council homes) to adapt their homes.
- 3.2 Since 2015-16 the grant funding has been channelled to the districts via the health-led Better Care Fund (BCF), which aims to join up health and care services so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.
- 3.3 Alongside putting the funding through the Better Care Fund, the government promised a phased increase in the national allocation up to 2019-20. For the year 2018-19 Cambridge City Council received just over £692k in capital grant; the allocation for 2019/20 is expected to rise from that figure, but this is yet to be confirmed. A proportion of this is being 'top-sliced' by Cambridgeshire county council to fund new prevention pathways.

- 3.4 A county-wide project was carried out in 2016-17 to review the joint approach to DFGs. Alongside an agreement to improve upstream prevention and intervention, one of the outputs from the review was a joint Adaptations Agreement, signed up to by key partners, including the five districts. This included a commitment to making better use of the DFG grant funding available, and to supporting a joined up approach to improving outcomes across health, social care and housing.
- 3.5 The draft policy for the five Cambridgeshire districts builds on that commitment. It aims to achieve a joint policy for home adaptations and other interventions which could be funded through the government grant. Although the aim has been to achieve consistency across the five districts, a few differences remain, reflecting local priorities. This version aims for as much consistency as possible across Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils, to support delivery of works through the shared service Home Improvement Agency for the three districts.
- 3.6 There remains a statutory duty on local authorities to provide mandatory Disabled Facilities to eligible applicants.
- 3.7 Cambridge City Council currently earmarks additional capital of £190k per year from its own resources to help fund additional discretionary assistance beyond DFGs. This has historically tended to be underspent, with the underspend remaining available for other priorities through the housing capital programme.
- 3.8 The policy makes clear that discretionary elements of the proposed policy (ie DFG Top Up, Relocation, Special Purposes Assistance, and spending on partnership work or other services) will only be able to be funded if there is sufficient money available over and above legal requirements around DFGs.
- 3.9 The council's current approach to mandatory DFGs and other discretionary interventions is through the council's Grants and Loans (Regulatory Reform Order) policy 2007. Other districts have their own existing policies which can vary considerably across the districts.
- 3.10 Cambridge City Council's existing policy currently offers ten different grants and loans:

- i. Disabled Facilities Grant up to £30k for adults on low incomes. Not means tested for children (strict legal requirements exist around the maximum amount payable, eligibility and means testing);
- ii. Top up loans of up to £15k for those eligible for DFG where work would increase the value of the property;
- iii. Top up grants of up to £15k for those eligible for DFG where work would not increase the value of the property;
- iv. Relocation grants of up to £30k for moving costs for applicants eligible for DFG, where the current property cannot be adapted or where costs would be excessive;
- v. Special Purpose Assistance loans for owners of up to £15,000, where work is required as part of DFG works but is not eligible for DFG funding;
- vi. Repair grants of up to £5k for owners on low incomes with less than £20k savings;
- vii. Repair loans of up to £20k for those eligible for repair grant;
- viii. Home energy grants of up to £1k for owners on low incomes with less than £20k savings;
- ix. Quick hit grants of up to £1k for home owners aged over 60 with up to £20k savings;
- x. Decorating grants of up to £5k for applicants aged over 60 or disabled and on low incomes.

3.11 The proposed new policy would be used to cover many of the same sorts of interventions already provided, but under just four headings, which should be more flexible, and be simpler to understand and administer.

3.12 It also includes the option to fund wider services or partnership projects which might help to meet the objectives of the policy.

3.13 Some potential applicants may be better off under the new system, and some may be worse off. However, it aims to be more flexible and to provide a more outcome based and person-centred approach to meeting individual needs.

3.13 It is hoped that being more flexible around how the money is used could help to reduce demand for mandatory DFGs. For example, preventative

measures such as helping people to make informed choices about their housing options could in some cases help to prevent the need for a more expensive adaptation.

- 3.14 As well as representatives from the districts and other Home Improvement Agencies, representatives from Cambridgeshire County Council and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group were involved in developing the policy. The Integrated Commissioning Board (the group responsible for the Better Care Fund) were the project commissioners and had input into the policy.
- 3.15 Consultation was carried out with key groups, including potential service user groups, during July to September 2018. The Older People's Partnership Board and Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment Partnership Board also had some input into the policy during the development stage.
- 3.16 Changes made as a result of consultation, apart from attempting to make some elements clearer included:
- a) Adding prevention of admission to residential schools, and savings in the health and education sectors to the objectives of the policy;
 - b) Adding work to make a home dementia friendly;
 - c) Adding an option to fund wider partnership projects or other services which would help to meet the objectives of this policy;
 - d) Widening the scope for relocation assistance to be paid beyond just where an existing home cannot be adapted, including spending on relocation where it would be better and cheaper than a DFG higher up the list of priorities.
- 3.18 A national review of DFGs was recently carried out, and the government's response is awaited. This draft policy aims to be flexible to allow for any national policy changes which may arise.
- 3.19 The other districts are in the process of putting their versions of the policy through their formal decision making processes. Subject to this approval, the policy would run from early April 2019.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

Page: 6

It is intended that the Policy will be implemented within existing resources. However, as a self-financing service, there could be potential revenue implications for the shared Home Improvement Agency if their costs were to increase as a result of the new policy, and they were unable to sufficiently recoup these costs through fees or other income.

(b) Staffing Implications

There are no immediate staffing implications, although if the launch of the policy were to lead to increased demand for adaptations and other works, the shared service Home Improvement may need to consider recruiting additional staff.

(c) Equality and Poverty Implications

An equality impact assessment has been carried out and is available as a background paper.

(d) Environmental Implications

NIL impact.

The new policy allows for adaptations and repairs, including home energy improvement and other works in people's homes, with potential positive and negative impacts on the environment. However, the current policy it replaces also supports such works. Any change in environmental impact would relate to changes in demand for adaptations and repairs, which are not currently possible to assess.

(e) Procurement Implications

There are no direct procurement implications, as the proposed new policy allows for similar types of works already procured under the existing policy through the Home Improvement Agency.

(f) Community Safety Implications

There are no community safety implications.

5. Consultation and communication considerations

Consultation took place with key partners and other groups. These groups will be contacted to advise them of the new policy and how the consultation helped shape the policy.

6. Background papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

- (a) Cambridge City Council Grants & Loans (Regulatory Reform Order) Policy 2007.
- (b) Comparison with Cambridge City's current policy.
- (c) Equality Impact Assessment.

7. Appendices

- (a) Appendix A: Cambridgeshire Adaptations & Repairs Policy – Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire.
- (b) Appendix B: Cambridgeshire Adaptations and Repairs Policy Summary of Policy – Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire.

8. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Helen Reed, Housing Strategy Manager, tel: 01223 - 457943, email: helen.reed@cambridge.gov.uk.