

Agenda Item

REPORT OF Public Health and Community Safety Manager

To: Full Council

Subject: Housing Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund

Date: 30 October 2023

Reference:

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To review and update the Authority's Housing Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund (BCF).

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council is obliged to fund Disabled Facilities Grants under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Ring-fenced funding is provided for this purpose through the Better Care Fund (BCF). BCF resources can be used to support other BCF metrics, as agreed by the local BCF priorities. In Devon, the BCF priorities are:

- Reduced admissions to residential and nursing care homes
- Reduce delayed transfers of care
- Reduce avoidable emergency admissions
- Increase dementia diagnosis rates

In order to better meet these priorities, the Council is able to offer discretionary assistance. To offer any assistance over and above the mandatory DFG, Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 requires the Council to adopt and publish a policy outlining the assistance on offer and any conditions associated with the assistance.

The current Housing Assistance Policy is dated 2019-2022. Although there is no requirement to review the policy within a certain timeframe, it has been around four years since the last substantive update. Alterations to practice and guidance within this time need to be considered and incorporated into the policy.

There is no legal requirement to consult on the policy. However, we have consulted with other Devon districts, Devon County Council and Foundations. Foundations are the national Body for Disabled Facilities Grant practice and delivery, contracted by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to provide best practice guidance with regard to delivery of financial assistance.

The ring-fenced funding is provided from central government via the Social Services authority (DCC) annually. Torridge currently undertakes between 50 and 100 adaptations annually, alongside the provision of other discretionary assistance. The number of adaptations required each year is determined by the referrals received from the Occupational Therapy team at

DCC. Adaptations range from a few thousand pounds for a stairlift, to the £50,000 grant limits for major adaptations.

The funding and spend for the last four full financial years is outlined in the table below:

Financial year	Budget	Spend
2023-2024	£1,366,310	YTD: £347,080 + ~£1m commitment
2022-2023	£1,264,464	£797,333
2021-2022	£1,035,422	£775,563
2020-2021	£996,553	£996,553
2019-2020	£1,261,688	£1,303,633

2. REPORT

A summary of the assistance and the main changes to the policy can be found in Appendix A.

The full revised policy is included in Appendix B.

3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

The proposed changes bring the policy up to date with current legislation and good practice and ensure that grant limits, conditions and the consideration of exceptional circumstances are clearly laid out.

Financial Implications

The proposed policy includes updated language on policy limits and exceptions. This gives clarity to Council officers and service users, ensuring that policy limits are adhered to in all but the most exceptional cases.

Human Resources Implications

None

Sustainability Implications

The policy includes grant and loan funding options to help households in Torridge improve the quality of their homes. This ensures that care can be provided and homes can be healthier for those who are identified under the policy as disabled, vulnerable or on a low income.

Equality/Diversity

None

Risk Management

There is a risk of legal, financial and reputational damage to the Council if it does not have an up to date and robust policy.

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

The policy aligns with other Policies and Strategies.

Data Protection (GDPR) Implications

None

Climate Change

Some grant and loan funding can be used to install energy efficiency measures, thus reducing the carbon footprint of dwellings within Torridge.

Lead Member Views

Councillor Hackett, Lead Member, has been consulted and is happy to support the policy.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Housing Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund (2023-2026) sets out the assistance on offer, both mandatory and discretionary. The policy has been revised to ensure it reflects best practice, local strategies (district and Devon-wide) and other priorities.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended:

1. that Members approve the revised Housing Assistance Policy for the Better Care Fund for adoption and agree to a publication (introduction) date of 01 December 2023.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Consultations:	See above
Contact Officer:	Phil Gilbert
Background Papers:	None.