

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Thursday, 1 February 2024 at 2.00 pm
Council Chamber - South Kesteven House,
St. Peter's Hill, Grantham. NG31 6PZ

Committee

Members: Councillor Nikki Manterfield (Chairman)

Councillor Steven Cunnington (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Pam Byrd, Councillor Robert Leadenhams, Councillor Penny Milnes,
Councillor Virginia Moran, Councillor Habibur Rahman, Councillor Vanessa Smith
and Councillor Sarah Trotter

Agenda

This meeting can be watched as a live stream, or at
a later date, [via the SKDC Public-1 Channel](#)

1. Public Speaking

The Council welcomes engagement from members of the public.

To speak at this meeting please register no later than 24 hours

prior to the date of the meeting via

democracy@southkesteven.gov.uk

2. Apologies for absence

3. Disclosure of Interest

Members are asked to disclose any interest in matters for
consideration at the meeting.

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01476 406080

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
www.southkesteven.gov.uk

4. **Minutes from the meeting held on 14 December 2023** (Pages 3 - 14)
5. **Updates from the previous meeting** (Page 15)
To receive updates on actions agreed at the previous meeting.
6. **Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service**
7. **Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan** (Pages 17 - 27)
This report provides an update on the council's actions to meet its responsibilities under the Armed Forces Act and the Armed Forces Covenant, achievements under the Council's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award engagement and advocacy agendas and plans for the coming year.
8. **Council in the Community** (Pages 29 - 34)
The purpose of this report is to provide an update on two outreach initiatives that were instigated in 2023, namely Council in the Community and SK Funding Workshops. This report provides an overview of both initiatives, their impact and outlines future plans for such community engagement.
9. **Cost of Living Team Update** (Pages 35 - 55)
The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a background regarding Household Support Fund, the formation of the Cost of Living Team and an update regarding the activity undertaken by the team, number of residents supported, value of support provided and an update regarding District, County and National activities.
10. **Private Sector Housing Adoptions Policy** (Pages 57 - 136)
The Council currently provides discretionary disabled facility grants (DFG) for adaptations to private residential dwellings within the district, in addition to its mandatory DFGs requirement. The Council is required to publish a policy if it provides discretionary DFGs and the existing Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is out of date and due for review. The report provides the updated options of the policy for consideration.
11. **Work Programme 2023-24** (Pages 137 - 139)
To receive the Work Programme for 2023-24.
12. **Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent**

Minutes

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



SOUTH
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Thursday, 14 December 2023, 2.00 pm

Council Chamber – South Kesteven
House, St. Peter's Hill, Grantham.
NG31 6PZ

Committee Members present

Councillor Nikki Manterfield (Chairman)
Councillor Steven Cunningham (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Pam Byrd
Councillor Robert Leadenhurst
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Vanessa Smith
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Helen Crawford
Councillor Charmaine Morgan

Cabinet Members present

Councillor Ashley Baxter (Deputy Leader of the Council)

Other Members present

Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Graham Jeal
Councillor Ian Selby

Officers

Graham Watts (Assistant Director of Governance and Public Protection)
Karen Whitfield (Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure)
Claire Moses (Head of Service - Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community)
Debbie Roberts (Head of Corporate Projects, Policy and Performance)
Carol Drury (Community Engagement Manager)
Michael Chester (Team Leader – Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces)
Charles James (Policy Officer)
Amy Pryde (Democratic Services Officer)

28. Public Speaking

There were none.

29. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Habib Rahman, Virginia Moran and Sarah Trotter.

Councillor Charmaine Morgan substituted for Councillor Virginia Moran.

Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing substituted for Councillor Habib Rahman.

Councillor Helen Crawford substituted for Councillor Sarah Trotter.

30. Disclosure of Interest

There were none.

31. Minutes from the meeting held on 11 October 2023

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2023 were a correct and accurate record.

32. Updates from the previous meeting

All actions were completed.

33. Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service

The Deputy Leader of the Council confirmed he had nothing to report. He wished the Committee a Merry Christmas.

34. Statement on Grantham Hospital

Councillor Charmaine Morgan provided the Committee with a verbal update on Grantham Hospital.

One Member requested that the Chief Executive or a Member of the United Lincolnshire Hospital Trust be invited to a future Committee meeting to answer questions.

It was further requested that the Chairman of ICB be invited to a future Committee meeting to clarify queries relating to the poor health provision in the south of the County.

The Chairman highlighted that South Kesteven District Council were very limited in terms of making decisions on health provision.

Councillor Charmaine Morgan declared that she was the District's representative on the Health Scrutiny Committee at Lincolnshire County Council and would be willing to pass on any concerns.

35. Mid-year KPIs

The Policy Officer presented the report that outlined South Kesteven District Councils performance against the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the year of 2023/24.

2023/24 was the final year of monitoring for the existing KPIs. A refresh of the Corporate Plan was currently underway. All Members had the opportunity to engage in the development of the new Corporate Plan, which would be adopted in the January 2024. To accompany the new Corporate Plan, a new suite of KPIs will be developed to reflect the priorities, ambitions and actions of the new Plan. These KPIs will be approved by each Committee and reporting will commence from April 2024.

Appendix A of the report presented the overall performance against the five actions being presented, as well as specific performance against the sub measures contained within those. Specific commentary was provided for each action, which is summarised as follows:

- 3 of the actions are rated Green. These are actions which are on or above target as planned.
- 1 of the actions is rated Amber. This is an action which is currently below the planned target.
- 1 of the actions is rated Red. This is an action, which is currently significantly below the planned target.

Members expressed their disappointment of the KPI relating to safeguarding training percentages having a rating of red. It was queried as to why safeguarding training was not being actioned as a priority.

The Senior Management Team had been tasked on ensuring all of their staff were up-to-date with safeguarding training in hope to improve the percentage.

One Member raised a specific concern around the process of certain housing safeguarding issues within council-run housing and whether the concern would be dealt with internally by the Housing department. It was suggested that all safeguarding matters be referred to the appropriate outside body, to maintain the same level of transparency throughout.

ACTION: For an update on safeguarding to be brought to the next Committee meeting and for the relevant Officer to be in attendance.

Concern was raised on the high level of staff turnover and why staff could not be retained.

A recent report had been taken to the Employment Committee which had demonstrated that the staff turnover was relatively low compared to previous years. Members were referred to the dashboard information presented to the Employment Committee recently.

It was clarified that all Members of staff were required to complete safeguarding training.

A Member highlighted the importance of the Community Fund meetings and Members were encouraged to give more priority to it.

Concern was raised on the 45% KPI target for safeguarding training and how this could be improved. Previous issues had been discussed around colleagues accessing computers etc.

It was queried as to whether the Council were sending out staff untrained, rising waiting times, or whether small number of staff trained had rising workloads. It was further queried what current implications were in place and what mitigations were in place short-term.

The Assistant Director of Governance and Public Protection suggested that the Committee recommend for Managers part of the Senior Management Team ensure their staff attend safeguarding training.

The Committee were assured that certain service areas and frontline services were required to give a more significant weight to safeguarding, due to the nature of their role and had all completed significant safeguarding training.

The online training was accessed through an online training account of Lincolnshire County Council. It was noted that issues in the way in which the data was tracked on our system may have caused issues.

It was further suggested that the Committee receive further assurances that people are not being put into the field untrained in safeguarding, which would be a breach of the authority's requirement.

It was clarified that all Members of staff were required to undertake e-learning modules which was facilitated by Lincolnshire County Council, however, staff in specific fields were trained to a higher level.

A further breakdown was requested in relation to safeguarding training on who required advanced training and how far the training had progressed.

It was noted that the Repairs Team and Council contractors were of a high importance to complete advanced training due to visiting people's houses.

One Member queried whether there were any reinforcement of refreshment in-person training.

The Community Engagement Manager clarified that every member of staff and Elected Member were required to complete a level of safeguarding training. The training followed a six-year training pathway and was put forward by the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Childrens Partnership and the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board, whether that be e-learning or face-to-face sessions. The Council followed their training as they were the responsible body. For members of staff that couldn't access computers, face-to-face training would be delivered by Officers.

Clarification was sought around the 90% target of staff receiving safeguarding training and the current percentage being 45%. It was suggested that a target be set for mid-year rather than the end of the year, in order to measure the likelihood of achieving the annual target.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the Committee:

- 1. Review and scrutinise the performance against the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators in relation to the delivery of the Corporate Plan priorities and outcomes.**
- 2. Use this report to inform and support the ongoing work programme of the Committee**
- 3. For the Committee to receive a further report on a breakdown of staff training and the type of training they require, as well as the progress made against each service area, including contractors and the safeguarding process within Housing.**

36. Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan

The Community Engagement Manager presented the report which outlined the Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan for 2024-27. A report had previously been brought to the Committee to seek views of Members on the development of the strategy.

A public consultation was then held via the Council's website and direct opportunities were offered to the voluntary and community sector organisations within South Kesteven to comment on the proposed content. The response to the consultation was higher from residents than it was from community groups, with general agreement of what was proposed.

It was clarified that the strategy would be amended to reflect the new Corporate Plan and the plan would become a living document and could be developed over time.

The Council's Armed Forces Lead Member made the following statement:

'As Armed Forces Lead Member, I welcome the inclusion of the Armed Forces Covenant, the Armed Forces Community and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in the proposed Community Engagement and Development Strategy. I further welcome the Armed Forces actions included in the accompanying Action Plan 2024 – 2027. I support the recommendation at Item 9 of today's meeting that the Committee recommends to Cabinet its adoption to complement the Council's emerging corporate priority of Connected Communities.

I will also suggest a few minor amendments to the Action Plan for your consideration as follows:

- *Sixth action – ‘Continue to ensure the Council’s compliance with the Armed Forces Act and its associated duties’. Include elected Members in ‘What success means’ (Well-informed officers who understand what is necessary to comply with the Act).*
- *Ninth action – ‘Develop an effective working relationship with the Lincolnshire Armed Forces Officer to explore opportunities for collaboration’. Add a similar action for the Armed Forces Lead Member / Champion to ‘develop an effective working relationship with the Lincolnshire Armed Forces Champion’.*
- *Seventeenth action – ‘Encourage staff within food businesses to sign up as Army catering Reserves for training/upskilling’:*
- *Amend designations to read ‘167 Catering Support Regiment RLC’ and ‘Army Reserve catering school’.*
- *Add ‘Encourage SKDC Members and staff to sign up as Army Reserves for training in the range of command and control, contract management, labour support, catering and logistic support jobs available’ partnering ‘PWoG Barracks Army reserve units’ with success meaning ‘To increase reservist sign up across a range of military disciplines with consequent individual, collective and organisational benefits to SKDC’.*

One Member suggested that Members be included within the engagement of Communities.

The Head of Services (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) clarified that Members would be made aware of anything that came out of the plan on a case by case basis, rather than the inclusion of an action relating specifically to Members.

One Member queried whether there was an age limit on reserve training.

It was confirmed that there was an age limit of 43 years old for the reserves and was wider than it was for the regulars.

It was further requested that the strategy and plan include the involvement of elected Members being consulted.

The Committee were reassured that the report would come back every six months, and Officers would ensure that elected Members be updated.

The Committee and report author accepted the suggested amendments.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the Committee:

- 1. Considers the Community Engagement and Development Strategy and recommends to Cabinet its adoption to complement the Council's emerging corporate priority of Connected Communities.**
- 2. Following the implementation of the Community Engagement and Development Strategy this Committee agrees to receive an update every six months on the progress and delivery of the Action Plan.**

37. Customer Service Update (Q1 and Q2)

The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) presented the report which provided the Committee with the Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 position regarding customer interactions and call handling within the Customer Service Team and high contact Services Areas.

The report also provided an update regarding various projects being undertaken by the Customer Service Team and a review of the customer service action plan.

The table and graphs on paragraph 2.5 onwards of the report provided figures of customer interactions received into the Customer Service Team since the 1 April 2023 to the 30 September 2023. The interaction figures were broken down by e-method and traditional methods.

The tables in paragraph 2.10 and 2.13 of the report provided the customer contact handled by Customer Services during Quarter 1 and Quarter 2. There had been an increase in customer contact in Quarter 2 from 47,420 to 50,412. Despite the increase, the number of calls handled had increased from 75% to 81% and had further increased to 83% as at the beginning of December 2023.

There had been a significant reduction in calls to the switchboard, meaning that callers were being re-directed to the service area at point of contact. Week commencing 27 November 2023, 452 calls went straight to the switchboard, in comparison to 657 for the same week in 2022. Week commencing 4 December 2023, there were 281 calls directed to the switchboard, compared to 685 for the same week in 2022. This meant switchboard Officers were able to undertake other work whilst not answering calls.

It was noted that the Deepings and Stamford walk in offices had been closed. As part of the customer experience strategy, a working group had been formed for 2024 and the service offer for the Deepings and Stamford would be discussed. This review would be included as an action within the customer experience strategy.

One Member raised concern of vulnerable residents in the Deepings and Stamford, who no longer had access to a walk-in office for face-to-face communication with Customer Services.

It was queried as to whether the location of calls received was monitored.

The technology used by Officers did not allow access to the location of where the person was calling from. Customer services would complete a request form when speaking to a caller, where that data would be gathered.

Clarification was sought around the figures relating to online forms.

A query was raised in relation to the Bourne Library, and whether Bourne Town Council were able to assist residents with blue badges and bus passes, as this fell under the responsibility of Lincolnshire County Council.

The Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) clarified that the funding provided by Lincolnshire County Council was purely for the library service and any further support was not funded for. The blue badges and bus pass forms were online, and computers were available at Bourne library for residents to utilise.

It was queried whether any provision had been put into place for the possible increase in calls during the rollout of the 'purple bin scheme'.

The Council were being heavily supported by Lincolnshire County Council colleagues, who were proving 2 FTE members of staff to deal with all enquiries, any overflows would be dealt with by SKDC colleagues. It was unknown as to how many queries the Council would receive; however, this would be monitored on a daily basis.

The customer experience strategy would be drafted in due course and be brought back to the Committee for review at a later date.

Concern was raised on significant changes in staffing and a high number of staff resigning. It was queried as to whether Officers were aware of the reasoning of high staff turnover.

It was clarified that the changes in staffing was mostly down to staff relocating to a different department within the organisation, to develop further opportunities.

The FTE was a lot less than it was in Quarter 1 (6.23) and Quarter 2 (4.42). In Quarter 2, new staff were trained within service areas.

The Customer Service Team dealt with 18 service areas. When an internal vacancy arises, the customer service staff were well positioned to be able to apply for a role.

One Member raised a query on whether customer services had any succession paths or ways of progression.

It was confirmed that within the team are Officers, Lead Customer Service Advisors and a Manager. The current way in which the role was graded was being reviewed and potential ways of succession.

A preview of the significant number of projects taking place across customer services in individual service areas was requested.

The projects taking place were set out with appendix 2 of the report pack:

- Twin Stream Bin Rollout
- Garden Waste Collections (2024)
- Replacement of Customer Service document management system
- Customer Service Centre – move to new location (Unit 1, The Picture House)
- Launch of Citizens Access portal (Revenues – Council Tax) – Phase 1
- Review of new website
- Virtual Operator Service
- Launch of Citizens Access portal (Revenues – Council Tax) – Phase 2: Moves in, out and within the District
- Customer Experience Strategy Review
- Launch of Citizens Access portal (Revenues – Council Tax) – Phase 3: Students and Severely Mentally Impaired – reporting and forms

It was queried as to how the 83% target for the call centre satisfaction level was benchmarked, as the percentage seemed low.

The target was set at 85%, which was not based on any data or analysis. As part of the customer experience strategy, the satisfaction level rate could be reviewed. The Customer Service Team were not a call centre and they dealt with more complex queries.

That the Committee

1. Notes the report and are invited to ask questions relating to the report

38. South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan

The Team Leader – Leisure, Parks and Open Spaces presented the report.

Cabinet had formally adopted the Lincolnshire District Council's Health and Wellbeing strategy at their meeting in March 2023. The strategy contained an action plan detailing interventions across Lincolnshire, which would improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

When agreeing to adopt the strategy, a commitment was also made to develop a bespoke action plan specific to the district of South Kesteven.

Since March 2023, a significant amount of work had been undertaken by Officers to develop the Local Plan which accompanies the South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan.

The responsibilities of the Council was discussed and how they could be managed.

Members welcomed certain areas of the strategy and that Housing and Homelessness was a key element of the action plan.

Clarification was sought around the meaning of economic inclusion.

The action plan detailed each of the lever areas. Economic inclusion was reducing economic inequalities and alleviating poverty as a fundamental driver for improving mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Concern was raised on the report stating that there were no financial implications.

The Deputy Leader of the Council clarified that the comments of the Officer within the report would usually be based on whether the Committee were being asked to utilise any money specifically, as part of the production of the report. It was likely that there would be financial implications when achieving actions of the plan in due course.

Members welcomed the report and thanked Officers for the detailed report.

One Member queried how the action plan would be managed and monitored moving forward.

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Endorses the South Kesteven Health and Wellbeing Action Plan aimed at achieving improved health and wellbeing outcomes for the residents of South Kesteven.**
- 2. Agrees to receive an update report in six months' time on the delivery of the actions identified.**

39. Work Programme 2023-24

The Committee noted the Work Programme 2023-24.

The following item was added to the Work Programme for the meeting being held on 28 March 2024:

- Rural Crime Update

One Member requested that referrals and a breakdown of levels of concern in regard to Safeguarding be discussed by the Committee.

Another Member requested that a response from the Health Trust be discussed by the Committee at a future meeting.

40. Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

The Chairman wished the Committee a Merry Christmas.

41. Close of meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting at 15:45.

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Action Sheet

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Actions from meeting of 14 December 2023

Min no	Agenda item	Action	Assigned to	Comments/Status	Deadline
35	Mid-year KPIs	For an update on safeguarding to be brought to the next Committee meeting and for the relevant Officer to be in attendance.	Jodie Archer (Head of Housing Services and Safeguarding Lead)	Verbal update to be provided at the meeting.	Complete

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Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1 February 2024

Report of Councillor Rhea Rayside
Cabinet Member for People and
Communities

Armed Forces Covenant Update

Report Author

Debbie Nicholls. Armed Forces Officer

 debbie.nicholls@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

This report provides an update on the council's actions to meet its responsibilities under the Armed Forces Act and the Armed Forces Covenant, achievements under the Council's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award engagement and advocacy agendas and plans for the coming year.

Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. Notes the Annual Armed Forces Engagement Report and comments on the content.

Decision Information	
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities? (delete as appropriate)	Connected Communities Sustainable South Kesteven Enabling Economic Opportunities Housing Effective Council
Which wards are impacted?	All wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance

1.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

1.2 There are no significant legal or governance implications arising from this report.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 The Armed Forces Covenant update is a retrospective of work carried out within 2023/24. The document also contains actions for delivery during 2024/25 and is attached at Appendix A.
- 2.2 The report is provided as detailed background to, and information on, how the Council is meeting, and exceeding, its responsibilities relating to the Armed Forces Community Covenant.

- 2.3 The actions for delivery are referenced throughout Appendix A, and detailed further within the Community Engagement and Development Strategy which was presented to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 December 2023. The strategy will be presented to Cabinet on 6 February 2024 for approval.
- 2.4 The report further illustrates the work of the council's Armed Forces Officer, backed by the authority's Armed Forces Champion, to deliver the council's advocacy and engagement commitments of its Gold Award status within the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 Key areas for Members to consider are contained within the accompanying appendix.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 This report is for information therefore no other options were considered.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 To ensure Members are kept up-to-date with actions taken to meet the requirements of the Armed Forces Act and to inform on progress relating to engagement and advocacy activity.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 Armed Forces Covenant Update 2022 can be found at:
[Armed Forces - Advocacy and Community Engagement.pdf](https://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/Armed%20Forces%20-%20Advocacy%20and%20Community%20Engagement.pdf)
(southkesteven.gov.uk)
- 6.2 Community Engagement and Development Strategy which was presented to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 December 2023 (agenda item 9): [Agenda for Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 14th December, 2023, 2.00 pm | South Kesteven District Council](https://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/Agenda%20for%20Rural%20and%20Communities%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee%20on%20Thursday,%2014th%20December,%202023,%202.00%20pm%20%7CSouth%20Kesteven%20District%20Council)

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Armed Forces Engagement Report

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Armed Forces Engagement

An annual update report



Our work and vision for the future

South Kesteven District Council is a proud holder of the prestigious Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award recognising exceptional levels of advocacy and support for the Armed Forces.

It's an accolade awarded by the Ministry of Defence to less than 900 organisations within the UK.

The Council employs a dedicated Armed Forces Officer, supported by an elected member Armed Forces Champion, and has designated officers delivering specialist support within the revenues and benefits, cost of living and housing teams.

Its Gold Award status has already encouraged SKDC to be ambitious in its support for the military community with further plans in the pipeline.

External military engagement sits alongside specific legal requirements under the council's long-standing signature to the Armed Forces Covenant - now enshrined in law under the Armed Forces Act.

The Act came into full force in November 2022. It conveys a duty requiring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, suffer no disadvantage because of their service.

It requires in-scope organisations such as SKDC to help serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families have the same equality of access to public services as civilians, recognising the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces.

Census data confirms 8693 military veterans live in the district (7.37% of the population aged over 16), putting it seventh on the national league table and adding weight to the council's responsibilities to support veterans.

Armed Forces initiatives come under the remit of the council's Community Engagement team, which monitors all new announcements of census data including veterans' characteristics, living arrangements and financial situations - with more information expected in 2024.

The three specific duties under the new Armed Forces Act relate to housing, education and health; the primary responsibility for SKDC being housing, and the need to consider that:

- Veterans may find it hard to engage with and trust professionals who have no military background
- Veterans take longer on average than others before asking for help.

The Council's Armed Forces actions and responsibilities can be divided into four key areas - all helping to deliver its Corporate Objectives:

- Armed Forces Act
- Commemorating heritage
- Advocacy
- Engagement

South Kesteven District Council Armed Forces Covenant contacts



Armed Forces Officer: Debbie Nicholls
debbie.nicholls@southkesteven.gov.uk

Armed Forces Champion: Cllr Richard Dixon-Warren
Richard.Dixon-Warren@southkesteven.gov.uk

Armed Forces Act

South Kesteven District Council, along with all Armed Forces Covenant signatories, will shortly be audited on performance and compliance after the first full year of the Armed Forces Act.

This will be done via the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee, reporting directly to the Defence Minister.

The Armed Forces Officer has helped to ensure that council duties on housing are recognised with robust processes on service delivery. Specific considerations relating to our service delivery include:

- Armed Forces Act requirements are reflected in the Council's 'people first' housing allocations policy.
- Anyone applying to join the housing register is asked whether they have served,
- The Act requires that anyone leaving the military can apply for housing anywhere in the country, so an applicant can claim exemption from the normal restrictions
- Lincolnshire's homeless strategy recognises that the location of work can establish eligibility, rather than being identified by their last military base

Across other Lincolnshire authorities, however, there are potentially service delivery gaps between councils and important sectors of their local population: military and ex-military, their families and children.

The Council is therefore co-funding a shared Armed Forces Officer for Lincolnshire, along with continuing its specific commitment of a dedicated Armed Forces Officer for South Kesteven.

The new post will ensure that district authority colleagues meet the requirements of the Armed Forces Covenant and that advice and delivery to the county's defence community

More specifically, SKDC has been at the forefront of reconvening the Lincolnshire Community Covenant Partnership to engage partners in support for defence and assist with pan-Lincolnshire compliance.



Armed Forces Champion chairing county partnership

OpFORTITUDE



Specialist officers engaging with veterans

Actions to date:

- ✓ All staff now have access to Armed Forces e-learning modules
- ✓ Housing officers have access to Op FORTITUDE - a centralised Covenant Trust-funded referral pathway from housing association Riverside which aims to end veteran homelessness - www.riverside.org.uk/
- ✓ Armed Forces champions are now established in housing and revenues and benefits, backed by the cost of living team
- ✓ Armed Forces Champion is chairing the re-convened Lincolnshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Partnership

Actions going forward:

- Work with Armed Forces Outreach Service to improve the lives of ex-military locally - armedforcesoutreachservice.org
- Ensure new starters are aware of SKDC's Armed Forces commitments
- Work to support the Lincolnshire Armed Forces Community Covenant
- Support and work with the new shared services postholder
- Explore pan-Lincolnshire potential to provide Veterans Housing

Corporate objectives:

- Sustainable South Kesteven
- Enabling Economic Opportunity

Commemorating Heritage

Our recognition and celebration of the district's military heritage and key wartime milestones was looked on extremely favourably in the council's application for the DERS Gold Award – all part of our advocacy role to engage the public with defence.

Further research has now identified new and unique local WW2 history, separate to but complementing that of Lincolnshire's Bomber Command label and the work of Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire.

Our new focus is on South Kesteven's local links with allied airborne forces from Britain, America and Poland. This has now been developed by a Council-coordinated research group of specialists into a new visitor trail: the Airborne Forces Heritage Trail with potential to deliver economic benefits from heritage tourism.

The trail has the potential to deliver economic benefits from heritage tourism visitors.

A trail feasibility study was conducted by the Arnhem 1944 Fellowship in April 2023, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the Council is submitting a funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in January 2024.

The trail is supported by the Council's Corporate Management Team and secured £15,000 of match funding from UK SPF Board towards an HLF bid.



Operation Sustainer – upskilling opportunities for food sector



Illustrating military heritage at Barkston Church

Actions to date:

- ✓ BBC filming at an SKDC-organised exhibition at St Vincent's Hall - Bomber Command 5 Group HQ for 80th anniversary of 617 Squadron's Dams Raid
- ✓ In separate 80th anniversary commemorations, SKDC co-ordinated PR and special invitations to watch a Lancaster fly-past at St Vincent's
- ✓ SKDC designed and organised unveiling in Barkston Church of an information board showing the history of RAF Barkston Heath
- ✓ Attendance 156 Parachute Battalion. Reunion RAF Salthby
- ✓ A Council-commissioned art installation of poppy cascades and wartime silhouettes enhanced Grantham's Remembrance commemorations
- ✓ SKDC funded 1,000 maroon tulips - matching the symbolic Parachute Regiment colours colour theme - for key airborne-related sites as Airborne Tulip Memorials



Illustrating 617 Squadron Dams Raid with hosted talk



Naval veteran Joan Briggs salutes Remembrance silhouettes and poppies



Airborne Tulip Memorial planting at St Vincents Church in Caythorpe

Actions going forward

- Celebration of D-Day and Arnhem 80th anniversary commemorations in 2024
- 216 Signals Parachute Squadron on their 2024 commemorations at Caythorpe
- 2nd Battalion Parachute Regiment service at Stoke Rochford
- Army Benevolent Fund Arnhem Commemoration at St Wulfram's Church in Grantham
- Development of the Airborne Forces Heritage Trail as income generating visitor attraction
- Development of Remembrance poppy activities to develop international links
- Celebrate flowering of Airborne Tulip Memorials scale and scope

Advocacy

Gold Award status confers a duty on holders to advocate for the defence community.

In its widest sense this includes public displays of council support, such as our flag raising and Remembrance activities, plus helping neighbouring local authorities to ensure their own compliance with the duty.

SKDC supported Armed Forces Week in June 2023 with a series of articles. A press release with an open invitation to join local cadet groups achieved regional radio coverage.

Lincolnshire's Community Covenant Partnership is seen as critical in advocating support for defence across its 40-plus representatives representing diverse sectors including health and education.

Direct engagement with the MOD Armed Forces Covenant team at the 'Covenant in the Community Annual Conference' in Newcastle resulted in the Head of the MOD Covenant team Patrick O'Brien speaking at the reconvened Partnership meeting in November.

The Armed Forces Officer is also working with Economic Development colleagues to explore opportunities offered by the Lincolnshire Defence and Security Cluster, now approved by Government as one of only three in the UK, and the Defence and Security Accelerator.

Collectively they offer opportunities for local company growth through access to valuable product development funding and potential new Ministry of Defence contracts.

SKDC Chairman Cllr Gloria Johnson inspects Reserves at Prince William of Gloucester (PWOG) Barracks in November 2023



2023 - 2024

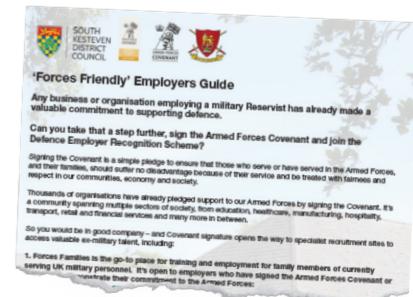
- ✓ Attendance at a Grantham Veterans Open Day with SKDC champions
- ✓ Armed Forces Week; a programme of PR and events
- ✓ Remembrance commemorations
- ✓ Flag raising
- ✓ New Defence Friendly Employers Guide for distribution to employers of Reservists graduating from PWOG Barracks

2024 -

- Develop upskilling potential between food businesses and Grantham-based 167 Catering Support Regiment RLC (Army Reserve)
- Encourage local businesses to access and hire skilled ex-military
- Explore business development opportunities with economic development team
- Promote product development funding opportunities with the Defence and Security Accelerator



Armed Forces Day flag raising helps SKDC to advocate defence



Council Cadet Force Adult Volunteer Drew Palmer also acts as a champion in the Housing Team

Engagement

Given the need to keep abreast of best practice and new initiatives, the Armed Forces Officer engages at county, regional and national levels to ensure that SKDC is updated.

The national Covenant Leads Officer Group delivers quarterly updates on new initiatives, such as:

- Milton Keynes University Hospital 'Veteran Aware' Gold Award initiative (disseminated to Lincolnshire NHS Hospitals Trust - Lincolnshire's newest Gold Award)
- Meetings with Riverside Housing Association, administering Op Fortitude Veterans Housing Helpline and Support Network to help SKDC tackle homelessness of ex-military

The forum has also enabled supply to SKDC of free Covenant funded e-learning modules on all aspects of the Armed Forces, accessible from the council's Learner Management System.

In Lincolnshire, two-monthly meetings of charity Every-One's Veterans and Families Wellbeing network invites key presenters and send out weekly news updates on news.

SKDC is also now working more closely with AF Officers from North Kesteven and City of Lincoln as a driving force for wider engagement.

Monthly meetings with Army representatives at PWOG discuss and deliver mutually beneficial engagement events such as the Civic Leaders Reception, delivering opportunities for key speakers on a range of subjects.

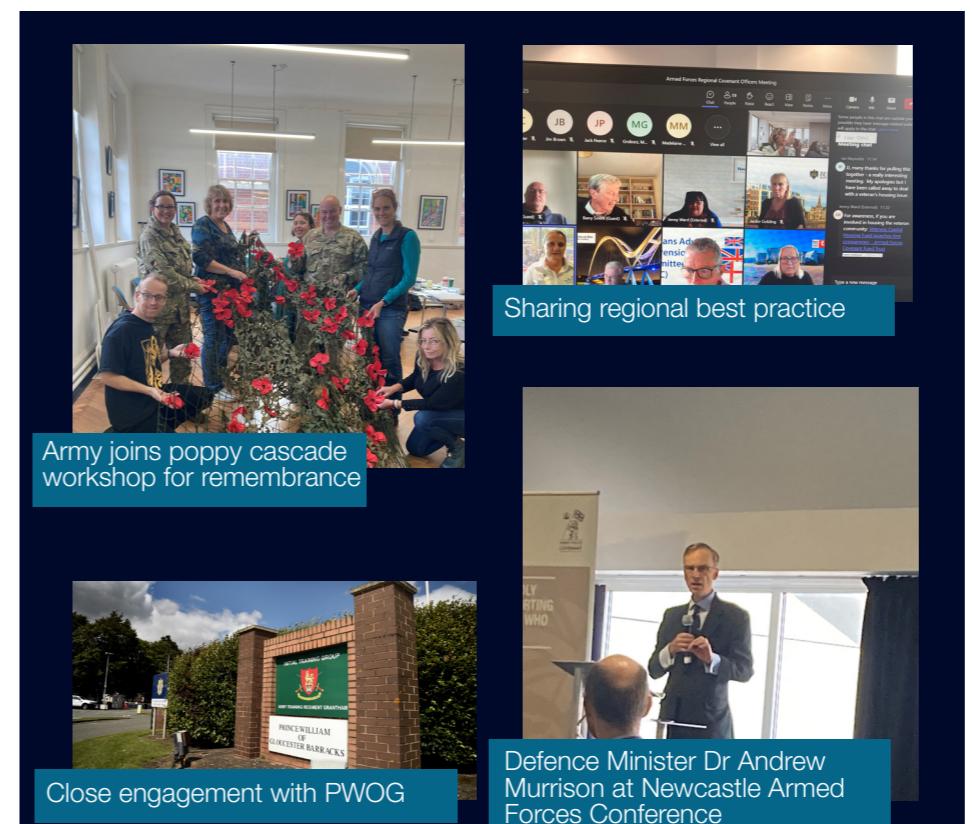
Actions to date:

- ✓ Armed Forces Covenant in the Community Annual Conference in Newcastle with the theme 'Preventing Disadvantage'
- ✓ Regional Officers Group includes representatives from Essex, Herts, Kent, Beds, Suffolk, Leics, Norfolk, Northants
- ✓ PWOG Civic Leaders Reception
- ✓ Chairman inspecting troops at Pass Off Parade
- ✓ Engagement with PWOG for poppy making workshops for Remembrance



Actions going forward:

- Identify new veterans' community engagement pathways
- Identify new engagement opportunities with PWOG
- Encourage local businesses' Reserve recruitment
- Encourage internal SKDC Reservists recruitment
- New 'behind the wire' PWOG Veterans Breakfast
- Develop 'Walkshops' (wellbeing talks and walks) wellbeing activities for veterans
- Work with Just Detect UK – Grantham based charity to identify new detecting sites



Contact Details

Alternative formats are available on request:
audio, large print and Braille

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Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1 February 2024

Report of Councillor Rhea Raysia,
Cabinet Member for People and
Communities

Council in the Community – Outreach update

Report Author

Carol Drury, Community Engagement Manager

 carol.drury@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on two outreach initiatives that were instigated in 2023, namely Council in the Community and SK Funding Workshops. This report provides an overview of both initiatives, their impact and outlines future plans for such community engagement.

Recommendation

In considering the report, it is recommended Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Notes the content of this report and that further updates on six monthly basis will be provided as part of reporting against the Community Engagement and Development Strategy Action Plan.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any No
exempt or confidential
information not for publication?

What are the relevant corporate • Healthy and strong communities
priorities?

Which wards are impacted? All

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

1.1 The financial implications arising from these initiatives are contained within existing budgetary levels. The report confirms that the most cost efficient and effective methods of customer access should be explored in order to ensure value for money to the taxpayer.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

1.2 There are no significant legal or governance implications arising from this report.

Completed by: Mandy Braithwaite, Legal Executive

2. Background to the Report

2.1 South Kesteven District Council's Corporate Plan (2020-2023) had creating healthy and strong communities as a priority. The aim being to enable residents, working with partners, to develop strong networks of support and maintain strong communities.

2.2 During 2023 the Community Engagement Team developed two outreach projects: one at the request of a newly elected Member and one at the request of the voluntary and community sector.

2.3 This report provides background to both initiatives, an overview of what has been achieved and proposed future plans.

Community Outreach - Council in the Community

- 2.4 Following feedback from representatives from the community it was proposed that the Council pilot an initiative that focused on establishing a mobile team of officers to facilitate drop-in sessions for residents. The request was made as it was considered that some sections of the community had difficulty accessing face to face services in order to make enquiries and carry out business with the Authority.
- 2.5 Although there was no evidence to support this concern, it was proposed to trial a community outreach programme that would be held in a rural and urban setting to test the need and to explore the effectiveness of 'taking the Council to the people' for every-day interactions.
- 2.6 It was further determined that, based on high demand areas of customer contact, the first session should focus on topics such as Council Tax, Benefits, Housing (social and private sector), Antisocial Behaviour and Cost of Living support. Subsequent events would require input from the Ward member(s) on the provision of information specific to their local area where issues had been raised to them by residents.
- 2.7 To date, two events have taken place. The first, in Bourne, had eight officers in attendance from community engagement, housing, cost of living and revenues and benefits. The event attracted twenty-one visitors including eight elected Members. The event was advertised through SKDC's social media channels and with posters and flyers. Support was sought from housing colleagues and from community engagement. No queries were presented relating to cost of living or benefits.
- 2.8 The second event took place in December and was held, at the request of the elected Member in Belvoir Ward.
- 2.9 The elected Member shared with officers a Dashboard outlining interactions between the residents of the Ward with Citizens Advice South Lincolnshire (CASL). Dashboard information from CASL is also supplied to officers on a quarterly basis as part of the monitoring of actions against the core funding grant agreement between the Council and CASL.
- 2.10 The dashboard shared by the Member outlined the top 5 debt issues identified by CASL in their dashboard report for Belvoir Ward related to:
 - Debt relief orders
 - Fuel debts
 - Breathing Space Moratorium
 - Council Tax Arrears
 - Unpaid parking penalties and congestion charges
- 2.12 One of the clients listed in the dashboard was identified as at threat of homelessness. The document however provides no detail of the tenure of the

household. Therefore, the need for officers to be in attendance to cover issues of both social housing and private sector housing was deemed necessary. The number of clients advised by CASL, based on this information, was 51 which represents 1% of the Ward's population.

- 2.13 A team of nine officers attended this event representing: Community Engagement, Neighbourhoods (ASB), Homelessness, Tenancy Support and Engagement, Cost of Living, Private Sector Housing, and Revenues and Benefits. Both elected Members from this Ward attended the event. It is disappointing to note that no members of the public attended this event.
- 2.14 Again, this event was promoted via SKDC's social media channels and with posters/flyers. Publicity for this event also went out to all residents of the Ward in the parish newsletter.
- 2.15 These events are resource-heavy in terms of officer time. If such events had been better attended it would have supported the concern that access to the Council is problematic for some residents. However, having piloted events in both a rural and an urban setting with little evidence of need identified, it is considered that an alternative method of engaging with residents should be explored.
- 2.16 In order to do this, it is suggested that officers develop a series of informal, open, community engagement opportunities that take advantage of pre-existing events across the district. The Community Engagement Team, with support from colleagues in Communications, would lead on this initiative with officers from other service areas attending such events as appropriate. This type of engagement would still provide opportunities for the general public to directly engage with officers from the Council but in a less formal way. These events would also support the delivery of our customer experience strategy and to promote the launch of systems like the Revenues and Benefits customer portal; housing portal and the Council's new website. Officers would be on hand to help educate and support customers in contacting the Council digitally. The attendance at these events could also be used to promote Go Digital and Hello SK and to broadly explore the demand for Council in the Community.

Council in the Community - Funding Workshops

- 2.17 Another initiative launched during 2023/24 came in the shape of a series of funding workshops.
- 2.18 These workshops, provided in support of the charity, voluntary and community sector across the District have, to date, taken place in the evening.
- 2.19 Attendees to these workshops are asked to book a place through Eventbrite. Although free to attend, the workshops are held in community venues so places are limited. We also ask that attendees book because it is useful for officers to have pre-event information on the groups being represented so that eligible funding sources can be investigated prior to the workshop taking place. Groups also attended that didn't book a space. Where necessary, follow-up contact was made

to provide information not available on the evening of the workshop.

- 2.20 Three workshops and one funding fair have been scheduled for 2023/2024. These workshops are promoted via SKDC's social media channels and through community partners.
- 2.21 The workshops include presentations relating to the SK Community Fund, LotterySK and UKSPF. These presentations are delivered by officers from the Community Engagement Team and Economic Development's SPF Team. There is also a presentation by the National Lottery. All cover the various funding support available and eligibility criteria. Community Engagement Officers also provide an overview of national and local funding sources (focused on the pre-booked participants to ensure relevance to attendees), tips for successful bid writing and links to infrastructure agencies such as Lincolnshire Voluntary and Community Service and other support agencies e.g. Charity Excellence, Lincolnshire Community Foundation, Amateur FA Funders, Sport England etc.
- 2.22 The first workshop took place in July 2023 and was held at Deepings Community Centre. This workshop attracted twenty-eight individuals representing eighteen voluntary and community groups.
- 2.23 The second workshop was held in Stamford at the Corn Exchange theatre. This workshop attracted thirty-two individuals representing twenty-four voluntary and community groups.
- 2.24 These workshops have received excellent feedback from groups stating that they are informative, an excellent way of networking with other groups from the local area and officers were knowledgeable and helpful. Since these workshops ten groups have reached out to the Council's Community Engagement Team for further support with funding searches and in the preparation of funding bids. Outcomes relating to funding levered into the district from such funding bids will be reported to this committee as part of the quarterly-reported suite of key performance indicators.
- 2.25 The third workshop scheduled took place in Grantham on 18 January at the Jubilee Church Life Centre. This event attracted forty-seven attendees representing forty-one voluntary and community groups. Requests for support with project development and funding bids have been received since the workshop and are being acted upon.
- 2.26 The final event for this financial year in this suite of awareness raising sessions will be a funding fair. This event will be held in partnership with Lincolnshire Community and Voluntary Service and will take place at Bourne Corn Exchange on 21 March 2024. Invitations have been sent to local, regional and national funders. To date the invitation has been accepted by the National Lottery, Children in Need, Lincolnshire Community Foundation, Sport England and Shine (Lincs). This event will take the shape of a market where interested parties can peruse information and have informal chats with funders. This will be a day-long event with sessions morning and afternoon. Workshops will also be held throughout the day for participants to have one-to-one sessions with Community Engagement staff.

- 2.27 These events provide an important source of information for the voluntary and community sector of South Kesteven and have been very well received by attendees therefore, a further suite of funding workshops will be developed and delivered for 2024/2025.
- 2.28 Going forward, the outcomes of Council in the Community outreach projects will be reported to this Committee as part of the monitoring report relating to the Council's Community Engagement and Development Strategy's Action Plan.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 The Council places importance on supporting communities with the things that are important to them. To assist communities, the Council has provided a series of outreach opportunities for residents and the voluntary and community sector. This report outlines the effectiveness of events to date.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council could stop such events however this would be in opposition to its new corporate objective of connecting communities as set out in the Corporate Plan.

5. Reasons for the Recommendation

- 5.1 The recommendation which includes the assurance of future updates to provide information to Members of this Committee on a six-monthly basis, will assist in their representational role as they work with communities to make a difference.



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Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1 February 2024

Councillor Rhea Rayside
Cabinet Member for People and
Communities

Cost of Living Update

Report Author

Claire Moses - Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community)

 claire.moses@southkesteven.gov.uk

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a background regarding Household Support Fund, the formation of the Cost of Living Team and an update regarding the activity undertaken by the team, number of residents supported, value of support provided and an update regarding District, County and National activities.

Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. Notes the activities and levels of support being provided by the Cost of Living Team
2. To ask questions in relation to the activities and provide feedback.

Decision Information	
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Healthy and strong communities High performing Council
Which wards are impacted?	All wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance

- 1.1 The report sets out the specific schemes that are being implemented to support residents with the cost of living as a result of Household Support Fund.
- 1.2 Household Support Funding is provided by the Department for Work and Pension to Lincolnshire County Council. South Kesteven District Councils share of this funding is £177,342.
- 1.3 In addition, South Kesteven have received £496,200 funding to support those residents in receipt of Housing Benefit only.
- 1.4 The Cost of Living Co-ordinator is funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to 31 March 2025.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.5 There are no specific legal implications connected with this report, however all financial support schemes acceptance must follow the agreed process and governance.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer

Diversity and Inclusion

1.6 Cost of living information is available in a variety of formats to ensure inclusivity. The Wellbeing event was held in a fully accessible venue and publicity of the event was shared with support organisations working with the socio-economically disadvantaged, older people, people with disabilities and people whose first language is not English. Further diversity and inclusion considerations will be identified and complied with as each project/funding stream is accessed.

Completed by: Carol Drury, Community Engagement Manager

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

1.7 The increases to cost of living and subsequent influence on financial stability is paralleled with heightened stress and anxiety levels thereby affecting mental health and emotional resilience. This forms a significant focus for the cost of living strategy.

Completed by: Fran Beckitt (Head of Service – Human Resources and Organisational Development)

2. Background to the Report

2.1 The Council has a clear commitment in its Corporate Plan 2020-2023 to ensuring healthy and strong communities and being a high performing council. This report, and the service provided through the Council's Cost of Living Team strives to delivery these priorities.

Forming the Cost of Living Team

2.2 In August 2022, the South Kesteven Cost of Living Strategic Working Group (COL SWG) was formed in response to increasing cost of living concerns and energy price increases. An action plan was developed with key themes agreed by the group. The group was represented by various SK officers from the key themes as detailed below:

- Communication
- Food insecurity and poverty
- Fuel & Energy Poverty
- Financial – Benefits, Debt Support and Funding
- Health & Wellbeing (inc Welcome Warm Spaces)
- Prevention of homelessness
- Skills, Employment & Businesses

2.3 As a result of the activities undertaken by the COL SWG, it was identified a business case could be put forward for a dedicated Cost of Living Coordinator. If successful, South Kesteven would be the first council in Lincolnshire to introduce a dedicated officer to oversee cost of living related workstreams.

A bid was put forward to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund on 26 January 2023, with the following outline project description / purpose:

Creation of a Cost of Living Coordinator post. This new role will have a focus on delivering community, health and wellbeing-based initiatives as part of the UKSPF programme. Initially Year 1 funding will allow an outreach of activities across four towns and builds on some of the successful initiatives delivered through the previous ERDF-RHHSF / Welcome Back Fund.

2.4 The priorities of the UKSPF funding linked to this role are:

- Funding for impactful volunteering and/or social action projects to develop social and human capital in local places; and
- Community measures to reduce the cost of living, including through measures to improve energy efficiency, and combat fuel poverty and climate change.

2.5 The bid was successful and recruitment for the role was undertaken. Interviews were held in April 2023, and a Coordinator was successfully appointed. Such was the calibre of candidates that a second role was offered (funded by Revenues and Benefits), and a Cost of Living Team was formed with both officers starting their roles on 5 June 2023.

2.6 Since 5 June 2023, the Cost of Living Team and the Head of Service have been working to objectives set out within the action plan, which is included within **Appendix One** of this report.

Introduction to Household Support Fund

2.7 One of the main responsibilities of the Cost of Living Team is to administer and distribute the Household Support Fund.

2.8 Household Support Fund (HSF) was first announced by Government in October 2021 with funding covering the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. Local Authorities had discretion on exactly how this funding was to be used (the scope set out in the national guidance and the accompanying grant determination). The expectation was that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy, and water bills.

2.9 It was confirmed the funding would be awarded directly to Tier 1 authorities, this being Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), acting as the LA Single Point of Contact (LA SPOC). It was agreed LCC and Lincolnshire's District Councils would form a

Lincolnshire Working Group to discuss and agree a way forward for the distribution of the funding across the County.

2.10 Since October 2021, there have been further HSF schemes announced and implemented, with the current scheme (HSF4) open for 2023/24. The Lincolnshire Working Group has continued to meet regularly since October 2021.

2.11 On 20 February 2023, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) confirmed the extension of Household Support Fund from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, with the distributing of a further £842m to Local Authorities in England to help households with the cost of essentials such as food, clothing and utilities.

2.12 Lincolnshire's allocation of £10,929,370 was to support residents as set out within the guidance. The grant period covers 1st April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The approach to the distribution of the fundings was as follows:

- i. Circa 43% of the HSF through appropriate delegation to schools and Early Years providers targeting children eligible for benefit-related 'Free School Meals' (FSM), 'Early Years Pupil Premium', (EYPP) and families with a 2-year-old eligible for 'Early Years Entitlement' (EYE)
- ii. Circa 44% directed through the Lincolnshire's District Councils to provide financial support to housing benefit-only claimants not in receipt of other support provided via the national scheme
- iii. Circa 1% of the grant funding to provide financial support to eligible care leavers in supported living accommodation via County Council commissioned providers.

2.13 The remaining grant funding would be directed at other vulnerable households via local schemes with:

- i. Circa 11% of the total grant made available to DC's on a proportionate basis to enable the funds to provide support to other households in need throughout the grant period. DC's and other third sector/Voluntary organisations will support in the need to provide an application-based process to ensure this funding is distributed through local channels in line with the grant conditions across local areas.
- ii. Circa 1% of the grant will cover administration of the grant.

2.14 The distribution of funding across Lincolnshire is as follows:

District area	Proportionate allocation of funding to be utilised up to and including 31 March 2024 for application-based locally	Allocation of £1,266,726
Boston	10%	£126,673
City of Lincoln	16%	£202,676
East Lindsey	24%	£304,014
North Kesteven	11%	£139,340
South Holland	12%	£152,007
South Kesteven	14%	£177,342
West Lindsey	13%	£164,674
Total	100%	£1,266,726

2.15 South Kesteven's share of the allocation is £177,342 – this includes £7k administration. Therefore, of the remaining £170,342:

- £65,411 has been distributed to South Kesteven residents; and
- £104,589 has been allocated to various schemes for distribution to residents between 1 January 2024 and 31 March 2024

In addition, £496,200 has been allocated for housing benefit-only recipients. Further detail of these schemes is included within paragraph 2.22 to 2.52.

Funding Amount	Distribution	Purpose	Distributed as at 31 December 2023	
			Recipients	Value (£)
£7,000	SKDC Administration	Various administration costs of the scheme – such as post office letter template, printing and posting of vouchers, admin costs associated with Charis vouchers and printing of resource material for staff and residents.	Not applicable – this is administration funding	
£9,000	Lincolnshire Community Foundation (LCF)	Contribution towards Warm Packs – as part of county-wide 'Warm welcome' working group	100	£9,000
£10,000	Housing Support Fund (HSF) Vouchers	Direct support for those where applications have been specifically received from Carers First	0	£0

Funding Amount	Distribution	Purpose	Distributed as at 31 December 2023	
			Recipients	Value (£)
	Carers First			
£45,000	HSF Vouchers SKDC Cost of Living Team	Support for those who are in receipt of DWP Benefits, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support who have been referred by SKDC Teams and Members.	586	£45,000
£46,000	HSF Vouchers Lincolnshire Community Foundation (LCF)	Support for those who have specifically not received the DWP Cost of Living Payments. LCF is able to provide additional wrap-around support for these residents.	149	£21,892
£60,000	Energy Vouchers SKDC Cost of Living Team	Eligible recipients i. Identified by staff and Members using the Cost of Living referral form ii. Residents who have attended a registered warm space venue	0	£0
£496,200	Post Office Voucher £300 SKDC Cost of Living Team	In receipt of Housing Benefit-only and therefore did not qualify for the national DWP Cost of Living Payment	1,364	£409,200

Cost of Living Support (Advice and Referral Process)

2.16 The aim of the Cost of Living Team is to enable our most vulnerable residents who cannot access any other income to sustain their home, health, family, and security. The Cost of Living Team is very aware of how important this support is to residents, and this is why the Council has introduced such a team since June 2023. One of the key activities for the team was to review the existing referral process from previous HSF schemes and to refine this process to ensure the best possible outcomes for our residents.

- 2.17 An internal, online, form has been produced for SK Officers and Councillors to complete, to refer a resident into the Cost of Living team for support. This support can take the form of general advice, referral to third sectors and assessment for a HSF voucher.
- 2.18 Each referral requires between a 20 and 30 minute appointment with the resident to discuss their personal, and household, financial circumstances to determine whether they are receiving all support available to them. The officer will discuss Council Tax Support, Housing Benefit, Foodbank vouchers, top-ups for shortfall in rent/council tax, tenancy support (if SKDC tenant – will be referred in to Tenancy Support Team) and other wider support such as referrals into Citizens Advice. The support provided is in-depth as officers need to make an assessment as to what is needed – the team simply cannot offer a blanket response to all residents as their circumstances are on an individual needs basis.
- 2.19 In comparison to other Districts within Lincolnshire, it is understood South East Lincolnshire authorities and West Lindsey have moved the majority of their funding over to Lincolnshire Community Foundation (LCF), which is administering the support on their behalf (LCF have a 4 to 6 week turnaround). City of Lincoln and North Kesteven opened their household support fund in October 2023.
- 2.20 Since the referral process was launched on 24 August 2023, the Cost of Living team has received a total of 682 referrals (over 18 weeks) of which:
 - 563 have been responded to; and
 - 119 are to be responded to
- 2.21 Once the referral has been completed and the triage discussion has been undertaken with the resident, details are then passed to the HSF Officer (within the Cost of Living Team) who will process the HSF voucher. The voucher is issued the same day it is processed. The HSF voucher process is detailed further in paragraph 2.24 to 2.28.

Cost of Living Support (£49,088)

- 2.22 Of the residents who have been supported via the referral and HSF process, a total of £49,088 of additional wrap-around financial support has been provided so far.
- 2.23 The 235 residents have received financial support through a variety of results such as Discretionary Housing Payment, Foodbank vouchers, reduction in council tax, funding towards the purchasing of goods (through referral to third party), reduction in utility bills and reduction in telephone bills.

Household Support Fund (HSF) through the SKDC Cost of Living Team (£45,000)

2.24 The cohort of residents the Cost of Living team is directly supporting are those who have already received the Government's national Cost Of Living payment. This was determined because the team has the dataset available to them to see what other support has been provided during the previous HSF schemes.

2.25 A total of £45,000 has been allocated to support these residents from the HSF funding for 2023/24.

2.26 To ensure we are able to support as many residents as possible, we have agreed financial levels of support of as follows – this is a one off voucher payment:

- £60 single households
- £100 couples
- £125 families

HSF is not designed to be an emergency payment – other financial assistance is available for this – such as Foodbank referrals and support from third sector organisations.

2.27 Vouchers will be issued via Charis. Charis is a trusted administrator for many essential funds and grants. Lincolnshire's District Councils engaged with Charis for HSF1 and have continued to issue vouchers via this method during all HSF schemes. It is an efficient service for the safe distribution of financial support for our residents. HSF vouchers can be issued for all major supermarkets, energy top-up, energy payment cards, DIY, home essential (those organisations signed up are Argos, B&M, Carpet Right and Currys).

2.28 To date, a total of 514 HSF vouchers have been issued for a sum of £45,000

Lincolnshire Community Foundation (LCF) – HSF vouchers (£11,411)

2.29 The Authority has engaged LCF to also support in the administration of the HSF vouchers for those residents who have not received the Government's national Cost of Living payment.

2.30 A total of £46,000 has been allocated to support these residents from the HSF funding for 2023/24.

2.31 These are the harder to reach customers and LCF has extensive experience in supporting these residents. LCF is well placed to undertake financial assessments for these residents and identify other support that would benefit them – this could be a mix of financial support, financial management mentoring, supporting with budgets and supporting with job seeking activities.

2.32 LCFs turn-around for the voucher to be issued is 4 to 6 weeks from the date of application – this is their standard operating model and has been used by other Districts in previous and current years for HSF.

2.33 To date, HSF vouchers totalling £11,411 have been issued by the Lincolnshire Community Foundation.

Lincolnshire Community Foundation - warm packs (£9,000)

2.34 The warm pack project is part of the county-wide Warm Welcome Spaces Working Group, with North Kesteven District Council taking the lead for Warm Spaces and Warm Packs.

2.35 Each Council across Lincolnshire has used £9,000 of their Household Support Fund to contribute towards warm packs. A total of 1,200 packs have currently been procured and are being split fairly across the County.

2.36 They are being stored in 10 'Warm Welcome Host' storage hubs throughout the county – the current host location for South Kesteven is the Jubilee Church Grantham, they are currently holding 100 packs for distribution. The hubs that are acting as storage points were selected based on a) their storage capacity, b) their location, c) their opening hours and d) their capacity to be able to facilitate this on behalf of the partnership. The Warm Welcome Spaces Working Group will consider other storage points, should the scheme continue for 2024.

2.37 Warm packs have been procured by "His Church" in addition to this. Generous additions have been added from SafeLincs , St John Ambulance service and the NHS.

2.38 There are two pathways into the Warm Pack scheme through the county-wide referral system, each of which has a variant on the warm pack contents available, so they are tailored to the needs of the resident. Referring partners for the two pathways are:

- AgeUK – for those aged over 50 and over – the packs can include a fleece blanket, electric heated throw, hat, socks, gloves, hot water bottle, insulated travel mug, slow cooker and torch; and
- NHS Health Partners – the packs can include electric blankets, sim card, water saving devices, carbon monoxide detectors, blankets, slipper socks, wearable blankets, draft excluders for doors, draft excluder tape, radiator insulation, radiator foil, insulation film for windows, hot water bottles, radiator keys and Cost saving brochure.

2.39 Warm packs started to be issued in December 2023. The referring partner will collect the warm pack they have ordered for the resident from the Jubilee Church and this will be delivered to the resident.

Cost of Living Payment for those in receipt of Housing Benefit (HB) only (£496,00)

2.40 The Lincolnshire Working Group agreed that residents in receipt of Housing Benefit only, and no DWP benefits would be supported as they will not have received the Government's national Cost Of Living payment. This was first introduced for HSF3 (October 2022 to March 2023), where the Lincolnshire Districts Working Group agreed to support these residents with a one-off payment, funded through HSF.

2.41 This approach was approved once again for HSF4, with eligible South Kesteven residents being identified for a £300 payment.

2.42 Two payments have been issued to far, with eligibility for the payments requiring the resident to be in receipt of Housing Benefit on 1 September 2023 and 1 December 2023. The number of eligible residents and payments issued were:

- First payment (£300) – 879 eligible residents with a total award of £263,700
- Second payment (£300) – 775 eligible residents with a total award of £232,500

2.43 Payments were issued by the Post Office, in the form of a voucher, which can be redeemed at any Paypoint / Payzone nationally. This is a trusted payment method of distribution and has been successfully used for previous HSF and energy schemes.

2.44 Of the 1,654 vouchers issued, only 290 (17.5%) have not been redeemed. Recipients have until 14 March 2024 to redeem the vouchers. The Cost of Living Team will be contacting these recipients during January and February 2024 to ensure these are redeemed.

2.45 Any vouchers that are not redeemed, will expire and can be re-issued – providing this is to the same cohort of residents i.e. those in receipt of Housing Benefit.

Energy Vouchers

2.46 The Autumn Statement did not make provision for energy support this winter and the £400 energy assistance that was available last winter has not been offered this year. No other scheme has replaced it.

2.47 Over 70% of the people the Cost of Living Team speak to have advised they are suffering financially as a result of Pay As You Go (PAYG) meters for their energy. They have limited disposable income which does not leave a margin to cover the additional cost for the extra energy needed over the winter months.

2.48 Residents on PAYG meters do not have the option of a delayed payment for their energy. If they do not top up the meter, they do not have energy to use. Even if they try to reduce their usage with the cost of the standing charge bills are still high.

2.49 Some residents the Cost of Living Team speak to only have electricity in their properties which can mean they are spending in excess of £70 per weekly over the winter months.

2.50 In line with the Council's decision making procedures, the Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community) issued an Officer Delegated Decision report to the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, Richard Wyles, proposing the remaining £60,000 of HSF be allocated for emergency energy vouchers as follows:

- (i) Voucher value of £100
- (ii) Two vouchers to be issued to each eligible resident (maximum of £200)
- (iii) To be issued mid-December 2023 and end-January/early February 2024

2.51 Eligible recipients will be identified by:

- (iv) SKDC referral by staff and Members using the Cost of Living referral form
- (v) Those residents who have attended a registered warm space venue

2.52 This decision was approved on 18 December 2023, and energy vouchers started to be issued in January 2023.

Identification of support for those who do not receive pension credit

2.53 As part of HSF2 (April 2022 to September 2022), residents in receipt of pension credit were awarded a £110 HSF voucher. There was an underspend across the County, including South Kesteven. It was agreed by LCC that the underspend could be retained by each District, providing ongoing identification of support was undertaken and vouchers issued.

2.54 The Cost of Living Team is identifying these residents and where a successful claim for pension credit is made, a £110 voucher is being issued. The award of pension credit also leads to additional financial support such as reductions in bills (BT, Anglian Water etc)

Household Support Fund and the Cost of Living Team – 2024/25

2.55 There has been no announcement so far that HSF will continue in 2024/25. Any HSF funding which has not been issued in 2023/24 i.e. vouchers not redeemed, can be issued during 2024/25, providing it is for the same cohort of residents. This will ensure the Council is able to provide some financial support to SK residents. Any such decision would need to be approved by Lincolnshire County Council, as the recipient and distributing authority of the HSF funding. Once the residual funding

amount is known, and a decision has been made, the Cost of Living Team will propose a scheme of support for 2024/25.

2.56 The Cost of Living Team is currently funded to 31 March 2025. The team's activities, as detailed in **Appendix One**, will continue and a further update as to additional activities for 2024/25 will be provided to this Committee at its meeting in May 2024.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 Members of Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the report and are invited to ask questions regarding its content.
- 3.2 It is recommended to Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the Cost of Living Team continues to review the impacts of cost of living and implement activities within the action plan to support businesses and residents of South Kesteven.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council disband the Cost of Living Strategic Working Group and cease any future activities.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 The recommendation will ensure businesses and residents of South Kesteven will have access to the support they need, with the Cost of Living Team being able to monitor progress against the action plan.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix One – Cost of Living Team action plan.

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Cost of Living Team – Action Plan

This action plan shows the activities undertaken by the Cost of Living Team so far during 2023, and future activities.

Completed Actions	
Action	Details of actions taken
Cost of Living advice and referral process to be implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referral form produced and live from 21 August 2023 Internal online link provided to SKDC staff and Members to complete the form on behalf of residents COL Team provide the following support to residents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budgeting advice Referral to relevant support organisations Income and Expenditure review Issuing of household support fund vouchers Liaison with charity organisations for support – furniture, white goods and grants
Household Support Fund voucher process to be implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voucher process in place Internal online link provided to SKDC staff and Members to complete the form on behalf of residents
Provide project management support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing project management is undertaken by the Cost of Living Co-Ordinator Liaison with SK communications team to ensure social media updates are issued as needed – such as 'Tak Money Week – 6 to 10 November' and HSF Awareness Week – WC 16 October'

Completed Actions	
Action	Details of actions taken
Manage a comprehensive action plan of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action plan which is monitored as part of fortnightly Cost of Living meetings with the Head of service and Cost of Living Team • Key activities from the action plan are included within this document
Liaison with internal teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for all SK residents • SK Tenants are support through the tenancy services team, however, were there are specific Cost of Living enquiries, internal referrals are made into the COL Team • Support identified for Ukraine residents from point of sign up
Liaison with partners and external support organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Cost of Living Co-Ordinator has developed positive working relationships with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Grantham Partnership Board ○ Jubilee Church – Coffee morning (outreach event) ○ Jubilee Church – toddler event (outreach event) ○ Manor Court Pension Credit Clinic – Outreach event ○ Jubilee Church – Veterans and Family Open Day ○ Essex Road Pension Credit Clinic – Outreach event
Co-ordinate responses to government support initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household Support Fund
Ensure the Cost of Living website is up to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The website is reviewed regularly and updated as needed • Details can be found here: Cost of Living help and support South Kesteven District Council

Completed Actions	
Action	Details of actions taken
Ensure Case management is up to date and provides clear outcomes – such as number of residents supported, value of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed case management is available on all financial support provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrap-around support Household Support Fund – administered by SKDC Household Support Fund – administered by Lincolnshire Community Foundation HB Only Cost of Living Payments (via Post Office vouchers)
Be the Single Point of Contact for Cost of Living enquiries for via the Cost of Living email address	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of Living email box has been set up Online Cost of Living referral form Inclusion of COL Team in SKToday (Summer edition) All SKDC staff are aware of COL Team and how to contact Support organisations are aware of COL Team and how to contact
Attend external meetings and represent SKDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Cost of Living Co-Ordinator represented SKDC at the following meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome Warm Spaces (hosted by North Kesteven DC) Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion partnership (hosted by City of Lincoln Council)

Future Actions			
Action	How action will be achieved	Responsible	Target Date
Actively contribute to the Welcome Warm Spaces Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend and contribute to the meetings for actions relating to the warm spaces for 2023/24 Visit warm spaces to offer cost of living advice Actively share ideas to improve the 2024/25 warm spaces 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	Immediate
Increase number of warm welcome spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaison with Members, Parish Clerks and warm welcome spaces (who registered in 2022/23) 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	Immediate
Energy Advice / Vouchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive basic energy advice training Distribute emergency energy vouchers to residents as well as offer advice to reduce ongoing costs. 	Cost of Living Team	Immediate
Actively contribute to the Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend and contribute to the quarterly meetings. Share any information to appropriate SKDC teams. Assist the organisers with the arrangements for the upcoming Lincolnshire Financial Inclusion Partnership Conference. 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	Immediate
Develop and maintain a positive relationship with all foodbanks across SKDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visits to Foodbank Coordinators within the district to share ideas on how best to help clients. Actively seek referrals for clients that have used foodbanks that may benefit from additional financial advice. 	Cost of Living Team	Immediate
Digital Inclusion for vulnerable and elderly residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assisting residents with digital forms such as pension credit checks and discretionary housing payments. 	Cost of Living Team	Ongoing

Future Actions				
Action	How action will be achieved	Responsible	Target Date	
Develop and manage information sharing protocol between SKDC and Support Organisations / advice agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain relationships with support organisations by attending events, seminars and doing Cost of Living talks. Sharing information and ideas to improve delivery of service to our residents within the legal guidelines. Attend community engagement events in the form of Cost Of Living Clinics in Library's, Jobcentres, children's centres. 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	Ongoing	
Energy Advice training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To seek a provider for basic energy advice training for the Cost of Living Team. Distribute emergency energy vouchers to residents as well as offer advice to reduce ongoing costs. 	Cost of Living Team	January 2024	
Re-introduce the Strategic Working Group (SWG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send invitations to relevant officers: COL Team, Communications, Community Engagement, Community Safety, Housing, Revs and Bens. 	Head of Service	5 January 2024	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure corporate wide awareness of the issues facing our residents and how teams are able to support Produce a holistic action plan, with the inclusion of all relevant SKDC Teams 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	First SWG meeting	
Review potential of a third HB Only payment in March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review any uncashed vouchers and chase up residents. Review remaining funding to distribute among HB only residents. 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	March 2024	

Future Actions			
Action	How action will be achieved	Responsible	Target Date
Review remaining 2023/24 HSF funding for potential distribution during 2024/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review any remaining funds from previously expired vouchers. Ascertain criteria for a 2024/25 welfare fund in the absence of another HSF Scheme 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	March 2024
Community Engagement in the form of Cost-of-Living Clinics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange events within the community at libraries, warm spaces, Children centres, jobcentres to offer budgeting skills, benefit checks and basic financial education i.e., pension credit checks 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	April 2024
Community Engagement in the form of Cost-of-Living Clinics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange events within the community at libraries, warm spaces, Children centres, jobcentres to offer budgeting skills, benefit checks and basic financial education i.e., pension credit checks 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	April 2024
Furniture Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review ways to source assistance from other organisations to help residents in need of furniture 	Cost of Living Team	April 2024
New tenant Cost of Living Advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budgeting Advice / referrals to external organisations for new tenants (appropriate additional support to that being provided by SKDC Tenancy Services Team) 	Cost of Living Team	May 2024
Proactive support for donation of second hand uniforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact the PTA of schools within the district and discuss the potential of a 2nd hand uniform donation. 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	June 2024
Develop SKDC Directory for External Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a directory of local charities offering aid, referral /contact details for external agencies, Food provision 	Cost of Living Team	June 2024

Future Actions			
Action	How action will be achieved	Responsible	Target Date
Review credits on rent accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with Income Recovery Team Leader to ascertain those accounts with credit. Contact tenant to arrange refund or transfers. 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	August 2024
Review credits on Council tax accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with Council Tax Enforcement Team Leader to ascertain those accounts with credit. Contact tenant to arrange refund or transfers. 	Cost of Living Co-Ordinator	August 2024

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**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**



Rural Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1 February 2024

Report of Councillor Phil Dilks
Cabinet Member for Housing and
Planning

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2024

Report Author

Ayeisha Kirkham, Head of Service- Public Protection



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Purpose of Report

The Council currently provides discretionary disabled facility grants (DFG) for adaptations to private residential dwellings within the district, in addition to its mandatory DFGs requirement. The Council is required to publish a policy if it provides discretionary DFGs and the existing Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is out of date and due for review. The report provides the updated options of the policy for consideration.

Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes and considers the policies put forward.**
- 2. Recommends which of the following options it supports for cabinet to approve.**

Option 1: Recommends that the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2024 be adopted and published.

Option 2: Recommends that the Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy be adopted and published.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any
exempt or confidential
information not for publication? No

What are the relevant corporate priorities? Housing that meets the needs of all residents

Which wards are impacted? All

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 The costs associated with implementing the policy will be met from the Disabled Facilities Grant which the Council currently receives on an annual basis.

Completed by: Alison Hall-Wright, Deputy Director (Finance & ICT) and Deputy S151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 There are no significant legal or governance implications which are not already referenced in the body of the report.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer

Diversity and Inclusion

- 1.3 Disabled facilities grants are awarded to support the continued independent living of persons with disabilities. The policy which provides the framework for the award of DFGs has been the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment which is provided along with this report.

Completed by Carol Drury, Community Engagement Manager

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 places a statutory duty on local housing authorities to provide grant assistance to qualifying disabled people to undertake a range of adaptations to their homes. The grant is subject to a means test (except in the case of children) and works must be eligible as defined by the Act and Regulations. The maximum grant available is £30,000.
- 2.2 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (“the RRO”) gives local authorities the power to provide assistance (either directly or indirectly) to any person for the purpose of improving living conditions in the local authority area provided this is given in accordance with a published policy.
- 2.3 Grants are funded from the Better Care Fund which is a larger pot of money that each Council is awarded a portion of based upon a calculation done by the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This financial year (2023/24) the amount provided to South Kesteven District Council was £1,060,000.
- 2.4 In order for the Council to provide such discretionary assistance from this grant funding a policy must be published. The current policy was published in 2019 and needs updating in order to be fit for purpose.
- 2.5 Two proposed policies have been produced for this purpose:
 - A local Policy – Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2024
 - Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy

The local policy has been drafted to only apply to South Kesteven District Council Whilst the Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy has been drafted in conjunction with 7 other districts within Lincolnshire.
- 2.6 Either of these policies are intended to replace the existing policy. The main changes to the existing policy are mirrored in both of the proposed policies and can be summarised as follows:
 - i. Increase on the amount on the maximum discretionary funding for individual grant applications.
 - ii. The introduction of a Discretionary Funding Panel within the Council to consider cases that have an increased amount beyond the base level grant funding available set within each of the policies.
 - iii. Minor amendments to operational procedures to remedy issues that have arisen within the existing policy.
- 2.7 Both proposed policies remedy the current constraints within the existing policy around the cap on grants, where on occasion given the rising costs associated with

some works, applicants have had to fund large amounts above the grant maximum and often where they are not easily able to do so.

2.8 The draft Local Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy has the following proposed changes to the existing policy:

- i. the maximum funding value has been removed;
- ii. the Disabled Adaption Assistance (and Stair Lifts) and Modular Ramps grant products have both increased to £10,000 nominal figure, which is an increase of £2,000 and £3,000 respectively.
- iii. The maximum funding amount has been replaced with a normal working limit and if a grant exceeds these it will be referred to a discretionary funding panel to consider each grant above the normal working limit for approval.
- iv. The operational change is to allow the discretionary grant funding to be used to cover as applicants assessed contribution following a means test, however this is only in cases where the applicant would be put into financial hardship if required to pay the contribution element.
- v. The current and proposed local policy intends to keep the current land charge arrangements. There are two arrangements depending upon the grant product, both land charge elements are that the grant amount is attached for a period of 10 years only, with one of those charge types decreasing by 10% each year.

2.9 The draft Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy has been designed to remove the variation in grant awards and amounts across Lincolnshire. The main policy can be summarised as:

- i. providing grant funding for discretionary grants up to £15,000 which covers a variety of grant products;
- ii. introduces the discretionary funding panels for grants exceeding this value.
- iii. this policy has an explanatory note that accompanies it to account for some variation in delivery of such grants, South Kesteven District Council currently do not means test for stair lifts and modular ramps. This policy seeks to not alter this and allow for this to continue not in line with other districts.
- iv. the main difference to the local policy relates to the Land Charge element, for the draft Lincolnshire Policy, where a grant is awarded a land charge maybe placed against the property to allow for the recovery of the grant on the sale of a property.
- v. the Lincolnshire policy differs in that any grant exceeding £1000 where value is added to the property the land charge for the full amount of the grant will be attached indefinitely until such time as it is paid in full.

2.10 The current and proposed policies can be found in full in the appendices.

3. Key Considerations

- 3.1 Both the Local and Lincolnshire Policies are working document that assists the Private Sector Housing Team carry out the award and delivery of DFG's to the residents within the district who require such adaptations.
- 3.2 Only one policy is necessary and therefore the most appropriate for South Kesteven District Council should be adopted.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The other option considered is to not update the policy and continue within the existing Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2019

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 The current policy is out of date and requires review. Two policies have been produced and both have merit, however one policy must be taken forward based upon the needs of the district.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 There is no statutory requirements for a consultation on the proposed policies and no consultation is proposed. The policy is merely a document that pulls together the legislative requirements around the delivery of discretionary grants and provides the parameters in which such grants will be offered.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix A: Current Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2019.
- 7.2 Appendix B: Proposed Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2024
- 7.3 Appendix C: Proposed Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy
- 7.4 Appendix D: Explanatory notes to Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy
- 7.5 Appendix E: Equality Impact Assessment

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**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy Independent Living

Providing assistance under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

Date	Version	Approver	Comments
12 October 2017	1	Cabinet	Policy approved
5 October 2018	2	Cabinet Member for Housing	Temporary amendment to 1 April 2019 to remove means test and local land charge for stair lifts and modular access ramps
1 April 2019	2.1	Cabinet Member for Housing	Amendment to remove means test and local land charge for stair lifts and modular access ramps

1.0 **Background**

The suitability of the home is integral to meeting the needs of our residents. A home which enables them to live independently or supports others to provide safe and effective care contributes to the promotion of physical and emotional health and wellbeing and supports a full and active life.

Helping residents to make the right housing choices for their needs and providing support to make the home safe can help reduce hospital admissions or re-admissions, reduce reliance on care and support, improve wellbeing and help maintain independence in the home. One of the ways of doing this is by providing financial assistance to support those choices or adapt the homes of disabled and vulnerable people enabling them to live safely.

The population of South Kesteven is increasing, with the number of older people expected to increase dramatically over the next 15 years. The prevalence of disability increases with age and as the District has an ageing population demand for adaptations is likely to increase. The majority of housing is not designed with elderly and disabled people in mind, and whilst some people have disabilities from a young age, most do not become aware of problems with their home until their circumstances change through illness, accident or growing frailty in older life.

This policy explains how South Kesteven District Council will use its resources to assist residents in need of support to maintain independence in the home, reduce the need for support from social care and health services and/or prevent further deterioration in their conditions. The assistance may be in the form of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants or discretionary assistance, which enables the Council to deal with immediate health and safety concerns swiftly and appropriately. With the exception of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants, all of the assistance provided under this policy is at the discretion of the Council and subject to available resources. If demand for discretionary assistance exceeds the available budget the assistance will be suspended. In these instances the Council does not undertake to maintain a waiting list.

This policy will be reviewed as necessary to take into account changes to legislation and policies at local and national level, but in any case, will be reviewed every 4 years in line with the time period of the Council's Housing Strategy.

2.0 Legal Framework

The main legislation governing the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) is the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. This places a statutory duty on local housing authorities to provide grant assistance to qualifying disabled people to undertake a range of adaptations to their homes which are deemed “necessary and appropriate” to meet their needs and it is “reasonable and practicable” to undertake the adaptations having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling. The grant is subject to a means test (except in the case of children) and works must be eligible as defined by the Act and Regulations. The maximum grant available is £30,000.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (“the RRO”) gives local authorities the power to provide assistance (either directly or indirectly) to any person for the purpose of improving living conditions in the local authority area provided this is given in accordance with a published policy.

In accordance with the RRO, this policy has been adopted by South Kesteven District Council and includes details of:

- a. The types of assistance the Council may make available
- b. The eligibility conditions for the assistance
- c. The amount of assistance available
- d. The conditions that will apply to the provision of the assistance
- e. The circumstances when repayment may be required

3.0 Strategic Context

In April 2015 the Government made significant changes to the funding mechanism for disabled facilities grants by making the allocation part of the Better Care Fund (BCF); a pooled budget between the NHS and upper tier councils. The aim of the fund is to provide more joined-up and customer focused services to reduce hospital and care admissions and enable people to return from hospital more quickly.

The Care Act 2014 established a requirement that a needs assessment must be carried out where it appears to the social care authority that a person for whom they may provide or arrange community care services, may be in need of such services. The associated guidance states that the care and support system must actively promote wellbeing and independence and aim to prevent need, not just wait to respond when people reach a crisis point.

Aligned to this, the NHS 5 Year Forward View (2014) noted that a key condition for transformation across local health economies is a strong primary and out-of-hospital care system, with well-developed planning about how to provide care in people's own homes, with a focus on prevention, promoting independence and support to stay well.

Home adaptations and essential repairs for disabled and vulnerable people support these requirements as they can:

- Enable independence at home
- Speed up hospital discharge/reduce readmission
- Prevent escalation of need e.g. accidents and falls
- Support maintenance of physical and mental well-being

It is clear that home adaptations can contribute to meeting a range of Public Health, NHS and Social Care outcomes. While the housing law relating to the provision of grants for disabled adaptations has not changed, there is scope for local innovation in delivery and opportunities to consider how home adaptations can better support housing, health and social care to achieve improved health and wellbeing outcomes for those with care and support needs.

4.0 Priority Areas and Evidence

This policy aligns with the South Kesteven District Council Housing Strategy outcome to enable independent living, by supporting those whose independence may be at risk to access housing (including their current home) which meets their needs.

The focus on prevention, with the suitability of the home being a core component of health and wellbeing is central to supporting an integrated approach.

Nationally, almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of people aged 65 and over, and $\frac{1}{2}$ of people aged 80 and over fall each year, with the home being the most common place for a fall. Falls account for between 10 and 25% of ambulance call outs for the over 65s, costing around £115 per call out. Older people who fall are likely to suffer a repeat fall and in most cases require recurrent use of health and social care services. Recurrent fallers are also more prone to have a fall-related fracture; the health cost associated with hip fractures alone is estimated at £6 million per day or £2.3 billion per year.

In addition, falls are one of the major reasons for people to move from their own home to residential care, again increasing social care costs and impacting on independence. The overall effect of increasing personal wellbeing, preventing

accidents and reducing strain on carers means that the cost savings to health and social care of preventing falls are potentially extremely high. A package of relatively low cost adaptations could reduce falls and may delay hospital admissions.

Many chronic health conditions experienced by people, particularly older people, have a causal link to, or are exacerbated by poor housing. Frail and older people experience poorer physical and mental health and higher risk of mortality, while babies and young children have an increased risk of respiratory problems. The annual cost to the NHS of treating disease due to cold private housing has been estimated at over £850 million (at 2009 costs). This does not include additional spending by social services, or economic losses through absences from work. Health risks associated with cold homes include; increased respiratory illness, worsening of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, worsening of arthritis, increased blood pressure and risk of heart attacks and stroke. A cold home also increases the risk of falls and accidents as strength and dexterity decreases at lower temperatures. Making homes weather safe, wind and weather proof, alongside ensuring suitable indoor temperatures can be maintained could reduce symptoms or instances of illness.

5.0 Types of Assistance

The provision of assistance other than Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants is subject to the availability of funding. Housing options advice will be provided in all cases to ensure that the right option for the household is being considered. This may include information about entitlement to benefits, third party funding options e.g. charities, energy efficiency and signposting to other services and agencies.

A summary of the available assistance is provided below. Full details of each type of assistance and associated conditions are in Appendix A.

Type of assistance	Means Test	Local Land Charge	Mandatory/ Discretionary	Key Outcome	Max. Funding
Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	Y	Y	Mandatory	Adaptations to enable independent living	£30,000
DFG top-up	Y	Y	Discretionary	Top up of mandatory DFG which exceeds grant limit	£10,000
Disabled Adaptation Assistance	N	Y	Discretionary	Minor adaptations for those eligible for a DFG without means testing	£7,000
Moving on Assistance	Y	Y	Discretionary	Financial assistance to move to more suitable accommodation	£10,000
Hospital Discharge Assistance	N	Y	Discretionary	Prevent Delayed Transfers of Care associated with housing disrepair or access issues	£10,000
Safe, Warm and Well	Y	Y	Discretionary	Minor essential repairs to make homes safe for vulnerable owner occupiers	£8,000
Dementia Aids and Adaptations	N	N	Discretionary	Enable people with a diagnosis of dementia to manage their surroundings and retain their independence.	£750
Stair Lifts and Modular Ramps	N	N	Discretionary	Provision of a stair lift and/or modular ramp for those who meet DFG criteria without means testing	£7,000

5.1 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)

The Council will continue to provide assistance to those who qualify for a DFG as laid down in legislation. The adaptations funded will be considered as being the most appropriate, reasonable and cost effective way of meeting the assessed needs of the disabled person up to the maximum grant of £30,000.

Where the applicant/ disabled person wishes to carry out works to the property which are over and above those assessed by the Occupational Therapist (OT), the Council may, in circumstances where the alternative is considered appropriate and will meet the assessed needs of the disabled person, offer financial assistance up to the value of the assessed need.

5.2 Top Up of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant

This assistance of up to £10,000 may be available in conjunction with a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant where the cost of the eligible works exceeds the current mandatory limit of £30,000.

The applicant's ability to afford the excess over the mandatory grant amount will be assessed by carrying out a means test of their resources. This will include a means test of the resources of parents/guardians of disabled children applying for discretionary DFG top-up funding.

5.3 Discretionary Disabled Adaptations Assistance

This provides non means tested financial assistance for disabled people for minor works with a value up to £7,000 that would be eligible for a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

5.4 Moving on Assistance

This assistance enables disabled people who would be eligible for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to move to more suitable accommodation where it is considered more appropriate than providing funding through a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to adapt their existing home. This funding of up to £10,000 may be used in conjunction with a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to undertake eligible works to the new property.

This may include circumstances where the existing accommodation is not reasonably and practicably capable of being adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person.

5.5 Hospital Discharge Assistance

This assistance is for people in hospital awaiting discharge back to their home, and provides up to £10,000 to fund urgent adaptations that allow access in and around the person's home. Other minor works which are needed to facilitate

their discharge from hospital will also be considered e.g. one off clearance of hoarded properties and works to heating systems.

5.6 Safe, Warm and Well

This assistance is for owner occupiers over the age of 65, or those with chronic or severe health conditions affected by poor housing conditions (verified by a GP or medical professional), who need to undertake essential repairs to their home in order to remain safe and healthy. Essential repairs are determined as a Category 1 (serious) or significant Category 2 (other) hazards as determined by the Housing Act 2004. The maximum available funding is £8,000.

Applicants must be in receipt of a qualifying benefit or have an annual household income after tax of below £23,250

5.7 Dementia Aids and Adaptations

This assistance provides aids and minor adaptations to the home which are designed to enable people diagnosed with dementia to manage their surroundings and maintain their independence. The assistance is limited to £750 and not subject to a means test.

5.8 Stair lifts and Modular Access Ramps

Provides non means tested assistance for the installation of a stair lift and / or modular ramp where the person that meets the non-financial eligibility criteria for a mandatory disabled facilities grant. The assistance is limited to a maximum of £7,000 per item.

6.0 Eligibility Criteria and Conditions

6.1 In this policy the term "assistance" means any form of financial assistance approved for the purpose of housing renewal, maintenance, improvement or adaptation. "Condition" means any condition attached to any such assistance. Any reference to "owner" or "person responsible" is taken to mean any owner or other person who is responsible for the relevant conditions either singly or jointly. This includes the original person who applied for or received the assistance, as well as any other person who has subsequently become responsible for any condition as a result of acquiring the property or an interest in it.

6.2 The specific criteria for each form of assistance are detailed in appendix A. However, the following conditions will apply in all cases:

- a. Where stated, any financial assistance and related conditions will be secured as a legal charge against the property. A breach of conditions

requires the repayment of all or part of the assistance. This charge will not be removed until either the conditions expire or until the assistance is re-paid together with any interest or additional charges that may apply.

- b. A charge against the property is binding on any person who is for the time being an owner of the premises concerned. Where a condition is broken, the Council has the usual powers and remedies in law to enforce the charge and secure payment of any amount due.
- c. Where any condition is in force, the Council may require the responsible person to provide any information to satisfy the Council that the condition is being complied with. The Council can require this information in writing or in other reasonable form. It is a condition that this information is provided in the form required within a reasonable timescale as specified by the Council and as fully, accurately and honestly as reasonably practicable. Failure to comply with this requirement is a breach of conditions in itself and the assistance, or part of the assistance where specified, must be re-paid to the Council.
- d. It is for the person responsible for complying with any condition to demonstrate to the Council's satisfaction that the condition is being complied with. Failure to do so will be treated as failure to comply with the condition. The Council does not have the burden of having to prove that the condition is not being complied with.
- e. Conditions will generally be enforced in all cases. Money repaid or recovered will be recycled back into the housing renewal capital programme.
- f. The approval of assistance does not give or imply the Council's approval of any other consent that may be required, such as planning permission or building regulation consent. It is the responsibility of the applicant to obtain any such consent as may be required.

6.3 Any person making an application for assistance must:

- a. Be over the age of 18 years on the date of application
- b. Live in the dwelling which is subject to the application as their sole main residence
- c. Live within the district of South Kesteven.

6.4 Persons will not be eligible for assistance in the following circumstances:

- a. Where ownership of the dwelling is disputed
- b. Where the owner of the property has a statutory duty to undertake the necessary works to the dwelling and it is reasonable for them to do so.

- c. Where the proposed works would normally be covered by buildings insurance. If before a grant is approved it is found that the applicant has submitted an insurance claim, the insurance company will be asked to confirm in writing the extent of the claim and their liability, if any. The value of any housing assistance will be reduced by the amount equivalent to the insurance company's liability.
- d. Where works have started before the formal approval of an application, except where in exceptional circumstances a defect may present a serious risk to health and safety.
- e. Where the proposed works are to repair any shed, outbuildings or appurtenances.
- f. Incomplete applications or applications lacking sufficient information will be refused.

6.5 All cases will be considered on a case by case basis. Incomplete applications or applications lacking sufficient information will be refused.

6.6 Enquiries about how the policy is operated should be referred to the Head of Environmental in the first instance. Appeals must be made in writing and detail the specific grounds on which the appeal is based.

7.0 Making an Application and Payment of Assistance

Applications must be made in writing on the appropriate form and must include original documentation where requested. An application will only be considered complete once all of the relevant documentation has been provided.

The Council may charge a fee for any professional services or charges incurred relating to the work for which the assistance is being sought e.g. obtaining proof of ownership, drawing of plans etc. This fee will be incorporated into the total assistance amount.

The Council will make arrangements for contractors to undertake works, however, the contract agreement is between the applicant and contractor; the Council will not be liable for disputes arising between the parties. If the applicant elects to use their own contractor they must submit at least 2 written quotations from different contractors.

In the event of any disputes between the applicant and the contractor the Council will help to resolve these, however should this not be possible it may be necessary for the applicant to seek legal advice to remedy any dispute.

The Council will normally arrange for grant payments to be made directly to contractors upon completion of works.

8.0 Maintenance and Repair

The quality of work undertaken by contractors appointed by the Council is guaranteed for a period of 12 months. Some of the individual items may have their own extended warranties that are provided by the manufacturer. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that any extended warranties are applied for in accordance with the manufacturer's guarantee. Copies of guarantees/warranties will be provided to the applicant after completion of the works.

The Council is not responsible for the ongoing maintenance or repair of any items.

9.0 Data Protection

All data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

The Council may investigate or formally verify any of the information provided in connection with any application for assistance.

In order to progress an application it may be necessary to share information provided with other organisations that may assist with the grant process. These may include:

Lincolnshire County Council – Adult Social Care or Children's Services
Lincolnshire Home Independence Agency or other Agencies appointed by applicants
Relevant Government Departments

The Council is under a duty to protect public funds and may use the information provided for the prevention and detection of fraud. It may also share this information with other bodies administering public funds solely for these purposes.

APPENDIX 1 – Details and Conditions of Assistance

1. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants
2. Top Up of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant
3. Discretionary Disabled Adaptations Assistance
4. Moving on Assistance
5. Hospital Discharge Assistance
6. Safe, Warm and Well
7. Dementia Aids and Adaptations
8. Stair Lifts and Modular Access Ramps

1. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants

Purpose: Local housing authorities have a statutory duty to provide grant aid to disabled people to undertake a range of adaptations to their homes.

Mandatory disabled facilities grants will be administered in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The following provides a summary of these provisions, but should be read in conjunction with the full Act.

Maximum amount: The maximum amount is £30,000.

Applicant eligibility: All applicants must be eligible under the Act. Applications must be supported by a referral from an Occupational Therapist confirming that the person is disabled for the purposes of the Act and that the proposed works are necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person.

Eligible works: The relevant works must be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled occupant and it must be reasonable and practicable to carry out the works having regard to the age and condition of the property. The purposes for which a grant must be given are detailed in section 23 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Financial assessment: The grant is subject to a means test in accordance with the Housing Renewal Grants Regulations 1996, to determine the customer's contribution towards the cost of the works. The maximum grant including any contribution must not exceed £30,000.

Application: Applications must be made on the relevant form and supported by a referral from an Occupational Therapist. The Council will consult the Social Services Authority on all applications.

Applications may be made by owner occupiers, private tenants and Registered Social Landlord Tenants. In the case of tenants, the landlord may make an application on their behalf.

The Council will normally appoint a contractor, however, where the applicant chooses to use their own contractor, a minimum of two estimates must be submitted with the application.

Works must not commence until formal approval of the grant has been received by the applicant.

Payment: Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices. In some instances payments may be made in instalments and the balance (no less than 10% of the total cost of the eligible works) paid on satisfactory completion.

The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if it believes it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.

Conditions: The Council may remove items of equipment e.g. modular ramps and stair lifts from the property for re-use when they are no longer required by the disabled person. This will be considered on a case by case basis dependent on the age and condition of the item. Where the items are not considered appropriate for re-use it will be the responsibility of the householder/property owner to remove any items at their own cost.

Where the Council provides funding in excess of £5,000 that creates additional living space e.g. an extension or conversion of a garage or outbuilding, and where the applicant has an owner's interest in the property, this will be registered as a local land charge against the adapted property, subject to a maximum of £10,000. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), repayment of the amount will be required.

The Council will not pay for any additional works carried out without prior approval.

All works must be completed within 12 months of approval.

2. Top Up of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant

Purpose: To provide discretionary financial assistance to a disabled person who qualifies for a mandatory disabled facilities grant where the cost of the eligible works exceeds the mandatory grant maximum of £30,000.

Maximum amount: The maximum top up is £10,000.

Applicant eligibility: Applicants must have an owner's interest in the property and the disabled person (if different) must qualify for a mandatory disabled facilities grant where the value of the eligible works (including the client contribution and any fees if applicable) exceeds the mandatory grant maximum.

Eligible works: Works funded by the top up must be eligible works which are necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs as defined by the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Financial assessment: The top up will be means tested using the prescribed test of resources applicable to mandatory disabled facilities grants. Where the disabled person is a child, the parents/guardians will be means tested.

Applications: Applications will be considered alongside an application for a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

Payment: The discretionary top up will be paid as an additional amount to the mandatory disabled facilities grant under the same payment conditions.

Conditions: The amount of the discretionary top up will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the adapted property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required.

Works must not commence until formal approval of the discretionary assistance and mandatory grant have been received by the applicant.

3. Discretionary Disabled Adaptations Assistance

Purpose: To provide discretionary financial assistance for disabled occupants who do not have the financial resources to pay for necessary adaptations to help support them to remain independent in their home. The discretionary assistance will fund minor works for those eligible for a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

Maximum amount: The maximum amount of assistance is £7,000.

Applicant eligibility: The disabled occupant must be eligible under the provisions of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Applications must be supported by a referral from a Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapist.

Eligible works: The relevant works must be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled occupant and it must be reasonable and practicable to carry out the works having regard to the age and condition of the property. The purposes for which a grant may be given are those detailed in section 23 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Any associated fees e.g. technical surveys, obtaining proof of title etc will be included in the total assistance amount.

Financial assessment: This assistance is not subject to a means test.

Payment: Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices. The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if it believes it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.

Conditions: The Council may remove items of equipment e.g. modular ramps and stair lifts from the property when they are no longer required by the disabled person for re-use. This will be considered on a case by case basis dependent on the age and condition of the item. Where the items are not considered appropriate for re-use it will be the responsibility of the householder/property owner to remove any such items at their own cost.

Only one application for discretionary assistance will be considered in any 12 month period (taken from date of approval).

Where the applicant has an owner's interest in the property, the amount of the discretionary funding will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the adapted property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required. This will be reduced by 10% for each complete year.

The Council will not pay for any additional works carried out without prior approval.

Where the discretionary funding is no longer available, applications will be considered under the provisions of a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

4. Moving on Assistance

Purpose: This discretionary assistance enables disabled people who would be eligible for a mandatory disabled facilities grant to move to more suitable accommodation, where it is considered more appropriate than providing funding through a mandatory disabled facilities grant to adapt their existing home.

Maximum amount: The maximum amount is £10,000 and may be used in conjunction with a mandatory disabled facilities grant to undertake eligible works to the new property.

Applicant eligibility: Any disabled person who would be eligible for adaptation works under a mandatory disabled facilities grant

Qualifying criteria: A referral for adaptation of the existing property must have been received from an Occupational Therapist.

In the Council's opinion, the existing property must be unsuitable for adaptation, in that it is not reasonably and practicably capable of being adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person.

The applicant must have or propose to have an owner's interest in new property. The existing and new properties must be within South Kesteven District Council's area, and be the permanent, main residence of the disabled occupant.

In the opinion of the Council and in conjunction with the Occupational Therapist, the new property must be considered suitable for the needs of the disabled person or must be reasonably and practicably capable of being adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person.

The assistance can be used for the following eligible costs:

- Legal and ancillary fees
- Estate agent fees
- Removal costs

Financial assessment: The assistance is subject to the prescribed test of resources applicable to mandatory disabled facilities grants. Where the disabled person is a child, the parents/legal guardians will be means tested.

Payment: Payment will be made to the applicant's solicitor on exchange of contract so that funding is available for completion. Evidence of the fees will be required prior to payment.

Conditions: This discretionary assistance may only be awarded once.

Where an award has been made under this policy and prior to the exchange of contacts and the disabled person is no longer able to relocate to the new property e.g. they have moved into permanent care or deceased, the Council may decide to pay all, some or none of the assistance.

The amount of the discretionary funding will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the new property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the purchase (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required.

5. Hospital Discharge Assistance

Purpose: This assistance is for people in hospital whose discharge is delayed due to the condition of their home. The assistance may fund urgent adaptations that allow access in and around the person's home by providing stair lifts or ramps. Other minor works which are needed to facilitate their discharge from hospital will also be considered e.g. one off clearance of hoarded properties and works to heating systems.

Maximum amount: The maximum grant is £10,000

Applicant eligibility: The applicant must be in hospital and their discharge delayed.

The application must be accompanied by a referral from a hospital Occupational Therapist or other suitably qualified professional confirming the urgent works that are required to the home to enable discharge.

The property subject to the application must normally be occupied by the applicant on a permanent basis.

Eligible works: Eligible works include:

- Stair lifts
- Ramps and door widening to the essential doorways
- Heating repairs or improvements
- Clearance and one off deep clean of hoarded goods

Other works will be considered which will facilitate the hospital discharge on a case by case basis.

Financial

assessment:

This assistance is not subject to a means test

Payment:

The Council will appoint contractors to undertake the work and will pay them directly on production of satisfactory invoices. The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if it believes it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.

Conditions: If the cost of the works exceeds the maximum financial assistance the Council will liaise with the Occupational Therapist and/or relevant professionals to determine the priority works.

The Council will not pay for any additional works carried out without prior approval.

Where the applicant has an owner's interest in the property, the amount of the discretionary funding will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the adapted property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required. This will be reduced by 10% for each complete year.

6. Safe, Warm and Well

Purpose: This assistance is for owner occupiers over the age of 65, or those with chronic or severe health conditions affected by poor housing conditions who need to undertake essential repairs to their home in order to remain safe and healthy.

Maximum amount: The maximum amount is £8,000.

Applicant eligibility: The applicant must be an owner occupier or private tenant with a full repairing responsibility.

The applicant must be over the age of 65 or have a chronic or severe condition exacerbated by the cold or poor housing conditions. Evidence of the condition will be required e.g. letter/referral from a General Practitioner or other relevant health professional. Examples of relevant conditions include:

- Arthritis (osteo and rheumatoid, requiring regular treatment and review)
- Cardiovascular disease (for example heart disease or stroke)
- Respiratory disease (for example chronic bronchitis, severe asthma, emphysema or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)

Eligible works: Essential repairs are determined as a Category 1 (serious) or significant Category 2 (other) hazards as determined by the Housing Act 2004, which affects the ability of the property to be safe, wind and weather proof. Examples of works may include:

- Heating repairs or replacement
- Works to prevent falls
- Roof repairs

Any associated fees e.g. technical surveys, obtaining proof of title etc will be included in the total assistance amount.

All properties will be subject to inspection and assessment by the Council or its agent.

Financial assessment:	Applicants must or have an annual household income after tax of below £23,250 or be in receipt of one of the following Benefits:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support • Income-based Employment and Support Allowance (not contribution-based ESA) • Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (not contribution-based JSA) • Guarantee Pension Credit (not Savings Pension Credit alone) • Housing Benefit • Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit provided that the annual income for the purposes of assessing entitlement to the tax credit is less than £16,010 (or any other subsequent threshold set as part of Working/Child Tax Credit) • Universal Credit • Attendance Allowance (with an income of the applicant and their partner [if applicable] after tax, below £23,250) • Disability Living Allowance (with an income of the applicant and their partner [if applicable] after tax, below £23,250) • Carers Allowance (with an income of the applicant and their partner [if applicable] after tax, below £23,250) • Personal Independence Payment (with an income of the applicant and their partner [if applicable] after tax, below £23,250) • War Disablement Pension (which must include a mobility supplement or constant attendance allowance)
Payment:	The Council will appoint a contractor to undertake the eligible works. Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices. The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if we believe it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.
Conditions:	The applicant must have lived in the property for a minimum of 12 months as their main residence.

Only one application for assistance will be considered within any 3 year period (further applications may be considered at the discretion of the Service Manager, Environmental Health in exceptional circumstances).

The Council will not consider applications in respect of dwellings which have been built or converted less than 10 years from the date of application.

Where works beyond the maximum assistance value are identified, the assistance will be prioritised based upon the hazard score and circumstances of the applicant. Works must be reasonable and practicable having regard to the age and condition of the property.

The amount of the discretionary funding will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the new property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required.

The Council will not pay for any additional works carried out without prior approval.

7. Dementia Aids and Adaptations

Purpose: This assistance will provide aids and adaptations in the home designed to enable people with a diagnosis of dementia to manage their surroundings and retain their independence.

Maximum amount: The maximum funding is £750

Applicant eligibility: Applicants must be owner occupiers or private tenants with a clinical diagnosis of dementia and referred by a General Practitioner, Dementia Support worker or other relevant health professional, confirming the works which are necessary and appropriate to support them to retain their independence.

Eligible works: The Council will work with the relevant health professional to determine appropriate works on a case by case basis. This may include: contrasting coloured hand rails, thermostatic taps, lighting and door signage etc.

Financial assessment: This assistance is not subject to a means test

Payment: The Council will appoint a contractor or work with a third party to undertake the eligible works. Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices.

Conditions: It must be reasonable and practicable to undertake the works.

All works must relate to the applicants dementia needs and assist them to remain in their home independently for a longer period.

Only one application will be considered within any 3 year period.

8. Stair Lifts and Modular Access Ramps

Purpose: To provide discretionary non-means tested funding for disabled people who meet the non-financial criteria for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to install a stair lift and / or modular access ramp.

Maximum amount: The maximum funding is £7000 per item.

Applicant eligibility: The disabled occupant must be eligible under the provisions of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Applications must be supported by a referral from a Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapist.

Eligible works: The provision of a stair lift or modular access ramp (the “relevant works”) must be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled occupant and it must be reasonable and practicable to carry out the works having regard to the age and condition of the property. The purposes for which a grant may be given are those detailed in section 23 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Any associated fees e.g. technical surveys, obtaining proof of title etc will be included in the total assistance amount.

Financial assessment: This assistance is not subject to a means test.

Payment: Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices. The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if it believes it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.

Conditions: The Council may remove the items when they are no longer required by the disabled person for re-use. This will be considered on a case by case basis dependent on the age and condition of the item. Where the items are not considered appropriate for re-use it will be the responsibility of the householder/property owner to remove any such items at their own cost.

Only one stair lift and / or modular access ramp will be provided per property in any 12 month period (taken from the date of approval of the assistance)

The Council will not pay for any additional works associated with the installation without prior approval.

Where this discretionary funding is no longer available, applications will be considered under the provisions of a mandatory disabled facilities grant or other discretionary funding that may be available.

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**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy Independent Living 2024

Providing assistance under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

1.0 **Background**

The suitability of the home is integral to meeting the needs of our residents. A home which enables them to live independently or supports others to provide safe and effective care contributes to the promotion of physical and emotional health and wellbeing and supports a full and active life.

Helping residents to make the right housing choices for their needs and providing support to make the home safe can help reduce hospital admissions or re-admissions, reduce reliance on care and support, improve wellbeing and help maintain independence in the home. One of the ways of doing this is by providing financial assistance to support those choices or adapt the homes of disabled and vulnerable people enabling them to live safely.

The population of South Kesteven is increasing, with the number of older people expected to increase dramatically over the next 15 years. The prevalence of disability increases with age and as the District has an ageing population demand for adaptations is likely to increase. The majority of housing is not designed with elderly and disabled people in mind, and whilst some people have disabilities from a young age, most do not become aware of problems with their home until their circumstances change through illness, accident or growing frailty in older life.

This policy explains how South Kesteven District Council will use its resources to assist residents in need of support to maintain independence in the home, reduce the need for support from social care and health services and/or prevent further deterioration in their conditions. The assistance may be in the form of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants or discretionary assistance, which enables the Council to deal with immediate health and safety concerns swiftly and appropriately. With the exception of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants, all of the assistance provided under this policy is at the discretion of the Council and subject to available resources. If demand for discretionary assistance exceeds the available budget the assistance will be suspended. In these instances the Council does not undertake to maintain a waiting list.

This policy will be reviewed as necessary to take into account changes to legislation and policies at local and national level, but in any case, will be reviewed every 4 years in line with the time period of the Council's Housing Strategy.

2.0 Legal Framework

The main legislation governing the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) is the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. This places a statutory duty on local housing authorities to provide grant assistance to qualifying disabled people to undertake a range of adaptations to their homes which are deemed “necessary and appropriate” to meet their needs and it is “reasonable and practicable” to undertake the adaptations having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling. The grant is subject to a means test (except in the case of children) and works must be eligible as defined by the Act and Regulations. The maximum grant available is £30,000.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (“the RRO”) gives local authorities the power to provide assistance (either directly or indirectly) to any person for the purpose of improving living conditions in the local authority area provided this is given in accordance with a published policy.

In accordance with the RRO, this policy has been adopted by South Kesteven District Council and includes details of:

- a. The types of assistance the Council may make available
- b. The eligibility conditions for the assistance
- c. The amount of assistance available
- d. The conditions that will apply to the provision of the assistance
- e. The circumstances when repayment may be required

3.0 Strategic Context

In April 2015 the Government made significant changes to the funding mechanism for disabled facilities grants by making the allocation part of the Better Care Fund (BCF); a pooled budget between the NHS and upper tier councils. The aim of the fund is to provide more joined-up and customer focused services to reduce hospital and care admissions and enable people to return from hospital more quickly.

The Care Act 2014 established a requirement that a needs assessment must be carried out where it appears to the social care authority that a person for whom they may provide or arrange community care services, may be in need of such services. The associated guidance states that the care and support system must actively promote wellbeing and independence and aim to prevent need, not just wait to respond when people reach a crisis point.

Aligned to this, the NHS 5 Year Forward View (2014) noted that a key condition for transformation across local health economies is a strong primary and out-of-hospital care system, with well-developed planning about how to provide care in people's own homes, with a focus on prevention, promoting independence and support to stay well.

Home adaptations and essential repairs for disabled and vulnerable people support these requirements as they can:

- Enable independence at home
- Speed up hospital discharge/reduce readmission
- Prevent escalation of need e.g. accidents and falls
- Support maintenance of physical and mental well-being

It is clear that home adaptations can contribute to meeting a range of Public Health, NHS and Social Care outcomes. While the housing law relating to the provision of grants for disabled adaptations has not changed, there is scope for local innovation in delivery and opportunities to consider how home adaptations can better support housing, health and social care to achieve improved health and wellbeing outcomes for those with care and support needs.

4.0 Priority Areas and Evidence

This policy aligns with the South Kesteven District Council Housing Strategy outcome to enable independent living, by supporting those whose independence may be at risk to access housing (including their current home) which meets their needs.

The focus on prevention, with the suitability of the home being a core component of health and wellbeing is central to supporting an integrated approach.

Nationally, almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of people aged 65 and over, and $\frac{1}{2}$ of people aged 80 and over fall each year, with the home being the most common place for a fall. Falls account for between 10 and 25% of ambulance call outs for the over 65s, costing around £115 per call out. Older people who fall are likely to suffer a repeat fall and in most cases require recurrent use of health and social care services. Recurrent fallers are also more prone to have a fall-related fracture; the health cost associated with hip fractures alone is estimated at £6 million per day or £2.3 billion per year.

In addition, falls are one of the major reasons for people to move from their own home to residential care, again increasing social care costs and impacting on independence. The overall effect of increasing personal wellbeing, preventing

accidents and reducing strain on carers means that the cost savings to health and social care of preventing falls are potentially extremely high. A package of relatively low cost adaptations could reduce falls and may delay hospital admissions.

Many chronic health conditions experienced by people, particularly older people, have a causal link to, or are exacerbated by poor housing. Frail and older people experience poorer physical and mental health and higher risk of mortality, while babies and young children have an increased risk of respiratory problems. The annual cost to the NHS of treating disease due to cold private housing has been estimated at over £850 million (at 2009 costs). This does not include additional spending by social services, or economic losses through absences from work. Health risks associated with cold homes include; increased respiratory illness, worsening of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, worsening of arthritis, increased blood pressure and risk of heart attacks and stroke. A cold home also increases the risk of falls and accidents as strength and dexterity decreases at lower temperatures. Making homes weather safe, wind and weather proof, alongside ensuring suitable indoor temperatures can be maintained could reduce symptoms or instances of illness.

5.0 Types of Assistance

The provision of assistance other than Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants is subject to the availability of funding. Housing options advice will be provided in all cases to ensure that the right option for the household is being considered. This may include information about entitlement to benefits, third party funding options e.g. charities, energy efficiency and signposting to other services and agencies.

A summary of the available assistance is provided below. Full details of each type of assistance and associated conditions are in Appendix A.

Type of assistance	Means Test	Local Land Charge	Mandatory/ Discretionary	Key Outcome	Funding
Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	Y	Y	Mandatory	Adaptations to enable independent living	Maximum £30,000
DFG top-up	Y	Y	Discretionary	Top up of mandatory DFG which exceeds grant limit	£10,000
Disabled Adaptation Assistance	N	Y	Discretionary	Minor adaptations for those eligible for a DFG without means testing	£10,000
Moving on Assistance	Y	Y	Discretionary	Financial assistance to move to more suitable accommodation	£10,000
Hospital Discharge Assistance	N	Y	Discretionary	Prevent Delayed Transfers of Care associated with housing disrepair or access issues	£10,000
Safe, Warm and Well	Y	Y	Discretionary	Minor essential repairs to make homes safe for vulnerable owner occupiers	£8,000
Dementia Aids and Adaptations	N	N	Discretionary	Enable people with a diagnosis of dementia to manage their surroundings and retain their independence.	£750
Stair Lifts and Modular Ramps	N	N	Discretionary	Provision of a stair lift and/or modular ramp for those who meet DFG	£10,000

				criteria without means testing	
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5.1 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)

The Council will continue to provide assistance to those who qualify for a DFG as laid down in legislation. The adaptations funded will be considered as being the most appropriate, reasonable and cost effective way of meeting the assessed needs of the disabled person up to the maximum grant of £30,000.

Where the applicant/ disabled person wishes to carry out works to the property which are over and above those assessed by the Occupational Therapist (OT), the Council may, in circumstances where the alternative is considered appropriate and will meet the assessed needs of the disabled person, offer financial assistance up to the value of the assessed need.

Where the applicant is assessed to have a contribution towards the works, but paying the contribution would put them in financial hardship the council may use the top up discretionary grant to cover the contribution amount.

5.2 Discretionary Funding Panel

If the cost of exceeds the amount specified for each of the discretionary grant products, then it will be reviewed by a panel to determine if the additional amount beyond the specified figure is reasonable and appropriate to fund. The panel will consist of Officers from the DFG team, team leader and senior management, where a decision will be made based on the merits of the clients circumstance to whether they receive additional funding from the Council.

5.3 Top Up of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant

This assistance of up to £10,000 may be available in conjunction with a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant where the cost of the eligible works exceeds the current mandatory limit of £30,000.

The applicant's ability to afford the excess over the mandatory grant amount will be assessed by carrying out a means test of their resources. This will include a means test of the resources of parents/guardians of disabled children applying for discretionary DFG top-up funding.

Where the applicant is assessed to have a contribution towards the works, but paying the contribution would put them in financial hardship the council may use the top up discretionary grant to cover the contribution amount.

5.4 Discretionary Disabled Adaptations Assistance

This provides non means tested financial assistance for disabled people for minor works with a value up to £10,000 that would be eligible for a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

5.5 Moving on Assistance

This assistance enables disabled people who would be eligible for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to move to more suitable accommodation where it is considered more appropriate than providing funding through a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to adapt their existing home. This funding of up to £10,000 may be used in conjunction with a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to undertake eligible works to the new property.

This may include circumstances where the existing accommodation is not reasonably and practicably capable of being adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person.

5.6 Hospital Discharge Assistance

This assistance is for people in hospital awaiting discharge back to their home, and provides up to £10,000 to fund urgent adaptations that allow access in and around the person's home. Other minor works which are needed to facilitate their discharge from hospital will also be considered e.g. one off clearance of hoarded properties and works to heating systems.

5.7 Safe, Warm and Well

This assistance is for owner occupiers over the age of 65, or those with chronic or severe health conditions affected by poor housing conditions (verified by a GP or medical professional), who need to undertake essential repairs to their home in order to remain safe and healthy. Essential repairs are determined as a Category 1 (serious) or significant Category 2 (other) hazards as determined by the Housing Act 2004. The maximum available funding is £8,000.

Applicants must be in receipt of a qualifying benefit or have an annual household income after tax of below £23,250

5.8 Dementia Aids and Adaptations

This assistance provides aids and minor adaptations to the home which are designed to enable people diagnosed with dementia to manage their surroundings and maintain their independence. The assistance is limited to £750 and not subject to a means test.

5.9 Stair lifts and Modular Access Ramps

Provides non means tested assistance for the installation of a stair lift and / or modular ramp where the person that meets the non-financial eligibility criteria for a mandatory disabled facilities grant. The assistance is limited to a maximum of £10,000 per item.

6.0 Eligibility Criteria and Conditions

- 6.1 In this policy the term “assistance” means any form of financial assistance approved for the purpose of housing renewal, maintenance, improvement or adaptation. “Condition” means any condition attached to any such assistance. Any reference to “owner” or “person responsible” is taken to mean any owner or other person who is responsible for the relevant conditions either singly or jointly. This includes the original person who applied for or received the assistance, as well as any other person who has subsequently become responsible for any condition as a result of acquiring the property or an interest in it.
- 6.2 The specific criteria for each form of assistance are detailed in appendix A. However, the following conditions will apply in all cases:
 - a. Where stated, any financial assistance and related conditions will be secured as a legal charge against the property. A breach of conditions requires the repayment of all or part of the assistance. This charge will not be removed until either the conditions expire or until the assistance is re-paid together with any interest or additional charges that may apply.
 - b. A charge against the property is binding on any person who is for the time being an owner of the premises concerned. Where a condition is broken, the Council has the usual powers and remedies in law to enforce the charge and secure payment of any amount due.
 - c. Where any condition is in force, the Council may require the responsible person to provide any information to satisfy the Council that the condition is being complied with. The Council can require this information in writing or in other reasonable form. It is a condition that this information is provided in the form required within a reasonable timescale as specified by the Council and as fully, accurately and honestly as reasonably practicable. Failure to comply with this requirement is a breach of conditions in itself and the assistance, or part of the assistance where specified, must be re-paid to the Council.
 - d. It is for the person responsible for complying with any condition to demonstrate to the Council’s satisfaction that the condition is being complied with. Failure to do so will be treated as failure to comply with the condition. The Council does not have the burden of having to prove that the condition is not being complied with.
 - e. Conditions will generally be enforced in all cases. Money repaid or recovered will be recycled back into the housing renewal capital programme.

- f. The approval of assistance does not give or imply the Council's approval of any other consent that may be required, such as planning permission or building regulation consent. It is the responsibility of the applicant to obtain any such consent as may be required.

6.3 Any person making an application for assistance must:

- a. Be over the age of 18 years on the date of application
- b. Live in the dwelling which is subject to the application as their sole main residence
- c. Live within the district of South Kesteven.

6.4 Persons will not be eligible for assistance in the following circumstances:

- a. Where ownership of the dwelling is disputed
- b. Where the owner of the property has a statutory duty to undertake the necessary works to the dwelling and it is reasonable for them to do so.
- c. Where the proposed works would normally be covered by buildings insurance. If before a grant is approved it is found that the applicant has submitted an insurance claim, the insurance company will be asked to confirm in writing the extent of the claim and their liability, if any. The value of any housing assistance will be reduced by the amount equivalent to the insurance company's liability.
- d. Where works have started before the formal approval of an application, except where in exceptional circumstances a defect may present a serious risk to health and safety.
- e. Where the proposed works are to repair any shed, outbuildings or appurtenances.
- f. Incomplete applications or applications lacking sufficient information will be refused.

6.5 All cases will be considered on a case by case basis. Incomplete applications or applications lacking sufficient information will be refused.

6.6 Enquiries about how the policy is operated should be referred to the Head of Environmental in the first instance. Appeals must be made in writing and detail the specific grounds on which the appeal is based.

7.0 Making an Application and Payment of Assistance

Applications must be made in writing on the appropriate form and must include original documentation where requested. An application will only be considered complete once all of the relevant documentation has been provided.

The Council may charge a fee for any professional services or charges incurred relating to the work for which the assistance is being sought e.g. obtaining proof

of ownership, drawing of plans etc. This fee will be incorporated into the total assistance amount.

The Council will make arrangements for contractors to undertake works, however, the contract agreement is between the applicant and contractor; the Council will not be liable for disputes arising between the parties. If the applicant elects to use their own contractor they must submit at least 2 written quotations from different contractors.

In the event of any disputes between the applicant and the contractor the Council will help to resolve these, however should this not be possible it may be necessary for the applicant to seek legal advice to remedy any dispute.

The Council will normally arrange for grant payments to be made directly to contractors upon completion of works.

8.0 Maintenance and Repair

The quality of work undertaken by contractors appointed by the Council is guaranteed for a period of 12 months. Some of the individual items may have their own extended warranties that are provided by the manufacturer. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that any extended warranties are applied for in accordance with the manufacturer's guarantee. Copies of guarantees/warranties will be provided to the applicant after completion of the works.

The Council is not responsible for the ongoing maintenance or repair of any items.

9.0 Data Protection

All data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

The Council may investigate or formally verify any of the information provided in connection with any application for assistance.

In order to progress an application it may be necessary to share information provided with other organisations that may assist with the grant process. These may include:

Lincolnshire County Council – Adult Social Care or Children's Services
Lincolnshire Home Independence Agency or other Agencies appointed by applicants
Relevant Government Departments

The Council is under a duty to protect public funds and may use the information provided for the prevention and detection of fraud. It may also share this information with other bodies administering public funds solely for these purposes.

APPENDIX 1 – Details and Conditions of Assistance

1. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants
2. Top Up of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant
3. Discretionary Disabled Adaptations Assistance
4. Moving on Assistance
5. Hospital Discharge Assistance
6. Safe, Warm and Well
7. Dementia Aids and Adaptations
8. Stair Lifts and Modular Access Ramps

1. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants

Purpose: Local housing authorities have a statutory duty to provide grant aid to disabled people to undertake a range of adaptations to their homes.

Mandatory disabled facilities grants will be administered in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The following provides a summary of these provisions, but should be read in conjunction with the full Act.

Maximum amount: The maximum amount is £30,000.

Applicant eligibility: All applicants must be eligible under the Act. Applications must be supported by a referral from an Occupational Therapist confirming that the person is disabled for the purposes of the Act and that the proposed works are necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person.

Eligible works: The relevant works must be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled occupant and it must be reasonable and practicable to carry out the works having regard to the age and condition of the property. The purposes for which a grant must be given are detailed in section 23 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Financial assessment: The grant is subject to a means test in accordance with the Housing Renewal Grants Regulations 1996, to determine the customer's contribution towards the cost of the works. The maximum grant including any contribution must not exceed £30,000.

Application: Applications must be made on the relevant form and supported by a referral from an Occupational Therapist. The Council will consult the Social Services Authority on all applications.

Applications may be made by owner occupiers, private tenants and Registered Social Landlord Tenants. In the case of tenants, the landlord may make an application on their behalf.

The Council will normally appoint a contractor, however, where the applicant chooses to use their own contractor, a minimum of two estimates must be submitted with the application.

Works must not commence until formal approval of the grant has been received by the applicant.

Payment: Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices. In some instances payments may be made in instalments and the balance (no less than 10% of the total cost of the eligible works) paid on satisfactory completion.

The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if it believes it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.

Conditions: The Council may remove items of equipment e.g. modular ramps and stair lifts from the property for re-use when they are no longer required by the disabled person. This will be considered on a case by case basis dependent on the age and condition of the item. Where the items are not considered appropriate for re-use it will be the responsibility of the householder/property owner to remove any items at their own cost.

Where the Council provides funding in excess of £5,000 that creates additional living space e.g. an extension or conversion of a garage or outbuilding, and where the applicant has an owner's interest in the property, this will be registered as a local land charge against the adapted property, subject to a maximum of £10,000. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), repayment of the amount will be required.

The Council will not pay for any additional works carried out without prior approval.

All works must be completed within 12 months of approval.

2. Top Up of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant

Purpose: To provide discretionary financial assistance to a disabled person who qualifies for a mandatory disabled facilities grant where the cost of the eligible works exceeds the mandatory grant maximum of £30,000.

Maximum amount: The maximum top up is £10,000.

Applicant eligibility: Applicants must have an owner's interest in the property and the disabled person (if different) must qualify for a mandatory disabled facilities grant where the value of the eligible works (including the client contribution and any fees if applicable) exceeds the mandatory grant maximum.

Eligible works: Works funded by the top up must be eligible works which are necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs as defined by the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Financial assessment: The top up will be means tested using the prescribed test of resources applicable to mandatory disabled facilities grants. If this test indicates a contribution towards the eligible works required, the grant recipient is normally expected to make the contribution. If this puts the recipient into financial hardship, then the contribution may be added to the grant amount. With the same conditions and land charge requirements applied. Where the disabled person is a child, the parents/guardians will be means tested.

Applications: Applications will be considered alongside an application for a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

Payment: The discretionary top up will be paid as an additional amount to the mandatory disabled facilities grant under the same payment conditions.

Conditions: The amount of the discretionary top up will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the adapted property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required.

Works must not commence until formal approval of the discretionary assistance and mandatory grant have been received by the applicant.

3. Discretionary Disabled Adaptations Assistance

Purpose: To provide discretionary financial assistance for disabled occupants who do not have the financial resources to pay for necessary adaptations to help support them to remain independent in their home. The discretionary assistance will fund minor works for those eligible for a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

Maximum amount: The maximum amount of assistance is £10,000.

Applicant eligibility: The disabled occupant must be eligible under the provisions of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Applications must be supported by a referral from a Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapist.

Eligible works: The relevant works must be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled occupant and it must be reasonable and practicable to carry out the works having regard to the age and condition of the property. The purposes for which a grant may be given are those detailed in section 23 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Any associated fees e.g. technical surveys, obtaining proof of title etc will be included in the total assistance amount.

Financial assessment: This assistance is not subject to a means test.

Payment: Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices. The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if it believes it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.

Conditions: The Council may remove items of equipment e.g. modular ramps and stair lifts from the property when they are no longer required

by the disabled person for re-use. This will be considered on a case by case basis dependent on the age and condition of the item. Where the items are not considered appropriate for re-use it will be the responsibility of the householder/property owner to remove any such items at their own cost.

Only one application for discretionary assistance will be considered in any 12 month period (taken from date of approval).

Where the applicant has an owner's interest in the property, the amount of the discretionary funding will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the adapted property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required. This will be reduced by 10% for each complete year.

The Council will not pay for any additional works carried out without prior approval.

Where the discretionary funding is no longer available, applications will be considered under the provisions of a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

4. Moving on Assistance

Purpose: This discretionary assistance enables disabled people who would be eligible for a mandatory disabled facilities grant to move to more suitable accommodation, where it is considered more appropriate than providing funding through a mandatory disabled facilities grant to adapt their existing home.

Maximum amount: The maximum amount is £10,000 and may be used in conjunction with a mandatory disabled facilities grant to undertake eligible works to the new property.

Applicant eligibility: Any disabled person who would be eligible for adaptation works under a mandatory disabled facilities grant

Qualifying criteria: A referral for adaptation of the existing property must have been received from an Occupational Therapist.

In the Council's opinion, the existing property must be unsuitable for adaptation, in that it is not reasonably and practicably capable of being adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person.

The applicant must have or propose to have an owner's interest in new property. The existing and new properties must be within South Kesteven District Council's area, and be the permanent, main residence of the disabled occupant.

In the opinion of the Council and in conjunction with the Occupational Therapist, the new property must be considered suitable for the needs of the disabled person or must be reasonably and practicably capable of being adapted to meet the needs of the disabled person.

The assistance can be used for the following eligible costs:

- Legal and ancillary fees
- Estate agent fees
- Removal costs

Financial assessment: The assistance is subject to the prescribed test of resources applicable to mandatory disabled facilities grants. Where the disabled person is a child, the parents/legal guardians will be means tested.

Payment: Payment will be made to the applicant's solicitor on exchange of contract so that funding is available for completion. Evidence of the fees will be required prior to payment.

Conditions: This discretionary assistance may only be awarded once.

Where an award has been made under this policy and prior to the exchange of contacts and the disabled person is no longer able to relocate to the new property e.g. they have moved into permanent care or deceased, the Council may decide to pay all, some or none of the assistance.

The amount of the discretionary funding will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the new property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the purchase (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required.

5. Hospital Discharge Assistance

Purpose: This assistance is for people in hospital whose discharge is delayed due to the condition of their home. The assistance may fund urgent adaptations that allow access in and around the person's home by providing stair lifts or ramps. Other minor works which are needed to facilitate their discharge from hospital will also be considered e.g. one off clearance of hoarded properties and works to heating systems.

Maximum amount: The maximum grant is £10,000

Applicant eligibility: The applicant must be in hospital and their discharge delayed.

The application must be accompanied by a referral from a hospital Occupational Therapist or other suitably qualified professional confirming the urgent works that are required to the home to enable discharge.

The property subject to the application must normally be occupied by the applicant on a permanent basis.

Eligible works: Eligible works include:

- Stair lifts
- Ramps and door widening to the essential doorways
- Heating repairs or improvements
- Clearance and one off deep clean of hoarded goods

Other works will be considered which will facilitate the hospital discharge on a case by case basis.

Financial

assessment:

This assistance is not subject to a means test

Payment:

The Council will appoint contractors to undertake the work and will pay them directly on production of satisfactory invoices. The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if it believes it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.

Conditions: If the cost of the works exceeds the maximum financial assistance the Council will liaise with the Occupational Therapist and/or relevant professionals to determine the priority works.

The Council will not pay for any additional works carried out without prior approval.

Where the applicant has an owner's interest in the property, the amount of the discretionary funding will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the adapted property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required. This will be reduced by 10% for each complete year.

6. Safe, Warm and Well

Purpose: This assistance is for owner occupiers over the age of 65, or those with chronic or severe health conditions affected by poor housing conditions who need to undertake essential repairs to their home in order to remain safe and healthy.

Maximum amount: The maximum amount is £8,000.

Applicant eligibility: The applicant must be an owner occupier or private tenant with a full repairing responsibility.

The applicant must be over the age of 65 or have a chronic or severe condition exacerbated by the cold or poor housing conditions. Evidence of the condition will be required e.g. letter/referral from a General Practitioner or other relevant health professional. Examples of relevant conditions include:

- Arthritis (osteo and rheumatoid, requiring regular treatment and review)
- Cardiovascular disease (for example heart disease or stroke)
- Respiratory disease (for example chronic bronchitis, severe asthma, emphysema or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)

Eligible works: Essential repairs are determined as a Category 1 (serious) or significant Category 2 (other) hazards as determined by the Housing Act 2004, which affects the ability of the property to be safe, wind and weather proof. Examples of works may include:

- Heating repairs or replacement
- Works to prevent falls
- Roof repairs

Any associated fees e.g. technical surveys, obtaining proof of title etc will be included in the total assistance amount.

All properties will be subject to inspection and assessment by the Council or its agent.

Financial assessment:	Applicants must or have an annual household income after tax of below £23,250 or be in receipt of one of the following Benefits:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support • Income-based Employment and Support Allowance (not contribution-based ESA) • Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (not contribution-based JSA) • Guarantee Pension Credit (not Savings Pension Credit alone) • Housing Benefit • Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit provided that the annual income for the purposes of assessing entitlement to the tax credit is less than £16,010 (or any other subsequent threshold set as part of Working/Child Tax Credit) • Universal Credit • Attendance Allowance (with an income of the applicant and their partner [if applicable] after tax, below £23,250) • Disability Living Allowance (with an income of the applicant and their partner [if applicable] after tax, below £23,250) • Carers Allowance (with an income of the applicant and their partner [if applicable] after tax, below £23,250) • Personal Independence Payment (with an income of the applicant and their partner [if applicable] after tax, below £23,250) • War Disablement Pension (which must include a mobility supplement or constant attendance allowance)
Payment:	The Council will appoint a contractor to undertake the eligible works. Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices. The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if we believe it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.
Conditions:	The applicant must have lived in the property for a minimum of 12 months as their main residence.

Only one application for assistance will be considered within any 3 year period (further applications may be considered at the discretion of the Service Manager, Environmental Health in exceptional circumstances).

The Council will not consider applications in respect of dwellings which have been built or converted less than 10 years from the date of application.

Where works beyond the maximum assistance value are identified, the assistance will be prioritised based upon the hazard score and circumstances of the applicant. Works must be reasonable and practicable having regard to the age and condition of the property.

The amount of the discretionary funding will be secured by attaching a local land charge on the new property. If the property is disposed of within 10 years of the completion of the works (as determined by the Council), re-payment of the amount will be required.

The Council will not pay for any additional works carried out without prior approval.

7. Dementia Aids and Adaptations

Purpose: This assistance will provide aids and adaptations in the home designed to enable people with a diagnosis of dementia to manage their surroundings and retain their independence.

Maximum amount: The maximum funding is £750

Applicant eligibility: Applicants must be owner occupiers or private tenants with a clinical diagnosis of dementia and referred by a General Practitioner, Dementia Support worker or other relevant health professional, confirming the works which are necessary and appropriate to support them to retain their independence.

Eligible works: The Council will work with the relevant health professional to determine appropriate works on a case by case basis. This may include: contrasting coloured hand rails, thermostatic taps, lighting and door signage etc.

Financial assessment: This assistance is not subject to a means test

Payment: The Council will appoint a contractor or work with a third party to undertake the eligible works. Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices.

Conditions: It must be reasonable and practicable to undertake the works.

All works must relate to the applicants dementia needs and assist them to remain in their home independently for a longer period.

Only one application will be considered within any 3 year period.

8. Stair Lifts and Modular Access Ramps

Purpose: To provide discretionary non-means tested funding for disabled people who meet the non-financial criteria for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant to install a stair lift and / or modular access ramp.

Maximum amount: The maximum funding is £10,000 per item.

Applicant eligibility: The disabled occupant must be eligible under the provisions of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Applications must be supported by a referral from a Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapist.

Eligible works: The provision of a stair lift or modular access ramp (the “relevant works”) must be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled occupant and it must be reasonable and practicable to carry out the works having regard to the age and condition of the property. The purposes for which a grant may be given are those detailed in section 23 of the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Any associated fees e.g. technical surveys, obtaining proof of title etc will be included in the total assistance amount.

Financial assessment: This assistance is not subject to a means test.

Payment: Payment will be made directly to the contractor upon satisfactory completion of the eligible works and approval of invoices. The applicant must agree that they are satisfied with the quality of the work prior to payment. If the applicant refuses, the Council will inspect the work and if it believes it is of sufficiently good standard the payment will be made.

Conditions: The Council may remove the items when they are no longer required by the disabled person for re-use. This will be considered on a case by case basis dependent on the age and condition of the item. Where the items are not considered appropriate for re-use it will be the responsibility of the householder/property owner to remove any such items at their own cost.

Only one stair lift and / or modular access ramp will be provided per property in any 12 month period (taken from the date of approval of the assistance)

The Council will not pay for any additional works associated with the installation without prior approval.

Where this discretionary funding is no longer available, applications will be considered under the provisions of a mandatory disabled facilities grant or other discretionary funding that may be available.

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Appendix C

Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy

Policy overview

Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance (DHFA) may be awarded to assist people to live independently in their homes and communities where a person's needs cannot be met through a mandatory grant, as the assistance required is not within its scope or where extenuating circumstances necessitate.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 allows Local Housing Authorities to directly or indirectly provide assistance, provided a policy is adopted and published setting out how it intends to use this general power to give assistance.

Title	Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy
Version	Draft v.7.4
Owner	
Attachments	1. Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy Explanatory Notes
Approved by	
Review date	

Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This policy takes into account relevant legislation relating to administering grants to improve housing standards. It also considers the duties imposed on the public sector relating to equalities, ensuring that each case is considered on individual circumstances and needs.
- 1.2. The policy has been developed to ensure that the council is working towards the health and wellbeing priorities identified within its own corporate plans and strategies as well as those supported across Lincolnshire. These include the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Lincolnshire Homes for Independence Blueprint, with actions being delivered through the Housing, Health and Care Delivery Group and its subgroups.
- 1.3. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Lincolnshire, which assesses the current and future health, care and wellbeing needs of the local community to inform local decision making, has two topics that are particularly relevant for this policy – ‘Unsuitable Homes’ and ‘Poor Condition Housing’.
- 1.4. Amongst other information, these identify:
 - Lincolnshire has a population that is ageing above the national average and areas that are in the top 10% of the most deprived in the country.
 - Across Lincolnshire, the total population aged 65 and over with a limiting long-term illness whose day-to-day activities are limited is projected to increase from an estimated 87,539 in 2019 to an estimated 120,655 in 2035.
 - 18% of private sector stock in the county is estimated to have a serious (Category 1) hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).
 - 17% of the private sector stock in the county is estimated to be occupied by low-income households.

2. Policy objective

- 2.1. To assist people who are unable to help themselves to live independently in their homes and communities for as long as possible.
- 2.2. Where a person's needs cannot be met through a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), as the assistance required is not within its scope or where extenuating circumstances necessitate, Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance (DHFA) may be awarded. The assistance will be subject to eligibility and provided for a range of purposes that support the national Better Care Agenda and reduces hospital admissions.
- 2.3. The range of purposes includes, but is not limited to:
 - helping an applicant to move to a suitable home (relocation)
 - topping up mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants
 - helping reduce delayed transfers of care (DTOC), e.g. priority works needed to facilitate hospital discharge

- helping people stay safe, warm and well
- provide aids and adaptations for people with specific conditions e.g. dementia, learning disabilities, neurodiversity and sensory impairments
- Assisting with an applicant's contribution to a mandatory grant

2.4. For the purpose of improving living conditions in their area, in accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, the Local Housing Authority may also directly or indirectly provide assistance in any form to acquire, adapt, repair, improve, demolish or construct housing accommodation subject to the appropriate approvals.

3. Council awards and allocations

3.1. Councils are under no obligation to award Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance, however, subject to the availability of funding Local Housing Authorities may award assistance on a case by case basis with authorised officers able to approve up to £15,000.

3.2. Assistance over this value may be awarded in accordance with the Councils agreed panel approach or in line with their appropriate scheme of delegation as set out in the attached 'Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy - Explanatory Notes (**Explanatory Notes**)'. The availability of other potential funding streams will be taken into account as part of this process.

3.3. The capital resources available for discretionary housing financial assistance will vary depending on the amount of funding allocated to the district councils from the Better Care Fund - a pooled budget between Lincolnshire County Council and the NHS Lincolnshire Integrated Care Board, received from the Department of Health and Social Care, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

3.4. The amount passed to each district council by Lincolnshire County Council varies and is set by national government using a prescribed allocation methodology. Each district council will then internally budget for anticipated mandatory DFGs before considering discretionary housing assistance.

4. Eligibility

4.1. **Person** - To be eligible for assistance an application must be supported in writing by one of the following:

- Occupational Therapist or Community Care Officer
- GP or medical professional e.g. Practice Nurse
- Local Authority Officer e.g. Housing or Environmental Health Officer, Wellbeing Lincs
- Professional from another appropriate organisation (see Explanatory Notes)

4.1.1. The referral must set out the type and details of housing assistance they believe the person requires and the reasons they consider the assistance is required.

4.2. **Property** - To qualify for assistance the following must apply in relation to the property (except for assistance towards relocation costs, when not all will be applicable):

- The property must be, or is going to be, the primary or sole residence of the eligible person and, depending on the nature of the works, they must intend to reside in it for as long as reasonably practicable. The exception to this is where a parent has legally agreed periods of custody over a disabled child.
- The owner of the property must give their consent for the required works. Assistance for works to rented properties will only be undertaken where the responsibility for the work does not rest with the landlord e.g. DTOC
- The property must be reasonably and practicably capable of being adapted or improved to meet the needs of the person, having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling.
- The property must be located within the council area where the application is being made.

4.3. **Financial** - To be eligible for Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance, the following criteria will be applied:

If you or your partner are in receipt of any of the following benefits, subject to meeting the other eligibility criteria, you are eligible for DHFA without further financial assessment:

- Universal Credit
- Income Support
- Income- Related Employment and support allowance (not contribution based)
- Income related Job seekers allowance (not contribution based)
- Guarantee Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit (where your annual income for the purposes of the tax credit assessment is below £15,050)
- Housing Benefit

4.3.1. If you are not in receipt of any of the above benefits, and depending on any local Council variations to this policy (see Explanatory Notes) a financial assessment (based on the mandatory DFG means test) will determine if you are eligible for DHFA, or if you need to make a financial contribution towards the cost of the required works. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes applications relating to disabled facilities for children.

4.3.2. The allowances within the financial assessment may be adjusted to take into account inflation depending on the applicant's circumstances i.e. amount of savings and or income, at the discretion of the council.

4.3.3. In exceptional circumstances (such as cases of end of life care), subject to the provision of appropriate supporting evidence (see Explanatory notes), the Local Authority may waive the financial assessment in order to expedite works up to the value of £8,000.

5. Financial assessment

5.1. The income and savings of couples, whether married or not will be included in the financial assessment, along with that of all other adults residing in the property (if

applicable). However, if there is clear evidence that other household members such as adult children or the applicant's parents, are already contributing appropriately to the household finances e.g. paying board and lodgings, this may be taken into account as income. Each case will be considered on its circumstances.

- 5.2. Any equity in the property you own and live in will be discounted along with a standard £6,000 in savings. Second homes will be included as capital or income depending on the circumstances. Households with an individual or combined income over £30,000 will not qualify for Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance unless evidence of exceptional circumstances is provided sufficient to satisfy a council's panel decision or applicable scheme of delegation. Households assessed as being able to make a contribution may, depending on the specific circumstances, be assisted by any appropriate means in accordance with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 e.g. payment scheme or discretionary interest free loan, in order to meet that contribution.

6. Local Land Charges

- 6.1. Where the council provides Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance of more than £1000 and the works are considered likely to increase the value of the property (see Explanatory Notes), a Local Land Charge will be registered to recover the funding when the property is sold or otherwise transferred. However, where the DHFA is linked to the top up of a mandatory DFG, the **full value** of the DHFA (excluding any amount awarded under the mandatory DFG) will be registered and recoverable as a Local Land Charge.

7. Warranties

- 7.1. The council is not responsible for any ongoing maintenance or repair relating to grant funded works, although there is normally an initial defects liability period, which is the responsibility of the contractor who undertook the works. Unless it has been agreed that it is included in the grant, it is the applicants responsibility to ensure that any extended / manufacturers warranties are applied for.

8. Other important information

- 8.1. Only one discretionary grant can be applied for in each financial year unless exceptional circumstances can be evidenced to the satisfaction of the councils agreed panel approach. Further details can be found within the attached Explanatory Notes.
- 8.2. While there are no statutory or regulatory timescales that apply, professional recommendations relating to urgency will be considered alongside the specific circumstances of the case and the council will use its best endeavours to make decisions on discretionary assistance as quickly as possible when provided with all the necessary information. Discretionary assistance works by their nature can be complex and time consuming, however we will strive to ensure that works are undertaken and completed as soon as practicable.

8.3. Works undertaken with Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance may affect any application for housing to the relevant councils Housing Register.

8.4. If applicants are dissatisfied with the service they receive or do not believe all relevant information has been taken into account, and are unable to resolve directly with the departmental service, they may use the complaints process for the council they are applying to for assistance.

9. General Conditions of Assistance

9.1. The term assistance means any form of financial assistance approved for the purpose of housing renewal, maintenance, improvement and adaptation. This may include a grant, an improvement scheme in which people are invited to participate, a loan or other form of financial assistance, whether provided directly or indirectly. Condition means any condition(s) attached to the assistance

9.2. Where stated, any financial assistance and any related conditions will be secured as a legal charge against the property (in the case of disabled facilities grants this would not apply to the tenant of a registered housing provider).

9.3. Any charge will not be removed until either all the conditions expire or until the assistance is repaid, together with any interest or additional charges apply. A breach of any conditions could also see the Council using existing powers and remedies to enforce the charge and secure payment of any amount due.

9.4. A charge against the property is binding on any person who is for the time being an owner of the premises concerned. Where any condition(s) is in force the Council may require the person responsible to provide any information to satisfy the Council that the condition(s) is being complied with. Failure to comply with a request for information within a reasonable time period and in the form required by the Council will be deemed a breach in itself and thus any assistance must be repaid to the Council. It is the responsibility of the person responsible to prove the condition is being complied with to the Council's satisfaction. Failure to do so will be treated as a failure to comply with the condition. The Council does not therefore have the burden of having to prove that any condition is not being complied with.

9.5. No applications for financial assistance will be considered where the relevant work has been started or completed. The approval of assistance does not imply or give the Council's approval of any other consents that might be required. e.g. planning permission or building regulations. It is the responsibility of the applicant to obtain any consents that are required.

9.6. Conditions will generally be enforced in all cases. Any money repaid or recovered will be recycled into the Council's capital programme for private sector housing renewal.

10. Delegations

10.1. As with any policy, over time parts of this document may become outdated as a result of amendments to legislation, financial constraint and the influence of other strategic policy documents produced by the Council, Government or other national

authorities. Thus it is essential that it is kept under regular review and updated when necessary and appropriate, therefore:

- i. Relevant Senior Housing Managers have delegated authority to make minor and inconsequential changes to the policy in consultation with the Members/Committee with responsibility for Housing if agreed on a countywide basis. Variations will not make changes to the policy that substantively change the purpose of the policy.
- ii. Relevant Senior Housing Managers have delegated authority to make amendments to the Explanatory Notes in consultation with the relevant Member/Committee with responsibility for Housing. This delegation will not be used to make amendments to the Explanatory Notes that impact other districts, unless agreed on a countywide basis.
- iii. Chief Executive Officers have delegated authority to suspend the awarding of any discretionary assistance under this policy in consultation with the relevant Senior Housing Manager and Member/Committee with responsibility for Housing.

How to access the Assistance

Please contact the relevant Local Authority as set out below for further information or an application form.

Authority	Contact (for referrals other than through Mosaic)
Boston Borough Council	DFG@boston.gov.uk Tel: 01205 314563 for enquiries
City of Lincoln Council	housing.privatesector@lincoln.gov.uk
East Lindsey District Council	Grants.Admin@e-lindsey.gov.uk
South Holland District Council	privatehousing@sholland.gov.uk
North Kesteven District Council	housingrenewal@n-kesteven.gov.uk
South Kesteven District Council	dfg@southkesteven.gov.uk Tel: 01476 406080 for enquiries
West Lindsey District Council	dfg@west-lindsey.gov.uk Tel: 01427 676676 for enquiries

Further advice in relation to housing assistance, including financial advice can be found from:

- The council's website
- Citizens Advice
- Shelter
- Gov.uk

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Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy - Explanatory Notes

These notes sit alongside the Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy and provide additional information where considered appropriate, to support all parties to fairly and consistently apply the policy so that it may effectively meet its objectives.

These notes are by no means comprehensive as the intention of the policy is to allow each case to be considered on its own merits depending on the specific circumstances so that assistance may be provided when reasonable and appropriate.

Range of purposes

Further information is contained within the table below on the range of purposes Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance (DHFA) may, subject to eligibility, be used for. However any justifiable, appropriate and reasonable case will be considered.

Applications must be supported in writing by an appropriate professional (see who can support an application / make a referral) setting out the type and details of housing assistance they believe the person requires and the reasons they consider the assistance is required

Purpose	Eligible costs	Who can refer?
Relocation Grant – It may be considered appropriate to assist an eligible DFG applicant to move to a suitable home where: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• their current home is not suitable for adaptation, or• their landlord refuses to allow the property to be adapted, or• an owner occupier is in financial difficulty and needs to move to a suitable affordable home.	Reasonable legal, estate agents fees and removal costs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Housing Authority• Occupational Therapist or Community Care Officer
Topping up a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant	Eligible costs above the mandatory DFG maximum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Housing Authority
Helping reduce delayed transfers of care (DTOC)	The cost of reasonable necessary and appropriate works to the patient's home in order to facilitate their safe discharge from hospital.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Occupational Therapist or Community Care Officer• GP or medical professional

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital Housing Link Worker
Helping people stay safe, warm and well	The cost of remedial works to address a Housing Health and Safety Rating System Hazard or other potential risk e.g. hoarding clearance, following assessment by a qualified Local Authority Officer or other appropriate information and evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authority Officer • Occupational Therapist or Community Care Officer • GP or medical professional • Professional from another appropriate organisation.
Providing aids and adaptations to support those with conditions such as dementia, learning difficulties, neurodiversity and sensory impairments to live safely in their homes	The cost of appropriate aids and adaptations in line with national guidance. This may include assistive technology where absolutely necessary and appropriate and no other funding source should be providing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational Therapist or Community Care Officer • GP or medical professional • Hospital Housing Link Worker • Local Authority Officer • Professional from another appropriate organisation
Assisting with an applicant's contribution to a mandatory grant	Reasonable assistance to meet calculated contribution amount in some circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Housing Authority

Professions and organisations who can support an application for DHFA

- Occupational Therapist or Community Care Officer
- GP or other medical professional e.g. Practice Nurse
- Local Authority Officer e.g. Housing or Environmental Health Officer, Wellbeing Lincs
- Professional from another appropriate organisations including but not limited to: Lincolnshire Police, Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, voluntary sector or third sector organisation e.g. Citizens Advice, Age UK.....

Applications must be supported in writing setting out the type and details of housing assistance they believe the person requires and the reasons they consider the financial assistance is required. Contact details of the supporting / referring professional must be provided.

Panel approach

Approval of Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance over £15,000 will be made through a panel approach or in accordance with the Councils Scheme of Delegation, details of the approach for each council are:

Authority	Decision and delegation
Boston Borough Council	Approval may be given by the relevant Assistant Director, Deputy Chief Executive or Chief Executive who must secure consent from the relevant portfolio holder with a full audit trail of the circumstances and decision process.
City of Lincoln Council	Panel to be made up of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Private Sector housing Team Leader• Case officer• Referring body
East Lindsey District Council	Approval may be given by the relevant Assistant Director, Deputy Chief Executive or Chief Executive who must secure consent from the relevant portfolio holder with a full audit trail of the circumstances and decision process.
North Kesteven District Council	Decisions on applications will be made in accordance with the Council's Constitution and Scheme of Delegation
South Holland District Council	Approval may be given by the relevant Assistant Director, Deputy Chief Executive or Chief Executive who must secure consent from the relevant portfolio holder with a full audit trail of the circumstances and decision process.
South Kesteven District Council	Decisions on applications will be made in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up to £15,000 - Team Leader• Up to £30,000 - Head of Service• Above £30,000 - Assistant Director
West Lindsey District Council	Panel to be made up of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homes, Health and Wellbeing Team Manager• Senior Homes, health and Wellbeing Officer• Senior Homelessness Prevention officer• Referring body

On Discretionary housing financial assistance can be applied for once in each financial year unless exceptional circumstances can be evidenced to the satisfaction of the councils agreed panel approach.

These circumstances may include significant deterioration of the applicants/clients condition or a substantial and unforeseen deterioration in the properties condition e.g. due to a leak.

Local variations to the Financial Assessment set out within the policy (if any)

Authority	Detail of local variation
Boston Borough Council	None
City of Lincoln Council	<p>All applicants for a discretionary grant up to the value of £15,000 will not be required to undertake a financial assessment of means.</p> <p>However, when 75% of the Council's Better Care Fund available budget has been committed discretionary grants will not be available until the next years funding has been received.</p> <p>In these instances, the Council does not undertake to maintain a waiting list.</p>
East Lindsey District Council	None
North Kesteven District Council	No applicant is expected to pay the first £1,800.00 of an assessed contribution
South Holland District Council	None
South Kesteven District Council	<p>A discretionary grant for a stair lift and/or modular access ramp is available to any disabled resident who meets the criteria for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant. The maximum funding available is £7,000 per item.</p> <p>This grant is not subject to a financial assessment or repayment condition, but the application must be supported by a recommendation for the adaptation from a Lincolnshire County Council Occupational Therapist.</p>
West Lindsey District Council	None

Waiver of financial assessment

In exceptional circumstances (such as end of care), the following supporting evidence should be provided to support the waiver of the financial assessment in order to expedite works up to the value of £8,000:

- Letter from the GP, Consultant or other appropriate medical professional involved in the person's care.

Works considered likely to increase the value of a property

Where works are considered likely to increase the value of a property, a Local Land Charge will be registered to recover the funding when the property is sold or otherwise transferred. The following works are considered likely to increase the value of a property:

- Renewal or significant repair or replacement of extensive element/s of a property e.g. roof, electrics, heating system
- Works that would increase the habitable floor space of a property or significantly improve the facilities available e.g. DFG extension, conversion of a part of an existing property.
- Where Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance is linked to the top up of a mandatory Disabled Facility Grant, the **full value** of the DHFA will be registered and recoverable as a Local Land Charge.

Title	Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy – Explanatory Notes
Version	Draft v.1.4
Owner	
Attachments	Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy
Approved by	
Review date	

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Equality Impact Assessment

Question	Response
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy April 2024/Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Assistance Grants Policy
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event	To enable the delivery of discretionary grant funding for the purposes of adapting properties for eligible residents to remain in their homes and carry out everyday tasks.
3. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	Residents of South Kesteven District Council who meet the eligibility of the grant products offered via the policy. In most cases that will be individuals who are either disabled or have vulnerabilities that require works within the property to enable them to carry out every day activities.
4. Has there been any consultation with, or input from, customers/service users or other stakeholders? If so, with whom, how were they consulted and what did they say? If you haven't consulted yet and are intending to do so, please complete the consultation table below.	No - policy has been developed in accordance with the relevant legislation and guidance around the use of such grant funding as provided by the Better Care Fund.
5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?	Quarterly/annual monitoring of spend, and grants approved/completed that is returned to the relevant ministerial department.

Protected Characteristic	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact e.g. adjustment to the policy <small>(The Action Log below should be completed to provide further detail)</small>
Age	Neutral	The grant funding is available to all ages, the main criteria relates to health and disabilities.	N/A
Disability	Positive	The grant funding provided within the policy is intended to assist individuals with disabilities by carrying out adaptations with properties to assist with completion of every day task, such as bathing, cooking and accessibility into and around the home.	N/A
Gender Reassignment	Neutral	The policy has no direct implications to adversely effect individuals with the characteristic.	N/A
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Neutral	The policy has no direct implications to adversely effect individuals with the characteristic.	N/A



Pregnancy and Maternity	Neutral	The policy has no direct implications to adversely effect individuals with the characteristic.	N/A
Race	Neutral	The policy has no direct implications to adversely effect individuals with the characteristic.	N/A
Religion or Belief	Neutral	The policy has no direct implications to adversely effect individuals with the characteristic.	N/A
Sex	Neutral	The policy has no direct implications to adversely effect individuals with the characteristic.	N/A
Sexual Orientation	Neutral	The policy has no direct implications to adversely effect individuals with the characteristic.	N/A
Other Factors requiring consideration			
Socio-Economic Impacts	Positive	The grant funding provided within the property is intended to assist those in the majority of cases that have been disadvantaged due to their circumstances, where that be physical or financial.	N/A
Carers (those who provide unpaid care to a family member, friend or partner)	Neutral/positive	The policy has no direct implications to affect careers, it has the potential to benefit them through the delivery of works to assist with the caring needs of the individual being cared for.	N/A

Consultation

Negative impacts identified will require the responsible officer to consult with the affected group/s to determine all practicable and proportionate mitigations. Add more rows as required.

Group/Organisation	Date	Response
N/A	N/A	N/A

Proposed Mitigation: Action Log

To be completed when barriers, negative impact or discrimination are found as part of this process – to show actions taken to remove or mitigate. Any mitigations identified throughout the EIA process should be meaningful and timely. Add more rows as required.



Negative Impact	Action	Timeline	Outcome	Status
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Evaluation Decision

Once consultation and practicable and proportionate mitigation has been put in place, the responsible officer should evaluate whether any negative impact remains and, if so, provide justification for any decision to proceed.

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	No – as detailed above the policy only seeks to assist those with some of the protected characteristics.	
Final Decision	Tick	Include any explanation/justification required
1. No barriers identified, therefore activity will proceed	✓	
2. Stop the policy or practice because the data shows bias towards one or more groups		
3. Adapt or change the policy in a way that will eliminate the bias		
4. Barriers and impact identified , however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the aim of the policy or practice (e.g. in extreme cases or where positive action is taken). Therefore you are going to proceed with caution with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision		

Did you consult with an Equality Ally prior to carrying out this assessment? Yes/No

Sign off

Name and job title of person completing this EIA	Tom Amblin-Lightowler – Environmental Health Manager, Environmental Protection & Private Sector Housing
Officer Responsible for implementing the policy/function etc	Tom Amblin-Lightowler – Environmental Health Manager, Environmental Protection & Private Sector Housing
Date Completed	12/1/24
Line Manager	Ayeisha Kirkham
Date Agreed (by line manager)	Head of Service Public Protection
Date of Review (if required)	12/1/24



Completed EIAs should be included as an appendix to the relevant report going to a Cabinet, Committee or Council meeting and a copy sent to equalities@southkesteven.gov.uk.

Completed EIAs will be published along with the relevant report through Modern.Gov before any decision is made and also on the Council's website.

Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/2024

WORK PROGRAMME

REPORT TITLE	OFFICER	PURPOSE	ORIGINATED/COMMITTEE HISTORY DATE(S)	CORPORATE PRIORITY
1 February 2024, 2.00pm				
Armed Forces Covenant Action Plan	Lead Officer: Claire Moses Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community)	Annual report – Due December 2023	Last reported to Committee on 8 December 2022	High performing Council Healthy and Strong Communities
Council in the Community	Lead Officer: Claire Moses Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community)	To review the Council in the Community events which have taken place during 2023 and propose future activities	This is a new report	High performing Council
Cost of Living Team Update	Lead Officer: Claire Moses Head of Service (Revenues, Benefits, Customer and Community)	To review the impacts of cost of living and scrutinise the performance of the action plan	Last reported to Committee on 16 March 2023	High performing Council Healthy and Strong Communities
Private Sector Housing Adoptions Policy	Lead Officer: Ayeisha Kirkham (Head of Service Public Protection	The Council currently provides discretionary disabled facility grants (DFG) for adaptations to private residential dwellings within the district, in addition to its	N/A	Housing that meets the needs of all residents

REPORT TITLE	OFFICER	PURPOSE	ORIGINATED/COMMITTEE HISTORY DATE(S)	CORPORATE PRIORITY
		mandatory DFGs requirement. The Council is required to publish a policy if it provides discretionary DFGs and the existing Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is out of date and due for review. The report provides the updated options of the policy for consideration.		
28 March 2024, 2.00pm				
Crime Disorder and Local Partnership working update	Lead Officer: Jodie Archer/Julie Martin Ayeisha Kirkham – Public Protection		last reported on 16 March 2023	
CCTV	Lead Officer: Alison Hall-Wright (Assistant Director of Finance)			
Safeguarding Annual Report	Lead Officer: Jodie Archer (Head of Housing Services/Safeguarding Lead)			
Draft KPIs	Lead Officer: Debbie Roberts (Head of Corporate Projects, Policy and Performance)			
Change4Lincs Update	Lead Officer: Jodie Archer/Sarah McQueen		Last reported 9 February 2023	

REPORT TITLE	OFFICER	PURPOSE	ORIGINATED/COMMITTEE HISTORY DATE(S)	CORPORATE PRIORITY
Update report on Grantham High Street Heritage Action Zone Project	Lead Officer: Claire Saunders (Project Management Assistant)			

Unscheduled Items

Report title	Issue	Originated	Corporate Priority
Car Parking			
Prevent Update	To provide an update regarding the Councils duties under Prevent	Last heard at Committee on 11 October 2023, update due in October 2024	High performing Council

The Committee's Remit

The remit of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be to work alongside Cabinet Members to assist with the development of policy and to scrutinise decisions in respect of, but not limited to:

- Allotments
- Anti-social behaviour, community safety and local policing
- Benefit claims
- Community engagement & cohesion
- Community funding and volunteering
- Community right to bid
- Community well-being
- Customer services

- Disabled facilities grant
- Equality and diversity
- Parish and town council liaison
- Public conveniences
- Safeguarding and individual wellbeing
- Shop front designs and funding
- Street furniture

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