



Cabinet

12 March 2024

Report of Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning

Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy

Report Author

Tom Amblin-Lightowler, Environmental Health Manager – Environmental Protection & Private Sector Housing

 tom.amblin-lightowler@southkesteven.gov.uk

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to publish a policy if it provides discretionary DFGs and the existing Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is out of date and due for review.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 policy for consideration.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy be adopted and published.

Decision Information	
Is this a Key Decision?	No
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?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 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 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 (SKDC) 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 The current policy was an SKDC policy only and is due for review, as part of that a larger piece of work was undertaken within Lincolnshire to create a county wide discretionary grants policy that removed the postcode variation of the amounts and types of grants offered between districts. This was produced by the Lincolnshire Health and Accessible Homes Group made up of representatives from all districts and relevant individuals from Lincolnshire County Council. This policy is referred to as;

- Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy

2.6 The main differences to the current policy 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.

3. Key Considerations

3.1 The draft Local Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is a 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 Cabinet is requested to approves the Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy be for adoption and publication.

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. The proposed policy meets the local requirements whilst ensuring consistent delivery across the county.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 There is no statutory requirements for a consultation on the proposed policy 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.
- 6.2 The policy along with a local variant were put to Rural Overview and Scrutiny on 1 February 2024, it was recommended at this meeting to take the proposed policy to Cabinet for approval rather than the local variant.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix A: Proposed Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy
- 7.2 Appendix B: Explanatory notes to Lincolnshire Discretionary Housing Financial Assistance Policy
- 7.3 Appendix C: Equality Impact Assessment.