

Housing and Health Committee	
Meeting Date	12 th September 2023
Report Title	Housing Assistance Policy Review
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities
Lead Officer	Glyn Pritchard, Private Sector Housing Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<p>The committee is recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To identify members of the committee to form a working group to support the policy review: 2. To agree the terms of reference of the review.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the Housing and Health Committee with an overview of the current Housing Assistance Policy and seeks direction from the committee on the review.

2 Background

- 2.1 The current Housing Assistance Policy was adopted by Cabinet in May 2018. Part of the Cabinet decision provided delegations for minor amendments to be made to the policy by the Head of Service in consultation with the Cabinet Member and the policy has been subject to minor amendments regularly. The last changes to the policy were made in 2021. The current policy is available here, [Housing Assistance Policy - April 2021.indd \(swale.gov.uk\)](#)
- 2.2 The Housing Assistance Policy sets out what assistance the Council is able to offer by way of grants, loans, practical assistance and advice to households. This policy has been adopted under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. The Order enables local authorities to develop a means of providing assistance to households living in the private sector to carry out repairs, improvements and adaptations so that they can address local needs and priorities and enable residents to remain independent in their homes.
- 2.3 The policy addresses the following aims:
- To provide adaptations to existing homes to meet disabled people's needs;
 - To assist with essential works to help disabled, elderly and vulnerable people to remain safe and independent in their home;
 - To assist in schemes that provide help to enable residents to be discharged from hospital back into their home safely, and to reduce the risk

of admission or re-admission to hospital by ensuring that the home environment is free from hazards; and

- To ensure that assistance is used as effectively as possible; that monies are recycled where possible and to provide assistance to those persons in greatest need.

2.4 The support currently available falls within the following schemes:

- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)
- Discretionary Grant and Loan Assistance
- Decent Home Loans (DHL)
- Home Repair Grant (HRG)
- Winter Warmth Grant (WWG)
- Relocation assistance (RA)
- No Use Empty Loans (NUE)
- Heating and Energy Advice Schemes
- Staying Put Services
- Kent Landlord Accreditation

2.5 The policy is funded principally through the Better Care Fund (BCF monitored by KCC and Government). In 2022/23 the allocation to Swale was £2,917,102 and in 2023/24 our allocation remained the same £2,917,102. This funds the Mandatory and Discretionary DFG schemes and elements of the Staying Put Services, and services provided by Kent County Council to the value of £391,552 and a further £55,000 for a dedicated KCC occupational therapist as part BCF agreements in Kent. The Better Care Fund must be spent in line with the BCF grant conditions and adhere to the [Disabled Facilities Grant \(DFG\) delivery: Guidance for Local Authorities in England \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#). The other schemes are funded through a range of mechanisms and either charges are recouped, or loans provided, and charges are placed on properties.

2.6 The spend and performance data is shown below in relation to work under the policy during 2022/23.

DFG Committed (Approved) = £2,176,266

DFG Expenditure (Paid) = £1,607,353

DFG Discretionary Grants (inc. Home Improvement Agency (HIA) spend = £496047

HRG Committed (Approved) = £1,998

HRG Expenditure (Paid) = £1,998

Winter Warmth Committed (Approved) = £85,463

Winter Warmth Expenditure (Paid) = £71,582

Loans Committed (Approved) = £32,662

Loans Expenditure (Paid) = £24,937

Number of DFG approvals = 135

Number of DFG referrals received = 244

Number of means test cases = 12
Number of non-means test cases = 232

- 2.7 The Council operates the Home Improvement Agency in-house, the staying put team exists to support clients to access the relevant support and this can be through low level interventions which enable residents to be discharged from hospital or reduce the likelihood of falls. The performance data from 2022/23 is shown below:

Enquires = 1,345
HIA Grant Case work = 182 cases
Handy Person Case work = 606 cases
Health referrals = 395
Clutter cases = 68 cases
Early discharges = 83 cases
Health and Safety Checks = 99 cases
Preventative Falls/ Hospital Admission Cases = 303 cases

- 2.8 As part of the policy review the committee is asked to identify members to form a working group and agree the scope of the review.

- 2.9 Proposed terms of reference for the review:

- To consider if the policy is providing the right assistance to households in the borough;
- To consider if the financial thresholds and means test are at the appropriate levels (some of these are set nationally);
- To consider if the policy is reaching the right residents in the borough;
- To ensure the policy can be resourced both in terms of funding availability and officer resource to administer.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 To identify members of the committee to form a working group to support the policy review:
- 3.2 To agree the terms of reference of the review.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 None

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 None

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone.
Financial, Resource and Property	The BCF for 2023/24 is after committed deductions £2,470,550. The Private Sector Housing Team have 7 x FTE officers. The Staying Put Team has 4.5 FTE officer.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	This policy has been adopted under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Winter warmth work makes homes more efficient and therefore would contribute towards the climate and ecological emergency.
Health and Wellbeing	The majority of work delivered under this policy directly supports the health and wellbeing of residents to live independently and improve conditions. The work of the staying put team directly reduces hospital admissions and carries out preventative work.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	The team work with vulnerable clients and will make appropriate referrals should they be required.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	As part of the policy review a community impact assessment will be conducted.
Privacy and Data Protection	The policy and associated database are managed in line with the Council policies.

7 Appendices

7.1 None

8 Background Papers

8.1 There are no background papers.