

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Cambridgeshire Adaptations Agreement and Huntingdonshire Housing Renewal Assistance Policy

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Environment) – 7th March 2017
Cabinet – 16th March 2017

Executive Portfolio: Cllr Ryan Fuller, Executive Member for Housing and Regulatory Services

Report by: Caroline Hannon, Housing Strategy Manager

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

This report provides Members with:

- a copy of the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations Agreement (which is a joint agreement between Cambridge City Council (CCityC), East Cambridgeshire District Council (EADC), Fenland District Council (FDC), Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC), South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) and Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) in partnership with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) which establishes a joint strategic approach to delivering housing adaptations from 1st April 2017 to ensure the best use of the capital resources available through the Better Care Fund (BCF).
- a copy of the refreshed HDC Housing Renewal Assistance Policy which has been updated to complement the adaptations agreement.

Recommendation(s):

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations Agreement and the HDC Housing Renewal Assistance Policy.

The Cabinet is asked to

- endorse the Cambs Housing Adaptations Agreement which establishes a joint strategic approach to delivering housing adaptations to ensure the best use of the capital resources available through Better Care Fund.
- approve the refreshed HDC Housing Renewal Assistance Policy which has been updated to complement the adaptations agreement.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Cambridgeshire Executive Partnership Board (CEPB - multi-agency partnership overseeing health and social care service transformation for older people and vulnerable adults) commissioned a review aimed at taking a wider and more strategic approach to delivery of housing adaptations encompassing both capital (Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and revenue funds available from all sources as a result of the increased DFG funding available.
- 1.2 The review which commenced in February 2016 and reported to Adults Committee at Cambs County Council (CCC) in November 2016 made 3 key findings:
- New services are needed that consider people's needs in context, including early conversations and planning for the longer term: services need to engage with people before they need an adaptation, and should encourage people to think about whether the accommodation they are living in is suitable for the longer term.
 - Existing services need to adapt to support a growing population: performance in many parts of the county is too slow in the implementation of adaptations funded through DFGs. It is recommended that the ability to 'fast track' commonly requested small adaptations (e.g. level access showers) be introduced and that a full review of existing processes and procedures is needed to speed up the DFG process.
 - Funding arrangements across the system will need to change to support a shift in focus: the significant increase in capital funding offers new opportunities for the Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) to generate more fees and become financially self-sustainable.
- 1.3 As a result of these findings, a Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations Agreement has been drafted (Appendix 1) containing principles that the partners can sign up to, including flexible use of the DFG Capital allocation for other grants, relocation expenses and "fast track" adaptations. It also includes provision for the District Councils to use an element of the DFG Capital Allocation to provide Top-up grants or loans that are currently the responsibility of the County Council. This will remove a significant amount of duplication of officer time and confusion for vulnerable households who currently apply to both the District and County Councils.
- 1.4 The HDC Housing Renewals policy (Appendix 2) has been updated to take account of the findings of the CEPB review and the joint adaptations agreement, the updated information is within Appendix Six.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The importance of housing adaptations in supporting people to live more independently in their own homes and communities has increasingly been recognised nationally. In 2016/17 there was a significant uplift in funding for DFGs distributed across all 5 District Councils via the Better Care Fund (BCF) from £1.9 million in 2015/16 to £3.4 million. Further increases in DFG funding are expected year on year until 2020 although these have yet to be confirmed.

- 2.2 The BCF is a pooled budget between local authorities and CCG to encourage a joined-up approach to improving outcomes across health, social care and housing. DFGs are funded from a financial allocation (called the DFG Capital Allocation) which District Councils receive to assist with the provision of adaptations in line with responsibilities under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002. This allocation is delivered via the Better Care Fund (BCF), under which money passes from the Department of Health in Central Government, through County Councils, to District Councils.
- 2.3 HDC's Housing Renewal Assistance Policy was last reviewed in November 2014. The policy has now been updated to reflect the adaptations agreement. Historically, HDC has tended to prioritise funding towards DFGs which are mandatory rather than towards the elements in the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy. For the last year HDC has not made any funding available for the other elements of the Housing Renewal Policy.
- 2.4 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 provides scope for capital resources received from BCF to be used more flexibly to deliver improved outcomes. This was also highlighted in the findings of the CEPB review which indicated that 'funding arrangements across the system will need to change to support a shift in focus'.
- 2.5 The adaptations agreement includes the following elements which will be reflected in the refreshed HDC Housing Renewal Assistance Policy:

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant	A grant provided to eligible households to enable them to continue to live safely in their home.
Discretionary Minor Repair Assistance	A grant paid to home owners who are in receipt of an appropriate welfare benefit to provide minor repairs to keep them safe and warm. Maximum grant £5,000.
Disabled Facilities Top Up Assistance	An interest free loan paid to property owners or a grant paid to Registered Provider tenants to enable relevant DFG work to proceed where the total cost of the work exceeds the maximum DFG amount. A simple means test will apply.
Disabled Persons Relocation Grant	A grant paid to cover the cost of moving to alternative accommodation where the applicant is eligible for a DFG but the cost of moving is less than the cost of adapting the home. Maximum grant £5,000
Special Purpose Assistance	A non-means tested grant of up to £3,000 to provide low cost adaptations or improvement works which are not eligible for a DFG and which may facilitate a person to return home from hospital or enable a disabled person to continue to live safely in their home

- 2.6 The table below provides a summary of the five elements of the current HDC Housing Renewals Policy and indicates whether they will remain, be withdrawn or altered by the refreshed policy:

Repair Assistance	This will be replaced by the new element: Discretionary Minor Repairs Assistance. Funding will be reduced from a maximum of £20,000 to £5,000 per application to achieve greater value from the budget.
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Landlord Grant	The policy enabled landlords to apply for grants to undertake repairs or improvements to private rented properties. No landlord grants have been awarded since 2012/13 as HDC did not provide a budget and accordingly the removal of this policy element should not have any impact.
Disabled Facilities Top up Assistance	This element of the policy will remain. Although HDC removed the budget for this in 2016/17 it is considered essential that we utilise BCF resources to implement this element to ensure complex DFG cases have a means of being resolved. CCC has withdrawn their funding for top ups as a result of the BCF being passed on to districts.
Special Purpose Assistance	This element will remain. However it will be changed to provide a grant rather than a loan as the primary purpose is to provide fast track adaptations such as in the case of hospital discharges. The provision of a loan takes much longer to process due to the associated paperwork and checks.
Disabled Persons Relocation Grant	This element will remain.
Boiler Replacement Scheme	This will be withdrawn but applications for boilers can be submitted through the Discretionary Minor Repairs Assistance policy.

- 2.7 Appendix Six of the refreshed Housing Renewal Assistance Policy sets out the proposed changes to the current approved policy document.
- 2.8 Whilst the housing adaptations agreement is seeking to encourage the flexible use of the DFG capital allocation, Section 1.4 of the agreement does enable HDC to prioritise funding towards mandatory DFGs and to only provide the other elements of the agreement if there is sufficient capital to do so.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 Do not agree to the joint adaptations agreement and do not refresh the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy:
This option was ruled out as it does not meet the wider objectives of the Better Care Fund to take a joined-up approach to improving outcomes across health, social care and housing. Additionally taking a flexible approach to allocating resources enables HDC to implement its Housing Renewal Assistance Policy without investing any additional resources.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section of the report prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 5.1 The HDC Housing Renewal Assistance Policy which has not had a budget attached to it in recent years can now be funded directly from BCF resources. This will provide residents in Huntingdonshire with a wider range of services available to them and will ultimately improve the housing stock in the district.

6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 The Cambs Adaptations Agreement will come into force once it has been approved by all local authorities.

6.2 The refreshed Housing Renewal Assistance Policy will come into force with effect from 1st April 2017.

7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND / OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

7.1 The Corporate Plan work programme includes “enabling people to live independently through the provision of adaptation and accessible housing”.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 Liaison with CCC, CCityC, ECDC, FDC, SCDC.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Reducing the number of loans which are available will reduce the necessity to place local land charges.

10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 No resource implications for HDC as the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy will be funded from the BCF allocation. There is significant demand for DFGs in Huntingdonshire and they will continue to be funded as a priority over other elements of the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy.

10.2 CCC will no longer provide DFG Top up assistance and their funding for this will cease. However the additional resources provided to HDC by BCF will provide a budget for this policy element.

10.3 No additional Officer time will be required as this will be managed within existing resources.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

11.1 The Cambs Adaptations Agreement and refreshed Housing Renewals Assistance Policy enable the flexible use of the BCF allocation which will improve the housing stock overall and provide a more strategic approach to housing adaptations across Cambridgeshire whilst continuing to enable people to live independently. The new policy elements will provide a fast track system which will enable people to be discharged from hospital more timely and will also create a mechanism to resolve complex cases which exceed the DFG limit.

12. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

12.1 Appendix 1 - Copy of adaptations agreement
Appendix 2 - Copy of refreshed housing renewal assistance policy
Appendix 3 - Copy of Adults committee report

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