

<b>This report is public</b>	
<b>Housing Grants and Assistance Policy</b>	
<b>Committee</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee</b>	4 November 2024
<b>Portfolio Holder presenting the report</b>	Portfolio Holder for Housing - Councillor Nick Cotter
<b>Date Portfolio Holder agreed report</b>	15 October 2024
<b>Report of</b>	Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing, Nicola Riley

## **Purpose of report**

To seek approval for the reviewed Housing Grants and Assistance Policy.

### **1. Recommendations**

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To approve the reviewed Housing Grants and Assistance Policy.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 As part of its statutory duties, the Council provides financial assistance and other forms of help to improve and adapt homes within Cherwell. Whilst property owners have responsibilities for maintaining, improving or repairing their homes, the Council has legal obligations to ensure that they provide for and assist vulnerable members of the community.
- 2.2 Additionally, the Council offers a suite of discretionary grants that it uses to help households in the district that are experiencing certain challenges within their circumstances, based on which the grant can be offered. In order to offer discretionary grants, the Council must have a policy. The grants that can be offered and their terms is set by the Council and the current and proposed offer is outlined with the Policy.
- 2.3 The Policy combines two existing policies into a single document. The Private Sector Housing Grants and Assistance Policy and the Disabled Adaptations Policy have been combined to create one Housing Grants and Assistance Policy.

## Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
<b>Finance</b>	<p>There are no financial implications arising from this report which is to approve the combining of two existing policies to a single document. The issuing of DFGs and Discretionary grants are within existing budget.</p> <p>Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 30 September 2024</p>			
<b>Legal</b>	<p>The policy changes proposed are compliant with legislation.</p> <p>Shahin Ismail, Interim Head of Legal Services, 2 October 2024</p>			
<b>Risk Management</b>	<p>There are no risk implications arising directly from this report. This policy review mitigates the risks of not meeting customer needs and keep the service legislative sound.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 2 October 2024</p>			
<b>Impact Assessments</b>	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
<b>Equality Impact</b>	x			<p>The policy has a positive impact on groups within the protected characteristics and has been developed in line with the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion framework, ensuring compliance with the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 02 October 2024</p>
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	x			<p>The Policy enables vulnerable groups to access grants that would enhance their quality of life.</p>
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	x			<p>The policy covers statutory grants, such as the Disabled Facilities Grant, which is targeted at those with disabilities and thus a protected characteristic.</p>
<b>Climate &amp; Environmental Impact</b>		x		<p>An Equalities and Climate Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix 2</p>
<b>ICT &amp; Digital Impact</b>		x		<p>Not applicable</p>

<b>Data Impact</b>		x		Not applicable
<b>Procurement &amp; subsidy</b>		x		Not applicable
<b>Council Priorities</b>	Housing that meets your needs			
<b>Human Resources</b>	Not applicable			
<b>Property</b>	Not applicable			
<b>Consultation &amp; Engagement</b>	Not applicable			

## Supporting Information

### 3. Background

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and discretionary powers to provide other forms of grants and assistance to improve housing conditions. Funding for DFGs comes from Oxfordshire County Council and the Better Care Fund in the form of an annual Capital grant. Discretionary grants are funded through CDC capital grant funding.
- 3.2 The Council delivers the DFG services through operating a Home Improvement Agency. This similarly is grant funded by the County Council. The Agency helps householders with the adaptations and assistance required through providing an end-to-end service to them, which includes helping them apply for, design, appoint contractors and project manage the grant funded improvements.
- 3.3 The DFG is a means tested grant. Therefore, it applies to those of more modest or limited means who would otherwise find difficulty in funding adaptations to their home. There are other eligibility criteria that are outlined within legislation that apply to the grants to ensure correct application. These checks are carried out by the Council upon application. Means tests are not applied to households where the adaptation is for a child.
- 3.4 A disabled person's adaptation needs are assessed by specialist Occupational Therapists at Oxfordshire County Council. The Council must carry out the assessment of means and determine whether the suggested adaptations are reasonable to achieve and resolve whether to approve the grant.
- 3.5 In addition to DFGs, the Council may offer discretionary grants and, any other form of assistance for improving housing conditions within its area, provided it first has a policy setting out how it intends to do so. This policy fulfils this requirement. Similarly, to DFGs, these grants are primarily for privately owned properties but how they are applied operates more flexibly and can be adapted by the Council to meet strategic objectives and operational needs.

## **4. Details**

- 4.1 The reviewed policy outlines the Council's statutory duties and responsibilities regarding the provision and administration of Disabled Facilities Grants. It provides an overview of the process that the Council follows with regard to DFGs and how decisions made are informed following tests and assessments that are applied.
- 4.2 This policy sets out a proposal to include Council Tax Reduction as a locally agreed passporting benefit for the DFG means test. This will enable the Council to help more disabled people to more quickly receive the adaptations they need, and also save Council resources by not having to undertake as many time-consuming means tests.
- 4.3 The policy outlines when the Council may place grants as a Local Land Charge against the property so that the grant may be recovered when the property is sold.
- 4.4 The policy also proposes a revised discretionary grants offering, outlines how discretionary grants are administered.
- 4.5 The general criteria and conditions for the grants offered by the Council are contained in the appendices of the policy.

## **5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not bring forward a reviewed and amended policy. As there has not been any recent changes to legislation in this area, there is no imperative for the current policy to be changed or reviewed. However, it is important the Council policies are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are able to meet customer needs, service needs and are legislatively sound. This option is therefore rejected.

Option 2: To keep two separate policies, one for mandatory grants and one for discretionary grants. As the policy areas are closely linked and intertwine, particularly when offering grants to disabled households, having a single policy provides simplification and clarity. This option is therefore rejected.

## **6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 6.1 It is important that the Council has up to date policies and procedures for its statutory and key service areas and it is important that they are legislatively and operationally sound. A periodic review of policies is therefore appropriate.

## Decision Information

<b>Key Decision</b>	Yes
<b>Subject to Call in</b>	Yes
<b>If not, why not subject to call in</b>	N/A
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	All wards

## Document Information

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Housing Grants and Assistance Policy
<b>Appendix 2</b>	ECIA – Housing Grants and Assistance Policy
<b>Background Papers</b>	None
<b>Reference Papers</b>	None
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