

## HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

### Executive Summary

The Housing Assistance Policy sets out how Woking Borough Council will provide financial assistance for residents, to enable them to remain in their homes as independently as possible through carrying out adaptations and supporting the provision of decent, healthy and safe housing within the Borough.

The updated policy will allow the Council to take a more flexible approach to adaptations to meet individual needs in line with the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The policy was considered by the Health and Wellbeing Task Group on 6 October 2021 and by the Housing Task Group on 16 November 2021. It is recommended subject to comments from the Executive on 20 January 2022.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

- (i) the Housing Assistance Policy 2022, as attached to the report, be approved; and
- (ii) the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, be delegated authority to make minor amendments to the Policy as required.

Reason: The provisions outlined in the Housing Assistance Policy will positively impact and support the health and wellbeing of the residents of Woking.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.
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**Background Papers:** None.

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## Housing Assistance Policy

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**Date Published:** 12 January 2022

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Provision of adaptations via the Disabled Facilities Grant scheme is a mandatory function for local authorities across the country under legislation contained within the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 allows for greater flexibility, details of which must be stated within a Council's Housing Assistance Policy.
- 1.2 Funding for the scheme is from Central Government and is allocated annually to each local authority through the Better Care Fund. Funding for other discretionary assistance is met via Woking Council's capital programme.

### 2.0 Wider Determinants of Health

- 2.1 Health is impacted by a wide range of factors – the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work and age as well as access to and quality of health and social care. These wider determinants can have both positive and negative impacts on a person's health.
- 2.2 The Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2031 has identified five key priorities: To support and improve mental health; to reduce the obesity rates; to identify and support those experiencing social isolation and loneliness; to empower residents to live independent lives and to support carers. This policy feeds into all five priorities and in particular the latter two. Enabling residents to remain living in their homes and as independently as possible can only be beneficial for their health and wellbeing.

### 3.0 Methodology

- 3.1 The current policy was approved in 2019. The amendments proposed here will clarify sections of the policy in order that those working within its guidelines can achieve the best result for the residents.
- 3.2 In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of people identified as living in poor conditions and often they are not identified until the emergency services need to enter a property. The updated policy will enable us to work with partners to try and avoid hospital admittance in the first place but also to make funding available to pay for works such as deep cleaning, decluttering or access to specialist services in order to assist discharge to a safe healthy environment.
- 3.3 Developments in technology are allowing individuals to achieve independence, for example by automating household tasks. The policy will allow funding provision where items are recommended by health professionals.
- 3.4 The Government means test for the Disabled Facilities Grant has long been considered in need of updating to reflect people's financial circumstances, in particular older people many of whom are still making mortgage payments or working but have increased health needs. The Regulatory Reform Order allows for councils to make their own local provisions and to carry out some works without the need for a means test. In Woking, we do not means test for certain works (stair lifts, wet rooms or ramps). These amendments will aid those for whom those particular works cannot be achieved to benefit from financial assistance. For example, a stair lift might meet the needs of the individual, however in some older properties the staircases are too narrow and steep to install a lift so an alternative adaptation needs to be considered. These changes will allow for the equivalent sum of money to be put towards the alternative scheme.
- 3.5 The updated policy will allow funding to be put towards work that will make a home more dementia-friendly for its residents, in some cases carrying out work before it becomes essential so that people have time to adapt and get used to things while they can.

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- 3.6 Many people have multiple agencies involved and the updates will enable us to work more closely and take referrals and recommendations directly from other health professionals and Trusted Assessors in addition to the traditional Occupational Therapist route.

### **4.0 Corporate Strategy**

- 4.1 The Housing Assistance Policy underpins the corporate objective of “improving the health and wellbeing of all residents”. By providing financial assistance to adapt or repair properties the policy supports independent living and supports those who are caring for others or who are experiencing social isolation as they are unable to access the community.
- 4.2 The policy outlines how the Council can also work with partners and other professionals to achieve the best outcome for our residents and effective use of resources.

### **5.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 5.1 Funding for the amendments to the financial provisions outlined in this policy is external via the Better Care Fund.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.2 It is anticipated that by clarifying certain criteria and scope of works, there will only be a positive impact on existing resources.

#### Legal

- 5.3 There are no specific legal implications or risks identified within the report.

### **6.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 6.1 The Health and Wellbeing Task Group and Housing Task Groups have been consulted on the proposed amendments to the policy.
- 6.2 Disabled Facilities Grants are a mandatory requirement of the Council. The amendments are to clarify and broaden the scope of what can be offered within the legislation and there can only be a positive impact on the residents of Woking. For that reason wider consultation is not considered necessary.

REPORT ENDS