

**COMMUNITIES, HOUSING &
ENVIRONMENT POLICY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

14 February 2023

Housing Renewal Policy 2023

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
CHE PAC	14 February 2023
Executive	22 March 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	Yes
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	EXECUTIVE
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall Director of Regeneration & Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	John Littlemore Head of Housing & Regulatory Services
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The Housing Renewal Policy guides the council in delivering a range of statutory and discretionary grants to assist residents who are vulnerable and in need of adaptations to their homes to help improve their quality of life. The new policy has been developed with the assistance of an independent specialist, stakeholder organisations and service users.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to the Executive:

1. That the Housing Renewal Policy 2023 attached as Appendix A to this report be agreed.

2. That the increase in the Home Improvement Agency fee from 12% to 15% be agreed.

3. That the Head of Housing & Regulatory Services in collaboration with the Lead Member for Housing & Health develops a priority framework to process Disabled Facilities Grants.

Housing Renewal Policy 2023

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place • Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve its corporate priorities, in particular to Homes and Communities. 	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recommendations support the achievements of the cross-cutting objectives, in particular addressing Health Inequalities and tackling Deprivation.</p>	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Already covered in the risk section 	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services

Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation. 	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing. 	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002. 	Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)
Information Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations will impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes. The Information Governance Team will/have reviewed the processing of personal data affected and the associated documentation has been/will be updated accordingly, including a data protection impact assessment. The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council Processes. 	Information Governance Team – either Anna, Georgia or Lauren to review and approve.
Equalities	We recognise the recommendations may have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone. Therefore we have completed a separate equalities impact assessment.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals. 	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct impact 	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services

Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None identified 	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services
Biodiversity and Climate Change	<p>The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed Housing Assistance Policy seeks to address fuel-inefficient homes and makes proposals to help vulnerable households improve the thermal warmth of their homes. 	Head of Housing and Regulatory Services

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Maidstone Borough Council’s Housing Renewal Policy sets out a range of policy matters relating to how we will enable vulnerable members of our community to maintain their homes to a decent standard, and the delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grant. In the main, staff and capital costs relating to this function are funded from the government grant under the Better Care Fund.
- 2.2 The Better Care Fund (BCF) programme supports local NHS and local authorities to successfully deliver the integration of health and social care in a way that supports person-centred care, sustainability and better outcomes for people and carers.
- 2.3 An element of the BCF is passported via Kent County Council to local housing authorities in Kent to deliver their initiatives that assist people who require their homes to be adapted, including the statutory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).
- 2.4 Last year Maidstone Borough Council received £1.5 million in grant, of which circa £200,000 was top sliced in a Kent wide agreement back to KCC to fund a pooled equipment and adaptations budget for social care clients. Maidstone Borough Council funds a range of initiatives through the BCF, including our Helping You Home programme that assists patients to move out of hospital beds and back onto their home environment. Staffing costs incurred through administering the DGF are recovered from the grant. The table below demonstrates the indicative and proposed usage of the BCF grant.

Table 1.

Heading	Comment	Amount
Disabled Facility Grant	Grants provided to adapt a person's home to improve their quality of life	£900,000
Helping You Home	Expenditure incurred to make adaptations to enable residents to return home following a period of hospital care	£90,000
Staff fees	Eligible costs incurred administrating grants	£156,980
Discretionary budgets (to be agreed)	New discretionary grant budget to support elements of the Housing Assistance Policy	£150,000
Total		£1,296,980

2.5 Disabled Facilities Grant

There are three main agencies involved in the DFG process in a two-tier area such as Kent and these are:

- Kent County Council – through their Occupational Therapists, who are the qualified staff that assess what adaptations are required and make recommendations.
- The Home Improvement Agency – who act on behalf of the client to ensure they are fully advised on what assistance is available to the person and to oversee the work being contracted and completed.
- The Local Housing Authority – who receives, and processes grant applications under the DFG regulations.

2.6 Kent County Council commissions the Home Improvement Agencies (HIA) for across Kent and in our sub-region this is provided by Town & Country Housing Association. The HIA is funded in part from KCC and from the fee they can charge against the DFG for each completed grant.

2.7 With a number of agencies involved in the process there can be a tendency for the process to become stalled or for bottlenecks to appear at different parts of the system. In early 2022 MBC was not content with the delays inherent in the system and commissioned an independent review of our process with a view to improving the experience of our residents.

2.8 Foundations, the UK Government appointed National Body for Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs), carried out the review during the Summer of 2022 and provided a comprehensive report on their findings in the Autumn of 2022. This has formed the basis of some changes within the Housing Renewal Policy 2023 and to our working practices.

2.9 The review concluded that the staff involved from across the three agencies were dedicated, wanted to see the best outcome for residents and were well trained in their areas of expertise. The impact once the adaptation was

completed for the resident was notably positive. The review did conclude that there were areas for improvement. These included:

- Implementing a process that promotes more trust between the agencies.
- Re-focusing on a delivering a person-centred approach.
- Eliminating duplication of activity.
- Setting out clear processes and scope of responsibilities
- Providing more consistency in approach
- Introducing improved contract management by Maidstone Council with agreed KPIs and regular liaison meetings to consider operational issues and service delivery with the HIA and KCC.

2.10 The Foundations review provided a range of recommendations to MBC. Some of the recommendations have already been implemented with the result that the average approval times for grants have drastically reduced from 50 days to 11 days. To achieve other improvements listed in the recommendations, this report proposes policy changes that are captured in the accompanying draft Housing Assistance Policy and operational adjustments to pursue a smoother, more efficient experience for the resident.

2.11 The review provided a period of reflection on how we operate with KCC and the role undertaken by Town & Country HIA. In conjunction with the HIA we have agreed a more purposeful role for the HIA, taking on aspects that were previously carried out by MBC staff. It is also proposed to provide the HIA with greater autonomy in executing the agreed works, including making minor adjustments to specifications without the need for the DFG process to be reset and recommenced.

2.12 This has two benefits; firstly, this should improve the customer experience as they will be dealing more completely with one agency and will receive a more efficient service. Secondly, it frees our officer's time from duplicating elements of the process. This freed capacity will be utilised on the team's broader role in delivering our statutory duties to enforce housing standards.

2.13 To enable this transition to take place and provide sufficient resource to the HIA it is proposed to increase the fee that was agreed with the HIA from 12% to 15%. The fee setting is within the Council's powers to approve and has been set at 12% for the past 10 years with no increase. The modest rise reflects the increase in duties that the HIA will undertake on behalf of the Council and can be funded from the DFG grant without affecting the Council's budget.

2.14 Local housing authorities (LHA) have duties in relation to responding to requests to assess the condition of accommodation under the Housing Act 2004. The action required to be taken by the LHA is dependent on the severity of the conditions found as it relates to the occupiers. The more serious the hazard the more likely the LHA will be under a duty to act. Otherwise the LHA has discretion to intervene.

2.15 The discretionary elements of the Housing Renewal Policy reflect these powers to intervene and provide an important mechanism for assisting our most vulnerable members of our community. This includes:

- Setting aside an element of the overall grant to provide a discretionary grant for residents who are unable to wholly fund their adaptation.
- Introducing a set of criteria for prioritising between DFG applications.
- Providing a means tested grant for vulnerable households to assist with remedying hazards; and to improve the energy efficiency of their home.

2.16 A further recommendation arising from the review will see the new Housing Renewal Policy 2023 develop a framework to prioritise the processing of grants. Currently prioritising between applicants is by date received and it is the intention of the new policy to amend this to acknowledge the difficulties experienced by residents who have rapid onset illnesses and end of life conditions. A new framework will be introduced to enable those cases that require an urgent intervention to be identified and prioritised for completion.

2.17 Kent County Council has a policy to prioritise applications at their assessment stage and it is proposed to develop a new framework for the Council based on the same criteria to ensure consistency in approach. An example of what this might look like is attached at Appendix B to the report.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 The CHE PAC could recommend that the Executive does not adopt a new Housing Renewal Policy or the changes to how we work with the Home Improvement Agency but this approach is not recommended, as the current policy is now dated and no longer serves the best interest of our most vulnerable residents.

3.2 Alternatively, the CHE PAC could recommend that the Executive adopts the new Housing Renewal Policy 2023, attached as an appendix to this report, and the increase in fee collected by the Home Improvement Agency to enable a more efficient and effective service to residents.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The preferred option is set out in Paragraph 3.2 above, as this will enable the Council to continue to deliver a range of activity that supports those whose quality of life can be improved through various interventions to improve their homes. The revised Housing Renewal Policy 2023 will enable the Council to meet its statutory duties in respect of delivering Disabled

Facilities Grants and tackling Housing Standards within existing accommodation.

5. RISK

5.1 The proposals are within the risk appetite of the Council.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 The review carried out by Foundations that has informed the recommendations to this report, included a range of consultations with key stakeholders and service users during 2022.

7. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Housing Renewal Policy 2023
 - Appendix B: Example of Prioritisation
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8. BACKGROUND PAPERS