

47. Private Housing Health Assistance Policy

Simon Colburn, Assistant Director, Health and Environmental Services:

- a. presented the Private Housing Health Assistance Policy 2018-2022 for consultation and advised that it would supersede the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy which had been suspended by Executive in 2015.
- b. referred to paragraph 5.2 of the Private Housing Health Assistance Policy 2018 - 2022 and gave an overview of the challenges that had been highlighted by the recent BRE Integrated Dwelling Level Housing Stock Modelling and Database for the City of Lincoln Council.
- c. referred to paragraph 2.2 of the report and advised on the changes that the Government had made to the funding mechanism for Disabled Facilities Grants.
- d. summarised the aim of the fund which was to provide a more joined up and customer based service to reduce hospital and care admissions and enable people to return home from hospital more quickly.
- e. advised on the aims of the proposed Private Housing Health Assistance policy as detailed at paragraph 4.2 of the report.
- f. referred to Appendix 1 of the report and gave an overview of the proposed schemes.
- g. advised that it was proposed that the formal means testing element be removed from the majority of the Discretionary Schemes which would reduce the time taken to process applications and assist in early intervention to prevent hospital admission/reduce reliance on carers.
- h. referred to paragraph 4.42 of the report and highlighted the proposed introduction of several new forms of financial assistance which could be used to support wider social care outcomes.
- i. advised that consultation on the draft policy had taken place with Lincolnshire County Council Adult Care and Community Wellbeing.
- j. advised on the financial and legal implications to the council as detailed at paragraph 6 of the report.
- k. gave an overview of the options that had been explored and the key risks associated with the preferred approach as detailed at paragraph 7 of the report.
- l. invited members' questions and comments.

Question: Would the grants be advertised?

Response: The mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) were not advertised, however, some of the other grants would need to be promoted to make people aware of them.

Question: Would the changes to the welfare system affect the Disabled Facilities Grants and could there be changes made to the grants?

Response: There were no proposals from the Government at the moment to make any changes to the DFG's.

Question: Was there a cash limit on the DFG's?

Response: There was a fixed budget allocated from the County Council to the District Councils at the beginning of each financial year. Currently the district allocation was approximately £700,000.

Comment: Concern was expressed over the staffing levels and the need for the council to ensure that the staff could cope with the extra work that this would bring.

Response: It was difficult to recruit staff in higher level housing positions nationally. There had been a review of the structure within the team, which involved members of staff being upskilled. It was felt that there was currently sufficient staffing levels to cope with the workload.

Question: With reference to paragraph 1.2 of the policy, when the available budget had been committed for the year and the council did not keep a waiting list, would the applicant have to make a new application in the new financial year?

Response: It had been written in to the policy in the event that the budget ran out early in the year, if for example there was 2 weeks to the next financial year the applicant would not be asked to submit a new application.

Question: With reference to paragraph 5.2 of the policy, would the information be updated more often than 4 years as it would be quickly out of date?

Response: The Substantive Stock Survey which was a large piece of research work would be completed every 5 years, the information in the mean time would be updated as and when required.

Question: Was it appropriate that the policy be amended to clarify the meaning of Article 3 RRO.

Response: RRO stood for The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 and it provided the legal framework.

Question: With reference to paragraph 8.2 of the policy, repayment of a grant with interest within 12 months was harsh for potentially vulnerable people.

Response: It had been written into the policy as a deterrent for people who may try and claim for works that they were not entitled to as they had funds to pay for work themselves.

Question: With reference to Appendix 1 of the report, what was the rationale for means testing some of the schemes and not others?

Response: A means test was required for mandatory grants such as the DFG's and in the case of large grants full checks needed to be done, however for emergency grants such as Hospital Discharge Assistance not completing a full means test would speed up the process.

The Chair further commented that more consistency and uniformity was needed throughout the individual scheme details in the policy in relation to the following:

- The eligibility of all ages including children needed to be clarified in all individual scheme details.
- It was stated in the Hospital Discharge Assistance Scheme conditions that if the property was disposed of within 10 years of completion of the works re-payment of the full amount would be required. This would be reduced by 10% for each complete year. Could this condition be included within all of the individual scheme details?

Response: The suggestions would be considered and the policy would be updated where appropriate.

RESOLVED that

1. The Private Housing Health Assistance Policy 2018-2022 be endorsed subject to the suggested changes listed above and referred to Executive for approval.
2. The Private Housing Health Assistance Policy be reviewed by Policy Scrutiny Committee in September 2019.