

## **Cabinet – 22 June 2022**

### **Housing Renewal Assistance Policy**

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Ali
<b>Service:</b>	Money Home Job, Childrens Services
<b>Wards:</b>	Borough Wide
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Forward plan:</b>	Yes

#### **1. Aim**

To ensure that the council can assist residents with a range of property related grants (including Disabled Facility Grants) to improve the condition, accessibility and energy efficiency of dwellings in the borough.

#### **2. Summary**

- 2.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gave local authorities a discretionary power to provide assistance for housing renewal in a number of ways through a Housing Renewal Assistance Policy. The Council is required to produce and publish a policy and this report describes and seeks approval for the new Housing Renewal Assistance Policy ('the Policy') for 2022 to 31 December 2025
- 2.2 Major improvements have been secured to the fabric of thousands of homes in the borough, extending their life span, removing hazards that can seriously injure or kill residents and adapt them for the resident's needs. The council continues to bid and be successful in securing external funds to help with capital works of improvement to residents homes within the borough and this Policy will help with the delivery of the same. The Policy considers the limited resources available for private sector housing works and targets those resources to people most in need and to meet local priorities in line with the adopted Housing Strategy and Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Action Plan.
- 2.3 This is a key decision because this Policy and the grants provided via it will have a significant effect on two or more wards.

#### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 Cabinet is recommended to request Council to adopt and publish the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2022-25 as contained in Appendix A of this report with the commencement dates as listed in the Policy document.

## 4.1 Report detail - know

### Context

- 4.1.1 The Council has statutory powers to offer advice and discretionary financial assistance to owner occupiers, tenants and private sector landlords to improve the quality and availability of housing. Where there is a disabled person in a household, in many circumstances local authorities have a mandatory duty to offer a Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) to assist with the cost of adaptation work.
- 4.1.2 As resources are limited and there is substantial demand, especially for mandatory DFGs, it is essential to ensure that financial assistance is offered on a fair, priority basis that takes account of competing needs. The funds for the DFG provided by government form part of the Better Care Fund.
- 4.1.3 The responsibility to maintain private property rests firmly with the owner, but the condition and availability of private sector housing stock does have substantial implications for this Council's Housing Strategy, especially in terms of access to affordable housing.
- 4.1.4 The proposed Policy for 2022- 2025 is contained in **Appendix A** of this report. The Policy links with national, regional and local strategic priorities. It aims to offer assistance to vulnerable households on an individual basis to help sustain the private sector for long term public benefit.

### Excellent track record

- 4.1.5 The Council has an excellent track record of securing external funding for a variety of housing initiatives and based on the above the following priorities have been set out using identified funding sources:

Table 1

Priority	Area of work	Funded by (where available)
1	Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant	Government annual allocation currently as part of the Better Care Fund allocation
2	Aids and adaptations including, 'inflationary allowance', 'exceptional top-up' assistance, low cost adaptation grants, Handyperson Service, Walsall Society for Blind referral scheme, relocation grants, palliative assistance, hospital discharge scheme.	Council capital resources and external loan and grant funds.
3	Address Category 1 hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.	Council capital resources External loan and grant funds. As at 2022 there is no funding available for this except via statutory enforcement.
4	Create decent private sector homes reducing deaths and hospital admissions due to cold / damp properties.	
5	Reduce fuel poverty and CO2 emissions from heating in dwellings.	External loan and grant funds.

6	Tackling long term empty homes	Council capital resources and external loan and grant funds. As at June 2022 there is no funding available for this except via statutory enforcement.
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### **Maximising Help via ‘Recycling’ of Funds**

4.1.6 Since January 2010 Cabinet approved the use of land charges in line with national guidance for statutory DFGs this was expanded in January 2011 to cover a range of other types of assistance where recovery through land charges should take place and the 2022-25 Policy continues this.

## **4.2 Council Corporate Plan priorities**

4.2.1 The proposal is in accordance with the:

- a) Housing Strategy (2020-2025), which highlights that the council is committed to improving the condition of homes in the borough;
- b) council’s Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Action Plan June 2021, which seeks to reduce fuel poverty and tackle domestic carbon emissions.

4.2.2 The Policy for consideration and delivery of grants is in line with ‘Our Council Plan 2022-25’ in particular:

**Communities:** Empower our communities so that they feel they are connected and belong in Walsall, creating safe and healthy places whilst building a strong sense of community.

## **4.3 Risk management**

4.3.1 The principal risk relates to the high demand for assistance through mandatory DFGs. This is being mitigated as far as possible through the;

- use of assessment and referral criteria for assessment previously approved by cabinet;
- support for residents as promptly as possible to help reduce the need for more expensive adaptations
- continued council capital support for DFGs and related adaptation works and early help (Handyperson works, minor works);
- use of land charging on DFGs and where possible on other grant schemes.

4.3.2 The council continues to lead the way in developing tenders that enable it to:

- provide a range of Agency Grant Services and
- have a detailed up to date schedule of rates (SoR) to which contractor’s submitted quotations can be compared.

Both of the above have helped the council ensure that grant offers are reasonable and appropriate and that excessive costs are not paid. This means that the council is able to help more people for the same capital allocations and it helps significantly when competing for external funding.

## **4.4 Financial implications**

4.4.1 The grants under the Policy will only be considered and awarded if funding is available. The council will never make financial commitments without budgets being in place.

- 4.4.2 As with previous versions of the Policy this new one ensures that the funds available to support housing renewal in the borough secure maximum benefits and the continuation of land charging for a wide range of projects will help over time to recirculate funding. It is again proposed that these 'recirculated' funds be directed back to housing renewal in the future.

#### **4.5 *Legal implications***

- 4.5.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 gives the Council power to offer housing assistance in any form, subject to that power being carried out in accordance with a policy which the Council has adopted and published. It allows Councils to adopt a flexible approach to giving financial help reflecting local circumstances, needs and resources.
- 4.5.2 The legislation for offering Disabled Facilities Grants is set out by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act (the Act) 1996, as amended. The Act places a statutory duty on local housing authorities to provide grant aid to people with disabilities (who meet the criteria) for a range of adaptations to their homes.
- 4.5.3 The Localism Act 2011 gives the Council a general power of competence, under which it is able to support sustainable development, incur expenditure and give financial assistance for things such as renewable energy. This power will be used to provide assistance for relevant funding schemes within this Policy.

#### **4.6 *Procurement Implications/Social Value***

- 4.6.1 Where the council delivers, on behalf of applicants, DFGs and related adaptation works or directly manages energy / insulation grants it will do this using organisations secured in compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and in compliance with the council's Contract Rules. For example, the council has already tendered for a range of DFG works including installation and maintenance of lifts and hoists to assist residents.
- 4.6.2 All funding will be considered in line with the Policy including applicants providing relevant competitive quotation(s) for the works.

#### **4.7 *Property implications***

- 4.7.1 The council owns a very limited number of dwellings. The housing standards and Improvement service will continue to seek to support and attract external funds to improve this portfolio.

#### **4.8 *Health and wellbeing implications***

- 4.8.1 Funding offered under the Policy will have a direct positive impact on the health and well-being of residents of the borough and in vulnerable households. Works will enable residents to remain living in their home longer, reduce the risk of harm and illness as a result of their housing conditions and directly reduce excess winter deaths and fuel poverty.

#### **4.9 *Staffing implications***

- 4.9.1 The Policy will continue to enable staff to give clear advice and support on housing renewal issues.
- 4.9.2 In line with national best practice the council has for over 10 years had Occupational Therapists (OT) based within the DFG team. This continues to improve the service for customers through closer liaison and reduction in time during the DFG process.

#### **4.10 Reducing Inequalities**

- 4.10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been produced for this Policy.
- 4.10.2 The Policy promotes the delivery of limited resources to the most vulnerable members of the community including providing significant support for residents with disabilities.
- 4.10.3 Where discretionary assistance is available this has been structured to enable those in greatest financial need to receive the highest but most affordable assistance. The Policy includes a range of schemes to help particular vulnerable groups including but not limited to the direct support for those referred for help from Walsall Society for the Blind and those households covered by the Armed Forces Covenant.

#### **4.11 Climate Change**

- 4.11.1 Domestic related carbon emissions have reduced in Walsall from 609 Kt CO in 2009 to 377 Kt CO in 2019 (latest figures) a drop of 38% which mirrors the regional and English reductions. The Policy continues to support households with improving the energy efficiency of their homes and enabling (if resources permit) others to produce their own green energy (solar PV and or air source heat pumps).

#### **4.12 Consultation**

- 4.12.1 This Policy is in accordance with the Housing Strategy which benefited from significant consultation prior to its adoption and a copy of the adopted Policy will be available on-line.

### **5. Decide**

- 5.1 An alternative to the recommendation in this report is not to update the existing Policy but this would lead to potentially missed opportunities to assist households with new funding.
- 5.2 Cabinet is requested to approve the recommendations made in section 3 of this report.

### **6. Respond**

- 6.1 In the event that Cabinet approves the Policy it will be published online.

### **7. Review**

- 7.1 The Housing Standards and Improvement service will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Policy in delivering housing improvements and the Policy The policy will normally be reviewed annually and amendments to the policy can be

approved by the delegated powers held by the Executive Director, or relevant Director in consultation with appropriate Portfolio Holder.

## Background papers

None

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