

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOME IMPROVEMENT POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 repealed the old mandatory grants legislation for housing repairs and improvements and gave a discretionary power to local authorities to provide assistance for housing renewal in ways they consider most appropriate. This could include grants, loans, equity release schemes and various other initiatives.

The Order states that before the powers contained within it can be used, local authorities must adopt and publish a policy on how they intend to use them. ODPM Circular 05/2003 sets out the required contents of the policy and describes the procedures necessary to publicise it.

Waverley Council introduced its Home Improvement Policy on 18th July 2003. This Policy has been in operation for eight years and the Council has now taken the opportunity to review it to see which features have worked well and which have not. In light of this review, the Council has undertaken a major revision of the Policy. The new Policy is set out in this document.

OBJECTIVES

This policy details how the Council will provide assistance for repairs, improvements and adaptations to the homes of those residents in the borough who need it most.

The Policy supports the following core priorities in the Corporate Plan:-

- Value for money
- Understanding our residents' needs
- Environment
- Health and wellbeing

Taking into account the priorities mentioned above, the Council intends that the Policy will:-

- (a) contribute to the Decent Home Standard in the private sector;
- (b) enable owner occupiers and private sector tenants to make their homes energy efficient and secure against crime;
- (c) help older people and people with disabilities to continue to live independently
- (d) remove housing hazards and improve the condition of the local private sector housing stock.

CAPITAL RESOURCES

The Government has made it clear that the responsibility for maintaining privately owned homes should rest first and foremost with the owner. However the Council has put together a package of measures to enable energy efficiency and home safety measures to take place, where financial assistance is required.

The Council commits Capital Resources to home improvements every year as part of its Capital Programme. For 2013/2014, the budgets are £450,000 for Disabled Facilities Grants and £30,000 to provide discretionary Safe and Warm Grants as set out in the Home Improvement Policy. In addition the Council receives approximately £10,000 each year from grant repayments; these receipts are fed back into the capital grant budget.

The Council will review the level of Capital Resources for the Home Improvement Policy each year.

TYPES OF ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

Purpose/Key Outcomes

To carry out adaptations to dwellings to meet the basic housing needs of disabled people and improve their quality of life.

Eligibility Criteria

The disabled person must be registered or registrable with Surrey Social Care Services.

Eligible Works

- (a) facilitating access to and from the dwelling by the disabled occupant;
- (b) making the dwelling safe for the disabled occupant and other persons residing with him/her;
- (c) facilitating access to the principal family room by the disabled occupant;
- (d) facilitating access to or providing a bedroom for the disabled occupant; the provision of a new bedroom will only be considered if the adaptation of an existing room is unsuitable;
- (e) facilitating access to or providing a room containing a w.c. for the disabled occupant or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
- (f) facilitating access to or providing a room containing a bath or shower for the disabled occupant or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
- (g) facilitating access to or providing a room containing a wash-hand basin for the disabled occupant or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
- (h) facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled occupant; in considering this work it is essential that the disabled person constantly cooks for the household; if this is not the case, facilities will be limited to the strict needs of the disabled person;
- (i) improving or providing a heating system in the dwelling to meet the needs of the disabled occupant; no provision will be made for heating facilities in rooms not normally used by the disabled person;
- (j) facilitating access to or control of the source of power, light or heat by the disabled occupant;
- (k) facilitating access and movement by the disabled occupant around the dwelling in order to provide care for a person who is normally resident in the dwelling.

In order to qualify for a grant, a recommendation is required from an Occupational Therapist that the works are necessary and appropriate and the Council must be satisfied that the works are reasonable and practicable. All applications for adaptations that are likely to cost more than £20,000 are assessed by a panel of Officers to determine whether the Council will support the proposed works.

Amount of Assistance

The maximum amount of grant is set by statute - currently £30,000.

A grant will not normally be awarded if the cost of the work or equipment is less than £1,000. An enquiry for works under £1,000 should be made to Waverley Social Care Team, Bridge Street, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1LA. Telephone: 01483 518990.

The maximum amount of grant is limited to the cost of the works recommended by the Occupational Therapist. Works in excess of these recommendations will not normally be considered for mandatory grant.

Owners and Tenants

The amount of grant will depend on the result of a test of financial resources (means test) carried out on the disabled person and any partner. This test will determine how much (if any) contribution they need to make towards the cost of the work.

There is no means test where the grant is for a disabled child.

Landlords

The amount of grant provided is the total of cost of the works and ancillary expenses less the assessed increase in capital value of the property as a result of the works.

Conditions

- a) The dwelling or home must be occupied as the disabled person's main residence
- b) The applicant must take reasonable steps to pursue any relevant insurance or legal claim and to repay the grant, as far as appropriate, out of the proceeds of such a claim
- c) The work must be completed to the satisfaction of the Council within 12 months from the date of approval unless the Council agrees to an extension of time
- d) The work must be carried out by one of the builders whose estimate accompanied the application unless the Council agrees to the appointment of an alternative builder
- e) No payment will be made if the works begin before the date of approval unless prior agreement is obtained from the Council
- f) No payment will be made unless the Council has been provided with suitable receipts or invoices
- g) The aggregate of interim or staged payments must not exceed nine-tenths of the amount of grant
- h) The Council may impose a condition requiring the recovery of specialist equipment when no longer required
- i) The Council will apply a legal charge to the property of up to a maximum of £10,000 to the amount of a completed grant that exceeds £5,000 where the application was made by the owner of the property and the works improve the value of the property. This charge will last for ten years and the amount repayable tapers downwards after the first full six years.

Safe and Warm Grant

Purpose/Key Outcomes

To carry out energy efficiency or home security measures which directly improve the health, safety and well-being of vulnerable households and reduce fuel poverty.

Eligibility Criteria

1. The applicant must be one of the following:-
 - a) an owner occupier; or
 - b) a person who occupies the dwelling under a right of exclusive occupation granted for life; or
 - c) a tenant with the power or duty to carry out the works in question.
2. The applicant must have occupied the dwelling for at least three years.
3. The applicant must be either:-
 - a) in receipt of a qualifying income benefit. These are:-

Income Support, Guaranteed Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Income Based Job Seeker's Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, War Disablement Pension or a replacement benefit for one of the above; or
 - b) aged over 60 years and with an income level below the income tax threshold.

Eligible Works

The following measures will be eligible under the Safe and Warm Grant:-

- a) Green Deal Assessments
- b) Replacement of old or defective boilers with Part L compliant boilers
- c) Installation of new central heating system and/or heating controls
- d) Loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and draught-proofing
- e) Insulation to park homes
- f) Replacement windows
- g) Fire precautions
- h) Home security measures e.g. door and window locks, door chains and viewers.

Any clients who qualify for 100% funding through ECO Affordable Warmth or other such initiatives that become available, will be assisted using funding from these national schemes.

In the case of rented properties and the works in question are the responsibility of the landlord, no financial assistance will be available.

Amount of Assistance

The maximum amount of grant is £5,000.

Conditions

- a) Where the amount of grant exceeds £1,000, repayment of the grant is required if the property is sold within ten years of grant payment
- b) Repeat grants are only permitted up to a maximum amount of £5,000 within any three year period

- c) No grant will be available for works which are eligible for funding through an insurance claim or would have been eligible had a house insurance policy been taken out.

PRELIMINARY OR ANCILLARY FEES AND CHARGES

If fees or charges arise which are reasonable to incur in relation to the works, they will be eligible for assistance and can be included in the grant or loan.

Eligible fees will include fees for Surveyors, Planning applications, Building Regulation approval and private Occupational Therapist reports.

GUILDFORD & WAVERLEY CARE AND REPAIR AGENCY

The Guildford & Waverley Care and Repair Agency provides a technical support service to prepare specifications and plans, obtain Building Regulation and Planning approval, obtain Contractors' estimates, supervise the works and certify payments. This service is provided for a fee which is reviewed each year. This fee can be included in the approval of a grant or loan.

The service is available to any resident of the borough who lives in private sector accommodation and is either elderly (60 or over), disabled or in receipt of a means tested benefit and is not able to undertake these tasks him or herself.

The provision of the Care and Repair technical service is aimed at facilitating repairs and improvements for people who would otherwise be unable to have such works carried out. The key outcomes are improving the quality of life of disadvantaged or vulnerable occupiers and increasing the number of decent homes in the borough.

ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE

Assistance is normally accessed initially by contacting the Private Sector Housing Team. This team will refer cases to the Care and Repair Agency, with the agreement of the client. The Care and Repair Agency can also be contacted directly via their own telephone number and email address.

In the case of enquiries for a Mandatory DFG, a preliminary test of resources form will be sent initially. Once this form is returned, a provisional calculation of the applicant's contribution is performed and the result is reported to the applicant. In the case of enquiries for any kind of disabled adaptation, a referral is also made to the Occupational Therapy Team of Surrey County Council in order to arrange an Occupational Therapist's report. The appropriate application forms and other relevant paperwork are normally issued following a site visit by an officer from the Private Sector Housing Team or Care and Repair and it has been determined that the person, property and work are all eligible.

The Council provides a grant towards the Handyperson Service, which is run by Age UK Waverley. The scheme provides reliable low-cost assistance to elderly people, irrespective of grant eligibility, for certain works often too minor to be covered by a grant. Relevant enquiries will be referred to the Handyperson Service.

There are also a wide range of schemes providing assistance with energy efficiency works e.g. insulation, draught-proofing and heating installation. Where a person qualifies under

one of these schemes, they will be referred to the most appropriate agency. This enables the Council's resources to be spent on works which are not covered by other schemes. Currently all enquiries for insulation and draughtproofing, whether grant-aided or not, are referred to Action Surrey, which is an agency set up in Surrey to organise energy efficiency measures. The contact details are provided below.

Information on support which is available will be provided to other agencies including Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Age UK Waverley, Action Surrey and Surrey County Council.

The services will be publicised with contact details in the Making Waves magazine, the local press, the Waverley website and through other appropriate communication channels that are available from time to time.

CONDITIONS

The grants will be subject to the conditions outlined above. All grant applicants will be informed that conditions apply both before and at grant approval stage. The conditions will be provided in writing. Details of grants and the conditions will be recorded in the Land Charges Section and the conditions will be a Local Land Charge.

Applications to waive conditions will be considered on their merits by the Private Sector Housing Manager.

ADVICE

A range of information leaflets will be made available to people who make enquiries. These will cover the range of services available under this Policy and the details of each of the different options. These leaflets will be available from all Council Offices and through other Agencies including Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Age UK Waverley and Surrey County Council.

Staff from the Private Sector Housing Team provide advice and assistance on a whole range of housing issues including the availability of grants from Waverley and alternative sources of funding works such as equity release loans and local and national schemes for energy efficiency measures. The Guildford & Waverley Care and Repair Agency also provide advice and information or redirect enquiries to other agencies, which are better able to provide it. Advice and information is provided free of charge.

Waverley staff will not provide financial advice. It will be made clear to anybody who may need to raise a loan that they should seek independent financial advice before entering into any commitments.

COMPLAINTS

Where people who enquire are unhappy, either about this Policy or about the level of service they receive under the Policy, they have the right to complain.

In the first instance a request for review should be made in writing to the Private Sector Housing Manager at the address given below. If the complainant is not happy with the response, he/she should make a formal complaint through the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. Details of this procedure will be provided on request. Details of

how to make a complaint will also be included in all the leaflets used to inform people about the services available.

EXCEPTIONS TO POLICY

It is recognised that any Policy is unlikely to take account of every individual situation. Each case therefore needs to be considered on its merits and this Policy used as guidance for officers. In cases where officers consider that a decision should be made outside of this Policy, they will be able to refer it to the Council's Executive Committee for a decision.

Where a person considers that his or her case should be considered as an exception to the Policy or where he or she considers that the Policy has not been correctly applied, there will be a right of appeal to the Council's Head of Housing who shall consider all of the information. If the Head of Housing considers that the case should be considered outside of this Policy, he/she will refer it to the Executive Committee for a decision. Where the Head of Housing considers that the Policy has been incorrectly applied, he/she shall direct the Case Officer in how the case shall be determined.

KEY SERVICE STANDARDS

Waverley Borough Council is committed to providing a high quality service within the resources available. To this end, the following Key Service Standards will apply:-

- All telephone calls will be answered within 3 rings
- Staff will be friendly, approachable and professional at all times
- All requests for service will be responded to within 10 working days
- All full applications for a Disabled Facilities Grant will be determined within three months of receipt subject to sufficient capital resources being available
- All full applications for a Safe and Warm Grant will be determined within six weeks of receipt subject to sufficient capital resources being available
- All requests for payment will be processed within ten days.

All service standards will be included in the information provided to clients and potential clients.

LOCAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Council seeks to attain and, wherever practicable, exceed the targets it has set itself.

The Council's own targets will include the following:-

<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Annual Target</u>
Performance against the published service standards	95% of responses and decisions within the set service standards
Number of applications for a Disabled Facilities Grant approved	50
Number of dwellings made more energy efficient	25

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POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

This Policy shall come into effect on 1st July 2013.

This policy will be reviewed during 2013/14 and a revised policy approved and introduced no later than 1st April 2015. Thereafter, the Policy will be reviewed every three years.

Any significant changes to the Policy will be publicised in accordance with the guidance issued by the government in the ODPM Circular 05/2003.

CONTACT DETAILS

If you wish to discuss the content of this policy please contact Simon Brisk, Private Sector Housing Manager, Waverley Borough Council, The Burys, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1HR.

Telephone: 01483 523421

Email: simon.brisk@waverley.gov.uk

The contact details for the Guildford & Waverley Care and Repair Agency are:

Telephone: 01483 444302

Email: careandrepair@guildford.gov.uk

The contact details for Action Surrey are:

Telephone: 0800 783 2503

Website: www.thamesweygroup.co.uk

The contact details for Age UK Waverley are:

Telephone: 01483 548812

Website: www.ageuk.org.uk/waverley