

## **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 14 NOVEMBER 2017**

#### **EXECUTIVE – 28 NOVEMBER 2017**

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##### **Title:**

### **HOME IMPROVEMENT POLICY**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Carole King]  
[Wards Affected: All]**

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##### **Summary and purpose:**

This report introduces a revised Private Sector Home Improvement Policy for Waverley that will allow the Council to extend the range of assistance available to vulnerable residents to help them remain living safely and independently in their own homes.

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##### **How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

This report relates to the Council's Community Wellbeing priority.

##### **Financial Implications:**

The additional costs of delivering the new grant schemes will be covered in full from the Better Care Fund grant Waverley receives. In 2017/18 Waverley has received £640,637. Additionally, £356,298 is available from previous years and funding until 2020 is secure.

##### **Legal Implications:**

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

##### **Introduction**

1. The Council introduced a Private Sector Home Improvement Policy in 2003 and then further revised the Policy in July 2013. The Policy sets out how the Council can assist disabled, elderly or vulnerable residents in carrying out adaptations or improvements to their homes. Prior to 2015 these works were partially funded by a government grant, which was topped up by the Council.
2. In 2015 the government grant was replaced by the Better Care Fund, a new programme designed to deliver integration of local health and social care services, and the funding was increased to a level where the Council did not need to top up disabled adaptations. The Better Care Fund has increased substantially since 2015 and the level of funding is expected to continue until at least 2020. Despite making some changes to how we process grants, we are now under-utilising this funding and we need to change the policy to make better use of it and further improve the lives of our residents.

3. In 2016/17 Surrey County Council and the Surrey Districts and Boroughs jointly commissioned Foundations, the national body for Home Improvement Agencies, to carry out a review of delivery of the Better Care Fund for home adaptations in light of the increased funding. Their report provided 20 recommendations, including dispensing with means testing for simple adaptations, providing “Relocation Grants” to help people move to somewhere more suitable and providing “Prevention Grants” for minor works to reduce care packages, hospital/care home admissions and bed-blocking. Some of their recommendations have already been introduced at Waverley. However, in order to incorporate other recommendations and maximise use of the Better Care Fund, it will be necessary to make changes to the Home Improvement Policy.

### **The Policy**

4. A comparison between the existing policy and the proposed new policy is attached at Annexe 1.
5. A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a mandatory grant to enable disabled residents (and residents with disabled children) to carry out adaptations to their homes to meet their needs. The grants are means-tested (except for disabled children) and are subject to a maximum limit of £30,000. The Council has delegated authority to the Head of Strategic Housing and Delivery to approve discretionary funding for major adaptations where the cost of the works exceeds £30,000.
6. The Safe and Warm Grant is a discretionary grant that enables energy efficiency and home security measures to be provided to improve the well-being of vulnerable households and reduce fuel poverty. A charge is placed on the property for 10 years from the date of completion of works. The proposed policy makes some changes to the Safe and Warm Grant including:
  - Qualifying residency period reduced from three years to one year
  - Eligible works extended to include rewiring, asbestos removal and removal of hoarding
  - Maximum grant increased from £5,000 to £10,000.
7. The proposed policy introduces a Relocation Grant of up to £10,000 to help disabled people move to accommodation that better suits their needs, if this is a more appropriate solution than a DFG of up to £30,000. It is anticipated that there will be a maximum of one Relocation Grant each year as circumstances where a grant would be awarded are likely to be rare.
8. The proposed policy also introduces a Prevention Grant of up to £5,000 to carry out a range of simple measures to ensure that elderly and disabled residents can occupy their homes safely and to ensure that properties are suitable for these people to be discharged from hospital without delay. Such works include home safety checks, provision of rails, ramps, hoists and steps and emergency heating and electrical repairs. This will be a fast track grant and will not require completion of forms or assessment of finances and no repayment conditions will be applied on completion of the works.

9. Some relatively simple but important adaptations, such as stairlifts and ramps, can cost more than £5,000. The proposed policy removes the requirement for means testing under an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant for stairlifts, hoists, low threshold steps, ramps and rails.
10. The cost of the measures included in the new policy will be entirely resourced from the Better Care Fund, which is £640,000 for 2017/18 and is expected to remain at this level or even increase until 2020. The measures are considered to be entirely in accordance with the aims of the Care Act 2015 and therefore it is appropriate to use this funding. There is no requirement for the Council to use its own capital funding.
11. The purpose of this report is to introduce a revised Home Improvement Policy that will allow the Council to extend the range of assistance available to vulnerable residents to help them remain living safely and independently in their own homes and to reduce hospital/care home admissions, bed-blocking and the demand for care packages. The proposed new Home Improvement Policy is attached at Annexe 2.

### **Observations and recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny**

12. The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the revised Home Improvement Policy at its meeting on 14 November 2017. The Committee supported the proposals to relax some of the constraints on the allocation of grant funding in order to widen the type of assistance available and increase the number of vulnerable residents eligible to apply for help to remain living safely and independently in their own homes.
13. The Committee noted that it was proposed to extend eligible works under the Safe and Warm Grant to include re-wiring, asbestos removal, and removal of hoarding. The Committee suggested that works to address flooding, damp and mould could also be included, as these could have serious impacts on health.
14. The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Executive adopts the revised Home Improvement Policy, subject to eligible works under the Safe and Warm Grant, also including works to address flooding, damp and mould.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive adopts the Home Improvement Policy.

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### **Background Papers**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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