



## Home Improvement Policy

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| <i>Owned by:</i>                             | <i>Simon Brisk</i> |
| <i>Created Date:</i>                         | <i>01/04/2013</i>  |
| <i>Equality Impact Assessment completed:</i> |                    |
| <i>CMT Approval Date:</i>                    | <i>17/04/2013</i>  |
| <i>JCC Consultation Date:</i>                |                    |
| <i>Executive/Council Approval date:</i>      |                    |
| <i>Date for review:</i>                      | <i>01/04/2019</i>  |
| <i>Last updated</i>                          | <i>15/09/2017</i>  |

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Waverley is committed to enabling residents living in non-Council accommodation in the Borough to carry out adaptations and other home improvements so that they can live independently in their own homes and reduce the risk of illness or injury, through the provision of grants and other forms of assistance.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

The responsibility for implementation of the policy is held by the Private Sector Housing Team, which is part of the Strategic Housing and Delivery Service.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 introduced 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 and a major revision of the Policy was carried out in 2012. A further revision to the Policy was carried out in 2017 and the new Policy is set out in this document.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The 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

- Customer service
- Environment
- Community wellbeing

It also supports the objectives of the Surrey Better Care Fund Plan.

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

- (a) contribute to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and action plan to deliver activities and services to improve the lives of Waverley residents;
- (b) contribute to the Ageing Well Strategy to support older people and people with disabilities to lead healthy and independent lives;
- (c) remove housing hazards and improve the condition of the local private sector housing stock;
- (d) enable residents to make their homes energy efficient and secure against crime.

The main objective of this Policy is to help reduce risk of illness or injury to reduce hospital admissions, enable faster hospital discharge, delay onset of admission to residential care and reduce care costs. While this policy is primarily aimed at the needs of elderly and disabled residents, it includes measures to help other residents on low incomes to improve their living conditions and reduce the risk of illness or injury.

### **CAPITAL RESOURCES**

The Care Act 2014 introduced a significant change in the way that national government funding for provision of home adaptations grants for disabled people is paid to local authorities. This allocation is now paid through the Better Care Fund and this presents an opportunity to integrate provision of assistance across housing, health and social care systems to achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes. This Policy is intended to contribute to the strategic aims and objectives of the Surrey Better Care Fund plan.

For 2017/2018, the Better Care Fund allocation is £640,000 and this level of funding is expected to continue through to 2020. In addition the Council receives approximately £10,000 each year from grant repayments; these receipts are fed back into the capital grant budget. This allocation has been used to provide the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant and the discretionary Safe and Warm Grant as set out in the previous Home Improvement Policy. The new Policy set out in this document has increased the range of discretionary assistance for home adaptations to reduce health and social care costs.

The Council will review the level of resources for the Home Improvement Policy each year when the Better Care Fund allocation is made known.

## **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 discretionary grant may be considered for some or all of the cost of eligible works that exceeds the statutory limit.

The amount of grant is limited to the cost of the works recommended by the Occupational Therapist. Works not recommended by the Occupational Therapist will not normally be considered for mandatory grant but can be carried out in conjunction with grant works if the client provides the funding.

In the case of applications by 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 for mandatory DFGs where the works are for a disabled child. However a means test may be applied to any discretionary additional grant.

The installation of stairlifts, hoists, low threshold steps, ramps and rails are exempt from the requirement for a means test and therefore a grant is available for the whole cost of these items.

In the case of applications by 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 is made by the owner of the property and the works are to provide sleeping accommodation or washing/toilet facilities to the property, whether by extension or internal conversion. This charge will last for ten years and the amount repayable tapers downwards after the first full six years.
- j) The Council will apply a legal charge to the property of up to the full amount of any discretionary grant paid to cover the cost of works in excess of the £30,000 mandatory grant where the application is made by the owner of the property. This charge will last for ten years and the amount repayable tapers downwards after the first full six years.

## **Relocation Grant**

### Purpose/Key Outcomes

To assist disabled people with the costs associated with moving to a suitable or easily adaptable property where it has been assessed that the works required to the existing property are uneconomical or impracticable having regard to its age, condition, size or location.

### Eligibility Criteria

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

### Eligible Costs

Removal expenses, legal costs, estate agent fees, mortgage arrangement fees, utility connection costs and any fees for services provided by approved organisations, such as Care & Repair, associated with the purchase of a suitable or easily adaptable property. Costs related to the purchase price of the house or furnishings are not eligible.

### Amount of Assistance

The maximum amount of grant is £10,000.

The applicant's contribution is determined by a test of resources of the disabled person (and partner) as for mandatory DFGs. The amount of grant is the total cost of the expenses less the applicant's contribution (if any).

### Conditions

- a. The applicant (or representative) must carry out a survey of the proposed accommodation to ensure that it meets the Decent Homes Standard or that any necessary works to achieve the standard can be completed within the applicant's resources.
- b. Where the proposed accommodation still requires adaptations, these must be within the scope of a DFG and not exceed £20,000 in cost.

### **Prevention Grant**

#### Purpose/Key Outcomes

To carry out simple measures to ensure that disabled and elderly residents can occupy their homes safely and to ensure that homes are suitable for these types of residents to be discharged from hospital without delay.

#### 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 private sector or housing association tenant.

2. The applicant must be either:-

- a) in receipt of a qualifying benefit; these are:-

Income Support, Guaranteed Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Income Based Job Seeker's Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Industrial Injuries



Disablement Benefit, War Disablement Pension, Universal Credit 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

This grant is available for a range of measures including the following:

- a) home safety checks and remedial actions
- b) emergency boiler repairs
- c) emergency electrical repairs
- d) fire alarms
- e) hoists
- f) ramps
- g) low threshold steps
- h) internal and external rails
- i) decluttering to improve access
- j) replacement of worn and dangerous carpets
- k) key safes
- l) movement and extreme temperature monitors.

This list is for guidance and other relevant costs may be considered.

This is a “fast-track” scheme for low level adaptations and improvements, which do not require a full social care assessment, application form or means test. A recommendation may be required from a health professional e.g. a GP, Occupational Therapist or health visitor.

### Amount of Assistance

The maximum amount of grant is £5,000.

### Conditions

There are no conditions attached to this grant.

## **Safe and Warm Grant**

### Purpose/Key Outcomes

To carry out energy efficiency or home improvement measures which directly improve the health, safety and well-being of vulnerable households and/or 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 one year.

3. The applicant must be either:-

- a) in receipt of a qualifying benefit; these are:-

Income Support, Guaranteed Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Income Based Job Seeker's Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, War Disablement Pension, Universal Credit 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 Safe and Warm Grant is available for a range of measures including:-

- a) Repair or replacement of old or defective boilers with Part L compliant boilers
- b) Installation of new central heating system and/or heating controls

- c) Installation of electrical heating systems or additional electric heaters
- d) Loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and draught-proofing
- e) Clearance of lofts for loft insulation
- f) Insulation to park homes
- g) Replacement of defective windows
- h) Installation of fire precautions
- i) Repair or renewal of electrical installations
- j) Removal or encapsulation of internal asbestos material where a health risk
- k) Home security measures e.g. door and window locks, door chains and viewers
- l) Remediation of damp and mould
- m) Works to remove the effects of flooding.

Any clients who qualify for funding through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme or other such initiatives that become available, will be assisted using funding from these national schemes in the first instance.

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 £10,000.

#### Conditions

- a) Repayment of the grant is required if the property is sold within ten years of grant completion
- b) Repeat grants are only permitted up to a maximum amount of £10,000 within any three year period
- c) No grant will be available for works which are eligible for funding through an insurance claim.

#### **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 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 adaptations and improvements for people who would otherwise be unable to organise such works themselves. The key outcomes are improving the quality of life of disadvantaged or vulnerable residents and increasing the number of decent homes in the Borough.

### **HANDYPERSON SERVICE**

This Council provides access to a handyman service to carry out falls prevention, energy efficiency and other minor works for elderly, vulnerable and disabled persons. Any works carried out under one of the grants listed in this policy will be free of charge. The handyman can also carry out repairs and improvements that are not covered by this Policy; in this case a charge will be applied for labour and the cost of materials.

### **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 or a Relocation Grant, 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 applicant is advised of the result. In the case of enquiries for any kind of disabled adaptation, a referral is also made to the Social Care Team of Surrey County Council in order to arrange for 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 works are all eligible.

There are also a wide range of national 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 loft and cavity wall insulation and draughtproofing are referred to Action Surrey, which is an agency set up in Surrey to advise on energy efficiency measures. Enquiries for boiler replacements and central heating may also be referred to Action Surrey for funding through a national scheme. Their contact details are provided below.

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

The services will be publicised with contact details in the "Your Waverley" 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 any repayment 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 the Citizens' Advice Bureaux 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 signpost 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 Strategic Housing and Delivery who shall consider all of the information. If the Head of Strategic Housing and Delivery 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 Strategic Housing and Delivery 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 or Relocation 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
- We will comply in all respects with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and will not use personal data except strictly in connection with processing an enquiry for grant assistance

- We will give appropriate consideration to each service user's race, nationality, cultural or ethnic background, marital status, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation and disabilities and shall not unlawfully discriminate within the meaning and scope of the provisions of the relevant legislation.

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 discretionary grants approved                         | 50  |

### **POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

This Policy comes into effect on 1st January 2018.

This policy will be reviewed during 2019/20 and a revised policy approved and introduced no later than 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. However an earlier review may be necessary if there are clear signs that take-up of grants is much higher or lower than expected. 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.

## **AUTHOR AND FEEDBACK**

The Council welcomes comments and feedback on its policies and procedures. If you have any comments 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](mailto:simon.brisk@waverley.gov.uk)

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

Telephone: 01483 505050

Email: [careandrepair@guildford.gov.uk](mailto:careandrepair@guildford.gov.uk)

The contact details for Action Surrey are:

Telephone: 0800 783 2503

Website: [www.actionsurrey.org](http://www.actionsurrey.org)

---

## **Related Information**

---

### **Other Related Council Policies/Information**

*Disabled Facilities Grant procedure*

*Safe and Warm Grant guidance*

### **Other Documents:**

*ODPM Circular 05/2003*

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/145088.pdf>