

North Somerset Council Decision

Decision Of: Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing

With Advice From: Director of Public Health and Regulatory Services

Directorate: Public Health and Regulatory Services



Decision No: PH053 (2021/22 Scheme)

Subject: Revision of the Housing Renewals Assistance Policy

Key Decision: Yes

Reason: The policy likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living in an area affecting two or more wards.

Background:

The purpose of this decision is to approve the revision of the Housing Renewals Assistance Policy, relating to the Council's power to provide assistance under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 to improve living conditions.

In order to use the powers to provide assistance the Council must have adopted and published a policy. The original policy was approved by the Executive on 1st July 2003 and has subsequently been reviewed and/or amended regularly.

The government white paper on social care reform included some positive and long overdue proposals in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG).

However, they propose consulting on the detailed arrangements and any policy change would follow much later. The key issue is the current maximum DFG has been set at £30,000 for over 15 years with no inflationary uplift, this results in any ground floor extensions or other major work requiring a top up through our discretionary assistance policy. The typical cost of an extension is in region £45,000-£50,000. The current policy requires applicants to exhaust other sources of funding before offering a top up, usually a low-cost loan through our partner.

The financial uncertainty for households is likely to continue for some time and finding money to repay loans can be challenging, particularly for families of disabled children, even when the DFG are not means tested for children up to the maximum.

The proposal is to amend the existing policy to offer a maximum top up of £20,000 (removing requirement to seek other sources of funding) which would provide grant funding of £50,000.

Decision:

To amend the Housing Renewals Assistance Policy as follows:

- to provide top-up funding above the maximum Disabled Facilities Grant of £20,000 under Private Sector Renewal Assistance
- where the estimated costs of a scheme exceed £50,000; provide an additional £10,000 subject to feasibility and alternative funding options (including loans) have been exhausted.

Reasons:

To support the delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grant programme to maintain independence in the home through major adaptations.

Options Considered:

Not updating the Policy – waiting for would delay increased funding for cases approaching approval stage and could disadvantage applicants. This change is seen as an interim step pending national policy amendment.

Financial Implications:

The Better Care Fund (DFG element) is used to fund this discretionary assistance and making this amendment will have no overall financial impact.

Costs:

The costs for this policy change can be met through existing resources and the viability of any scheme is assessed at the preliminary stage. This approach will provide greater certainty and flexibility to designing schemes.

Funding:

The Better Care Fund (DFG allocation) can fully fund costs.

This amendment will release funding available through Lendology for low-costs loans which can be redirected to other work. The government white paper confirms DFG funding will continue at current levels until 2025. When the policy outcome of the DFG consultation is known, the discretionary policy can be reviewed.

Legal Powers and Implications:

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 provides the Council with the power to provide assistance to improve living conditions, including adaptations in domestic properties.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications:

There are no direct climate change implications although providing additional assistance will help ensure individual schemes are designed and built to the highest achievable standard.

Consultation:

The Adult Services and Housing Policy and Scrutiny Panel have been consulted and support this policy change, acknowledging the additional support for families of disabled children.

Alliance Homes were consulted as part of developing an Adaptation agreement and acknowledge the benefit to their tenants of this approach.

Risk Management:

Any risk to the council is mitigated, as the availability of all types of assistance and loans will be subject to resources and the Council may withdraw, suspend or amend this policy (or part of) at any time should circumstances require.

Equality Implications:

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? No

Only positive outcomes arise from this decision.

Corporate Implications:

This policy helps support the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2020 - 2024 by helping residents in need improve and adapt their homes and enable the occupiers to live in a healthy and safe environment that meets their needs.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Updated Housing Renewals Assistance Policy

Background Papers:

Link to current policy

<https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/Housing%20renewal%20assistance%20policy.pdf>

Signatories:

Decision Maker(s):



Signed:

Title: Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing

Date: 18.03.22

With Advice From:



Signed:

Title: Director of Public Health and Regulatory Services

Date: 18.03.22

Footnote: Details of changes made and agreed by the decision taker since publication of the proposed (pre-signed) decision notice, if applicable: