



Signed off by	Head of Neighbourhood Operations
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To	Executive
Date	Thursday, 17 November 2022
Executive Member	Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services

Key Decision Required	Y
Wards Affected	(All Wards);

Subject	Housing Assistance Policy - Financial Assistance for Adaptations and Repairs
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Recommendations
(i) That the amended Housing Assistance Policy – Financial Assistance for Adaptations and Repairs provided as Annex 1 be approved.
Reasons for Recommendations
<p>The Housing Assistance Policy – Financial Assistance for Adaptations & Repairs (‘the Policy’) has been reviewed and updated to reflect current and future circumstances, particularly increases in the cost of housing assistance works due to global materials price increases. The changes recommended are in keeping with national and local policy objectives of helping to maintain independence for older and disabled residents.</p> <p>The proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit vulnerable residents and enable them to remain living at home safely and in their own communities for as long as possible; and • Make best use of the Better Care Fund, Housing Capital Grant, that is provided by central government for councils to develop local responses to meet need from residents who require practical assistance to remain living at home, primarily via the Disabled Facilities Grant (‘DFG’).

Executive Summary

The Housing Assistance Policy – Financial Assistance for Adaptations & Repairs ('the Policy') has been reviewed and updated to reflect current and future circumstances, particularly increases in the cost of housing assistance works due to global materials price increases. Annual increases in the capital funding for disabled adaptations in previous years have resulted in a substantial underspent balance on these ring fenced funds. These cannot be used for other purposes, but there is guidance on the application of discretion to allow best use of these funds beyond the basic mandatory provision prescribed in law.

The key proposals in the revised Policy are to:

1. Increase the maximum discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding above the current maximum award of £45,000, up to a new maximum of £55,000.
2. Increase the level of disregard of the first portion of client's means-tested contributions for DFG's, from the current level of £5,000 up to £7,000.
3. Allow the inclusion of an extended warranty of up to 5 years with all DFG funded stairlifts, step lifts and through floor lifts.
4. Include funding for vehicle crossovers, where required as part of a mandatory DFG to facilitate safe vehicle access onto a hardstanding or driveway.
5. Increase the maximum value of Small Works Grants from the current level of £500 up to £1,000.
6. Increase the maximum value of Small Works Loans from the current level of £6,500 up to £10,000.

The benefits of the recommended changes are three-fold:

1. Help more people to access the adaptations they require more quickly;
2. Enable the Council to spend more of its government allocation for disabled adaptations; and
3. Reduce the growing underspend.

The recommendations will benefit those in need of their homes being adapted, as well as families and wider communities who provide support to older and disabled residents. This will also support delivery of wider health and social care objectives and help reduce budget pressures, through assisting people to live independently at home for as long as possible.

Executive has authority to approve the recommendation.

Statutory Powers

1. The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 requires the local housing authority to administer grants to provide adaptations and facilities in the homes of disabled people. The terms under which these mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) may be given are set out in the legislation. This includes physical and financial eligibility criteria for applicants and criteria on what adaptations may be funded by the DFG.
2. The DFG is a means tested capital grant which can contribute towards the cost of adapting a home, for example by installing a stair lift, creating a level access shower

room, widening doorways, providing ramps and hoists or creating a ground floor extension. The DFG is a mandatory grant, which means that it is a legal requirement for local authorities to provide help to people who meet the eligibility criteria. These criteria include ensuring that the works are necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person, and that they are reasonable and practicable given the age and condition of the property.

3. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England And Wales) Order 2002 allows for greater discretion in the use of DFG's and requires local housing authorities to publish a scheme of assistance. The Council's Housing Assistance Policy ('The Policy') was previously updated in 2019, but it is now appropriate to update the Policy to reflect increases in the costs of delivering housing adaptations. This will also address the accumulating underspend of the ring fenced Better Care Funds provided for housing assistance, as well as being consistent with guidance on the use of the Regulatory Reform Order 2002.
4. The term 'discretion' is used to mean assistance that is outside of the mandatory DFG requirements. The Policy will allow the scope of this discretion to be clearly defined, and ensures consistent application of criteria to all clients, avoiding the potential for 'case by case' judgements to be required. Eligibility requirements for DFG's in terms of care and support needs as assessed by a registered occupational therapist will not be affected, to ensure consistent application of criteria to all clients.

Background

5. The Policy has been reviewed and revised in response to current and expected future circumstances, particularly increases in the cost of housing assistance works due to global materials price increases. Over the last year, increasing construction and materials costs have meant that it has become increasingly challenging to design, approve and deliver the necessary adaptations to meet clients identified needs within the existing Policy, particularly for those requiring a large scale adaptation or who are found to have any client financial contribution. This is resulting in an increasing number of vulnerable clients having to self-fund a portion of the works, and also introducing delays as schemes are subject to repeated rounds of re-designs to try to find compromises to meet the needs in a way that can be achieved within the funding envelope. This creates distress and anxiety for clients, as they may have to consider using their other limited financial resources or else sacrificing necessary parts of a scheme to get the project in budget. This is undesirable not just for clients and their families, but is also frustrating for the professionals involved from both the Council and external partners such as Surrey County Council Occupational Therapy and our contracted Home Improvement Agency (HIA) provider, Millbrook Healthcare Ltd.
6. The majority of the housing assistance programme is funded by the government allocation ringfenced for this purpose, the Better Care Fund, Housing Capital Grant. This is a combined fund provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and the Department of Health and Social Care, to enable councils to assist residents to access housing improvements and adaptations, which will enable them to live independently at home, for as long as possible.

7. Following several years of funding increases, the Council has accumulated a significant balance in Capital reserves. The money is ring fenced for home adaptations and cannot be diverted elsewhere. To date the underspend has been carried forward. However, it is always possible that the Government could in future require uncommitted balances to be repaid.
8. In March 2022 the Government released updated guidance for local authorities in England on delivery of the DFG function. This includes challenging best practice timescales for moving cases through the DFG process. The current construction cost increases make it even more difficult to progress cases swiftly, as more projects require compromises and the provision of extra funds, slowing the entire process and making it less likely that the Council's service can meet government targets.
9. The recommended Policy revisions update a number of discretionary elements which are already provided in addition to mandatory DFG provision. This includes an increased upper limit on DFG's, an increased disregard of the first portion of certain client financial contributions, and increased value of Small Works Grants and Loans, plus introducing the ability to include extended warranties in the grant package for lifts and confirming the inclusion of vehicle crossover works in specified circumstances.

Key Information

Background

10. The current Housing Assistance Policy was last revised in 2019, at which time a number of new discretionary elements were introduced to extend provision beyond mandatory requirements. The current proposals seek to extend this discretionary assistance to keep pace with increases in construction costs which have impacted the Council's ability to deliver timely and effective housing assistance to vulnerable clients.
11. The largest part of the housing assistance programme is via the DFG. Since 2018, the Council has delivered an average of 93 completed DFG's each year, although this figure dropped during 2020-21 due to the impact of COVID'19 pandemic restrictions. Grant assistance ranges in value from a few thousand pounds up to a current maximum of £45,000, with some larger projects being completed, usually with additional client funding. The majority of projects are delivered via the Council's contracted Home Improvement Agency (HIA) provider, Millbrook Healthcare Ltd.
12. Certain works are priced via a fixed Schedule of Rates in accordance with industry best practice, which is subject to periodic review. This includes bathrooms, ramps and Closomats (washer dryer toilets). All other works are tendered and the lowest price contractor will be selected. Millbrook maintain a list of Approved Contractors for tendered works, who have been vetted and meet the contract approval requirements. They also employ a small direct labour team to undertake bathroom works, an addition to the team that has substantially improved installation times.
13. However, the effect of global material price increases has become very noticeable over the last 12 months, with all projects increasing in price, such that previously suitable levels of discretionary assistance are no longer adequate. This is creating

delay and anxiety for clients, as they have to either try to find their own funding to supplement grant provision or go through scheme redesigns to try to make it fit within budget, but with inevitable compromises and loss of recommended features, for example having to choose between having adapted access or an adapted bathroom.

14. The key objective of the review has been to improve customer outcomes, by helping to secure funding for necessary adaptations at an earlier stage, particularly for those needing more extensive works and to reduce the need for client contributions, which can often be found unaffordable by elderly and disabled clients and is a key reason for eligible clients to drop out of the application process. This includes recommended amendments to the Small Works Assistance offered, in addition to the DFG itself.
15. The recommended Policy revisions are to amend certain discretionary elements i.e. those that are outside the strict mandatory requirements of the legislation. It will retain the existing mandatory DFG requirements regarding eligibility, purpose of works and means testing. It is recommended to use the discretion afforded by the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 to offer discretionary DFG elements for private sector residential adaptations in the following specific circumstances:

Discretion to Increase Disabled Facilities Grant Upper Limit

16. The mandatory DFG maximum is set in legislation at £30,000, and the Policy changes made in 2019 exercised the Council's discretion to increase this to £45,000. The new recommended Policy increases this maximum amount by a further £10,000, where the cost of work exceeds £45,000 (either as a result of unforeseen works or due to the extent of the original work that is recommended to the Council). This type of assistance will only be offered for schemes that meet the criteria for mandatory DFG's as set out above. The maximum amount of DFG assistance will therefore be £55,000. Where the cost of the works is more than £55,000, the applicant will generally need to fund this themselves, although in very limited circumstances Surrey County Council may provide some funding, usually only for children's adaptations.
17. There are only a small number of very large projects each year, 13 were approved for works over £30,000 in 2021/22. Typically this is where the adaptations require a small extension, often to create a ground floor bedroom or bathroom. Previously it was generally possible to build a small single storey extension within £45,000, but increases in costs mean that this is now extremely difficult. Some necessary schemes are having to be curtailed to try and bring them in within the £45,000 upper limit. This also adds time delays, as schemes are having to go through multiple design rounds to try and find a solution that meets the client's needs and can be bought in on budget. This is very undesirable for clients and takes up a lot of additional time for all of the professionals involved.
18. By increasing the maximum amount of funding to £55,000 it will be possible to design and build the majority of adaptations in line with the occupational therapy statement of needs. This would allow schemes to be approved and implemented more swiftly than is possible at present.

Discretion to Waive the first £7,000 of some client contributions

19. When the means test determines that a client has a financial contribution to make, where the client has not more than £24,500 in savings, since 2019 under the Council's Policy, the first £5,000 of this contribution has been waived. It is recommended to increase the value of this waiver to £7,000. This means that clients can have up to £7,000 of DFG works completed, before they have to make a financial contribution i.e. for the cost of any works required that is in excess of £7,000.
20. Previously the 'disregard' of £5,000 was generally sufficient to allow for a level access shower room or a stairlift to be provided with no financial contribution from the client. However, global materials cost increases which have meant that even relatively small adaptations like level access bathrooms, that could previously normally be completed for around £5,000 are now costing £6,000 – £7,000, which is starting to result in more clients having to self-fund the remaining portion of costs themselves. In many cases this is via a very small amount of remaining savings to a value of £1,000 - £2,000. This amount can make a significant impact on the finances of a vulnerable elderly or disabled client and is causing delays in progressing works while funds are confirmed or even deterring some from proceeding.
21. Increasing the value of the disregard would avoid vulnerable clients having to self-fund these works or choosing not to proceed at all. The figure of £24,500 matches the value used by Surrey County Council in the means test to qualify for alternative means of assistance, and is intended to assist consistency of approach.

Include an extended warranty of up to 5 years with DFG funded stairlifts, step lifts and through floor lifts

22. Currently the standard DFG package for provision of a stairlift, step lift or through floor lift, is to only provide the manufacturer's warranty, usually one year. This means that after that time, the client is responsible for all on-going costs, including routine service and maintenance and any repairs, including call out costs. This can be a significant disincentive to having a lift, as many clients are concerned about funding this on-going cost. Where a lift is installed in a Raven Housing Trust property, it is automatically included within their overall lift service and maintenance contract, so this would not need to be applied to those properties, reducing the cost mentioned.
23. It is therefore recommended that the standard offer be amended to include up to a 5 year warranty, so that clients have greater confidence that the lift can be suitably serviced and maintained and if necessary repaired. This is also likely to prolong the effective life of the equipment if it has been subject to the correct service and maintenance regime and will avoid the costs of early replacement of grant funded lifts due to lack of suitable repair and maintenance.

Include funding for vehicle crossovers, where required as part of a mandatory DFG to facilitate safe vehicle access onto a hardstanding or driveway

24. It is recommended to include a specific provision that DFG funding will be available for provision of vehicle crossovers ('dropped kerb'), where these are integral to the provision of safe access to an applicant's property, as part of a mandatory DFG

application. Crossovers are not technically included in the criteria for mandatory DFG's, as the legislation does not cover situations where the land on which works are recommended is not owned by either the applicant or their landlord i.e. the public pavement. While the legislation permits the use of considerable discretion in what can be funded as part of a DFG, this discretion must be set out in the published policy. The Council updated its Housing Assistance Policy in 2019 to clearly define the circumstances where discretionary funding would be available, however, this does not currently include crossovers.

25. An application for an Exceptional Circumstances case for funding of a vehicle crossover was taken to Licensing & Regulatory Committee in June 2020 and the Committee approved the application. The Committee also resolved to allow its decision to act as a precedent for future applications for the funding of crossovers, where these are integral to the provision of safe access to an applicant's property as part of a mandatory DFG.
26. While this has enabled subsequent applications, it is recommended to fully incorporate this point into the main Policy, to avoid any doubt in future where it may over time become more difficult to pinpoint the authority to use this discretion, as arising from a historical precedent case. Only a handful of crossover cases are completed each year at quite limited cost, but previously this omission from the Policy has caused significant delay and difficulty on individual cases, and so it is sought to safeguard this point for the future.

Small Works Assistance

27. In addition to DFG's the Council also provides Small Works Grants (SWG) of up to £500 and Small Works Loans (SWL) of up to £6,500 from its own budget (previously classed as capital expenditure, but to be charged in future to revenue, in view of the nature and value of the works provided). These are available to owner occupiers who are on specified income related benefits and are intended to help towards the costs of repairs, adaptations or improvements that will enable the occupier to continue to live independently in a safe, secure and weather-tight home. Applications for such grants or loans will be considered where there is an immediate need for work to be undertaken or where the works will be necessary within 12 months of the application being made. Loans are over £500 in value and are interest free and become repayable upon the sale of the property, if this is within 35 years of the loan being given.
28. These mechanisms have however been consistently underutilised for several years. One reason suggested is that the £500 grant limit does not allow for enough work to be done, particularly in view of significant cost increases in construction materials over the last year. It is therefore recommended to increase the value of Small Works Grants up to a maximum of £1,000 to allow more scope for more or slightly higher value works.
29. It is recommended that the maximum loan value be increased to £10,000, and also to make more reference to use of the funds for enabling energy efficiency improvements to homes. Currently the policy states that loans can be made available for improvements such as provision of central heating, provision of gas heaters (fires

and water heaters) and thermal insulation, but it is recommended to amend this to reference other methods of heating not involving solid fuel combustion and other energy efficiency improvements, so as to broaden the scope of eligible works. It is suggested that by increasing the value of loan available, it might be possible to encourage more significant energy efficiency improvements.

30. It should be noted that the scope of Small Works Assistance is slightly different to DFG, with applicants not needing to meet criteria for care and support needs or to be elderly. The works can also cover necessary home repairs e.g. to roofs, windows and plumbing or electrical installations, which by their nature are not capital projects suitable for DFG funds.
31. All other aspects of the current Housing Assistance Policy are to remain as at present.

Options

32. Executive has the following options:

- 1) Agree the recommendation to adopt the revised Housing Assistance Policy. This is the **recommended option**;
- 2) Make additional amendments to the recommended Housing Assistance Policy and then agree the recommendation as set out in the revised Policy;
- 3) To not agree the recommendation. This will significantly hinder the Council's ability to make the most effective use of the Better Care Fund grant allocation, as set out below and is therefore **not recommended**.

33. Rationale:

Option 1: Adopt the revised Housing Assistance Policy - this is the recommended option. The financial risk of over-spending will be managed through diligent budget review and consideration will be given to a reduced level of discretionary spending, if an overspend were forecast. Communications with our residents will be clear on what is mandatory grant policy, as well as that which is discretionary policy and therefore subject to review, in order to manage expectations.

Option 2: Amend the Housing Assistance Policy, in light of Executive feedback – to approve several, but not all, of the recommended Policy elements would require officers to work with Executive to ascertain which elements should be implemented immediately, and which require further action, or are to remain as current policy. To implement a number of the Policy amendments, but not the full range, would prolong current budget underspends, rather than responding to customer need.

Option 3: Make no change to the current Policy – not to change the Policy would miss an opportunity to target resources, also to ensure older and disabled people experience a swift decision and installation of the equipment and adaptations they require. Policies would not contribute as significantly to local social care and health objectives. The current underspend would continue to grow, but being a ring-fenced budget, could not be used for other council activity.

Legal Implications

34. The framework under which mandatory DFG's may be given is set out in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and this will continue to be used to provide the core eligibility criteria for clients and works.
35. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England And Wales) Order 2002 allows for greater discretion in the use of DFG's and requires local housing authorities to publish a scheme of assistance. The Council's Housing Assistance Policy was previously updated in 2019, but it is now appropriate to update the Policy to reflect changing circumstances as well as increases in Better Care Funds provided for housing assistance, and guidance on the use of the Regulatory Reform Order 2002.

Financial Implications

Disabled Facilities Grants

36. Disabled Facilities Grants are funded by an annual government capital allocation, as part of the Better Care Fund. The Better Care Fund has increased substantially since 2015 when it was £200million, to the most recent announcement in December 2021 that £573million is being made available for the DFG in each year from 2022/23 to 2024/25.
37. This Council received a Better Care Fund grant of £1,286,692 in 2022/23, and expects to receive the same amount in each of the next two financial years.
38. There has been a sizeable carry forward of unspent budgets for each of the previous five years. This money is ring-fenced for DFG and related capital spending projects and unspent balances are carried forward each year. By the start of 2022/23, the accumulated underspend plus this year's annual grant allocation from government was just over £4million.
39. There is always a risk that the Government could in future require underspends to be repaid. Increasing the amount of assistance available to clients will reduce the level of underspend being carried forwards, by using the funds to facilitate more projects and for these to progress more swiftly. A driver for the recommended change is therefore to promote a faster and smoother experience for the client, so that the financial support for the required adaptation work can be secured at an earlier stage with fewer people needing to self-fund part of the works or to have to compromise the scheme design to try to keep within current assistance limits. This is one of the main reasons for delays and discontinued applications in the current DFG process, and could be improved by the Policy changes that are now recommended.
40. In 2021/22, there were 13 DFG cases approved for values above £30,000 (the maximum mandatory value), of which three included works costing in excess of £45,000. If the recommended higher maximum DFG limit had been in place, this would have added up to £30,000 to the total expenditure, equivalent to an additional large DFG case. So far in 2022/23, there have been two cases approved for the

current maximum value of £45,000, both cases involving children, where the home requires extensive works to accommodate their current and future needs. In 2020/21 there were only five cases where the cost of the completed works exceeded £30,000, with three cases in 2019/20 and two cases in 2018/19.

41. The number of very large cases is generally small, but in the last 18 months the cost of building even a small extension has risen so that more cases are now approaching maximum funding and having to experience delays due to repeated redesigns, so as to keep within budget. The recommended higher maximum level would seek to alleviate this difficulty.
42. Increasing the amount of client contribution that is waived will also have only a small effect on the overall budget, but make a big impact for the individual clients. So far in 2022/23, 12 clients have had an assessed financial contribution to make before they would be eligible for any mandatory DFG funding. In 10 of these cases, the value of the works was more than £5,000 and so while they benefitted from a discretionary grant of £5,000 under the current policy, they also each had to pay a contribution of typically £1,000 - £3,000 to cover the rest of the cost of the works. These clients are generally frail and elderly and will have only a small amount of savings, as the waiver policy only applies to those with less than £24,500 in savings. To have to use these funds to get essential adaptations to their home can be very concerning for clients, but would have only added around £15,000 to the overall expenditure.
43. The recommendation to provide an extended warranty package on all stair lifts, through floor lifts and step lifts would again be well within the tolerance of the overall DFG budget. On average over the last two financial years, there have been about 25 lifts approved each year, with the vast majority being stairlifts. An extended warranty package on a stairlift is currently an average of £550 in addition to the product, and an average of £1,500 for a step or through floor lift. This is expected to add around £16,600 to the overall spend. It should also be noted that where a lift is installed in a Raven Housing Trust property, it is automatically included within their overall lift service and maintenance contract, so this would not need to be applied to those properties, reducing the overall cost.
44. There will be minimal impact from the recommended continuing inclusion of crossovers, as only a handful of these are completed each year, at a cost of around £2,000 each. However, without them, certain projects have in the past completely stalled, as the mandatory access works to the property e.g. a hardstanding to provide safe vehicle access, are rendered pointless if the crossover is not also provided.
45. If all of the recommended new DFG elements are implemented, it is estimated that, based on current activity levels, this would add around an extra £82,600 to the annual DFG budget expenditure. Total annual expenditure via the DFG budget in 2021/22 was £887,000, so the effect of adopting these proposals would not be significant given the scale of the overall budget and is well within the capacity of the grant allocation of £1,286,692 in 2022/23.

46. While it is the case that the grant allocation has been kept the same this year as 2021/22 and is anticipated to be kept at this level for the next two years, when set against the impact of rising costs more widely, this is in real terms a cut in funding. However, based on current activity levels and costs, the allocation that the Council receives is sufficient to cover the recommended policy changes.
47. Any discretionary assistance will only be considered having regard to the available DFG budget at the time. If the DFG budget will not have sufficient resources in reserve to deal with other mandatory referrals that may present throughout the financial year, the Council retains the right not to approve any discretionary elements. This will be subject to on-going budget monitoring, as well as on-going consideration of the impact of the Policy changes, in terms of numbers of applications, approvals and speed of delivery.
48. Some of the accumulated underspend from previous years, calculated at around £3million, after 2022/23 spending has been deducted, could also be released from Unallocated Reserves to the in-year DFG budget, to provide additional resilience if the allocation was at risk of being exceeded in year.

Small Works Assistance

49. With regard to the Small Works Assistance recommendations, these are tied to a 2023/24 Service and Financial Planning Growth proposal for £25,000 revenue budget growth, as a replacement for the current £50,000 capital budget, which will in turn release £25,000 of capital budget savings. This change is necessary because it has been identified that most of the work done via the Small Works Assistance programme relates to revenue expenditure rather than capital works, as it mostly consists of repairs and minor improvements to residents homes. The value of the assistance by its nature is also below the capital De Minimis Policy threshold of £10,000.
50. Because the Small Works Assistance capital budget has not been fully utilised in previous years, it is recommended to give up some of this budget as capital savings and monitor demand and spend during 2023/24. As the recommended Policy revisions include increasing the value of small works assistance given via Small Works Grants and Loans, in order to make them more attractive to vulnerable residents, it is possible that the initial £25,000 revenue budget being requested may prove inadequate and that further budget growth may subsequently need to be sought from the 2024/25 Service & Financial Planning process.
51. If the £25,000 revenue budget is not approved during Service and Financial Planning for 2023/24, the Council would be unable to continue to provide Small Works Assistance to vulnerable elderly and disabled home owners, in accordance with the current Policy, and would not be able to take forward the increases in the value of

assistance as recommended here. The Small Works Assistance programme, although underutilised in recent years, does offer a valuable additional dimension to supplement the other elements of the Policy. It is not dependent on an assessment of health and care needs, as with the DFG and is deliberately broader in scope to include for repairs and maintenance issues, which are crucial in maintaining safe, weathertight properties. Given the current cost of living crisis, the provision of assistance for low income home owners, which would also allow for improvements in energy efficiency measures, has become even more important to support vulnerable residents. The Policy proposals to provide for slightly larger sums are intended to make these forms of assistance more attractive and so to increase take up.

52. If in future there was to be a significant reduction in the grant allocation from Government, such that it became necessary to withdraw approval of discretionary elements of the policy, then the entire Housing Assistance Policy would be revised in line with the prevailing circumstances and returned to Executive for consideration.

Equalities Implications

53. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and the Policy proposals would have an overall positive impact, particularly for those with the protected characteristics of age and disability, as well as in relation to deprivation, which is considered as an additional vulnerability.
54. If accepted, the proposals will assist vulnerable residents (including those with protected characteristics, such as the elderly and those with disabilities) to live independently and are likely to result in lower numbers of emergency hospital admissions for older and disabled people, due to falls and other accidents. Acceptance of the proposals will have no negative impacts on any group in the community, but rather the opposite.
55. Through development of this Policy, all potential users were considered and it is felt that the service is available to all within our society, but predominately by those who are older, disabled and/or on low incomes. The main Policy changes relate to the DFG, and have kept to the mandatory eligibility criteria, which is based on health and social care requirements as well as financial eligibility. This ensures that while 'discretion' is implemented, it is clearly defined, and ensures consistent application of criteria to all clients, avoiding the potential for 'case by case' judgements to be required.

Communication Implications

56. It is anticipated that the Council will continue to work with our Home Improvement Agency provider, Millbrook Healthcare Ltd, to promote the full range of services available to support adaptations and repairs. This will include publicity via both organisations' websites, other digital channels such as social media and the use of promotional material such as 'Borough News' residents' magazine.

Environmental Sustainability Implications

57. The Policy proposals have the potential to provide positive environmental sustainability impacts, by facilitating residents to make energy efficiency improvements to their homes via the Small Works Assistance programme, contributing to a reduction in carbon emissions from the borough's housing stock. The scope of the eligible works has been slightly extended to specifically mention energy efficiency improvements, and the recommended higher maximum values for Small Works Grants and Loans would allow greater opportunity for these types of works. As such the proposals complement the aims and objectives of the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

Risk Management Considerations

58. There are no risk management issues identified.

Consultation

59. Each of the groups below were consulted and provided ideas and support for the policies suggested within this proposal.

60. The groups consulted were:

Adult Occupational Therapy team, Reigate and Banstead locality – Surrey County Council

Children with Disabilities team – Surrey County Council

Millbrook Healthcare Ltd (Home Improvement Agency)

Tandridge District Council – who also use the Millbrook HIA service

Mole Valley District Council – who also use the Millbrook HIA service

Policy Framework

61. This Policy is well aligned with the themes and priorities of the Councils Five Year Plan, 'Reigate and Banstead 2025'. In particular our objective to provide targeted and proactive support for our most vulnerable residents, which states that we will assist vulnerable residents to remain in their homes and avoid problems such as

social isolation and fuel poverty, through early assistance and the provision of advice, grants and other financial support.

Background Powers

1. Corporate Plan 2025 - https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/info/20205/plans_and_policies/280/reigate_and_banstead_2025
2. Equality Impact Assessment