

## Expansion of discretionary funding to include repairs to the homes of disabled and vulnerable people.

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Report of: Colin Moss, Head of Health & Housing (Acting)

Report to: Gerard Tinsdale, Chief Officer, Environment, Communities and Housing

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

### What is this report about?

#### Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- Following the recent increases in Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) budget to local authorities, the deputy director at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has written to all authorities outlining the potential of using DFG monies to make safe and repair properties occupied by disabled people.
- The proposal is to include carrying out much needed repairs to a disabled person's home and to their heating system to ensure they can remain in their home living independently.
- These proposals lie at the heart of our Best Councils Plan achieving targets within the Health and Well-being, Housing and Age friendly Leeds priorities. This initiative will meet one of the published outcomes of wanting Leeds residents to '*live with dignity and stay living independently as long as possible*'

### Recommendations

- a) Approve the initiative to carry out repairs to the properties and heating systems to disabled and vulnerable people's homes.
- b) To sign off the amended 'Private Sector Housing Assistance policy' where these proposed changes in policy are to be published.

### Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1.1 In the Ministry's local authority allocation letter for the DFG budget for 2021-22, the deputy director Cathy Page states: '*The RRO gives local housing authorities power to assist individuals with renewals, repairs and adaptations in their homes through grants or loans, subject to the adoption and publication of a policy for provision of assistance under the RRO. For example, it*

*can provide authorities with power to fund essential repairs to reduce injury and accidents in the home, to ensure homes are adequately heated, and to expand the scope of adaptations available under the DFG legislation approach when making decisions with regard to extensions to ensure equity and that accusations of discrimination, which almost inevitably arise, can be defended.'*

- 1.2 The national DFG budget has risen over 61% since 2016 and this has given local authorities the ability to widen the scope of the works they undertake to promote independent living. The Health & Housing service will accept applications from disabled people, subject to a test of resources, to make repairs and improvements to their heating systems and carry out repairs to the property to ensure they are safe, secure, wind and weatherproof.
- 1.3 Each application for 'heating repairs/upgrade' will be initially referred to the Council's Sustainable Energy and Climate Change team to see if any central Government grants are available for the work. If central funds are not available, the application for funding will be passed back to the Health & Housing service for consideration.
- 1.4 It is anticipated that referrals will usually be initiated following a visit by one of Health & Housing's surveyors for the installation of adaptations. However, applications will be accepted from any disabled person seeking repairs/improvements to their home.
- 1.5 For the time being, the scheme of works will be scheduled, tendered and delivered by Care and Repair (Leeds) UK, Health & Housing's procured partner that currently delivers LCC's 'handyperson scheme'. The proposal is to expand the remit of these current £1,000 grants (maximum) up to a maximum of £20,000 to include the proposed repair work to the property. The expansion of the handyperson's scheme to include these works will be incorporated into the 'Memorandum of Understanding' that currently exists to underpin the services provided to the Council by Care and Repair.
- 1.6 The extent of works to be delivered under this initiative is outlined in Health & Housing's officer guidance document HOAD G6 (attached).
- 1.7 The disabled person will be assessed to confirm they meet the current handyperson's eligibility for the grant.
- 1.8 The Council's published 'Private Sector Housing Assistance policy' has been amended to reflect this new area of discretionary work. As with all discretionary funding from the Disabled Facilities Grant budget, the Council have the right to withdraw funding for these types of initiatives at any time if the Council does not have the budget available. Any scheme that has been approved to proceed will always be honoured as long as the scheme has been completed within 12 months from the approval date.

### **What impact will this proposal have?**

**Wards Affected:**

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes       No

### **What consultation and engagement has taken place?**

This proposal is following Government best practice advice and as such consultation is not required.

### **What are the resource implications?**

- 3 Health & Housing do not currently have the resources to deliver this proposed area of work within their own workforce. However, Care and Repair (Leeds) have agreed, under the joint 'Memorandum of Standing', to expand the current handypersons scheme (that the Council fund), to deliver a more comprehensive package of works and charge an agreed fee for each completed application.

### **What are the legal implications?**

- 4 This initiative has been promoted by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and, if approved, will be published in the Council's amended Private Sector Housing Assistance policy. The funding of this work comes under the provisions of the Regulatory Reform Order 2003 and will be funded directly from the Disabled Facilities Grant ringfenced budget provided by central Government. There are no implications to Leeds City Council's general fund budget.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 5 The approval of funds for this initiative in the Council's published policy is discretionary and can be withdrawn by the Council at any time. The DFG budget is constantly monitored so discretionary spend is fully controlled to ensure that the budget in any given year is not exceeded. Health & Housing's managers will always ensure that the DFG budget has sufficient funds to meet the Council's statutory duties on the provision of applications for DFG at any given time.
- 6 If any applicant wishes to appeal a decision made by the Health & Housing service, a case can be referred back to the Review Panel for re-consideration and subsequently on to the Council's independent appeal panel if necessary. Any further re-course for an applicant would be with the local government ombudsman's office as with any other public complaint relating to the Council's services.

### **Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?**

Inclusive Growth       Health and Wellbeing       Climate Emergency

- 7 This initiative meets both the 'health and well-being' and 'climate emergency' pillars. The repairs to property support a disabled person to remain living independently for longer and the repair and improvement work around heating systems and insulation levels will reduce energy consumption and provide a safe and warm environment for the occupants.

### **Options, timescales and measuring success**

#### **a) What other options were considered?**

- 8 There are no other specific options considered as the Council is following Government's advice on good practice.

#### **b) How will success be measured?**

- 9 The Health & Housing service will monitor the uptake of applications for funding and will be able to produce data on the numbers of properties repaired and improved.

#### **c) What is the timetable for implementation?**

10 Following approval, the Council will have to have a number of meetings with Care & Repair to embed the process and complete necessary procedural documentation. It is planned to accept applications for grant funding within 3 months of formal approval.

## **Appendices**

11 The documents attached are:

- The Private Sector Housing Assistance policy. April 2022. (the amended section is highlighted in yellow)
- HOAD G6 The LCC's officer guidance document for implementation of the initiative.

## **Background papers**

12 None