



Cabinet Member Report

Decision Maker:	Councillor Heather Acton, Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Licensing
Date:	27 th October 2020
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Home Improvement Grants and Assistance & Leaseholder Relocation Assistance Policy 2020
Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	An entry was included in the Forward Plan of Key Decisions enabling a decision to be made from 24 th March 2020
Financial Summary:	The proposals contained within this report can be met within existing budgets. The Better care Fund for 2020/21 contains £1,523,990 expenditure to fund the Disabled Facilities Grants programme and it is proposed that £304,000 is made available to fund the private sector discretionary grants programme.
Report of:	Annette Acik, Director of Public Protection and Licensing

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Unsuitable, poor or inaccessible housing for any vulnerable person in our City can have a significant detrimental effect on health and wellbeing and can lead to the development or aggravation of long-term health conditions. Our older person population is also projected to grow, with the numbers of those aged 75 predicted to increase by 52% by 2030¹. Estimates also suggest that 25% of older people living in Westminster have a low income², and whilst many people will age in good health, there will be others that will live with long-term conditions that will cause both minor and severe impacts on their mobility, health and care needs. This will impact not only the individual's wider role in the community but also create higher demand for Adult Social Care support.as our residents move into older age.

¹ Westminster Housing Market Analysis 2014

² Westminster Housing Market Analysis 2014

1.2 Decent, safe and accessible homes make a huge difference to people's lives, and each year the council dedicates resources and funding³ to help our older and most vulnerable residents remain in their own homes for longer to ensure

- Independence for disabled and older residents
- Safety from crime and the fear of crime
- Decent and safe homes for vulnerable residents

1.2 Through the Governments Better Care Fund, in 2016 Westminster received an increase of 100% from previous funding allocations to provide mandatory disabled facilities grants and carry out essential adaptation/repair services for our residents. This funding has remained at this level and is a key driver for supporting our residents to remain at home as they grow older.

1.3 Westminster currently administers this funding through the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) within Public Protection and Licensing (PP&L), in line with our Regulatory Reform Order Policy. This policy was last updated in 2013. Therefore a review of both the policy and the services that we deliver is necessary to reflect the increase in funding available and to ensure that we continue to deliver high-quality care and support in the community.

1.4 With the increase in funding Westminster can expand its services to residents, and the policy includes additional capacity to:

- renew warranties on equipment and carry out repairs to existing adaptations
- increase the funding available to each eligible resident for adaptation works
- meet decent homes standards
- increase opportunity and investment in assistive technology

1.5 The policy has been updated to reflect the services and funds available, and is attached Appendix B.

2.0 Recommendations

- (i) That the Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Licensing approves the Home Improvement Grants and Assistance & Leaseholder Relocation Assistance Policy 2020 (Appendix B)
- (ii) That delegated authority is given to the Director of Public Protection and Licensing to approve minor modifications and updates to the policy.

³ Funds are sourced from the councils Capital Fund as well as receiving contributions from the Governments Better Care Fund (an integrated care model with services including health, social care, housing and other public services)

(iii) That the policy, if approved, will be implemented from **12th October 2020**

3.0 Reason for Decision

3.1 To approve the Home Improvement Grants and Assistance & Leaseholder Relocation Assistance Policy 2020 to ensure Westminster continues to meet our vulnerable residents' needs for remaining safe, healthy and independent at home, as well as enable the grant of relocation loans for our leaseholders in housing renewal areas

4.0 Legal and Policy Context

4.1 The Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 governs the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) which states that these grants may be issued when an adaptation is considered 'necessary and appropriate' and that the works are 'reasonable and practical'.

4.2 Since 2002, DFG monies are managed by the Government's Better Care Fund⁴ and powers were afforded to Local Authorities to provide this assistance under local policies⁵ to ensure the policy met the needs of the local population.

4.3 All private sector tenants, owner occupiers/long leaseholder and Registered Social Landlord tenants are able to apply for grant support. Eligibility or part contribution payments for a grant is means tested in most cases and based on current income and savings.

4.4 Only where the policy permits are Westminster Council tenants eligible for support, as it is considered that any adaptation or improvement works will normally be covered by the Housing Management and Repairs Service.

5.0 Home Improvement Grants and Assistance & Leaseholder Relocation Assistance Policy 2020

Current Home Improvement Grant Policy 2013

5.1 The current 2013 policy supports a range of grants and funds available to eligible residents including:

- disabled adaptations
- removal of minor hazards

⁴ The Better Care Fund encourages integration of Health, Social Care and Housing and supports households requiring disabled facilities adaptations (including adaptations required for the elderly).

⁵ Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002

- home security
- energy efficiency

5.2 Referrals for adaptations are received from Adult Social Care Occupational Therapists and the HIA assess whether the household meets qualifying criteria for works to be funded and arrange for contractors to carry out the works on their behalf.

5.3 The policy also includes the council's free Handyperson Service for all residents in Westminster who are either aged 60 and over, or in receipt of a disability allowance. This service is for small jobs that can be done in a maximum of half a day such as changing light bulbs, fitting grab rails or minor repairs all of which help to maintain health and wellbeing and safety in the home. Any qualifying resident can use the service twice in any 12 months. The first £50 of materials are provided free but anything that costs more has to be paid for.

Proposed Policy Changes

5.5 Following an internal consultation across the council including Adult Social Care, Occupational Therapists, Housing, and the Home Improvement Agency to review the increase in funding allocation from the Better Care Fund, it is considered that our services can be tailored and expanded to meet the changing needs of our residents.

5.6 The following policy changes are proposed:

- Those who apply for assistance are often asset rich but income poor so we have widened the criteria for our **Emergency Assistance grant** to include removing Category 1 hazards and hoarding and self-neglect support with maximum grant of £5,000 in any year.
- Residents are living longer so repairs to previously installed adaptations are now essential to ensure the clients can continue to use the adaptations so we are introducing a **Repairs to existing adaptations** and renewal of existing warranties with a maximum grant of £5,000
- A new area of work to support residents remain independent is **Assistive Technology** so we are allocating £10,000 for Assistive Technology support in the home. Equipment provided agreed by Home Improvement Team Manager in consultation with Care Management and Telecare Team Manager.
- This grant supports those residents recognised as needing adaptations but do not meet the DFG criteria. To meet increasing prices and identified need we are Increasing the funding under the **Adaptations Assistance grant** from £5,000 to £8,000 or £8,000 to £10,000 depending on benefits received.
- **Decent Homes Grants** increased from maximum of £8,000 to £10,000 to allow for renewal of heating systems within the budget.

- The 'loft proofing and draught insulation grant' and 'assistance with emergency works to heating and hot water' is removed from the existing policy, however access to this support and funding for such works remains under the emergency assistance grant.
- The addition of a **Relocation Assistance** grant to assist leaseholders of properties that are acquired by the Council during redevelopment programs. This will enable the Council to offer loans secured by equity in a leaseholder's property.

5.7 The proposed Policy 2020 is attached at Appendix B.

7.0 Equalities Impact Assessment

7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, and the change in policy and increase in funding would not negatively impact any protected groups.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 The proposals contained within this report can be met within existing budgets. The Better care Fund for 2020/21 contains £1,523,990 expenditure to fund the Disabled Facilities Grants programme and it is proposed that £304,000 is made available to fund the private sector discretionary grants programme.

9.0 Legal Implications

9.1 Westminster makes these policy changes under its General Power of Competence as set out in s1 of the Localism Act 2011. This power holds that the authority may generally perform any act an individual may do. Subsection (4)(c) holds that the authority may exercise this power in any way whatsoever for the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident or present in its area.

9.2 These changes will bring the Grants Policy in line with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. This Order, at clause 3, provides a local housing authority with the power to provide assistance for the purpose of improving living conditions within their area.

9.3 If these changes are not made, the current Westminster grants policy will be ineffective. In particular we will be unable to offer loans under our relocation assistance policy without Secretary of State consent. This will be impractical, and cause delays and increased costs to both Westminster and residents seeking assistance.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Other Implications

Appendix B: Home Improvement Grants and Assistance & Leaseholder Equity Loans Policy

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

**If you have any queries about this report, please contact [Lesley Bellenger](mailto:lbellenger@westminster.gov.uk)
lbellenger@westminster.gov.uk**

For completion by the **Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Licensing**

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: _____

State nature of interest if any

.....
(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled

.....and reject any alternative options which are referred to but not recommended.

Signed

Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Licensing

Date

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
.....
.....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Strategic Director Finance and Performance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

Appendix A

Other Implications

1. **Resources Implications** – The policy may result in a minor increased resource requirement for back office administration and increase back office costs and handling times as a result.
2. **Business Plan Implications** – The policy will be incorporated into relevant business plans for 2020/21
3. **Risk Management Implications** - The policy will be kept under review and updated with any changes to legislation.
4. **Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment including Health and Safety Implications** – None
5. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – None
6. **Impact on the Environment** – None
7. **Equalities Implications** – An equalities impact assessment has been completed and the the policy does not adversely impact or unlawfully discriminate against any protected characteristics.
8. **Staffing Implications** – None
9. **Human Rights Implications** –
10. **Energy Measure Implications** – None
11. **Communications Implications** – A positive communications campaign to launch a communications campaign to promote the availability of funds and support our communities remain independent and in their own homes as a result.