

 Executive Committee 31 August 2017		Agenda Item No. 3
Title	Proposed Housing Financial Assistance Policy	
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Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number		
Background Papers	HEART Executive Report 28 September 2016	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	Yes
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes – Ref 658
Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken	Yes

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	30/7/2017	Chris Elliott/Bill Hunt
Head of Service	8/8/2017	Bill Hunt
CMT	8/8/2017	Chris Elliott/Bill Hunt/Andrew Jones
Section 151 Officer	14/8/2017	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	2/8/2017	Andrew Jones
Finance	14/8/2017	Andrew Rollins
Portfolio Holder(s)	8/8/2017	Councillor Peter Phillips
Consultation & Community Engagement		
HEART Project Board representing Warwickshire Local Authorities and Public Health. Housing Portfolio Holder		
Final Decision?	Yes	

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 On the 1 April 2017 Warwick District Council entered into a partnership agreement with the four other Warwickshire District and Borough Councils, Warwickshire County Council and Public Health to participate in the countywide HEART service (Home Environment Assessment and Response Team) for the delivery of home adaptations and related services.
- 1.2 The reasons for reviewing the Housing Financial Assistance Policy are directly linked to the creation of HEART and the increase in Disabled Facilities Grant funding.
- 1.3 In 2013 the Government introduced a single pooled budget for health and social care services, known as the Better Care Fund (BCF). It includes Disabled Facilities Grant funding. The BCF requires the NHS and local authorities to agree a joint plan to demonstrate how the funding will be best used within social care to achieve the best outcomes for local people. The funding includes financial incentives to deliver services which prevent the need for: residential care; emergency admissions to hospital; or acute services.
- 1.4 The aims and objectives of the new Housing Financial Assistance Policy are to:
 - Create consistent types of financial assistance across Warwickshire for delivery by the HEART partnership.
 - Align the policy with the objectives of the Better Care Fund which are to: assist with the prevention of admissions to hospital and social care; support hospital discharge; and reduce the need for social care interventions. (A summary of the proposed financial assistance is included in appendix one of the report.)
 - Make effective use of the increased budgets from the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation to meet the Better Care Fund objectives.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Executive recommends to Council the approval of the Housing Financial Assistance Policy, attached at appendix two, to run concurrently with the agreement to participate in the countywide HEART service until 31st March 2022.
- 2.2 That the Executive agrees that any future minor changes to the policy that maintain the alignment with the Better Care Fund objectives are delegated to the Head of Housing Services in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder.

3. **Reasons for the Recommendation**

- 3.1 The increase in Disabled Facilities Grant funding has created the opportunity to increase the amount and types of financial assistance available to local residents to help address conditions within the home environment. The council's Housing Financial Assistance Policy needs amending to take advantage of this opportunity.
- 3.2 The policy will deliver consistent financial assistance across Warwickshire aligned with the Better Care Fund objectives.

- 3.3 It will support HEART to deliver a more holistic service and to be able to take advantage of the opportunity to assist with the prevention of, and reduction in the need for, health and care interventions.
- 3.4 It will further enable HEART to adapt and respond quickly to future needs and opportunities as it is proposed that delegated authority is given to the Head of Housing Services, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder, to authorise minor changes to the policy which are in keeping with the objectives of the Better Care Fund. (Major changes would be reported to Executive for approval in the usual way.)

4. **Policy Framework**

- 4.1 The proposed Housing Financial Assistance Policy links in with the service and money strands of Fit for the Future. The service is focused on managing resources efficiently to meet customer demand and making best use of available budgets. The Warwickshire District and Borough Councils will use the HEART partnership to deliver the policy.
- 4.2 The effective delivery of aids and adaptations to residents' homes directly and positively contributes to the housing and health-and-wellbeing priorities within the council's Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 4.3 Impact Assessments
 - 4.3.1 The policy is designed to help prevent, reduce or delay the need for care or health service interventions and to improve conditions within the home environment.
- 4.4 Equality Implications
 - 4.4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is included at appendix three.

5 **Budgetary Framework**

- 5.1 The Housing Financial Assistance Policy will be funded by the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation provided by the Government via the Better Care Fund. This funding has increased over the past few years from:

2015 / 2016

Warwickshire £1,925,078

Nuneaton and Bedworth £608,192

Warwick £373,058

Stratford-on-Avon £373,165

Rugby £274,508

North Warwickshire £296,156

To:

2017 / 2018

Warwickshire £3,848,420

Nuneaton and Bedworth £1,238,795

Warwick £750,159

Stratford-on-Avon £723,780

Rugby £539,361

North Warwickshire £596,324

- 5.2 It is expected that this funding will continue to rise for the next two years by a further 10% following the previous Government's spending review.
- 5.3 The DFG budgets being spent by the HEART partnership are ring fenced for each housing authority: there is no pooling of these budgets.

6. Risks

- 6.1 The revised policy will help deliver a more holistic service, via HEART, and therefore reduce the risk of underspends from the increased DFG allocations.
- 6.2 The spending is monitored by the HEART Management Board and each partner organisation has a senior representative on the board. For Warwick District Council this will be the Head of Housing Services.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

- 7.1 To review the council's current 2006 policy in isolation, without linking this to the countywide HEART service would miss an opportunity to provide an enhanced and consistent Housing Financial Assistance Policy throughout the county, linked to the objectives of the Better Care Fund.

8. Background

- 8.1 Since 2003 the council has had the discretion to develop and maintain its own Housing Financial Assistance Policy in compliance with the Housing Assistance (Regulatory Reform England) Order 2002 (RRO 2002). This allows the council to provide financial assistance for owners or occupiers of private sector housing within the district.
- 8.2 Each council is obliged, under the RRO 2002, to publish a policy addressing any non-mandatory forms of private sector housing assistance, and only to deliver assistance in accordance with that policy.
- 8.3 Councils in Warwickshire developed local policies independently: Warwick District Council's policy was approved in 2006. Policies were then revised in different directions and at different times, being delivered in a variety of ways and with a distinct local focus. Not surprisingly, though the general aims of many policies have similar roots, in practice they now look quite different.
- 8.4 The home environment plays a major role in health and wellbeing and therefore housing authorities can contribute to improving this by providing assistance to adapt, repair or modify the homes of residents. HEART has been developed to provide these services on behalf of Warwickshire councils.
- 8.5 The HEART partnership is now the delivery body for many of the forms of assistance which councils can offer. However, in order to provide this assistance effectively, it is necessary to harmonise the aims and some of the details of those partner councils' policies.
- 8.6 There is now an opportunity to better align the council's policy with the objectives of the Better Care Fund to reduce hospital admissions, assist with discharge, and prevent or reduce the need for social care.

- 8.7 The proposed policy has been prepared as much as possible in accordance with withdrawn government guidance (ODPM Circular 05/2003) which was not replaced but which still reflects best practice and thinking on the subject.
- 8.8 The Housing Financial Assistance Policy has being prepared by the five district councils and boroughs within Warwickshire to consider mutual adoption and consistent delivery through HEART. Once appropriate approvals have been given, the HEART service will act on behalf of the partner councils and will take decisions on matters within this policy on their behalf. A decision by HEART will be a decision of the partner council in that regard, and the HEART service will be responsible and accountable to the partner councils for the decisions and actions it takes.
- 8.9 Adopting the proposed policy will align the aims and objectives of the policy with those of the Better Care Fund. This will allow the council the flexibility to use the additional DFG allocation on additional preventative measures in line with BCF objectives.
- 8.10 The contents of the new policy are similar to the housing financial assistance types available in previous policies and include:
- Disabled Facilities Grants (Mandatory Grant)
 - Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance – a discretionary grant (up to £10k,) and a discretionary loan (a further £10k) for where the cost of works goes above the statutory maximum. Whilst this is referred to as a loan it is a charge on the property that only becomes payable on a change in the property ownership.
 - Warm and Safer Homes Grants – discretionary assistance to remove hazards from homes (up to £10k)
 - Hospital Discharge Grant – to facilitate discharge from hospital or prevent likely return to hospital due to the home environment (up to£10k).
 - Home Safety / Handy person – small grants to carry out preventative works, (up to £500 per property over a three year period).
- 8.11 The main changes for Warwick District Council are to increase the values of the financial assistance available and the new grant to help facilitate hospital discharge.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of financial assistance included within policy

Appendix 2 – Housing Financial Assistance Policy 2017

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment