

Appendix B

Summary of 2018 changes to the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2006 (as amended in 2012)

The layout and clarification of certain items have been provided in each section to help applicants better understand the grants/loans, including the amount, who is eligible and not eligible, the qualifying benefits.

The most significant policy changes are set out below.

1. Introduction

The introduction has been replaced with sections that focus on the principles of providing housing assistance, the legal framework surrounding the policy including use of the Better Care Fund and the priorities for action. This section also reinforces the link between poor housing and poor health and the importance of improving housing conditions in the private housing sector that are sustainable over the longer term.

The introduction sets out the context for the policy and how it will be delivered, the property standard that needs to be achieved and differentiates between discretionary and mandatory grants assistance.

Properties as a minimum need to meet a minimum standard for housing. This section explains the inspection assessment, the Housing Health and Safety Rating System used by the service when visiting properties. If properties do not meet this statutory standard then they fail one part of the Decent Homes Standard. Whilst the Decent Homes Standard now only relates to social and housing association housing, the Council helps those in greatest need to fund improvements that can be maintained over the longer term. For this reason, grants and loans such as the Home Repair's Grant and associated loan have been retained from the 2006 policy (as amended March 2012).

The different teams in the Private Sector Housing Agency are explained (section 5). The Council's in-house home improvement agency was closed in October 2016 and the team dealing with grants and loans has been renamed as Housing Assistance Team.

It is proposed that the policy be reviewed every 2 years, or in line with primary legislative or resources changes. (section 4.1)

2. Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) (section 8.1)

The grant conditions on mandatory DFG's have been clarified. All DFG grants over £5k are repayable within the 10 year grant condition period.

3. Discretionary Fast Track Disabled Facilities Grant (section 8.2)

It is proposed that a new discretionary grant be introduced to provide disabled people with a fast track system for certain works that will be funded from the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (Better Care Fund). No means test would be carried out in these cases.

4. Discretionary Disabled Adaptations Loan v. 2018 (section 8.3)

It is proposed that the loan is funded by the Better Care Fund and that recycled monies will be ring-fenced for disabled facilities. The loan has been increased from £15,000 to £30,000. The reason for this is largely to support applicants with a greater top-up, where they have applied for the Mandatory DFG in for a large extension scheme and the current £15,000 top-up does not help with the full cost of the eligible works.

This loan section also includes an additional eligible applicant scenario. This would allow a DFG applicant to apply for a loan, helping to provide the assessed contribution in cases of serious hardship where the applicant is unable to fund their contribution. This is not available under the current policy.

The section also clarifies the conditions and repayment of this loan.

5. Home Repair Grant and Loan (sections 8.4 and 8.5)

It is proposed that the maximum grant is increased from £3,000 to £5,000 to reflect the increase in costs of minor works over the period between 2012 and the present day. The associated grant condition will remain at 5 years. This will allow the Council to award grants to help vulnerable adults and families with important work such as a replacement gas boiler and central heating system and roof repairs (where eligible) where the cost of work and fees exceed the current £3,000. Under the current policy, a maximum grant of £3,000 can be awarded and the applicant is then required to either top-up with private finance or apply for a top-up loan to cover the difference in cost.

There have been no requests for the Common Parts designation of the grant and loan for leaseholder applicants over the last 12 months and this has been removed.

The new draft policy includes an item under the Home Repair Loan advising that exceptions may be made on a case by case basis and dependent on circumstances, for the Council to use its discretion to approve assistance above the maximum levels of grant and loan of £30,000.

Clarification has been provided on non-eligible works.

6. Emergency Home Repair Grant (EHRG) v. 2018

The age and household eligibility criteria have been revised to align with the Home Repair Grant. It is proposed that the age at which someone is eligible for an EHRG is reduced to 60 years for home security measures so that it aligns with the Home Repair Grant and Loan criteria. In addition, it is suggested that the amount is increased from £2,000 to £3,000 to take account of the increase in cost of materials since the policy was last amended in March 2012. There is no grant condition attached to this grant. It is proposed that a fee of £50 (incl. VAT) is charged to organise a quote for the works.

It is proposed that previous HRG and EHRGs are disregarded so that identified urgent work can be grant aided to help those in receipt of qualifying benefits.

7. Accredited landlord assistance

It is proposed that the Private Landlord Grant be renamed. It focuses on tackling category 1 and 2 hazards and removes the need for an enforcement notice to have previously been served. The enforcement notice criterion has been removed to encourage landlords to actively undertake work at their property. It also includes a need for works to be undertaken in order for the property to improve energy efficiency at the property to bring it up to a minimum EPC rating of E. This is a requirement for all new lettings from April 2018.

8. Empty Property Grant and Loan

A new Empty Property Loan, an interest free loan, has been introduced alongside the Empty Property Grant, to encourage owners of long-term empty properties (empty for at least 6 months) to bring them back into use as residential accommodation. A maximum of £10,000 per unit has been introduced, up to a maximum of £50,000 per scheme. The loan for a

studio flat has been capped at £5,000. Larger schemes will be considered on a case by case basis by the Private Sector Housing Agency (PSHA) Manager. There is a 5-year loan condition attached and loan recipients need to reoccupy the property as their main residential home, offer nomination rights on the first and successive lets to the Council for 5 years during the condition period, or privately rent the property on completion of works.

The current policy states that the Empty Property Grant is given subject to funding being available from the South East London Housing Partnership (SELHP). Until recently a funding stream from the Greater London Authority (GLA) was available, through entering into a direct contract with the GLA and in the past as part of the SELHP. This funding stream is no longer available. Empty property funding has been re-introduced which would be corporately funded and be a grant or loan. The maximum level of funding for both of these has been retained as the maximum set for Empty Homes Grant under the current policy. These are 50% of the eligible works up to a maximum of £15,000 per unit and up to a maximum of £50,000 per scheme. Studio flats will be capped at £7,000. Large scheme applications above the maximum level of assistance will be considered on a case by case basis, at the discretion of the Private Sector Housing Agency (PSHA) Manager.

An alternative to the criterion has been added under Method of Application in relation to membership. It is proposed that in place of membership, an applicant can alternatively provide evidence of letting properties through the Council's Private Sector Leased Scheme.

It also includes a need for works to be undertaken in order to improve energy efficiency at the property to bring it up to a minimum EPC rating of E. This is a requirement for all new lettings from April 2018.

Following approval from Assistant Director of Housing, funding of £200,000 from the discretionary Grants & Loans capital budget has been allocated to the Empty Property Grants budget for 2017/18 and 2018/19.

9. 8.7b. Empty property inspection service

A new Empty property inspection service has been introduced for those properties that have been empty for more than 2 years and are about to be renovated or converted into residential purposes. Properties that have been empty for at least 2 years may be able to claim a reduced rate of VAT at 5% and in order to provide that the property has been empty for this qualifying period the Council can carry out an inspection and provide information to HM Revenue and Customs.

10. Help with Moving (section 8.9)

It is suggested that the amount is increased from £3,000 to £6,000 to take into account the present day costs of moving home.

11. Renewable Energy Systems

Applicants were not eligible for the Government's feed-in tariff and there has been no take up of this assistance within the last 12 months. This assistance has been removed.

12. Handyperson Service

Details of this service have been removed as the Council's Handyperson Service closed in July 2017.

13. Fees (for example in 8.1 DFG)

Fees and charges have been clarified within the refresh document. Clarification has been given in respect of self-funded adaptations project management costs. Increased fee

charges for project management services from £3750 to £4250 (inclusive of VAT) and removed fee cap from cost of works £61,000 and over to 15% of total cost of works with no cap.

A survey and production of a schedule of works fee of £250 + VAT (this can be seen under the Accredited Landlord Assistance).

The fee of £50 for helping complete application forms has been removed.

14. 9.3 Home maintenance service

It is proposed that a new service has been introduced to provide advice to homeowners and private tenants who have repairing responsibilities wishing to maintain or improve their homes. A fee of £150 will be charged for this service.

15. Decision

A decision timescale has been introduced for this part of the process. The Private Sector Housing Agency aims to make a formal decision following a valid grant application within a 3 months decision period. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) still have a statutory 6 month determination limit.