



Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy & Service Transformation

Cabinet – 18 March 2021

Disabled Facilities & Improvement Grant Programme 2021/22

Purpose:	To provide details of the Disabled Facilities & Improvement Grant Programme and to seek approval to include schemes in the 2021/22 Capital Programme. To comply with Financial Procedure Rule No.7 (Capital Programming and Appraisals) - to commit and authorise schemes as per the Capital Programme.
Policy Framework:	1. Local Housing Strategy. 2. Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations: Policy to Provide Assistance 2017-2022.
Consultation:	Legal, Finance, Access to Services.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The Disabled Facilities and Improvement Grant Programme as detailed, including its financial implications, is approved and included in the 2021/22 capital budget.
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The current Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy was approved by Council on 22nd June 2017.

2.0 Capital Programme Process

2.1 The Disabled Facilities Grants and Improvement Grant Budget for 2021/22 of £5.2m is to be considered by Council on 4th March 2021.

3.0 The Scheme

3.1 The current Policy for Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations sets out the detail of various types of assistance aimed at helping home owners and tenants to carry out essential adaptations and repairs. Assistance is provided on the basis of helping residents, who are often on low incomes and/or vulnerable, carry out essential repairs and maintain independence at home. The Policy also describes the Council's approach to bringing empty homes back into use and offering loans for home repairs. In summary, types of assistance include:

- Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) – medium and large scale adaptations for private home owners and tenants of private rented accommodation, for example, level access showers, bedroom / bathroom extensions.
- Council House Adaptations – small , medium and large scale adaptations for Council tenants.
- Homefix Loans – Recyclable loans for homeowners needing serious and urgent repairs, for example, roof repairs and damp proofing.
- Care & Repair Western Bay Minor Adaptation Grants– Small, rapid adaptations provided for elderly and disabled residents ; Comfort, Safety, and Security Grants – Low cost, rapid repairs provided for elderly and disabled residents.
- Welsh Government Landlord Loan – previously known as Houses to Homes Loan Scheme – interest free loans to tackle empty homes to renovate and improve properties or convert empty properties into a number of units suitable for residential accommodation. Loans to be repaid and recycled as further loans.
- Welsh Government Owner Occupier Loan – previously known as National Home Improvement Loan Scheme – interest free loans for the repair or conversion of properties to make them safe, warm and/or secure. Loans to be repaid and recycled as further loans.
- Renewal Areas – Renewal Area funding to deliver an agreed programme of property repair and environmental improvement works in the Sandfields Renewal Area.
- Welsh Government Western Valleys Empty Homes Grant - the Council committed to participating in the scheme in the 20-21 capital programme, however a delay in the award letter from Welsh Government will result in the scheme programme being extended into 21-22.

The application for funding and participation in the scheme was agreed by Cabinet in July 2020.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The programme for 2021/22 is shown at table 1 below and is fully funded by the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Welsh Government Landlord and Owner Occupier Loans are funded by ring-fenced WG funds. These loans formerly known as Houses to Homes and National Home Improvement Loan schemes have been reported separately to Cabinet on 12th November 2013 and the 18th of November 2014 respectively. The changes to these loans were reported to Council on the 21st June 2018.
- 4.2 The Covid 19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the DFG and improvement grant programme in 2020/21. There has been significant disruption to delivery of the adaptations programme as a result of restrictions being in place impacting on the ability to survey and prepare schemes of work. In addition contractors have been furloughed for a period of time delaying the commencement of works.
- 4.3 As a result it is estimated that £1.8 million of the DFG capital budget in 2020/2021 will not be spent and will need to be carried forward into the 2021/2022 grant programme.
- 4.4 At present with Covid 19 restrictions likely to extend into 2021/22 there is uncertainty as to whether the capital programme and carried forward 2020/21 budget for DFGs will be fully committed for next year. A review of the restrictions and impact on DFG demand and ability to deliver the capital programme will take place at the end of the first quarter of 2021/22.
- 4.5 It had been agreed with the Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy and Service Transformation that the Private Sector Housing Renewals and Disabled Adaptations Policy would be reviewed in 2020/21 to help inform funding requirements for the programme in future years. However, due to Covid pandemic work priorities this review has been delayed and will now take place in 2021/22.
- 4.6 Sandfields Renewal Area funding is required in 2021/22 to fund release of retention at end of defects period on a previously completed scheme and to fund environmental improvement works delayed from 2020/21 due to the Covid pandemic. Capital funding available for the Renewal Area in 2021/22 is estimated at £335,000, funded from a combination of receipts from previous area renewal energy efficiency programmes, resident contributions and general capital funds.
- 4.7 The pilot Welsh Government Western Valley Empty Property Grant scheme required an estimated capital contribution from the Council in 2020/21 of £182,000, funded through carry forward balances from 19-20 capital programme from Homefix, Grants For Nominations and Homefix Sandfields. Due to the delay in receiving the grant award from Welsh Government, the scheme programme and funding will now run into 21/22.

4.8 Revenue running costs for 2021/22 are estimated at £1,474,100 and are met from fees of £1,427,600 generated from administering grants and loans. The balance is met from a contribution of £46,500 from the General fund.

Table 1 details proposed 2021/22 programme and draft programme for 2022/2023

Table 1			
SCHEMES	2020/21	Proposed 2021/22	Draft 2022/23
DFG, mini and fast track adaptations	£4,300,000	£4,300,000	£4,300,000
Tenant adaptations (HRA funded)	£2,850,000	£2,750,000	£2,750,000
Homefix Loans	£500,000	£500,000	£500,000
Care & Repair Mini Adaptation Grant	£370,000	£370,000	£370,000
Care & Repair Comfort, Safety, Security	£ 30,000	£ 30,000	£ 30,000
Sandfields Renewal Area*	£nil	£nil	£nil
WG Western Valleys Empty Property Grant scheme.**	£nil	£nil	£nil
TOTAL PROGRAMME	£ 8,050,000	£7,950,000	£7,950,000
Funded as follows:			
Total general funded	£5,200,000	£5,200,000	£5,200,000
Total HRA funded	£2,850,000	£2,750,000	£2,750,000
* Sandfields Renewal Area : carry forward estimated underspend in 20/21 of £335,000 into 21/22 to fund release of end of defects retentions and environmental works.			
** WG Western Valleys Empty Property Scheme : WG funding of £338,000, council contribution to WG empty property schemes estimated at £182,000.			
Total funding	£8,050,000	£7,950,000	£7,950,000

5.0 Equality and Engagement Implications

5.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Our Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

- 5.2 An EIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full EIA report was not required.

The grant programme does not negatively impact on any protected characteristic groups, with a number benefitting from the forms of assistance provided including:

Poverty & Social exclusion – provision of adaptations and repairs assistance to those on means tested benefits and low income, bringing back into use empty properties creating low cost affordable homes, often for first time buyers or renters in the local area.

Community cohesion- provision of much needed repairs and adaptations to homes in deprived areas where applicants are on low income and not able to afford the works themselves, enabling the individuals to remain living independently within their home. Re-use of often problematic long term empty properties in areas that have a negative impact on the locality and community, often a haven for anti-social behaviours, drug and alcohol abuse.

Age and generations: provision of adaptations and repairs are often to applicants over 60, empty property schemes give local residents, often first time buyers the opportunity to remain in the locality close to their extended families.

The Screening Form is included in the appendices as a background paper.

6.0 IT/Systems Implications

- 6.1 None.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 The schemes detailed are in line with local authority powers to provide assistance, contained in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and the Councils published Policy.
- 7.2 The Council will need to ensure that it complies with any terms and conditions attached to any Welsh Government grant funding.
- 7.3 All works and services undertaken to deliver any scheme will need to be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and European and domestic procurement legislation as appropriate.

Background Papers: Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy to Provide Assistance 2017-2022

Appendices: Appendix A - EIA Screening Form