

EXECUTIVE

16th January 2025

Report Title	Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
Lead Member	Cllr Mark Rowley – Executive Member for Housing and Communities
Report Author	Amy Plank - Interim Strategic Lead for Private Sector Housing Elina Passari - Interim Lead for Disabled Facilities Grants

Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with?	Active, fulfilled lives

List of Appendices

- Appendix A** – Equality Screening Assessment (ESA)
- Appendix B** – Climate Change Impact Assessment (CCIA)
- Appendix C** – Equality Implications – Additional Information to section 7.7
- Appendix D** – Outcome of Consultation on the proposed revised
- Appendix E** – Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy sets out all available funding – both mandatory and discretionary – which will become available to assist the residents of North Northamptonshire. With regards to the discretionary funding, this has been designed as a response to rising labour and material costs and additional financial constraints previously faced by residents, which have become challenges for the Council to overcome. Furthermore, the policy focuses on supporting vulnerable, elderly and disabled residents that are eligible for grant assistance by offering further clarity, flexibility, equality and inclusivity.

- 1.2. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the below mentioned recommendations (Section 3) to be included in the revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy. These recommendations propose to increase the amount and type of discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) assistance the Council could offer to residents of North Northamptonshire. The recommendations are aimed at improving the health and well-being of disabled people and helping them to live safely and independently in their homes for longer.
- 1.3. Additionally, the purpose of this Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is to allow further flexibility via new streamlined measures, proposals and additional discretionary funding in delivering DFGs.
- 1.4. The new policy proposes to:
 - Provide new grants and procedures to assist people with adapting their homes, including applicants with Dementia and Motor Neurone Disease.
 - Enable speedier hospital discharges and delay the need for care.
 - Support residents to continue living in their own homes independently or assist them with moving to a more suitable property.
 - Positively impact on those currently suffering financial hardship via the introduction of further discretionary funding and waiving of certain land charges and in some instances means testing.
- 1.5. Overall, all recommendations made focus on supporting vulnerable, elderly and disabled residents by streamlining procedures and by offering further financial assistance which in return will lead to additional flexibility, equality and inclusivity.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report will provide a summary of all recommendations included in the revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy, justify the reasons behind all new proposals and identify alternative ideas considered. This report also endeavours to present any equality, financial or climate implications and the relevant consideration given to overcome any negative impact and ensure a positive outcome for all stakeholders affected.
- 2.2. This report seeks approval to introduce a number of new proposals to use discretionary funding under the Regulatory Reform Order to widen the scope of Disabled Facilities Grants.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Executive approve the proposals detailed within the report at a) - m) to be incorporated into North Northamptonshire Council's revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy:
 - a) **Proposal 1: Discretionary DFG Grant (Top-Up)**
The current maximum Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant is £30,000. The current maximum Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (Top-Up) is £10,000.

It is recommended that the Discretionary DFG Grant (Top-Up) is increased from £10,000 to £20,000.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Provide extra funding for those cases that have increased labour and materials costs.
- Provide extra funding for those complex cases with extensive scope of works.
- Reduce Officer time of involvement (Surveyor and OT) and reduce MP complaints by frustrated applicants.
- Reduce timescales required from start to project completion.

Alternative recommendation considered: According to Foundations (The National Body for Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Improvement Agencies in England), the Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (Top-Up) should be £30,000. This figure has been considered and assessed against data based on research on various recently published Housing Assistance Policies from several Councils, including Unitary Authorities from various geographical areas - excluding London Boroughs - with similar or lower Annual Disabled Facilities Grants Funding Allocations for 2023/2024 – in addition to the £30,000 mandatory grant funding. The proposal of £20,000 is in line with the figure implemented by other Unitary Councils and it is proposed that this will be annually reviewed and always subject to funding availability.

b) **Proposal 2: Means Test Equipment**

According to the current policy, all DFG works are means tested, excluding children's applications and applicants with passporting benefits.

It is recommended that there be no means test for equipment cases (installation of a stair-lift, or a ceiling track hoist (CTH), not associated with any other DFG funded building works), up to a maximum cost of £10,000 is introduced.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Reduce Officer time (approx. 45 minutes - 1 ½ hours) and benefit the applicant.
- Assist the applicant by removing the requirement for paperwork/evidence submission (bank statements etc.).
- Reduce timescales required from start to project completion (4-8 weeks).

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members suggested that the original figure of £8,000 is increased to £10,000. When the initial figure to be put forward (£8,000) was considered, this was on the basis that a curved stair-lift or an H-shaped ceiling track hoist (which are the most expensive types of equipment included in this proposal) can be fully covered. It has since been reconsidered and the revised proposal for this is £10,000.

c) **Proposal 3: Means Test (Discretionary Top up - Children's cases)**

The current policy does not allow for all means tested applicants with a confirmed client's contribution to be eligible for a Discretionary DFG Grant (Top-Up). Applicants with passporting benefits and children's applications are eligible for a Discretionary DFG (Top-Up), as the parents are not means tested.

This proposal is no longer going forward, i.e. to means test parents for children's applications with regards to the Discretionary DFG Grant (Top-Up) only, so it is now disregarded.

d) **Proposal 4: Land Charges**

The current policy stipulates for the following land charges to apply:

- Mandatory £30K grant: Maximum land charge £10,000 (from £5,000K to £15,000)
- Same terms apply on the Discretionary Grant of £10,000: Maximum land charge £5,000.
- The two grants are treated as separate awards with a total maximum land charge of £15,000 (£10,000 on mandatory and £5,000 on discretionary)
- No land charge on tenant's applications (private Landlords or Housing Associations)

It is recommended that Executive approve the following:

- i) No land charge placed on Through Floor Lift (TFL) cases, including enabling works.**
- ii) No land charge placed on stair-lifts.**
- iii) No land charge placed for any amount below £200.**
- iv) No land charged placed for a child applicant on long-term foster placement.**
- v) Land charge waived due to financial hardship and/or if moving properties is to receive care from others.**

Reasons for recommendation -

It is recommended that land charges do not apply on the above works because they do not add financial value to the property and/or the proposals are reasonable.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members felt that the amount of £200 – mentioned under item 3 above – was too low to justify the expense of registering a land charge. It was suggested that a higher amount of £1,000 could be considered.

e) **Proposal 5: Fast Track Adaptations**

Under the current policy, there is a single North Northamptonshire Waiting List for DFGs. The cases are prioritised based on the priority grading system set by

the Occupational Therapist (OT) - standard, urgent or critical - and the date on the OT recommendation.

It is recommended that a “Fast Tracking” process is introduced, outside of the OT priority grading system mentioned above, to assist with hospital discharge cases, terminally ill applicants and palliative care.

Reasons for recommendation -

Bureaucracy will be minimised where possible and alternative equipment / construction solutions will be explored.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and made no further recommendations.

f) **Proposal 6: Dementia Grants**

Dementia Grants are not covered by the current policy.

It is proposed that these grants are based on the initial dementia diagnosis and prior to the disease escalating to the stage when major DFG adaptations are recommended. The following adaptations would be covered:

- Safer flooring.
- Labels and signs on doors and cupboards.
- Contrasting colour decorations between walls and floors.
- Installation of contrasting coloured fixtures such as grab rails and toilet seats.
- Task focused lighting in bathrooms and kitchens.
- Assistive technology for monitoring activity or to inform if it is day or night.

It is recommended that the dementia grants are covered by the policy as proposed above with works with a cost value of over £1000. Note that any works below this amount can be covered by the Minor Adaptations budget held by Community Occupational Therapy.

Reasons for recommendation

This proposal will:

- Postpone or eliminate the need for more costly adaptations, re-housing, social care due to its preventative nature.
- Promote independent and safe living.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and made no further recommendations.

g) **Proposal 7: Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Grants**

Motor Neurone Disease Grants are not covered by the current policy. Applicants with an early MND diagnosis can continue and will choose to carry on working until no longer able to work. Applying for a DFG at this stage will most likely deem them as non-eligible for the grant through the means testing process due to their earnings.

It is recommended to introduce this grant on the basis of disregarding their earnings. This will ensure the adaptations can be in place for when they no longer work and are unable to manage daily activities.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Provide a fast-track process.
- Ensure no means test is carried out for cost of works up to £5K.
- Ignore the applicant's earnings when means testing is carried out at an early stage.
- Enable major adaptations before the disease escalates rapidly.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and made no further recommendations.

h) **Proposal 8: Independent Panel**

The current policy, subject to eligibility, allows for applicants to be entitled to a £30,000 mandatory grant and a £10,000 discretionary grant. If the cost of work exceeds the maximum £40,000 grant, the applicant is required to meet the shortfall, or the works cannot progress.

It is recommended for the introduction of an independent member/officer Panel to review cases on an ad-hoc basis, understand needs and approve further discretionary grants to meet the cost difference over the approved mandatory and discretionary limits, subject to evidence that the applicant is unable to raise the necessary funds themselves.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Enable major adaptations to proceed.
- Potentially provide some savings on Adult Social Care budgets as residents remain in their homes.
- Eliminate cases being put on hold until a resolution to the financial shortfall is found.
- Prevent time consuming conversations on alternative solutions.
- Ensure adaptations are completed for the benefit of the applicant.

This recommendation needs to be formalised by including it in the revised policy. At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and agreed that there will be no need for a monthly set date for the panel members to meet. Instead,

these meetings will be called on an ad-hoc basis, and the conversations/decisions can be made over Teams.

Alternative recommendation considered –

The current arrangement of exceptional approval via the Assistant Director for Regulatory Services and Executive Member for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up has been informally in place for a while and to maintain this status quo could be considered as an alternative to the proposed Independent Panel.

i) **Proposal 9: Equipment Maintenance**

The current policy stipulates that all equipment is covered by the standard 12-month warranty offered by the supplier. After completion of the work, any ongoing maintenance, servicing, repairs, or warranties are the responsibility of the grant recipient. The grant recipient can request a quote for extending the manufacturer's warranty (normally up to 5 years) and purchase this service at their own cost.

It is recommended that all extended warranties are covered by the grant for all equipment for 5 years. Additionally, it is proposed that the grant covers the call out fees, if contacted by the applicant, including any repairs up to £500.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Provide a better service.
- Assist old applicants with broken equipment up to value of £500.
- Reduce the need for an OT recommendation for new equipment, which will be a saving to the DFG budget.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were keen to ensure the clients' statutory rights are safeguarded. Consideration will be, therefore, given in training the Council's relevant Officers on consumer rights. This training would enable the Council to provide the necessary advice to the applicants.

j) **Proposal 10: Private Landlords (LL) and Housing Associations (HA)**

The current policy does not allow for any special provisions for private or social housing tenants. The same DFG eligibility criteria and conditions apply to tenants as owner / occupiers.

It is recommended that the policy will allow to expediate the grant application process for private and social tenants, if:

- a. the private LL or HA make the application and**
- b. manage the works, including provision of drawings / specification for Council's approval and / or carrying out the works.**

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Provide a positive change for tenants – shorter waiting times.

- Assist with Officer time being able to be spent on other cases.
- Support landlords to make their portfolios more accessible for current and future disabled tenants.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and made no further recommendations.

k) **Proposal 11: Non-mandatory works**

The current policy makes no special provisions for non-mandatory DFG works not covered by the legislation e.g. safe play space and/or play equipment, sensory space, or study space. There are several variables to set a fixed policy on awards for non-mandatory works.

It is recommended that the following changes are approved with respect to non-mandatory work:

- All proposed non-mandatory work will be reviewed between the Lead Officer for DFGs, Surveyor, OT, carers, special support, GP etc. before confirming them as reasonable, practicable and required by the applicant.**
- All non-mandatory work up to an estimated cost value of £1,000 will be approved by the Disabled Facilities Grants Manager.**
- All non-mandatory work, of a more extensive design proposal, will be subject to a feasibility visit by a surveyor to identify the estimated cost of works. If in excess of £1,000 and subject to the approval in principle by the Disabled Facilities Grants Manager, the case will be reviewed by the Independent Panel before approval or rejection can be confirmed.**

Reasons for recommendation -

To assist more people, even those not necessarily covered by the legislation.

Alternative recommendation considered -

At EAP, members wished to know whether the above proposal will affect different groups of people differently, and if social housing tenants or leaseholders for flats or communal areas would be excluded. This proposal will apply to all groups of people deemed as eligible for a DFG in line with the relevant legislation. It is confirmed that the following applies:

- Leaseholders are eligible for DFGs, provided they meet the grant's criteria related to disability and income assessment.
- The remaining lease term is not less than a period of five years.
- Communal areas are included, subject to receipt of the owner's permission.

l) **Proposal 12: Unchanged Policy: HomeMove Grants**

It is recommended that there is no change to the following grant conditions:

- a. **To fund more cost-effective alternatives to providing a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant.**
- b. **Maximum grant £6,000.**
- c. **Cost of adaptations (maximum £5,000).**
- d. **Relocation costs (maximum £1,000).**

Alternative recommendation considered – At EAP, members questioned whether the cost of moving properties has risen due to inflation and whether £6,000 is still adequate assistance. The following has since been determined:

- A person who lives in England or Wales and is in receipt of Housing Benefits, could apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to help with moving costs.
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Moving House Grant amounts vary based on an individual's circumstances and are generally intended to cover moving-related costs like removal charges, rent deposits, and related expenses. The maximum grant available is £5,000 but could be as low as £500.
- Given that the Government provides this £5,000 for eligible residents, it has been deemed unnecessary to increase the Council's HomeMove grant.

m) **Proposal 13: Other Policies: Home Repair Grant -**

It is recommended that all grants included in the current policy, namely Renovation Grants (maximum grant £10,000), Landlord Renovation Grants (maximum grant £10,000) and Home Repair Assistance Grants (maximum grant £5,000) are replaced with one Home Repair Grant.

This grant will offer a maximum £15,000 assistance to eligible owner-occupied residents, on a means tested benefit and/or low income. This grant aims to prevent Category 1 hazards in the property, address safety improvements, electrical works, thermal insulation, affordable warmth, energy efficiency or lack of a heating system.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The current Private Sector Housing Policy is a combination of the housing policies previously used by the four former legacy Councils – Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough. The document was put together on 1 April 2021 when the unitary Council was implemented.
- 4.2 During the last 3 years, we have identified areas for improvement within the North Northamptonshire Housing Policy. The need to incorporate new and revised proposals as a response to the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO).
- 4.3 The RRO allows local authorities further freedom in providing housing adaptations and improvements in line with the needs of the local area. As a result, the Council is required to publish a Housing Assistance Policy outlining how assistance will be delivered. The current policy has therefore been

reviewed, updated and fully refreshed, allowing the new streamlined procedures, methods and proposals to be incorporated.

- 4.4 The Council's current Private Sector Housing Policy was first adopted in April 2021 and included provisions for mandatory DFGs. The revised policy will be a Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy which proposes to increase the amount of discretionary assistance available to all eligible disabled applicants. New and revised proposals have been incorporated as a response to the additional powers the Council can utilise under the RRO.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. The Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are the only mandatory grant covered by the revised policy and consequently by this report. These grants are available to disabled people to adapt their properties so that their medical needs can be met.
- 5.2. An owner occupier, a private tenant, a landlord with a disabled tenant or a housing association tenant are eligible to apply for a DFG. A local authority tenant is also eligible to apply for a DFG, however, this is not the standard route to be followed, and it would be funded separately from the Council's housing revenue account. Council tenants are not encouraged to apply for a DFG. Instead, the Council will proceed with the necessary adaptations, as recommended by an OT under a separate Council programme. If the adaptations are not deemed to be reasonable, practical, or cost-effective, the Council would aim to find a more suitable dwelling for the disabled applicant which could better meet their medical needs and ask them to move. DFGs typically provide adaptations for private dwellings, qualifying houseboats and caravans. Common parts of buildings containing more than one flat and leasehold properties as also covered, subject to certain qualifying criteria.
- 5.3. The maximum DFG mandatory grant amount is currently set by the statute at £30,000. The grant has been at this level since 2008 meaning that rising labour and material costs as well as inflation for the past 16 years have not been accommodated in the available grant funding. As a result, North Northamptonshire Council had to introduce a Discretionary DFG (Top-Up) grant of £10,000 to assist with the increased cost of adaptations. In the last 3 years, from April 2021 to April 2024, there have been 28 cases whose cost of works exceeded the mandatory grant funding. This resulted in £669,362.40 additional monies spent – paid either by the Council or the applicant.
- 5.4. The RRO gives local housing authorities the power to adopt discretionary policies regarding housing interventions to promote independent living and wellbeing. North Northamptonshire Council has not previously utilised these additional powers and flexibility, apart from when the £10,000 Discretionary DFG (Top-Up) was introduced.
- 5.5. Historically, there has been insufficient government funding, due to the mandatory grant limit of £30,000, to meet the demand of some large and complex grant schemes and to cover the rising labour and material costs. As a result, the local authority would either have to find funding from their own resources, delay grant approvals and payments or close cases due to

insufficient funds available to pay for the works. North Northamptonshire Council has not been able to offer further discretionary DFG assistance – apart from the £10,000 top-up and the HomeMove Grant (maximum £6,000 grant) to help a disabled applicant to move to a more suitable accommodation, unless by exception where an emergency top up has been approved.

- 5.6. When re-writing the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy, the main consideration has been how to assist more people, what mechanisms can be put in place to assist those in greater need and how further flexibility and inclusivity can be achieved. This is the Council's opportunity to use the powers in the RRO 2002 to provide further discretionary financial assistance. Additionally, the Council can adopt a more flexible approach in streamlining the grant's administration.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. The revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy has been produced and incorporates all recommendations made by Officers and has been discussed at Prosperous Communities EAP on 6th November 2024, as detailed at section 3 of this this report and explained in section 7.6
- 6.2. The proposed revised policy was published on 14th October 2024 for a public consultation which ended on 17th November 2024. This allowed a 5-week public and internal consultation period. For further details, please see link, as follows:

<https://northnorthants.citizenspace.com/estates-and-facilities/private-sector-housing-assistance-policy-review>
- 6.3. The report has now also been amended to incorporate all comments and recommendations made by Place and Environment Scrutiny on 17th December 2024, as detailed in section 7.7 of this report

The next steps will be as follows:

- To produce a shorter distilled version of this policy and to distribute it to libraries and hubs.
- To publish the approved policy on NNC's website on or after 16th January 2025.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1. The proposed discretionary assistance included in the revised policy will be met from the capital funding allocation from central government and from the Better Care Fund. Therefore, there will be no direct financial cost implications to the Council and no impact on revenue budgets.
- 7.1.2. The approval of discretionary grants should not negatively affect the approval and progress of mandatory grants. We will need to ensure that sufficient budget remains available - through each financial year - to approve and progress all adaptations to be covered by mandatory grants. This will be reviewed via

routine in service budget monitoring and the Chief Auditor and s151 Officer will be updated at the end of each year on total spend and commitment from this ring-fenced budget.

7.2. Legal and Governance

7.2.1. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance (England and Wales) Order 2002 allows local authorities further powers in aiding those applicants eligible for purposes including home adaptations, improvements and repairs to living accommodation. This can be achieved by way of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants. However, when there are limitations that cannot be resolved via a mandatory grant, a discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants and therefore other discretionary funding comes into play. These discretionary grants can be introduced as a means to overcome certain situations that are not covered by the relevant mandatory grants. However, any discretionary funding, assistance and powers need to be published in the form of a Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy so that they can be approved. The purpose of a Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is to provide clarity to all stakeholders and prevent situations where the Council may be challenged on a decision.

7.2.2. All proposals included in the revised policy for which approval is sought are in line with the guidance offered by the government in the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) delivery: Guidance for local authorities in England (published 28 March 2022). This document advises local authorities on how to deliver DFG funded adaptations in an efficient and effective manner for the needs of local disabled and elderly people, including legal duties and responsibilities. The purpose of this guidance is to inform on existing policy, legislative duties and powers together with recommended best practice.

7.2.3. Additionally, the draft revised policy has also been read and checked by Foundations (the National Body for Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Improvement Agencies in England). According to their feedback, our revised policy follows all mandatory legal frameworks and all discretionary grants and mechanisms introduced have resulted in a strong policy that can legally use government funding for Disabled Facilities Grants more flexibly, including measures to speed up DFG delivery.

7.2.4. Based on the above statements, there are no legal implications arising from the proposals. The Council will adhere to their statutory duty to approve DFG applications which meet the statutory requirements.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. According to the government, there are currently elderly and disabled people who live in non-suitable accommodation to meet their needs. Their homes prevent them from completing everyday tasks such as washing, cooking, using the bathroom or being able to access the community. These homes are no longer fit for purpose and their design is preventing an aging population from living safely and independently. As published in the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) delivery: Guidance for local authorities in England, in 2019-2020, one or more people with a health condition lived in approximately 1.9 million

households in England that required adaptations ([Disabled Facilities Grant \(DFG\) delivery: Guidance for local authorities in England - GOV.UK](#)).

7.3.2. Furthermore, the government wishes to assist local authorities in providing home adaptations which is a statutory duty. Thus, more people can be given the option to live independently, safer and healthier in their own home for longer. This can also reduce the need for residential care and prevent hospital admissions.

7.3.3. One of the key commitments in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021 / 2025, is to help people live healthier, more active, independent and fulfilled lives. Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants assist disabled, elderly and vulnerable people to receive the financial support they require in order for their homes to be adapted so that they can continue to live there independently. Furthermore, the introduction of additional discretionary grant funding under the proposed new policy will provide help to more people and allow the Council to broaden the scope of persons positively impacted by the above-mentioned commitment.

7.4. **Risk**

7.4.1. The only risk, as noted in the Place and Economy Directorate Risk Register is lack of funding for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants. This could be caused by changes made by the central government in national allocations to all Councils. To date, this scenario has never happened. Nevertheless, any such future changes could mean that North Northamptonshire Council will need to find the necessary money in the Council reserve budget. Insufficient funds available could mean that the Council is unable to fully provide the statutory service required in relation to mandatory DFGs. As a result, the Council could be legally challenged, although this is highly unlikely.

7.4.2. There are no other significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. As the proposed discretionary assistance will be met from the additional funding provided by the Better Care Fund, there will be no direct financial cost to the Council. Additionally, all proposed discretionary assistance provided through this policy and linked to a Disabled Facilities Grants application is subject to funding availability and it will not be prioritised to the disadvantage of mandatory grants. No stand-alone applications for the following forms of assistance will be considered:

- Discretionary Top-Up Grant (maximum assistance of £20,000).
- Client Contribution Support (maximum assistance of £1,000).
- HomeMove Grant (maximum assistance of £6,000).

7.4.3 In exceptional circumstances, the Council reserves the right to defer payment of a grant for up to 12 months after the date of approval.

7.5. **Consultation**

7.5.1. A public consultation on the revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy has been undertaken for a period of 5 weeks from Monday 15th October until Sunday 17th November 2024. This consultation has been conducted with the

assistance of the Consultation and Engagement Team (CET). Please see link below:

<https://northnorthants.citizenspace.com/estates-and-facilities/private-sector-housing-assistance-policy-review>

7.5.2 A Consultation Record Document where all consultation feedback has been reviewed and analysed in relation to the proposed policy is presented at **Appendix D** of the report.

7.5.3 CET have distributed the revised draft Private Sector Housing Policy, as follows:

- A notification has been sent to the Consultation Register Database.
- Town and Parish Councils.
- All NNC MPs and Councillors (sent by Democratic Services).
- Internal comms on the Your Voice Matters hub.
- Internal bulletin.
- On the Leader's update.
- Visible by the public on YVM Hub.

7.5.4 During the same period, the revised policy was also issued to all stakeholders both internal and external for consultation, as follows:

- Community Occupational Therapy (internal)
- Private Sector Housing Team
- Disabled Facilities Team (internal)
- Carbon Management Team
- NNC Equalities
- Carbon Management Team (internal)
- Housing Directorate – Adult Social Care, Communities and Well Being Executive, Assistant Director and Housing Manager (internal)
- Housing Associations (external)
- Care & Repair (external)
- Residents (external)
- Selection of past Disabled Facilities Grants Recipients (external)

7.5.5 The main changes to the current policy, namely the 10 no. new recommendations made by the Private Sector Housing Managers were presented in a PowerPoint Presentation to the Executive Advisory Panel (EAP) on 6th November 2024. During this session, the members made suggestions in relation to some of the discretionary proposals put forward for approval. These recommendations have been recorded in section 3 and in the recommendations under each relevant proposal and called "alternative recommendation considered".

7.5.6 As it was essential to reach a certain audience that could be disabled, elderly, have no access to the internet etc., it was ensured that the consultation comments could be shared via e-mail, post or telephone.

7.5.7 The discretionary DFG assistance detailed in this report was considered by the members during EAP. The feedback received has been taken into consideration and it has influenced the final policy proposals.

7.5.8 An analysis of the consultation responses has been undertaken and amendments to the draft policy have been made as set out in **Appendix D** of the report.

7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1. The Prosperous Communities Executive Advisory Panel was held on Wednesday 6th November 2024. At the EAP, members asked questions and sought further clarification on proposals for a better understanding of the current mandatory arrangements and how these proposals could assist more groups of people.

7.6.2. Members made alternative suggestions on some proposals details of which are set out within section 3 and recommendations of the report.

7.6.3. Members made no comments regarding proposals 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9.

7.6.4. All alternative recommendations were taken into consideration. The authors of the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy, who have also drafted this report, attended EAP and have considered the recommendations made. They have also assessed them in relation to any implications that they could have to the DFG capital budget, available resources and service delivery. Their findings were further explained to Cllr Rowley on 26th November 2024 who agreed with the authors' justification. It was, therefore, decided to keep the proposals 1, 2A, 3, 8, HomeMove Grant and Home Repairs Grant as originally introduced.

7.6.5. With regards to proposals 2 and 10, it was agreed that the recommendations made by the Members will be incorporated.

7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

The Place and Economy Scrutiny Committee reviewed the proposed policy on 17th December 2024.

The feedback of the Scrutiny Committee was broadly supportive of the policy and proposed changes. Specific comments were made in relation to:

Proposal 3 - Means Test (Discretionary Top up Children's case) - Scrutiny proposed that means testing of top up grants for children's applications be removed, on the basis that they felt this may unfairly impact some children as recipients of the grant whereby their parents/guardians could not afford or did not want to fund the top up payment. Officers advised they would need to model the financial impact of removing this proposal. Officers have subsequently carried out a review of the number of cases to which these provisions would apply and confirmed this would be minimal, and the financial impact would not be significant, therefore removing the proposal to means test top up grants for children's applications is affordable.

Proposal 4 – Land Charges-

There was a discussion about whether there should be an amended limit of £1,000 rather than the £200 recommended. It was explained how the land

charge would be applied in relation to the grant awarded and that the charge would not be applied to the first £5,000 of the grant awarded. Following further discussion, it was agreed to continue with the original recommendation of a limit of £200.

Proposal 7 – Motor Neurone Disease -

Agreed to remove bullet point 3 under reasons for proposal ‘ignore the applicant’s earnings when means testing is carried out an early stage’ as unnecessary/not needed.’

Proposal 8 – Independent Panel –

It was discussed that there would need to be Terms of Reference and criteria agreed for the panel. It was agreed that these would be implemented in advance of the first panel meeting. There were also comments made about re-examining the membership of the panel and officers advised that the proposed panel would be made up of 2 Senior Officers; Assistant Director for Adults Services and an Assistant Director from Children’s Services and the Executive Member for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up.

Proposal 9 – Equipment –

Members of scrutiny agreed with the proposal and requested that officers reviewed client letters to ensure applicants/recipients were made clear of their responsibilities regards ongoing maintenance and upkeep of equipment after the expiry of the warranty period, which was agreed.

Proposal 10 – Private Landlords and Housing Associations –

It was discussed and agreed to change wording of 2nd para to replace ‘streamline’ with ‘expedite’, which was agreed.

Proposal 11 – Non mandatory works –

It was discussed regards the reference in 2nd para ‘remaining lease term is not less than period of 5 years’ and why this was included in the policy and why 5 years? It was explained that if there was a short period left on the lease period then it would not make financial sense to invest in non-mandatory work such as outside play equipment if it could potentially be removed after the lease period.

7.8. Equality Implications

- 7.8.1. An Equality Screening Assessment (ESA) has been previously completed on 26th September 2024. The content of the ESA has been discussed in length with the Equality Officer and a copy of the final ESA document – approved by the Equalities Team on 4th November 2024, is set out in **Appendix A** to the report.
- 7.8.2. According to the ESA’s outcome, the proposals covered by the revised policy will have an impact on people’s lives and therefore will have an impact on some people with the protected characteristics. This is a Positive Impact, if any of the people belonging to the protected groups are eligible for Disabled Facilities Grants or any other grants covered by the policy. In some instances, there will be No Impact from this policy, as people’s protected characteristics are not relevant to the work covered by this document. Additionally, people’s eligibility

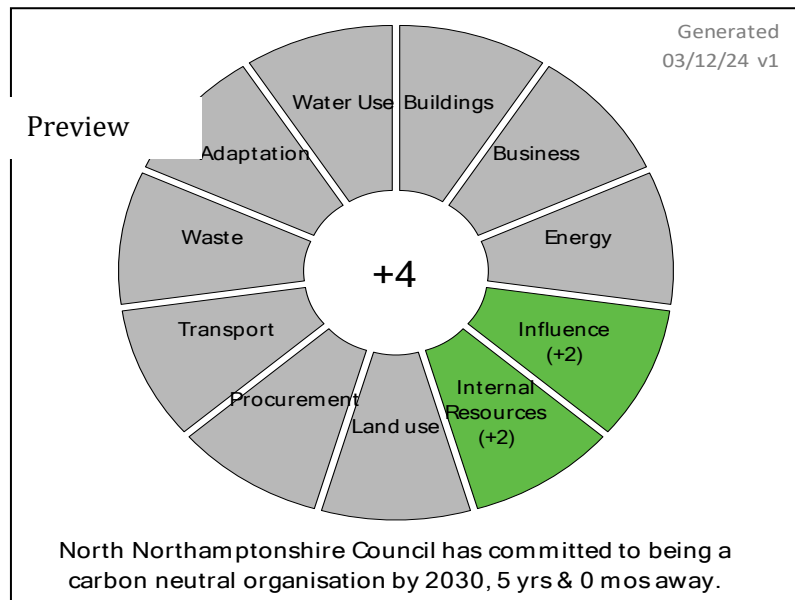
is not negatively affected due to these characteristics. The ESA has not identified any negative impact.

7.9. Climate Impact

7.9.1. A Climate Change Impact Assessment (CCIA) has been undertaken and approved; confirming this policy proposal will have no adverse impact on the Council's carbon neutral goal of 2030.

7.9.2. A copy of the infographic is set out below which illustrates that there are no negative impacts. The positive impacts that bring benefit can be explained as follows:

- Energy - Any new boilers that are installed either via a Home Repair Grant or a Disabled Facilities Grant would be energy efficient. Installations of any thermal benefit, e.g. loft insulation, would reduce the need for heating requirements from the boiler.



- Influence – Working with partners - Some element of case study sharing and best practice will be shared across partners internally and externally.
- Internal resources – External funding - The policy outlines what grants are available and what criteria are required for people to be eligible. This is only funded from the external budget provided from central government, so there are no additional funding options, and no impact here.
- Transport – Demand reduction - Travel patterns and efficiency savings from Officers can be mapped out and explored. The policy will have no impact on this, but Officers can encourage vulnerable/disabled people to take different modes of public transport.

7.10. Community Impact

- 7.10.1. The revised policy and consequently this report applies to all private housing sector tenures. The adaptations provided via Disabled Facilities Grants and further work funded by other grants covered by the revised policy, will improve accessibility of owner-occupied, privately rented and social housing.
- 7.10.2. Although Council tenants are eligible to apply for Disabled Facilities Grants, a DFG for a Council tenant cannot be funded through the DFG budget allocation from central government. Instead, any adaptations to Council stock, for the benefit of the disabled tenant, must be paid from the housing revenue account. For this reason, Council tenants are not required to make a formal DFG application. All adaptations to Council stock are managed by a different department and governed by a separate policy. Nevertheless, Council tenants should not be adversely affected.
- 7.10.3. Children in foster care as well as care leavers, previously mentioned under section 7.7 Equality Implications, may also be eligible for a DFG.
- 7.10.4. All wards within North Northamptonshire will be affected equally.

7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact

- 7.11.1. The revised policy will pose no significant crime and disorder implications.

8. Background Papers

- Current Private Sector Housing Policy:

[file:///C:/Users/epass/Downloads/NNC%20Private%20Sector%20Housing%20Policy%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/epass/Downloads/NNC%20Private%20Sector%20Housing%20Policy%20(2).pdf)

<https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/housing/housing-policies-and-reports>

- Foundations 2022 DFG Guidance. Write a Housing Assistance Policy: <https://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com/guides/write-a-housing-assistance-policy/>
- Foundations Housing Assistance Policy Template: <https://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com/guides/housing-assistance-policy-template/>