

Appendix C

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

Equality Implications – Additional Information to section 7.7

An Equality Screening Assessment (ESA) has been previously completed on the 26th of September 2024, as this is a requirement for all proposals put forward for Executive approval. The content of the ESA has been discussed in length with the Equality Officer and it has been revised further so that a meaningful outcome can be achieved. A copy of the final ESA document – approved by the Equalities Team on the 4th of November 2024, is in Appendix A.

The author(s) of this report have attended the necessary iLearn training session prior to completing the ESA form. The relevant guidance was also consulted throughout the process. For the record, an Equality Impact Assessment is not required to be completed, as no negative impact has been identified under the ESA.

As North Northamptonshire Council aims to promote equality whilst preventing discrimination in their capacity as an employer, service provider and purchaser of goods and services, this policy shall ensure that all service users, potential users and Council's employees are treated fairly. Members, employees and agents of the Council are required to promote equality and reduce discrimination, where possible, whilst maintaining good relations between all stakeholders.

During the Equality Screening Assessment process, we have considered all "protected characteristics" of age, disability, gender, reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation, as outlined in the Equalities Act 2010. We have reviewed each protected group, if they will be affected by the revised policy and whether they will be impacted positively or negatively.

This policy has taken into consideration the varied needs of individuals within our community and will be applied in a consistent manner to all potential applicants whilst ensuring any scope for discrimination is reduced. The aim of this policy is to proactively support vulnerable, disabled and elderly applicants in relation to living independently and safely in their own homes for as long as possible.

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 by 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.

The purpose of this policy is to assist disabled residents of all ages and from various ethnic backgrounds to apply for grants covered by this policy. All decisions made are based on the applicants' financial circumstances, their disability and therefore, type of adaptations required to remain living independently at their house and for longer.

Based on the above, it is evident that the protected characteristics of “age” and “disability” will be positively affected by this policy. This policy does not apply and will not affect the protected characteristics of sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation or religion.

The ESA has highlighted that we do not know all equality information about our clients. We do currently collect information regarding someone’s age when they apply for a DFG. And we could identify their sex by the title before their name. Nevertheless, this process has emphasised that we do not collect specific equality monitoring information from our clients. For example, we do not currently know the proportion of males and females that apply or are awarded DFGs. And thus, we cannot necessarily demonstrate that we are meeting our statutory equality duties. We will therefore consider the introduction of collecting ethnicity information as part of the application process. This would help inform us who is applying and being successful or not in their applications. It has, therefore, been agreed that we will explore the possibility of introducing an equality monitoring form to ensure that we capture the above-mentioned information, so we are more informed on who our clients are.

It has been agreed that we will introduce an Equality Monitoring Form, including questions mainly on our clients’ age, sex, ethnicity and disability.

Furthermore, through the ESA, we have identified the need to ensure that we communicate the policy changes so that the whole community can understand them and apply accordingly. Therefore, we must ensure that we write the policy in plain English, which will assist potential applicants that are neurodiverse. In addition, we will ensure that the policy is accessible in its formatting to support those that use assistive software; for example, someone with a sight impairment that uses DRAGAN. Additionally, as the policy is a 50-page long document, we will consider how a distilled version could be presented on the website and distributed to the libraries, other Council venues and hubs.

With regards to young people who leave care, they should have a personal advisor to provide them with support and advice in transitioning into adulthood and independent living. We trust that the personal advisor’s role would also cover signposting young people to the grants covered by this policy. Nonetheless, it is appreciated that this group of people may struggle to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant due to lack of the necessary support network. Further consideration will be given to this matter to identify any additional support we could provide to this group.

Age: Disabled people of all ages can apply for a grant covered by this policy. All eligibility decisions are based on financial circumstances and type of adaptations required to assist applicants to either return home from hospital or continue living independently and safely at their home with no need for further care and support. When the applicant is under 18 years of age, means testing is not applicable, as guided by the legislation. Additionally, when dealing with young disabled children and babies, it is often difficult to obtain the necessary diagnosis as this may have not been confirmed yet. This policy aims to positively assist, and support families and each case will be reviewed on its own merit, including meetings with medical professionals. Furthermore, the Council can support all applicants, but this mainly

applies to elderly residents, with completing the application either over the phone or via a house visit. Additionally, if an applicant is unable to submit the necessary paperwork, one of our Officers will collect from their home to avoid unnecessary delays to the process. A translator service is also available upon request.

Disability: As this policy mainly covers Disabled Facilities Grants, its aim is to assist as many disabled residents as possible. It has been recommended that the current Discretionary DFG (top-up) grant of £10K is increased to £20K. This is in addition to the £30K mandatory grant. Furthermore, means testing is not applicable to children's applications or those on passporting benefits. The revised policy also proposes that means testing is not applicable for equipment cases up to a maximum cost of £10k. In addition to the above, the revised policy proposes the introduction of a "Fast Tracking" process, outside of the OT priority grading system (standard, urgent, critical). This will assist with hospital discharge cases, terminally ill applicants and palliative care. The recommended introduction of Dementia and Motor Neurone Disease Grants, not previously covered by the policy, will offer further assistance of a preventative nature to applicants with these types of disability. Finally, there are certain types of works deemed as non-mandatory by the legislation and therefore, not covered by a fixed policy. The revised policy has made provisions so that awards on non-mandatory works can be considered.

Health & Wellbeing: The revised policy aims to streamline the grant application process for housing association tenants, if the landlord makes the application and manages the works. This will have a positive change for the tenants as there will be shorter waiting times. Also, a Home Repair Grant, maximum £15K, will be introduced for eligible owner-occupied residents on a means tested benefit and/or low income. This grant aims to prevent Category 1 hazards in their property, address safety improvements, electrical works, thermal insulation, affordable warmth, energy efficiency or lack of heating system. Moreover, if there is an applicant's contribution for a DFG of less than £1K, and the applicant is unable to make this payment, it will be covered by a discretionary grant. The applicant's savings need to be under £6K. This will have a positive impact on those currently suffering financial hardship and hopefully reduce personal stress. Additionally, land charges will not be applied on certain equipment cases and other circumstances whilst the cost of all 5-year extended warranties for all equipment will be covered by the grant. The grant will also cover the call out fees, if contacted by the applicant, including any equipment repairs up to £500. Most importantly, the revised policy proposes the introduction of an Independent Panel to review cases and approve further discretionary grants if the cost of work exceeds the maximum £50K (£30K mandatory and £20K discretionary). All these measures should assist positively to the well-being of eligible residents.

The Council wishes to ensure that continuous effectiveness is provided on utilising available funding and on delivering the required outcomes. The Council aims to achieve reasonable timescales, including streamlining processes whilst making certain that assistance is available to those residents in greater need.

Monitoring this policy on an ongoing basis is vital for the implementation of the above criteria. This process will be based on monthly and quarterly reviews of expenditure tested against local performance indicators as well as number of cases on the waiting list and/or completed. The introduction of an Equality Monitoring Form, to be

completed by all applicants at application stage, will also ensure collection of more informed data on our applicants age, race and their disabilities. This type of information will enable us to identify how we could assist different groups of people further.