

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

11 February 2020

TITLE:	Home Repairs Assistance Grant Scheme
PORTFOLIO:	Councillor Mike Bowen - Portfolio Holder, Communities
OFFICER:	Alicia Patterson – Head of Environmental Health
WARD:	All wards

Attached documents: None

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To make members aware of the Home Repairs Assistance Grant Scheme and to consider the opportunity for funding presented by related income from a previous Home Repair Scheme.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Cabinet approves the recommendations at section 6.1.1 to 6.1.3 of the report.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Environmental Health Service currently operates a Home Repairs Assistance Grant (HRA) Scheme which aims to provide support for the most vulnerable households in carrying out emergency or essential repairs to their properties. It also gives supplementary funding to support additional repair works at premises with disabled occupants where the work is not covered by

the traditional Disabled Facilities Grant. The funding is limited and has diminished significantly over the last 3 years due to demand and a lack of funding to replenish the grants awarded.

- 3.2 In June 2012, secured and unsecured loans granted for housing improvements under the West Midlands Kickstart Partnership project transferred to the Council. Debts outstanding are secured by legal charges on properties and loans were granted based on equity share agreements. When a loan-assisted property is sold the funds received under these agreements are accounted for as capital receipts and used to support the Council's capital programme.
- 3.3 In total £57,861.45 was received through Kick-Start repayments in 2018-19 and a further £24,079.65 in the current year to date.
- 3.4 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan approved in February 2019 proposed that monies received from this former housing grant scheme should be used to support the HRA commitment. An initial commitment of £30,000 was added to the HRA Budget with the caveat that the proposals would be subject to a further report and approval by members.
- 3.5 It is proposed that the Kickstart funding receipts are ring-fenced for use as HRA Grant funding over the remaining period of 2019/20 and for the next financial year. A further report on the effectiveness of the scheme and the level of spend will be presented in January 2021 or earlier if required.
- 3.6 It is further proposed that some discretion is available to the Head of Environmental Health to vary the grant limit (currently £2,000) in cases where the investment will bring about a more favourable outcome (for example, when an empty property is brought back into use as a result).

4. Implications

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| 4.1 | <u>Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)</u> | Contributes to the reduction of the psychological affects leading to crime and disorder associated with poor quality housing. |
| 4.2 | <u>Employees</u> | None. |

- 4.3 Equalities This report has been prepared in accordance with the Council's Equal Opportunities policy.
- 4.4 Financial Grant provision is based entirely on the availability of contributory funding and so will be finite based on the Kickstart receipt income.
- 4.5 Legal This is a discretionary Grant and so is based on the Council's Private Sector Housing Policy. Grants may be registered as a local land charge, recoverable on the sale of the property on the open market.
- 4.6 Sustainability Discretionary grant will be sustainable and only given with the provision of available funding.

5. **Implications**

- 5.1 The Environmental Health Service currently operates a Home Repairs Assistance Grant Scheme. The aim of this type of assistance is to ensure that the most vulnerable householders living in the worst conditions receive help to ensure that their homes are safe to live in. It is also designed to help people bring an empty property back into use.

Examples of qualifying works are as follows:

- General items of essential or emergency repair;
- Replacement of lead water pipes;
- Radon remedial works;
- Energy efficiency works.
- Top-up of funding where the costs associated with adaptation work exceeds the DFG Maximum limit.

- 5.2 This is a discretionary grant and is only available subject to capital resource allocations in each financial year. These grants are targeted at vulnerable people, i.e. those who are elderly, low-income households or disabled persons. The grant can also be claimed by persons who are in need and require assistance to bring an empty property back into long-term use for owner-occupation or rental. The maximum funding that can be offered is £2,000.00 per

property over a 2 year period. Where the works are substantial in nature or will otherwise require a greater level of funding, it is recommended that a determination will be made by the Head of Service as to whether there is sufficient justification to approve a grant in excess of this amount on a case by case basis.

- 5.3 The funding available for this type of assistance has reduced significantly over the last 3 years as the capital resource has not been renewed, and at the start of the 2019/20 financial year the available budget had reduced to around £300.
- 5.4 In June 2012, secured and unsecured loans granted for housing improvements under the West Midlands Kickstart Partnership project, transferred to the Council following the winding-up of the Kickstart loan scheme. The funding for the scheme came originally from a bid to Government in 2008/09 and the funding was finite. Debts outstanding are secured by legal charges on properties and loans were granted based on equity share agreements. When a loan-assisted property is sold the funds received under these agreements are accounted for as capital receipts and used to support the Council's capital programme. In total, £57,861.45 was received through Kickstart repayments in 2018-19 and a further £24,079.65 in the current financial year to date. The funding is not sustainable year on year as no loans were issued after 2012 and the current income reflects the loans repaid so far.
- 5.5 The Council published its Empty Property Strategy in 2017 and an element of the Action Plan encouraged the innovative use of funding to help those people who wanted to bring an empty property back into use but were struggling to find assistance towards things like bathroom and kitchen replacement, new boiler/heating systems, etc. The HRA Grant scheme was expanded, accordingly, to include support for individuals seeking to bring an empty property back into use for owner/occupation or rental. The funding of up to £2,000 proved limiting when looking at the nature of the repairs that would be needed to bring empty properties back into use, and so enabling the Head of Environmental Health to have the discretion to vary this upper limit on a case by case basis would encourage more home owners to come forward with applications for assistance.
- 5.6 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan approved in February 2019 proposed that monies received from the Kickstart scheme should be used to support the HRA commitment. An initial commitment of £30,000 was added to the HRA Budget with the caveat that the proposals would be subject to further report and

approval by members. This funding has already been put to use in several emergency cases and to assist disabled persons by topping up the maximum grant available under the Disabled Facilities Grant programme to ensure that the project proceeded. The funding has also been offered to enable the owner of an empty property to install a new bathroom so that the property can be re-occupied. In this case the owner was seeking only a contribution to the cost of the fixtures and fittings and so the £2,000 limit was not a barrier, but if the owner had also required assistance to install this bathroom then the project might well have failed. The introduction of discretion would enable more ambitious projects to be considered.

6. Summary

6.1 It is, therefore, proposed that members consider the funding opportunity presented and determine whether the recommendations in this report should be supported. To summarise, the proposals are as follows:

- 6.1.1. To ring-fence the Kickstart funding to the Home Repairs Assistance Grant Scheme for 2019/20 and 2020/21 and to use this funding to top-up the Grant programme in accordance with demand.
- 6.1.2 To produce a report in January 2021 to determine the effectiveness of the Grant Scheme, the remaining funding available and whether to continue to use the funding to support the HRA Grant.
- 6.1.3 To approve the granting of discretion to the Head of Environmental Health to vary the grant limit (currently £2,000) in cases where the investment will bring about a more favourable outcome (for example, when an empty property is brought back into use as a result, or where an adaptation scheme might not progress because the applicant cannot afford to top-up the maximum Disabled Facilities Grant of £30,000).

Mark Trillo

Executive Director (People) and Monitoring Officer

Background Papers

Staffordshire Moorlands District
Council Housing Renewal Policy

Location

Environmental Health
Service

Contact

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