

DARTFORD

BOROUGH COUNCIL

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING DISCRETIONARY ASSISTANCE POLICY

Update October 2023 v4

IMPORTANT UPDATE

In accordance with the Council's Discretionary Assistance Policy p 9 par 11.9. "In all cases, discretionary assistance is subject to budget availability and may be frozen by the Council when necessary" and the addendum to the Disabled Facility Grant Policy s3.20 "Discretionary assistance is subject to budget availability and may be suspended by the Council when necessary", please note that -

With immediate effect (from 7 December 2022), all Discretionary Assistance Grants/Schemes have been suspended until further notice, as highlighted in yellow in this document.

31 October 2023 UPDATE

Top up contribution grant for mandatory DFGs is re-opened, highlighted in section 7 . All other Discretionary Assistance Grants/Schemes remain suspended. (highlighted in yellow)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This document sets out Dartford Borough Council's (hereby referred to as 'the Council') policy of assistance pursuant to the Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Assistance) 2002. The Order provides local authorities with a general permissive power to assist households with the improvement of living conditions. This policy has been adopted under Article 4 of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO). The Order enables local authorities to develop a means of providing assistance to any resident so they can address local needs and priorities. A local authority must adopt a policy to exercise the powers set out in the Order.
- 1.2. The RRO gives authorities a general power to introduce local policies for assisting individuals with renewals, repairs and adaptations in their homes through grants or loans. For example, it can provide authorities a vehicle for funding essential repairs to reduce injury and accidents in the home, to ensure homes are adequately heated, and to expand the scope of adaptations available under the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) legislation. Local authorities can also use the RRO to create assistance schemes which help people meet their needs without going through the full DFG process. Schemes such as these can, for example, provide 'fast track' mechanisms for low level adaptations, which do not require a full social care assessment or means test.
- 1.3. The Council believes that it is primarily the responsibility of property owners to maintain the housing they own to a satisfactory standard of repair. Nevertheless, the Council is aware that some property owners, including the disabled and the vulnerable, will have difficulty in doing so without assistance.
- 1.4. In addition, in 2015, Government announced that up to £500 million of capital funding was being made available for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and related works as part of the Better Care Fund (BCF).
- 1.5. The BCF creates a local single pooled budget to incentivise the NHS and local government to work more closely together around people, placing their wellbeing as the focus of health and care services. The BCF also shifts resources into social care and community services for the benefit of the people, communities and health and care systems and maximises the partnership role that the Council has with the NHS. The aim is ensure that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.

1.6. This policy sets out how the Council's is providing additional assistance to its residents as a result of the RRO and BCF and the range of programmes and packages available to assist people in better maintaining housing they own and/or live in and to assist people to move to more suitable accommodation or provide non-person specific assistance to meet an identified need.

2. Under the terms of this Policy the following may be provided.

- Assisting with essential works such as repairs
- Provision of necessary equipment
- Deep cleaning/de-cluttering
- Enabling homes to be efficiently heated for persons whose long term health conditions or age makes them vulnerable to the cold
- Non person specific assistance where resources allow
- Assistance to help disabled people relocate to a suitable property that meets their needs
- Non-repayable, non-means tested grants for all types of assistance including works to enable people to be discharged from hospital into a safe environment

2.1. This Policy is therefore intended to cover a range of non means tested services/funding not currently provided through any other means to prevent admissions or readmissions to hospital, improve health and wellbeing and to provide funding to eligible households for, for example, essential repairs or heating installation which, if not carried out, may have a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing.

2.2. Eligibility for different programmes will be subject to meeting certain criteria. Exceptions will be considered by a Senior Manager.

3. **Discretionary Financial Assistance**

3.1. Historically, the way in which Disabled Facilities Grant funding could be used was rather prescriptive. However, since the introduction of the Better Care Fund in 2015 and the RRO a wider private sector housing assistance approach is being promoted. The RRO permits housing authorities to assist, directly or indirectly, any person in respect of the acquisition, adaptation, improvement, repair, demolition or construction of housing accommodation and takes a joined-up approach to improving outcomes across health, social care and housing.

3.2. The following grants are available to persons who meet one or more of the aims of this Policy:

4. **Hospital Discharge Grant (HDG) Suspended December 2022**

4.1. **The maximum grant is £10,000.**

4.2. This grant is solely to provide support to local residents being discharged from hospital. Due to the many housing related issues that prevent a timely

hospital discharge, a finite list of works cannot be given. However all works associated with the grant must be essential to enable the individual to once again reside in their own home.

4.3. Examples of works that would be expected to be supported by a HDG include:

- Moving necessary furniture from upstairs to downstairs
- Clearing a room to make it safe, including tackling hoarding
- Deep cleaning a room to make it safe
- Necessary equipment (not provided by any other means) to enable the person to be discharged from hospital, e.g. tilting chairs/boiler repairs or replacements
- Purchasing of essential furniture such as a bed, if this is preventing hospital discharge
- Any other works that are deemed necessary to enable the person to return home to a safe, warm and secure environment; within the scope of this Policy (to be agreed by the Head of Housing)

4.4. Applicants for an HDG must be in hospital at the time of referral and awaiting discharge.

4.5. External organisations can refer applicants to the Council for assessment including local hospitals etc., care navigators, GPs, occupational therapists, health staff and the Health and Housing Coordinator based at Darent Valley Hospital.

4.6. Confirmation of ownership/tenancy in the Borough will be confirmed prior to discharge. In the case of tenants, only works or the provision of equipment that is not the responsibility of the landlord will be provided.

5. **Safe and Secure Grant (SSG) Suspended December 2022**

5.1. **The maximum grant is £10,000 with the exception of insulation measures (roof/loft and wall), where the maximum grant is £2,000*.**

5.2. The Safe and Secure Grant is designed to reduce admissions and readmissions to hospital, improve health and wellbeing, to promote independence and to ensure that the person can remain in their own home as long as possible.

5.3. Applicants should normally be 65 or over **and/or** have a specific ill health diagnosis/disability that affects their ability to remain in their own home without financial assistance (see 7.2. also).

* September 2021 ; the addition of the wording in par 5. 1 of “ **with the exception of insulation measures (roof/loft and wall), where the maximum grant is £2,000**” was made under delegated authority to make in-year amendments to the approved Private Sector Discretionary Assistance Policy, as necessary, granted, by Cabinet 29 October 2020

5.4. Repairs to the house and its environs could include:

- repairs or modifications to stairs, floors and steps
- boiler installation or repairs
- safety and security repairs, including the provision of key safes etc.
- providing additional property modifications to promote independence for customers with a specific disability or diagnosed condition e.g. dementia or other related conditions
- any other works that are deemed necessary to enable the person to remain in their own home and prevent hospital admission or readmission within the scope of this Policy (to be agreed by the Head of Housing)

5.5. Applicants can make a self-referral or external organisations can refer residents to the Council for assessment including local hospitals etc., care navigators, GPs, Occupational Therapists, health staff, Home Improvement Agency and the Health and Housing Coordinator based at Darent Valley Hospital.

6. **Discretionary Assistance Grant** (also part of the Council's DFG Policy) *Suspended December 2022*

6.1. **The maximum grant is £15,000.**

6.2. Discretionary Assistance Grant is a non-means tested grant for urgently needed disabled aids/adaptations e.g. straight track stair lift, level access shower, access ramp and the repair/replacement of obsolete or defective equipment e.g. repair to stair lift or wash dry toilet. The purpose of the grant is to assist hospital discharge, prevent hospital admission and provide palliative assistance via a more streamlined process. Applications should be submitted using the Council's Discretionary Assistance application form.

Applicants must be:

- An owner- occupier
- A private sector tenant
- A Registered Social Landlord tenant
- Registered or registerable as a disabled person

6.3. Works must be recommended by an Occupational Therapist.

6.4. Applicants may employ the Home Improvement Agency or an Independent Agent to assist them in the process and fees can be included within the cost of the discretionary facilities grant.

7. **Top up contribution grant for mandatory DFGs** **Re-opened October 2023**

7.1. **The maximum grant is £10,000.**

- 7.2. A grant will be made available to the property owner where a person is in receipt of a mandatory DFG but they have a financial contribution towards it, following the statutory means test.
- 7.3. Grants will be made available to pay for a person's financial contribution towards DFG works. The application for this grant must be made by the homeowners of the property being adapted.

8. Relocation Grant *Suspended December 2022*

- 8.1. **The Maximum grant is £10,000.**
- 8.2. In appropriate cases where a person is eligible for Disabled Facilities Grant assistance but the property is unsuitable for adaptation to their specific needs, a Relocation Grant may be offered. This grant will only be available to a disabled person following a decision by the Council in consultation with Social Services that the existing property cannot be economically or reasonably adapted to their needs.
- 8.3. In the event of the owner occupier having to move to alternative accommodation, it will be a requirement that they sell their existing property to facilitate a move to a property that is considered suitable for adaptations.
- 8.4. The applicant may be asked to undertake the statutory means test for a Disabled Facilities Grants and/or provide other details to confirm there is financial hardship.
- 8.5. If the new property is of less value and the applicants benefit from the equity released, then the new grant may be a NIL approval.
- 8.6. Social Services and the Council must agree the suitability of the new property. If the new property requires adaptation, a Disabled Facilities Grant may also be offered.
- 8.7. Eligible items that can be included in the grant:
 - Legal fees (minimum of two quotes required)
 - Stamp Duty
 - Surveyor/ Valuation fees
 - Estate agent fees (minimum of two quotes required)
 - Removal fees (minimum of two quotes required)
- 8.8. The Grant is to be approved before costs are incurred.
- 8.9. All fees are to be paid in full by the applicant who will then be reimbursed by the grant.

- 8.10. All requests for payment are to be supported by relevant invoices from the contractors via the applicant.

9. Non person specific assistance *Suspended December 2022*

- 9.1. The RRO permits housing authorities to assist, directly or indirectly, any person in respect of the acquisition, adaptation, improvement, repair, demolition or construction of housing accommodation. It gives the power to use BCF DFG funding as part of a wider private sector housing assistance and improvement approach.
- 9.2. Applications for financial assistance will therefore be considered for the funding of adaptation/improvement work for a variety of non person-specific schemes such as providing disabled access to a communal entrance of a residential block and the improvement or acquisition of properties to assist vulnerable persons, including rough sleepers. All applications/schemes will be subject to approval by Senior Management and dealt with on a case by case basis, where resources allow.

10. Subsidised Handyperson Service & Handyperson Enablement

10.1. Handypersons service and materials budget

The Council already subsidises a Handyperson service for local residents through the local Home Improvement Agency run by Peabody SE Ltd. The service undertakes minor repairs of a DIY nature for residents within the borough of Dartford, following checks on repair responsibilities. All clients are expected to cover the cost of materials required to carry out their repairs. The service provides a subsidised service charge of £5.00 per hour (Inc. V.A.T) for labour to residents who receive a qualifying mean tested benefit. For those who do not qualify a labour charge of £15.00 per hour (Inc. V.A.T.) will apply.

- 10.2. In addition to this, funding is made available for the provision of a handyperson enablement service which offers both discharge and practical support to help people get discharged from hospital more quickly and to prevent admissions to hospital by offering practical solutions to problems around the home.

Funding has also been made available for the cost of materials to the enablement service. A capped spend of £500.00 per customer is available without the need to apply for one of the discretionary assistances outlined in this policy. Any cases over this cap will be considered on an individual basis and a final decision made by the Housing Solutions & Private Sector Housing Manager. This service is provide free of charge. A maximum of £6,000 is available annually for this service.

10.3. Health and Housing Co-ordinator *Scheme has ended*

The Council funds a full time Health and Housing Co-ordinator for the Dartford Borough provided by Peabody SE Ltd, working at Darent Valley Hospital to assist persons leaving hospital as well as offering a service to help residents retain safe and independent living in their own home. It is a tenure neutral service provided free of charge.

10.4. Hoarding Co-ordinator *Scheme has ended*

The Council funds a hoarding co-ordinator with mental health specialism which is provided by Peabody SE Ltd, in partnership with Gravesham Borough Council and is a tenure neutral service.

Customers must either be 65 years or older or have a long term health condition that is being exacerbated by the conditions in which they live; or are living in housing with significant disrepair issues that need urgently addressing and are impacting on a person's physical health but cannot be addressed due to the clutter within.

The service will endeavour to ascertain the underlying cause that leads to hoarding and will work to support the person to agree to a referral to an appropriate ongoing service.

Referrals will be treated as a priority where a patient is in hospital and their discharge is dependent on clutter/hoarding being dealt with to ensure a safe home environment. Referrals can be received from any of the Kent mental health units where patients discharging need assistance with housing related issues and they are either a resident of Dartford or Gravesham. Referrals can also be accepted from Local Authorities, Kent Fire and Rescue Service and Health and Social Care professionals.

All referrals must meet the service criteria, any variation to the criteria must receive prior approval from the relevant Local Authority before the service's involvement.

This service is provided free of charge.

11. Grant Conditions

- 11.1. All assistance is non-means tested and non-repayable and is available to all eligible residents. Tenants are eligible for assistance not required to be met by the landlord (e.g. de-cluttering, deep cleaning, purchase of mattresses etc.).
- 11.2. To be eligible for a safe and secure grant, for under 65 year olds, written evidence must be provided to the Council confirming the applicant's medical condition, e.g. GP referral letters/hospital letters.
- 11.3. In each grant case, an application form must be completed and approved by the Council.

- 11.4. Applicants, or their advocate, need to provide one quote for all works or the provision of equipment.
- 11.5. Consent for works to be completed on a property must be provided by an owner of the property.
- 11.6. An application for any assistance shall be in a form approved by the Council.
- 11.7. Any application for assistance for work, which has been carried out or already commenced, will be refused.
- 11.8. In all cases, funding will only be provided where there is no other assistance/funding available to the applicant.
- 11.9. In all cases, discretionary assistance is subject to budget availability and may be frozen by the Council when necessary.

12. Decision and Notification

- 12.1. The Council will notify an applicant in writing whether his or her application is refused or approved
- 12.2. If the Council approves the application, the notification will specify the works eligible for assistance, the value of the assistance and the contractor's quotation on which the assistance is based.
- 12.3. If the application is refused, the notification will include the reasons for refusal.

13. Supervision of Works

- 13.1. The responsibility for supervision of the works and obtaining any necessary Building Regulations approval or other consent rests with the applicant or his or her agent. The Council does not accept any responsibility for supervision of the works.
- 13.2. The Council is not responsible for the quality of the work or any defects that arise.

14. Payments

- 14.1. The Council will pay assistance direct to the contractor either in instalments or in one lump sum on completion of the works. It should be noted that the Contract is between the applicant and the contractor, not the Council.
- 14.2. Payments will be made by the Council direct to the contractor on satisfactory completion of works. Where assistance is payable, but the eligible works have not been executed to the satisfaction of the Council, the Council may withhold some or all of the payment from the contractor until the issue is resolved to the satisfaction of the Council. Where works are completed to the satisfaction of the Council, but not the applicant, the Council may still make full payment to the contractor.

15. Death of the applicant

- 15.1. Where the applicant dies before the eligible works have been completed, the Council has discretion whether to pay any assistance in respect of some or all of the works already carried out or any other works covered by the application.

16. Successive Assistance

- 16.1. An application for two grants or more within a three-year period will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be determined at the Council's sole discretion.

17. Complaints

- 17.1. If a complaint relates to the standard of service or to an action or lack of action in implementing this Policy, the complainant should follow the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure www.dartford.gov.uk
Complaints leaflets are available from the Council offices.