



Housing Assistance Policy

April 2014 -March
2015

Introduction

The government has acknowledged that much work is needed to the nation's housing stock and although Councils spend several hundreds of millions each year improving housing conditions the public purse cannot and should not meet all the need. The government has made it clear that the responsibility for maintaining privately owned homes "should rest first and foremost with the owner."

Since July 18th 2003 local authorities have had more freedom to provide assistance for housing renewal in ways they consider the most appropriate. The broad aim is to provide better opportunities for people to repair their homes from their own resources where they are able to do so, and to target help through grants and other financial assistance on those who are trapped in poor quality housing that they cannot afford to repair.

Since the beginning of the new system the Council has been taking advantage of the new freedom to devise forms of assistance to suit local needs and local demographics. The opportunity is taken each year to review the assistance available and modifications are made in the light of demand and changes to government policy.

This policy will be available via the Council's web site www.molevalley.gov.uk and also from Pippbrook, Dorking and the Help Shop, Mansion House, Leatherhead.

Housing Assistance Policy April 2014 - March 2015

The policy in relation to other strategies.

This policy contributes to the following strategic housing priority in the East Surrey Housing Strategy:

- Improving housing standards by promoting healthy, safe housing.

The Council priorities the Policy will address

The policy will support the Council's current priorities relating to working with partners to provide the right services to our residents and ensure that they are supported through the welfare reform & the emerging health & wellbeing agenda.

Capital resources to implement the policy.

The Capital Programme proposed provides for £760,000 in 2014/15.

What can it be used for.

A grant can be used to give better freedom of movement into and around the home and/or to provide essential facilities within it.

Acceptable types of work include:

- widening doors and installing ramps
- providing or improving access to rooms and facilities - for example, by installing a stair lift or providing a downstairs bathroom
- adapting heating or lighting controls to make them easier to use
- improving access to and movement around the home to enable you to care for another person who lives in the property, such as a child

An occupational therapist will look at individual circumstances and can recommend the type of adaptation(s) needed.

The types of assistance available

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants	
Purpose/key outcomes	To meet the basic housing needs of disabled people. To improve the quality of life of disabled residents
Eligibility criteria (applicant)	Set by statute - as existing Statutory test of resources.
Eligibility criteria (property)	Set by statute - as existing
Eligibility criteria (works)	Set by statute. Grant normally based on lowest of 3 tenders/quotations - as existing.
Conditions	Set by statute. Cost recovery can occur on larger grants see website for detail.
Ceiling	Cost of eligible works less client contribution up to £30,000 set by statute.

Park Home Assistance	
Purpose/key outcomes	To assist the residents of park homes in the worst condition to stay put.
Eligibility criteria(applicant)	Site owner must have formally indicated reasonable dissatisfaction with condition of property. Owner occupier of park home for at least 5 years and receipt of a means-tested benefit for at least 6 months.
Eligibility criteria(property)	Park home in poor condition on a licensed park home site in Mole Valley. Home at least 20 years old.
Eligibility criteria (works)	Works of repair or improvement. Excludes work of internal decoration
Conditions	One grant per home. Intention to stay for 5 years after work completion required. Notice of vacating to be given to Council. Grant repayable if vacate before 5 years
Ceiling	£5000

Home safety assistance	
Purpose/key outcomes	To reduce accidents; ill health; prevent hospitalisation or re-housing by carrying out small scale repairs and improvements to deal with significant risks to health or safety of occupier.
Eligibility criteria (applicant)	For owner-occupiers – applicant at least 65 and household: receives a disability related benefit or has received a means-tested benefit for at least 6 months, or needs assistance as shown by the grants test of resources.
Eligibility criteria (property)	Where EHO considers essential works are necessary to eliminate significant risks to current occupier's health or safety.
Eligibility criteria (works)	Generally internal small-scale work which reduces risks to occupant's health or safety. Grant normally based on lowest of 3 quotations
Conditions	Provided as a loan repayable on sale or death. Charge on property plus 10% admin charge.
Ceiling	Max £5000 as a loan. Only one loan per property for same occupier.

Home security assistance	
Purpose/key outcomes	Improve security and reduce fear of crime provide reassurance.
Eligibility criteria (applicant)	Owner-occupier or private tenant, who is over 65 living alone or on means tested or disability-related benefit and referred by crime prevention or any owner –occupier or tenant referred by the East Surrey Domestic Abuse Outreach service.
Eligibility criteria (property)	Subject to burglary/attempted burglary or in vicinity of one, or especially vulnerable
Eligibility criteria (works)	Door and window locks or similar minor security measures.
Conditions	Provided as a grant. Landlord written consent needed for tenants. Only one grant per property for same occupier.
Ceiling	100% of recommended work up to max £500.

Roofing assistance	
Purpose/key outcomes	To maintain a key building component that is difficult and dangerous for vulnerable residents to maintain. To help combat unscrupulous contractors.
Eligibility criteria (applicant)	Owner-occupier at least 65 but in receipt of guaranteed pension credit or a means tested benefit for at least 6 months or, needs assistance as shown by the grants test of resources.
Eligibility criteria (property)	Property failing or at risk of failing decent home standard because of roof condition.
Eligibility criteria (works)	Works of improvement or repair to roof covering, chimney pots, stacks, flashings, ridge, hip, or eaves considered reasonable by the EHO.
Conditions	Provided as a loan only. Home Improvement Agency should be used. Any loan repayable on sale or death. Charge on property plus 10% admin charge. Only one loan per property in any period of 10 years.
Ceiling	Maximum £7000 .

Disabled Persons Assistance	
Purpose/key outcomes	To improve the welfare and quality of life for disabled persons
Eligibility criteria (applicant)	As for Mandatory DFG's. In receipt of a means tested benefit or undertakes a statutory test of resources that could be contribution based.
Eligibility criteria (property)	As for Mandatory DFG's.
Eligibility criteria (works)	This grant is not for works that are eligible under the mandatory grant. The works must be to improve the welfare of the person concerned. Grant based on competitive tenders/quotations – normally a set of 3.
Conditions	Only 1 grant per person
Ceiling	Maximum £3000.00 cost of eligible work minus any client contribution

The types and amounts of preliminary or ancillary fees and charges associated with the provision of assistance that will be payable and in what circumstances.

Professional fees associated with preparation of specifications of work, drawing plans, tendering, building contract preparation, supervision of work and costing of payments due will be eligible for assistance in relation to major works. If fees or charges arise, which are reasonable to incur, in relation to the works they will be eligible for assistance. The Environmental Health Manager has discretion to set a ceiling on the level of any preliminary or ancillary fees assisted.

The process to be used to apply for assistance including any preliminary enquiry system.

Assistance is normally accessed initially by contacting the Environmental Health admin team at Pippbrook. The officer can ensure the person; property and work appear to be eligible. If the eligibility conditions are satisfied the person will be sent the appropriate paperwork. In respect of mandatory disabled facilities grants, and other forms of assistance where a test of resources is applied, a preliminary test of resources form will be sent initially. Once this form is returned the provisional calculation is performed and the result is reported to the applicant. If the individual still wishes to pursue the grant the full application form and other paperwork can then be completed. Grants can also come via Surrey County Council's Occupational Therapists or direct through Independent Home Solutions, see below.

The Council currently uses the Independent Home Solutions Agency service to provide extra help to many vulnerable applicants for various forms of assistance. The Agency helps with every stage of the process from application to completion of the work.

How persons can obtain access to the process of applying for assistance.

Advice about the process of applying is available from the Environmental Health admin team and officers in the Environmental Health residential and pollution team in Pippbrook, or the web-site. The Independent Home Solutions agency can also advise clients.

How conditions will be enforced and in what circumstances they may be waived.

Conditions vary with each type of assistance. Conditions will be enforced in various ways including requiring the production of invoices, physically checking works done, registering charges against the property, checking occupation after works done. Applications to waive conditions will be considered on their merits by the Environmental Health Manager.

The arrangements for complaints about the policy and its implementation.

Complaints about the policy should be made in the first instance to the Environmental Health Manager. Complaints about the implementation of the policy should be raised with the officer involved with the implementation. If the complainant is not satisfied the Council has a complaints procedure that can be used.

The arrangements for applications for assistance to be considered where these fall outside policy.

All applications will be treated on their merits. Any application made which falls outside the policy for one reason or another will be considered and decided upon by the Environmental Health Manager.

Key service standards that will apply to the provision of assistance

The Wellbeing service area aims to:

Process all applications within 6 months of receipt of a full application.

Process all requests for payments within 10 working days of request.

Provide application forms via the internet or within 5 working days of request.

We aim to achieve 90% satisfaction levels from our customers.

Performance data is collated monthly. An annual overview will also be available.

The Agency also has performance standards set by the DCLG.

There are no national performance indicators or targets relevant to this policy. The Council seeks to attain and wherever practicable exceed the targets it has set itself.

Policy implementation

It is the normal practice of the Council to have an annual housing assistance policy so a successor policy will be considered early in 2015 to take effect on the 1st April 2015.

Demand for assistance is very difficult to anticipate. It is conceivable that demand for assistance of one form or another will begin to put pressure on the budget. If such a situation occurs it may be necessary to withdraw or scale down a particular form of assistance. The Environmental Health Manager has delegated authority to stop or scale down the availability of each form of assistance and to shift resources between different forms of assistance. Where restrictions on availability have to be applied as much notice as possible will be given to anyone who might be affected.