



NORWICH City Council

Committee Name: Cabinet
Committee Date: 06/04/2022
Report Title: Affordable Warmth Grant

Portfolio: Councillor Jones, Cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods

Report from: Interim Head of Housing and Community Safety

Wards: All Wards

OPEN PUBLIC ITEM

Purpose

1. To seek approval for an additional financial assistance package to be included in the council's existing private sector financial assistance policy for home repair, improvement and adaptation.
2. To seek approval to provide funding towards a specific supported housing scheme.

Recommendation:

To:

1. Approve an extension to the council's existing Financial Assistance Policy to include the provision of affordable warmth grants.
2. Approve an amendment to the 2022/23 General Fund capital programme to create budgets funded from unspent Better Care Fund (BCF) grant to provide:
 - a. Affordable warmth grants.
 - b. A grant of £0.100m to be made to Norfolk County Council, to support the development of a specialist supported housing scheme for the acute needs of a Norwich resident.

Policy Framework

The Council has five corporate priorities, which are:

- People live independently and well in a diverse and safe city.
- Norwich is a sustainable and healthy city.
- Norwich has the infrastructure and housing it needs to be a successful city.

- The city has an inclusive economy in which residents have equal opportunity to flourish.
- Norwich City Council is in good shape to serve the city.

This report meets the priority to support people living independently and well in a diverse and safe city.

Introduction

1. Each year, Norwich City Council receives an allocation from the Better Care Fund (BCF) to enable the council to make Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and provide financial assistance for home improvements (HIA). Grants are awarded to support people to live independently in their existing homes.
2. In 2020/21, due to Covid-19 impacting services and demand, the combined DFG and HIA budgets underspent, resulting in only £0.944m of the £1.286m BCF grant being utilised (see appendix A).
3. For the 2021/22 financial year, it is forecast that £1.040m of the £1.294m BCF grant will be utilised by the end of the financial year. There are a number of contributing factors to why this has occurred, but, significantly, there are no waiting lists of private sector residents needing to access the service.
4. Norfolk County Council has approved an application for the unspent BCF funding from 2020/21 (£0.342m) and 2021/22 (forecast £0.254m) to be carried forward into the 2022/23 financial year.
5. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) Delivery Guidance - March 2022 states that BCF is intended to be used for private sector residents and not tenants of the council; council tenants receive support through alternative funding sources.
6. Discussion has taken place between the county council and officers from the city council on how best this money could be used to support the aims of the Better Care Fund in supporting residents.
7. This has resulted in two proposals: first, to initiate affordable warmth funding, and secondly to assist in the development of specialist accommodation.
8. On 22nd February 2022, Council approved to delegate to Cabinet, to include in the capital programme, additional capital schemes funded wholly by grant where it meets the Council's aims.
9. It is proposed that the remaining underspent BCF grant, forecast to total £0.596m, is utilised to create the following budgets within the 2022/23 General Fund capital programme:
 - a. £0.100m – specialist supported housing grant to Norfolk County Council
 - b. £0.496m (subject to 2021/22 final outturn) – affordable warmth grants

Affordable Warmth Grant

10. Nationally, there were large increases in excess winter deaths between December 2019 and March 2020 (Covid-19 deaths are excluded from the numbers). An estimated 28,300 excess winter deaths occurred in England and Wales over this period, which was 19.6% higher than winter 2018 to 2019.
11. Respiratory diseases accounted for 39.6% of all excess winter deaths in 2019 – 2020. Furthermore, Public Health England estimate that 10% of all excess winter deaths are due to cold homes.
12. Within fuel poor households, there are those who have increased vulnerability, such as the very old or the very young and those with long-term health conditions. Everyone can be negatively impacted by living in a cold home, but these vulnerable groups are particularly at risk of the cold exacerbating underlying health conditions such as respiratory and cardiovascular problems.

Children who are living in cold homes are significantly more likely to suffer from chest problems, asthma and bronchitis. Cold homes can slow down recovery following discharge from hospital, when people are already at risk, and can lead to repeat admissions due to unsuitable housing. It has been estimated that housing-related ill health costs the NHS £2.5bn per year.

13. In consultation with the environmental strategy team, it is believed that replacing old ineffective, but working boilers, would be the most effective solution in the immediate term. Homes heated by electricity are twice as likely to be in fuel poverty than those heated by gas, and, in households heated by gas, those heated by an inefficient boiler are again twice as likely to be in fuel poverty than those heated by efficient boilers.
14. There are funding streams already available to replace boilers that are no longer working, but often people in fuel poverty who have working but expensive to run systems are unable to raise funds to bring down their heating costs.
15. The proposed replacement of gas boilers greater than 15 years old, with new and more efficient gas boilers, saves both energy, operating cost and carbon emissions. An energy efficiency saving of 20-30% can be expected, with a proportionate saving in carbon emissions.
16. Replacing old gas boilers with renewable heating systems requires the replacement of the entire heating system, including radiators and often necessitates a higher rated electricity supply being provided, such as in the case of heat pumps. The increased cost of renewable heating systems would mean that the grant would be consumed by a smaller number of participants and this would result in fewer vulnerable people benefitting from assured and reliable heat.
17. There is already in place, a framework of contractors used by the home improvement team. It is intended that the contractors would also be utilised to deliver the boiler replacement programme.

18. Funding towards insulation measures was also considered, however, with the exception of double glazing, there are already effective grant schemes in place that the council could signpost to, if needed.
19. The activity described in this paper has been designed to complement other funding and activity planned for this financial year, including the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and Sustainable Warmth grant, which explicitly exclude the replacement of gas boilers, although do include funding for solar photovoltaic systems.
20. The Energy Company Obligation funding stream also exists for homes in need of increased insulation, which NCC can target at those in need. All activity relating to these workstreams will be joined up with regards efficiently targeting need and carrying out installation work.
21. The councils Council Tax Reduction scheme is identified as being an effective and efficient way of targeting those residents who have already been assessed as having limited finances, which would prevent them from modernising and upgrading their homes.

Grant Details

22. It is proposed to provide an affordable warmth grant, funded from the BCF.
23. The grant will fund replacement boilers that are 15 years and older. This is in line with the Norwich Standard.
24. Boilers will be replaced with modern energy efficient 'A' rated boilers.
25. The grant will fund the replacement of any radiators that are insufficient in size, not effective or in need of replacement.
26. Additionally, the grant will cover the installation of new 'A+' BFRC rated double glazing where there are any windows in the property that are single glazed, or if the property is a listed building or in a conservation area, the installation of secondary glazing, if none is present.
27. There are no repayment conditions on the grant and no grant maximum, however, the home improvement team will identify and specify the required works and arrange for them to be carried out.
28. It is anticipated that around 65 households could benefit from this scheme but this will be dependent upon the level of funding available.
29. To qualify for the grant, residents must be a homeowner and supported with Council Tax Reduction.
30. The proposed affordable warmth grant will be fully funded from unspent BCF and therefore the value of the budget to be created will be confirmed once the

2021/22 outturn has been finalised and the total value of grants made will not exceed this.

Supported Living

31. Norfolk County Council has developed a supported programme to increase the suitability, pace and quantity of supported living units being delivered across the county.
32. Norfolk has a shortage of independent accommodation for working age adults with disabilities and a higher proportion of people with Learning Disabilities, Autism, Physical Disabilities and Mental ill health in residential care compared to both the East of England and nationally.
33. While a number of long-term options for accommodation for those with complex needs are being progressed, it is clear that for at least one individual, there is the need for bespoke accommodation in the medium term (3-6 months development timescale).
34. The county council has agreed capital funding, in partnership with funding from National Health Service England NHSE to purchase and adapt a single storey bungalow in Norwich. The accommodation needs to be suitable for the accommodation of this person, who has been a Norwich resident with family in Norwich, but who is currently in an out of county hospital due to a lack of appropriate accommodation.
35. Norwich is the individual's location of choice due to the proximity of his family and his connections to Norwich Football Club. Both factors are important for his wellbeing.
36. Suitable properties in Norwich have been identified, however the cost of the adaptations required exceeds the available budget. The use of the city council's expertise and funding in undertaking these adaptations will allow the successful completion of this project.
37. It is proposed that £0.100m is granted to Norfolk County Council to provide this specialist accommodation.

Financial and Resources

38. Any decision to reduce or increase resources or alternatively increase income must be made within the context of the council's stated priorities, as set out in its Corporate Plan and Budget.
39. The 2020/21 combined Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Improvement Agency budget was underspent which resulted in only £0.944m of the £1.286m Better Care Funding grant being utilised and £0.342m remaining unspent at the end of the financial year.

40. The 2021/22 combined budget to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Improvement Agency works is also currently forecast to underspend and utilise only £1.040m of the £1.294m Better Care Fund grant, which would result in £0.254m remaining unspent at the end of the financial year.

41. This would result in a total available grant of £0.596m (subject to 2021/22 final outturn).

Legal

42. The council has power under Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 to provide discretionary financial assistances.

43. The council will ensure that Data Protection Act 2018/UK GDPR will be adhered to when providing the services.

Statutory Considerations

Consideration	Details of any implications and proposed measures to address:
Equality and Diversity	A full equality impact assessment has been undertaken on the proposals and attached at Appendix B
Health, Social and Economic Impact	It is considered that the scheme proposed has a positive impact, in that the funding will be used to support positive outcomes for residents who may otherwise be at risk of fuel poverty.
Crime and Disorder	Not applicable
Children and Adults Safeguarding	Not applicable
Environmental Impact	As set out above, the proposals in this report have the potential to improve energy efficiency, and have a positive impact, in relation to up to 65 properties.

Risk Management

Risk	Consequence	Controls Required
The Better Care Fund is not used effectively to support residents living in their own home	Norwich residents do not benefit from the funding available, potentially requiring additional care support to live independently	The proposals set out in this report enable the funding to be spent. Delivery of schemes funded by the grant will be monitored through existing mechanisms used to monitor private sector grants

Other Options Considered

44. Various options have been considered in discussion with Norfolk County Council and the environment strategy team. The proposals within this report have been developed to complement existing schemes whilst meeting the purpose of the Better Care Fund

Reasons for the decision/recommendation

45. The constitution requires that any key decision is referred to Cabinet to determine; the proposals within this report require the commitment of more than £0.500m and meet the definition of being a key decision.

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Appendix A:

Background

46. The council has statutory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) to adapt people's homes to help keep them living independently. These are currently funded through the Better Care Fund (BCF) which is administered by Norfolk County Council.
47. In recent years, successive governments have recognised the preventative benefits of DFGs and increased the budget allocated to councils accordingly. In 2015/16 the allocated budget was £472k; in 2021/22 the budget was £1.29m, an increase of 174%
48. The county council is required to pass the calculated allocation onto the city council who can only spend the money on DFGs, unless jointly agreed otherwise.
49. There has also been a move towards extending the purposes for which the funding can be used beyond just providing DFGs, in recognition that other work, for example, tackling hazards in the home or carrying out minor repairs and improvements, can help to meet the purposes of the better care fund.
50. The council uses its powers under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 to offer discretionary financial assistances. With the agreement of the county council, we utilise the BCF grant to finance these additional assistances.
51. For example, the council offers emergency repairs grants, hospital discharge grants, means test contribution grants etc.

Appendix B

What is being assessed	Affordable warmth grant	Status	First assessment of a new proposal
Officer completing	Kevin Ayers	Role	Home Improvement Manager
Team	Home Improvement team	Directorate	Community Services
Senior leadership team sponsor	Louise Rawsthorne	Role	Executive Director for Community Services

What are the main aims or purpose of the policy, practice, service or function? *(include links to project briefs, cabinet reports etc)*

To provide an affordable warmth grant to fund replacement boilers that are 15 years and older with modern energy efficient 'A' rated boilers. The grant will also fund the replacement of any radiators that are insufficient in size, not effective or in need of replacement.

Additionally, the grant will cover the installation of new 'A+' BFRC rated double glazing where there are any windows in the property that are single glazed. Or if the property is a listed building or in a conservation area the installation of secondary glazing, if none is present.

There are no repayment conditions on the grant and no grant maximum, however, the home improvement team will identify and specify the required works and arrange for them to be carried out.

To qualify for the grant, residents must be a homeowner and in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.

How does it fit with other services and policies, and how does it support our [corporate objectives](#) and [City Vision](#)?

This is an addition to the council's financial assistance policy and meets the People living well and Great neighbourhoods, housing and environment corporate priorities, and the City Vision theme of a Fair City.

What is the reason for the proposal or change (financial, legal etc)? *The Equality Act requires us to make this clear.*

Financial: The affordable warmth grant is making use of an underspent budget focused on health outcomes from the home environment.

Equality Impact Assessment

Who implements, carries out or delivers the policy, practice, service or function?

The home improvement team will deliver the policy and the works will be carried out by selected contractors of the council.

What outcomes do we want to achieve, why and for who?

To provide affordable warmth grants for qualifying homeowners to make use of an underspent budget and benefit homeowners to improve their homes thermal comfort when otherwise they may not be able to afford to do so.

Will anyone be disproportionately affected by the programme, and/or will it create any benefits?

Recipients of the grant will benefit from reduced heating bills. No one will be negatively impacted as a result of this proposal.

If yes, complete the relevant sections below for any benefits and adverse impacts identified.

Affected group	Key findings from analysis of data and evidence. Identify any gaps in data here	Level & type of impact: low/medium/high, positive/adverse	Justifiable if adverse	Actions to mitigate impacts, maximise benefits or address identified gaps in data	By when
Age	The recipients of the grant will benefit from new efficient heating systems which will add health benefits to older people and younger children. These groups are particularly at risk of the cold exacerbating underlying health conditions such as respiratory and cardiovascular problems. Children who are living in cold homes are significantly more likely to suffer from chest problems, asthma and bronchitis. Cold homes can	Positive	N/a	N/A	N/A

Equality Impact Assessment



	slow down recovery following discharge from hospital, when people are already at risk, and can lead to repeat admissions due to unsuitable housing. It has been estimated that housing-related ill health costs the NHS £2.5bn per year				
Disability	<p>For one individual, with very specific care and support needs, there is the need for bespoke accommodation in the medium term (3-6 months development timescale).</p> <p>The county council has agreed capital funding, in partnership with funding from National Health Service England NHSE to purchase and adapt a single storey bungalow in Norwich. The accommodation needs to be suitable for the accommodation of this person, who has been a Norwich resident with family in Norwich but who is currently in an out of county hospital due to a lack of appropriate accommodation.</p>	Positive	N/A	N/A	N/A

Equality Impact Assessment

Gender reassignment	No impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Marriage and civil partnership	No impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pregnancy and maternity	No impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Race/ethnicity	No impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Religion and belief	No impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sex/gender	No impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sexual orientation	No impact identified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other groups low-income households,	The recipients of the grant will benefit from new efficient heating systems which will reduce heating bills for low-income households	Positive	N/A	N/A	N/A

What evidence and data has been used for this assessment, including community engagement and consultation?

Nationally there were large increases in excess winter deaths between December 2019 - March 2020 (COVID deaths excluded from the numbers). An estimated 28,300 excess winter deaths occurred in England and Wales over this period, which was 19.6% higher than winter 2018 to 2019. This was likely down to respiratory issues.

Additionally, within fuel poor households there are those who have increased vulnerability such as the very old or the very young and those with long-term health conditions. Everyone can be negatively impacted by living in a cold home, but these vulnerable groups are particularly at risk of the cold exacerbating underlying health conditions such as respiratory and cardiovascular problems. Children who are living in cold homes are significantly more likely to suffer from chest problems, asthma and bronchitis. Cold homes can slow down recovery following discharge from hospital, when people are already at risk, and can lead to repeat admissions due to unsuitable housing. It has been estimated that housing-related ill health costs the NHS £2.5bn per year

In Norwich, there are on average 71 excess winter deaths a year.

Equality Impact Assessment

In consultation with the environmental strategy team, it is believed that replacing old ineffective, but working boilers, would be the most effective solution in the immediate term.

There are funding streams already available to replace boilers that are no longer working, but often people in fuel poverty who have working but expensive to run systems are unable to raise funds to bring down their heating costs.

Alternative heating schemes, such as air source heat pumps, were considered but disregarded due to their current cost, the insufficient infrastructure for the delivery of them and the suitability of houses identifiable for their installation.

The home improvement team has an established framework of contractors who have the capability and capacity to deliver boiler replacements immediately.

Funding towards insulation measures was also considered, however, with the exception of double glazing, there are already effective grant schemes in place that the council could signpost to, if needed.

The councils Council Tax Reduction scheme is identified as being an effective and efficient way of targeting those residents who have already been assessed as having limited finances which would prevent them from modernising and upgrading their homes.

The Equality Impact Assessment must be able to influence the proposal and decision. This section asks how your understanding of the impacts identified has influenced your proposal, and how the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment can be measured going forward.

How has the equality impact assessment informed or changed the proposal?

The evidence outlined above relating to the older and younger people suffering as a result of unaffordable or inadequate heating has led us to focus this unspent funding in the way proposed.

What actions have been identified going forward?

N/A

How will the impact of your proposal and actions be measured moving forward?

The success (or failure) of the grant will inform future policy decisions for any amendments, additions, reviews or rewrites of the council's financial assistance policy

Equality Impact Assessment

Officer completing assessment	Kevin Ayers	Date	14/02/2022
Senior leadership team sponsor	Louise Rawsthorne	Date	25/03/2022
Equality lead (strategy team)	Emma Smith	Date	28/02/2022