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| Report To: | Education & Communities Committee | Date: 10 September 2013 |
| Report By: | John Arthur, Head of Safer & Inclusive Communities | Report No: EDUC/59/13/DH |
| Contact Officer: | Drew Hall, Service Manager, Community Safety & Wellbeing | Contact No: 01475 714272 |
| Subject: | Scheme of Assistance Proposed Amendment | |

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek Committee approval to amend the Inverclyde Council Scheme of Assistance (the Section 72 Statement) to expand the housing options available to individuals and households who have particular needs.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 All local authorities in Scotland have to publish a Scheme of Assistance (SOA) for home owners in terms of Section 72 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006. The SOA sets out the advice, information, practical assistance, and financial assistance available from Inverclyde Council and the SOA requires updating and amendment from time to time to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. The financial assistance aspect of the SOA was formerly delivered through Private Sector Housing Grants and is now an integral part of the SOA.
- 2.2 An increasing number of requests for complex and costly adaptations are being received by the Safer & Inclusive Communities Service through referrals from the Occupational Therapists working in conjunction with Inverclyde Care & Repair. Given the limited budget available for works of this type under the SOA, it is considered appropriate to review the options open to home owners and to Inverclyde Council in order to address these complex needs and challenging circumstances.
- 2.3 Meetings have been held with the Inverclyde Centre for Independent Living (ICIL) and Inverclyde Care & Repair (IC&R) with a view to finding an equitable arrangement for owners who require SOA grant funding but whose needs cannot be met by conventional means. The options available under these circumstances are set out in paragraphs 5.1 – 5.3 of this report.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Committee:
 - a) note the current position in respect of requests for grants under the Inverclyde Council Scheme of Assistance (Section 72 Statement);
 - b) note the options available to home owners and to Inverclyde Council as set out in paragraphs 5.1 – 5.3 of this report; and
 - c) approve the proposed amendments to the administration of the Inverclyde Council Scheme of Assistance and remit the approved changes to the Head of Safer & Inclusive Communities for implementation.

John Arthur, Head of Safer & Inclusive Communities

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Inverclyde Council fully supports the objective of assisting individuals and households with particular needs to remain in their own homes and their own communities by making grants available for suitable equipment and adaptations. Mandatory grants of between 80% and 100% are available to home owners where works are needed to allow them to make best use of their present homes and these grants are provided under the SOA. However, it is also possible under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 for local authorities to offer practical assistance to allow owners to find an alternative home that would better suit their needs. This could be through financial assistance to help with the purchase of another home, or by covering removal costs and other expenses involved in a move of house.
- 4.2 The Safer & Inclusive Communities Service is an associate member of the Inverclyde Common Housing Register and the service together with Inverclyde CHCP enjoys a well-established and beneficial working relationship with the housing associations (RSLs) operating in Inverclyde. There are nominations arrangements in place with RSLs and referrals from Inverclyde Council / Inverclyde CHCP are always given full consideration. In some circumstances, a move to an RSL property that already meets the needs of an individual or household, or that can be readily adapted to meet their needs would be an appropriate means of practical assistance under the SOA.
- 4.3 Meetings have been held with ICIL and IC&R to identify suitable means of expanding the options available to home owners with complex needs where it is impractical or inordinately costly to adapt their present homes, or to provide appropriate equipment. An equitable system of distributing the limited SOA grant funding available is needed and the options for doing so are set out in paragraphs 5.1 – 5.3 below.

5.0 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE INVERCLYDE COUNCIL SOA

- 5.1 All requests for grants of £10,000 or more under the SOA are automatically referred to the Service Manager, Community Safety & Wellbeing for review in terms of best value, value for money, and for budget monitoring purposes. An increasing number of people with complex needs are seeking grant assistance to have adaptations, or to have equipment installed to allow them to remain in their present homes. Unfortunately, in many of these cases the topography of the Inverclyde area makes it extremely difficult and very costly (typically in excess of £20,000 or more) to provide a safe and effective solution. A typical example would be to provide level access for a wheelchair user where their home is on a hillside and a ramp would not be feasible due to the steepness of the slope(s) involved. Under these circumstances it would be appropriate to consider a move to another house that currently is, or that could be made, suitable for their needs.
- 5.2 Practical assistance can include partially funding the purchase of an alternative house that meets the needs of the individual or household in the private sector, or by nomination or referral to an RSL with suitable housing stock. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 permits local authorities to make SOA funding available to assist with sourcing alternative housing where this is considered the most appropriate solution in all the circumstances. Referral or nomination to partner RSLs is standard practice across Scotland and this option should be available to all those seeking to address their housing needs together with financial assistance to help with moving house.
- 5.3 The purpose of the SOA grant funding is to allow people to make the best use of their present homes wherever possible. The topography of the Inverclyde area combined with the incidence of exposure to severe weather makes it impractical to provide expensive engineering and mechanical solutions to commonly occurring access problems that can lead to regular and costly repair and maintenance issues. It is therefore proposed that all applications with complex needs should be considered for alternative housing as part of the assessment process and that financial assistance should be offered to allow them to take up this option. A ceiling of £20,000 is proposed in order to allow for an equitable distribution of larger and smaller works and to accommodate the wide range of needs met by SOA grant funding.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Strategic

Support for people with particular needs to find suitable homes is a key element of the Inverclyde Local Housing Strategy 2011-2016 and Inverclyde Council wishes to ensure that as many people as possible receive assistance under the SOA. It is therefore of vital importance that we continue to support owners within the limited SOA budget available.

6.2 Financial

The financial situation is as noted above. Committee approval is therefore being sought to make the best use of the limited funding available to allow as many owners as possible to benefit from the range of assistance available under the SOA.

6.3 Legal

There are no legal implications for Inverclyde Council arising from this report.

6.4 Human Resources

There are no Personnel implications arising from this report.

6.5 Equalities

When delivering services to our customers, full cognisance is taken of equality and diversity processes and procedures.

6.6 Repopulation

The widening of housing options and choices is intended to support and complement the work of the SOA Outcome Delivery Group on Repopulation, which is seeking to stabilise the existing population and to attract new people to the Inverclyde Council area by ensuring that the housing available within Inverclyde meets particular needs.

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

7.1 This report has been prepared in consultation with the following:

- Inverclyde Centre for Independent Living (Inverclyde CHCP);
- Inverclyde Care & Repair Service; and
- Chief Financial Officer, Inverclyde Council

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Inverclyde Local Housing Strategy 2011 – 2016; report to Safe, Sustainable Communities Committee, 25 October 2011.

SSC
25.10.11
P698

Scheme of Assistance Budget 2013/14; report to Education & Communities Committee, 12 March 2013.

ECC
12.03.13
P190