

Report of the Assistant Director – Housing & Community Safety

Amendments to the Private Sector Assistance Policy

Summary

1. This report asks the Executive Member to note the receipt of £1.101m from the Better Care Fund (BCF) for the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and approve a number of changes to the Private Sector Assistance Policy to ensure York residents are able to maximise the funding available.

Recommendations:

2. The Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods is asked to:
 - a) Note receipt of £1.101m from the BCF complimented by the contribution from the Council's own capital budget.
 - b) Agree Option 1, to amend to the Private Sector Assistance Policy (the policy) and introduce a number of changes to the policy around the DFG element, including some transitional arrangements.

Reason: To ensure that the increased DFG funding allocation is used effectively and offers a prompt and streamlined service which aims to prevent, reduce and delay need for NHS commissioned and Social Care services.

Background Information

3. As a Housing Authority the Council has a statutory duty to provide DFGs. These grants are up to £30k and help disabled residents living in the private sector (homeowners and private tenants including housing association tenants). The grants fund a wide range of adaptations, typically level access showers, lifts and extensions. These adaptations are administered by the Council's own Housing Standards and

Adaptations Service with the support of the Occupational Therapy Service.

4. Last year, on the 25 February 2016 the Department of Health wrote to all Directors of Social Services confirming the levels of funding to be allocated for the DFGs for financial year. The level of funding was some £461k higher than previous years. The Department of Health has again confirmed its funding for this year 2017/18 on 20 April and has again increased the funding levels by a further £82K.
5. In addition the extra funding was released by Government in tandem with the Local Government Ombudsman's Report, *Making a House a Home: Local Authorities and Disabled Adaptations 2016*. That report sets out a range of national issues associated with the poor delivery of DFGs by many Councils such as long waiting times for assistance. Extra funds have been provided to help address these issues and speed up process.
6. In response to these, we have carried out a review of the disabled facilities grant. We know from the excellent feedback from our customers we have high satisfaction levels where they have been receipt of grant aided work. Typical comments include "*Everything that was done for me was brilliant, I hadn't been able to have a proper shower for over a year. Life is much better*"

However, concerns have been expressed and the DFG review confirmed that there were issues including:

- a) The speed of the service from the initial visit by the occupational therapist through to the end process.
- b) The complexity of the process with multiple stages and routes.
- c) That non-dedicated staff find it difficult to balance competing demands.

Therefore, we have developed an action plan to simplify and speed up the process.

7. Part of that action plan was to review the policy considering best practise.

Proposed changes to the Disabled Facilities Grant

8. A copy of the proposed policy is attached as Appendix A. The key changes are intended to both speed up the process by reducing

administration relating to the means test and to broaden the scope of the work undertaken.

Removal of the means test for low value work

9. Where a disabled household is in receipt of certain benefits, they are not required to make any financial contribution towards the cost of the DFG. However, households who are not on a means tested benefit and who have savings and/or income may have to make a contribution.
10. The administration of the means test does take some significant time both in terms of the work carried out by the team and the customer having to find various proofs (e.g. bank/building society statements, wage slips, pension statements, war pensions and information about non-means tested benefits) which delays the process.
11. The proposal is to scrap the need for means test for all works that have a total value of less than £5000. The change shall greatly speed up the time taken to process DFG applications for the benefit of the customer. In addition, this change shall free up capacity within the housing standards and adaptations team enabling them to deal with the increased volume of work as a result of the increase in the growth levels of funding.

Broadening the scope of Discretionary Assistance

12. We are also seeking permission to broaden the work covered by the grant. Typically these works include the cost of undertaking repairs to enable the DFG to proceed and include items such as:
 - a. Undertaking works to resolve a Category 1 Hazard such as excess cold
 - b. Undertaking electrical repair works to a home where a new level access shower or lift is provided
 - c. Undertaking the cost of an asbestos survey and removal of any asbestos.
13. As the above changes are discretionary and subject to the Council's annual budget setting procedure and the availability of sufficient levels of external funding. All such payments are at the Council's discretion and will be removed once available funds are exhausted.

Consultation

14. The proposals highlighted within this report have been worked up by the DFG review team and have also considered a variety of good practice reports include those referred to paragraph 5 and also to *Home*

Adaptations for Disabled people : A detailed guide to related legislation, guidance and good practice: DCLG/Home Adaptations Consortium: 2013.

Options

15 There are two options being put forward:

- Option 1- To amend the Policy
- Option 2 – Not to amend the Policy

Analysis

Option 1

16. By amending the policy we aim to ensure that the increased DFG funding allocation is used effectively and offers a prompt and streamlined service which aims to prevent, reduce and delay need for NHS commissioned and Social Care services. We will be able to deliver timely and quality services for an increased number of disabled residents reducing the need for those most vulnerable to be put at risk and live safely. Carers will be able to safely care for residents.

Option 2

17. If we don't seek to amend the policy the Council will be significantly challenged to spend the increase allocation and to help disabled residents. There could be a significant risk to our reputation that we have not taken this opportunity to review and improve our services for a wider group of disabled residents.

Council Plan

18 The proposed changes to the Policy product will support and contribute towards a number of the Administration's council key priorities:

- A prosperous city for all
- A focus on frontline services
- A council that listens to residents

Implications

19 The implications arising directly from this report are:

- **Financial** – The budget for the DFG was set by Budget Council in February 2017 based on grant income of £1.003m. The increase in

grant will be included in the capital outturn report along with requests for slippage for Executive Members to agree. This change in policy does not have any financial implications.

- **Procurement** – None
- **Human Resources** – Currently we are considering the resources implications. These would be funded from the fee income.
- **Equalities Implications** – Attached is the Community Impact Assessment (Appendix B)
- **Legal Implications.** – Article 3 of The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 enables local housing authorities to provide discretionary assistance for the purpose of improving living conditions. Assistance may be in any form and may include grants.

Risk Management

20 This amendment enables the Council to introduce financial assistance in line with the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002. We have, in line with the order, considered where we should focus our efforts and have introduced a policy initiative that is best suited to the circumstances.

Contact Details

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Wards Affected: All				
For further information please contact the authors of the report				

Annexes

Appendix A – Proposed Private Sector Assistance Policy

Appendix B – Community Impact Assessment

Abbreviations

BCF – Better Care Fund

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

DFG – Disabled Facilities Grant

NHS – National Health Service