



Policy and Resources – 11 April 2011

Private Sector Housing – Disabled Facilities Grants

Purpose of report

This report sets out the proposed funding for private sector housing requirements from April 2011.

Attachment(s)

Appendix 1: Equalities Impact Assessment

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 22 February 2010 (minute 367 refers), the committee agreed that the capital budget for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding would be set at £300,000 for 2010-11. Members recognised that while the provision of DFG grants is mandatory, the legislation allows for payments to be deferred for 12 months and that by doing so the DFG allocation for the subsequent years would be fully committed.
- 1.2 At the meeting on 7 June 2010 (minute 36 refers) members resolved that the grant of £299,000 from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for 'Private Sector Renewal' (formally known as "Decent Homes"), be used for DFG and some discretionary repairs. The private sector renewal grant funding ceased at the end of 2010-11.
- 1.3 On 23 March 2011 we were advised by DCLG that Ministers had agreed that remaining DFG allocation under spend would be allocated to equally to all local authorities as un-ring fenced money. East Northamptonshire Council's allocation was £4,100.
- 1.4 Environmental Services has been advised that the council's funding allocation from the government for 2011-2012 will be the same as the previous year of £167,000. From April this funding will no longer be ring fenced. A review has been undertaken, commissioned by the DCLG on DFG allocations and the calculation for these to each region.

2.0 Disabled Facilities Grant allocation methodology and means test: Final Report

- 2.1 This report was published at the end of February 2011 and proposed changes to how the allocation for each authority is calculated and reviewed the means testing part of DFG grants process. The report detailed two amended methodologies for calculating local authority allocations and a review of the means testing criteria. It included a combination of different proposals to address criticisms of the current means testing and discussed the consideration of introducing an equity test for homeowners.
- 2.2 The two models proposed were titled the "full model" and "simplified model" and they include consideration of the following:
 - number of claimants of disability related benefits
 - proportion of the population aged 60 and over
 - proportion of people on means tested benefits
 - proportion of the housing stock not owned by the local authority
 The simplified model uses all of the above criteria except the proportion on means tested benefits.

- 2.3 The review of the current means testing used as part of the DFG application process looked at a number of suggestions including:
- Removing means testing for works under £6,000
 - Using actual housing costs of the applicant rather than a set standard rate
 - Setting the allowable income limit to basic income support/pension credit levels plus 25%
 - Removing the tapers from the loan generation formula
- It also considered the use of a combination of some or all of these suggestions and proposes that an equity test is also considered. A decision has not been made at this time regarding which method is to be used in the future.

- 2.4 Both models show an increase in allocations to the East Midlands region with the simplified model having a slightly larger increase. East Northamptonshire is not highlighted as an authority that will receive significantly more or less of the allocation than currently.

3.0 Current Spending and Demand

- 3.1 During 2010-2011 the DFG budget was £679,000. This included the £299,000 of the private sector renewal grant approved by members in June 2010 to be used to fund DFGs.
- 3.2 The additional sum of £299,000 only became available to spend in September 2010. Due to the lateness in the year for this money to be allocated officers have not been able to complete all committed works by the end of March. As a result £253,000 will need to be carried over to the 2011-2012 budget.
- 3.3 There have been 93 disabled facilities grants works completed this year. The completed works amounted to £425,876.
- 3.4 At present there are 18 committed applications totalling £109,000 and 55 referrals that are being progressed to applications totalling approximately £195,000. These works must be completed in 2011-2012. This will mean that if the £253,000 is not carried over to 2011-2012 the budget of £300,000 agreed at budget setting will be fully committed.
- 3.5 Carrying over the £253,000 will result in 2011-2012 budget being already committed to £51,000 of DFG works in April leaving £249,000 for the rest of 2011-2012 DFG applications

4.0 Case Review Panel

- 4.1 At the committee's meeting on 22 February 2010 meeting (minute 367 refers) proposals for a case review panel to be set up in order to prioritise DFG applications further were considered. It was suggested that the panel would be able to set priorities and review individual cases on appeal to the panel. The rationale for this was to enable the council to manage the limited budget better and to provide an opportunity for individuals to seek a review of their case and priority.
- 4.2 Members resolved to consider the introduction of a panel in 2011 with a report to be submitted to committee detailing the terms of reference, frequency of panels, staffing implications including member involvement.

5 Proposals

5.1 Option 1

- 5.1.1 To approve the carry forward of £253,000 of committed spend based on the 2010-2011 budget to ensure payment for mandatory applications are not paid out of the

2011-2012 budget. This leaves a shortfall of £51,000 that will have to be paid out of the new budget.

5.1.2 To include in the money to be carry forward the additional allocated funding on the 23 March 2011 by DCLG of £4,100.

5.1.3 Consideration by members of approving an additional £51,000 from reserves to cover the remainder of the committed works to allow 2011-2012 budget of £300,000 to remain unaffected.

5.1.4 This would ensure that all valid applications currently on the list would receive their adaptations and those payments are made without affecting the budget for 2011-12 applications. The council would still not be in able to promote the availability of the grant to vulnerable groups as this would further increase the demand on a limited budget. No discretionary grants could be offered requiring the council's grant policy to be revised.

5.1.5 Funding for DFGs is made up of £167,000 Government funding from DCLG and the remainder is through East Northamptonshire contributions.

5.2 **Option 2**

5.2.1 To approve the carry forward of £253,000 of committed spend based on the 2010-2011 budget to ensure payment for mandatory applications are not paid out of the 2011-2012 budget. This leaves a shortfall of £51,000 that will have to be paid out of the new budget.

5.2.2 To include in the money to be carry forward the additional allocated funding on the 23 March 2011 by DCLG of £4,100.

5.2.3 The budget of £300,000 remains with an additional amount of £100,000 to be allocated as a priority need budget that the review panel would assess for. Any approved grants after this amount would be deferred for payment until the next financial year unless further assessed by a review panel in that year.

5.2.4 At this level of funding a proportion of applicants may not receive their grant funding for up 12 months from it being approved however for those cases deemed the most serious the review panel would be required to assess their case. It is unlikely that the level of demand will decrease nor will our DFG funding allocation from the government increase, as a result applicants may have to wait longer than the statutory 12 month maximum period. No discretionary grants could be made and the council's grant policy would require amending.

5.2.5 Funding for DFGs is made up of £167,000 funding from DCLG and the remainder is through East Northamptonshire contributions.

5.3 **Option 3**

5.3.1 To approve the carry forward of £253,000 of committed spend based on the 2010-2011 budget to ensure payment for mandatory applications are not paid out of the 2011-2012 budget. This leaves a shortfall of £51,000 that will have to be paid out of the new budget.

5.3.2 To include in the money to be carry forward the additional allocated funding on the 23 March 2011 by DCLG of £4,100.

5.3.3 That members agree to keep the total DFG funding at £300,000, as resolved at the October 2009 Policy and Resources Committee meeting (minute number 367), and require proposals for the Case Review Panel to be brought for consideration by the committee at the next meeting of this committee.

- 5.3.4 Funding for DFGs is made up of £167,000 funding from DCLG and the remainder is through East Northamptonshire contributions.
- 5.4 In addition to any of the options chosen above, it is recommended that the Head of Environmental Services writes again to the new Head of Public Health and the new consortium to take over from the primary care trusts to request their assistance with funding DFGs to prevent vulnerable residents requiring greater medical and residential care.

6.0 Important Issues to Consider

- 6.1 The provision of DFGs is mandatory under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. East Northamptonshire has a growing aging population, this was identified during the last housing stock condition survey in 2005, which showed that the authority had, at the time, 34,500 dwellings and that 79% of that stock was owner occupied. The profile of residents showed that 25.7% of the heads of households within East Northamptonshire were aged between 60-74, above the national average of 20.4%

7.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 7.1 An equality impact assessment (EIA) was completed in February 2011 and can be found at appendix 1.

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 As stated in section 6 above the provision of DFGs is mandatory for every local authority. Timescales are set in the legislation for approving applications, payments and deferring of payments.

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 As the provision of DFGs is mandatory, if we limited the amount of grant funding available, refused applications based on lack of funding or were unable to complete grants within the specified time due to funding constraints, residents could take their complaints to The Local Government Ombudsman and may also wish to complain to their elected member, member of parliament, or to the Secretary of State.

10.0 Financial Implications

- 10.1 The demand for DFGs is not decreasing, however funding from central government is and the ability to allocate funds locally is also restricted at this time. Providing additional funding will help to alleviate the waiting list of valid applications but will require strict financial monitoring in addition to monitoring by officers and potential application reviews at case panels.
- 10.2 The risk of not increasing the budget to reflect demand may result in the inability to approve grants within the year they are applied for requiring them to be carried over to the next financial year. This will allocate the budget as soon as the new financial year begins and prevent the council from approving new grants.

11.0 Corporate Outcomes

- 11.1 **Good Quality of Life**
DFGs provide vital funding to residents within the district to make essential adaptations to their property to enable them to continue to live independently and to protect them from harm as a result of a disability or illness. DFGs can provide simple adaptations such as stair lifts and level access showers to ground floor extensions, and hoists.

11.2 Good Reputation

As DFGs are mandatory, the effectiveness of this service is essential in maintaining a good reputation with the residents and external contractors and the medical profession, such as occupational therapists and general practitioners. DFGs have set timescales for approving grants upon receipt of a valid application and payments of grants. Ensuring that this service is able to meet as much of the demand as possible maintains the council's reputation.

11.3 High Quality Service Delivery

The administration of the DFG programme has been improved over the years to ensure that we provide the best level of service possible. Officers attend and complete the forms with the applicants to prevent delays and concerns on completing the forms wrongly, deal with all minor works such as stair lifts in house and within a fast turn around and utilise the services of care and repair to administer complex grant works which require technical drawings and greater case officer involvement. Service delivery can only be maintained at a high quality if the funding provided seeks to meet the demand.

12.0 Recommendations

12.1 The committee is recommended to:

- (1) Determine which option detailed in section 5 above shall be applied

(Reason – To determine budget position for 2011-2012)

- (2) Require full proposals for the Case Review Panel to be brought back to the next meeting of this committee

(Reason – If agreed by members that this option should be progressed)

- (3) Agree that the Head of Environmental Services should write again to the new Head of Public Health and to Nene Commissioning to request their assistance with funding DFGs to prevent vulnerable residents requiring greater medical and residential care.

(Reason – To express East Northamptonshire Council's concern at the level of funding and changes in public health)

Legal	Power: Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers:					
Person Originating Report: Jenny Walker, Environmental Protection Manager					
Date: 30 March 2011					
CFO		MO		CX	

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)



EIA Initial Screening Form – service or function

1. Name of Service or Function:	
2. Name and Job title / role of person completing Initial Screening:	Julia Smith and Jenny Walker
3. What is the main purpose of the Service or Function?	Disabled Facilities Grants
4. List the main activities of the Service or Function:	Mandatory provision of disabled facilities grants to vulnerable residents within the district to enable them to use essential facilities in their home
5. Who are the main beneficiaries of the Service or Function?	People with physical disabilities to enable them to remain in their own home.
6. How is the success of the Service or Function measured?	In team plan turnaround times are measured for non complex grants, complex ones are given to care and repair to do within 12 months. The allocation of funding is monitored and additional funds are bid for. Meet legal requirements for determination.
7. Are equality monitoring systems in place?	No <i>(If yes give details)</i>

8. Use the following table to indicate using a ✓:

- a) Where you think that the Service or Function could have a positive impact on any of the groups or contribute to promoting equality of opportunity or improving relations within equality groups.
- b) Where you think that the Service or Function could have a negative impact on any of the equality groups i.e. it could disadvantage them.
- c) Where you think that the Service or Function could have a neutral impact on any of the equality group i.e. no impact

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
Gender:				
Women/Girls			✓	
Men/Boys			✓	
Transgender people			✓	
Sexual Orientation:				
Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals			✓	
Race/Ethnicity:				
White British people			✓	
White non-British people (including Irish people)			✓	
Asian or Asian British people			✓	
Black or Black British people			✓	
People of mixed heritage			✓	
Chinese people			✓	
Travellers (Gypsy/Roma/Irish heritage)			✓	
People from other ethnic groups			✓	

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
People who do not have English as their first language		✓		Majority of information is in English, and face to face communication is in English.
Disability:				
Physical impairment, e.g mobility issues which mean using a wheelchair or crutches.	✓			Helping them to remain in their homes
Sensory impairment, e.g blind/having a serious visual impairment, deaf/having a serious hearing impairment.	✓			Helping them to remain in their homes
Mental health condition, e.g depression or schizophrenia			✓	
Learning disability/difficulty, e.g. Down's syndrome or dyslexia, or cognitive impairment such as autistic spectrum disorder		✓		Form filling maybe negative impact, and information provision in writing.
Long-standing illness or health condition, e.g. cancer, HIV. Diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy			✓	
Other health problems or impairments (<i>please specify if appropriate</i>)			✓	
Age:				
Older People (60+)			✓	
Children and Young People (see guidance for definition)			✓	
Religion/Belief:				
Christian			✓	
Buddhist			✓	
Hindu			✓	
Jewish			✓	
Muslim			✓	

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
Sikh			✓	
Other religion (including holding no belief)			✓	
Other Potentially Affected Groups				
Rural Isolation - People who live in rural areas e.g isolated geographically, lack of internet access			✓	
Socio-economic Exclusion – e.g. people who are on benefits, have low educational attainment, single parents, people living in poor quality housing, people who have poor access to services, the unemployed or any combination of these and the other protected strands	✓	✓	✓	Visit made to each applicant to complete the forms with them to prevent any delays in the application process and to make it easier for anyone who has a disability or unable to read and write. Positive as improve housing to those with poor quality housing and their use of the property and ability to remain there.
Any other potentially affected groups (<i>please specify</i>)			✓	
9. If you have indicated that there is a negative impact on any group:				
a) Is that impact against legislation?	Yes	No		
b) What is the level of impact?	High	Low		
10. Could you minimise or remove any negative impact that is of low significance?	How? Could provide translated information. People assist in filling out forms such as OT's, Officers or family members.			

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
				Information available on website.
11. Could you improve a positive impact of the Service or Function?				Yes if more funding streams were available could assist more people and have quicker response times.
12. If there is no evidence that the Service or Function promotes equality of opportunity or improved relations, could it be adapted so that it does?				No
Head of Service signature				
Date of Initial Screening:	11 February 2011			