

## **DISABLED FACILITY GRANTS (DFG) UPDATE**

**Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Ray Stanley  
**Responsible Officer:** Simon Newcombe, Public Health and Professional Services Manager

**Reason for Report:** To provide an update on the current position with the disabled facilities grant (DFG) programme

**RECOMMENDATION:** To note the contents of this report.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The provision of grants to adapt properties for disabled people to allow them to live independently in their homes links directly to the aspirations of the corporate plan. In particular, Homes – Facilitating the housing growth that Mid Devon needs, including affordable homes; and Community - Promote physical activity, health and wellbeing.

**Financial Implications:** Funding for the DFG programme is provided through a government allocation called the Better Care Fund. The allocation is administered to the County Council who are then responsible for distributing the funding to the District Councils. The allocation is currently sufficient to cover the local demand and therefore there should no longer be a need for the Council to add its own funding to top up the allocation as it has done historically.

**Legal Implications:** The Council has a statutory duty to administer the DFG programme under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

**Risk Assessment:** The two main risks associated with the DFG programme relate to the funding. Failing to deliver the programme may result in funding being returned to the Better Care Fund; insufficient funds may result in the Council being unable to deliver its duty. The risk in both cases is considered low based on current performance.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** The Disabled facilities grant programme positively impacts on the protected characteristics of age and disability. It does not have an impact on the other protected characteristics as these are not taken into account as part of the eligibility criteria for a grant.

### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 A number of changes have been made to the way in which the DFG programme is being administered by the private sector housing team and this report provides an update on the performance of the team.

### **2.0 Summary of changes**

2.1 During the summer of 2016 the existing process was fully reviewed identifying areas where there was scope for streamlining and updating.

## 2.2 The main areas identified were:

- Review the method of providing referrals
- Review the fast track process
- Look at the option of requiring one quote to save time.
- Introduce a triage approach where a preliminary means test is issued to the client before the grant progresses. Once the form is returned, an initial means test is undertaken and the client is advised of the result so they can decide if they wish to go ahead.
- Introduce a surveyor to undertake site visits and produce plans and schedule for agreement by the council and client.
- Application form to be completed by an officer once all quotes and permissions have been received.
- Introduce a form for the client to complete to agree the works and identify the method of getting quotes.
- Agree with procurement the use of the Housing depot (Old Road) as an option with only one quote.
- Introduce a method of controlling the input of information into the system. Centralise a significant part of the process with one officer. Identify the elements that each person is responsible for so that officers are more familiar with the system. Introduce a part of the process conducted by the lead officer only to ensure the records are properly reviewed before approval.
- Notify land registry on completion of the grant when a charge needs to be added to the property, not before.

2.3 By October 2016 all the above points had been introduced and a new process was fully implemented. This included new forms, letters, and certificates. The grant conditions were updated to reflect the legislation and a new process with timelines was introduced. The surveying skills in the Housing building services were utilised to provide plans and schedules of work and a service level agreement put in place.

## 3.0 Performance

3.1 The success of these changes has been measured in respect of the time taken to complete different aspects of the grant process.

3.2 The table below shows the comparative performance for the time taken to deal with a referral when it is received to the point a valid application is made and the time taken to approve a grant once the application has been received.

There is a statutory time frame of 6 months to approve an application for a grant.

### DFG performance monitoring – Timescales 2016/17

	October to March 2016/17*	April to September 2016	2016/17	2015/16
Average number of days/weeks from receipt of the client Statement of Needs (SON) (Occupational Therapist referral) to receipt of valid application	63 days/ 9 weeks	117 days/ 17 weeks	98 days/ 14 weeks	137 days/ 19.5 weeks
Average number of days from valid application to approval	3 days	8 days	5 days	7 days

\*New procedures introduced October 2016

#### 4.0 Budget

4.1 In 2016/17 the total government allocation for Mid Devon through the Better Care Fund for disabled facilities grants was £561,385. In common with all Devon district authorities it was agreed by the Mid Devon and Devon County Council that 10% of the allocation would be retained by the County Council for redistribution to those areas where there was additional demand.

4.2 This meant that Mid Devon received an allocation of £505,246. The private sector housing team spent and committed a total of £551,580 and therefore was able to apply for the 10% that had been retained and this has been successfully invoiced. In total the team committed 98% of the original allocation.

4.3 In 2015/16 the total government allocation was £590,000 and the team spent and committed only £360,000 which was 61% of the allocation. Therefore performance has significantly improved over the last year.

4.4 In 2015/16 61 referrals were received and in 2016/17 64 referrals were received. Therefore the difference in delivery is not related to a drop in demand but is likely to be as a result of the efficiency of the service at the time.

#### 5.0 Conclusion and next steps

5.1 Overall the performance of the team in the delivery of the DFG programme has improved significantly over the last year. This has resulted in better customer service ensuring that all customers in need of an adaptation are being dealt with efficiently.

5.2 The Better Care Fund allocation for 2017/18 has now been announced as £614,684. We are working with Devon County Council and the other districts on a county wide housing assistance policy which considers alternative grants and assistance to help disabled people in a way that better meets the

priorities of the Better Care Fund (BCF). Once a draft has been agreed in principle this will be brought back to the PDG for discussion.

- 5.3 As a minimum we anticipate having adequate capital funding from the BCF to meet demand and therefore our statutory DFG administration duties.

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**Circulation of the Report:**                   **Cabinet Member**  
  **Director of Operations**  
  **Leadership Team**

**List of Background Papers: None**