

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel considers the draft Disabled Facilities Grant - Financial Assistance Policy and makes a recommendation to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report presents the Council's draft Disabled Facilities Grant - Financial Assistance policy. This is a refreshed policy to take into account the latest guidance and best practice, and also to reflect grant increases due to the increased costs of works, requiring a more flexible approach to the award of funding. The proposed Policy is attached at Appendix 1.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) provide funding to improve accessibility and enable people to remain living independently in their own homes.
- 3.2 The Council has a statutory duty to administer DFGs. The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996; as amended by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) requires all Local Authorities to have a published document in place setting out the Council's policy on the aims and application of the local grant scheme.
- 3.3 The Council receives funding each year from the Government via the Better Care Fund to deliver the scheme in private housing. The budget for 23/24 is £1.2m. DFGs delivered to the Council's housing stock are funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The budget for 23/24 is £950k.
- 3.4 In 22/23 the Council delivered 97 and 84 DFGs in the Council's housing stock and other housing respectively.
- 3.5 In accordance with the regulations the maximum amount of grant allowed for each referral is up to £30,000, or other such amount determined by the Secretary of State. The Council is receiving an increasing number of complex referrals and requests for assistance, whereby senior officer discretion is increasingly being applied to increase the grant funding available to provide effective solutions. The number of requests for extensions (bathrooms or extra bedrooms) to existing housing is also increasing. Coupled with an increase in building costs, current policy limits are no longer able to provide adequate funding in an increasing number of referrals.
- 3.6 The revised policy proposes increases to existing spending limits to reduce the need for senior officer discretion on individual cases, which are becoming more common place.

4. Housing Financial Assistance Policy Key Components

- 4.1 The eligibility requirements, scope of works, and the general requirements governing mandatory DFGs are prescribed in legislation, and the Council is unable to deviate from these requirements.

- 4.2 However, the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) enables the Council to offer discretionary funding to promote independent living and wellbeing.
- 4.3 This discretionary funding can be delivered through several separate grants, covering different scenarios or criteria. Currently the Council has a number of separate discretionary grants available with maximum grant awards previously agreed by Members. It is proposed to increase several of these amounts to reflect inflationary increases in building costs and the increase in complex cases, which often require additional discretionary funding, on top of mandatory maximum allowances, to deliver effective adaptation schemes for disabled household members.
- 4.4 Whilst there are a number of discretionary funding elements within the proposed policy, in reality, discretionary funding is only ever granted in a small number of cases. In 22/23 the average spend on a DFG was £9,242. Discretionary funding above the mandatory DFG of £30k, was applied to 4 cases from the HRA and 2 cases from the Better Care Fund.
- 4.5 A summary of proposed funding revisions are shown below:

Table 1: Existing discretionary grants and revisions:

Type of Grant or Loan	Previous maximum funding limit	Proposed maximum funding limit
Additional DFG Top Up Grant	£10,000	£30,000
DFG Top Up Loan	£15,000	£15,000
Home Removal Loan	£10,000	To be renamed Relocation Grant* to provide financial support to move - £5,000. No longer provided as a loan.
Client Contribution Loan	£10,000	£10,000
Palliative Care Grant	£5,000	Delete - To be renamed Safe, Suitable and Warm Grant** - £5,000
Home Repair Loan	£15,000	£15,000
Hospital Discharge Grant	£5,000	£7,500
Minor Disabled Adaptation Grant	£1,000	Delete - Amended to Safe, Suitable and Warm Grant** - £5,000
NFDC contribution grant – where the means test determines the applicant must contribute to the DFG but specific circumstances make this prohibitive	New Proposal	£10,000
*Relocation Grant	New Proposal	£5,000
**Safe, Suitable and Warm Grant	New Proposal	£5,000
Abortive Fees Grant – where an application is withdrawn but has incurred fees, to reduce the financial impact on vulnerable people.	New Proposal	£2,000

- 4.6 The proposed funding options will enable more flexibility in NFDC's approach to delivering adaptations, ensuring that those residents that need more extensive adaptations, or funds to allow them to access adaptations can be supported to do so and access funding available.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 This Financial Assistance Policy supports the Council's Private Sector Housing Policy to enable safe independent living, and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in preventing homelessness.
- 5.2 It is proposed that the DFG - Financial Assistance Policy be approved by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The funding for private properties including Registered Providers is through the Better Care Fund, allocated by Hampshire County Council. The Council currently has a reserve fund of £1.6m for private housing (a historic balance held and added to by an underspend during the covid pandemic) and any additional expenditure can be drawn down from this reserve, with financial approval.
- 6.2 The funding for Council owned properties is via the Housing Revenue Account, where £950k has been allocated for 23/24. It is not proposed to increase this budget.

7. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no crime & disorder implications arising from this policy

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 When carrying out adaptations in Council owned stock, the council aims to employ sustainable works and materials in line with its Greener Housing Strategy.

9. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are positive implications for those affected by particular characteristics and the award of grants under this Policy in bringing about much needed adaptations enabling people to remain independent in their properties for longer. The proposed revisions will enable more people to benefit from such works.
- 9.2 The revisions are designed to provide increased access to funding and increase the number of suitable solutions provided to vulnerable people.

For further information contact:

Richard Knott
Assistant Director – Housing
023 8028 5242
Richard.Knott@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Published documents

Kirsty Farmer
Private Sector Housing Manager
023 8028 5276
Kirstym.farmer@nfdc.gov.uk