
DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with an update on the delivery of the Council's Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) programme and journey for residents.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Council has a mandatory duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to provide financial assistance for essential adaptations in people's homes.
- 2.2 DFGs are statutory, means-tested grants of up to £30,000 and their main focus is to improve the quality of life and promote independence within the existing home setting. The DFG is used to discharge this statutory housing responsibility. Work carried out under a DFG ranges from low-cost work, such as stair-lifts and ramps, to major work such as extensions. The most common type of work is level-access showers.
- 2.3 The Council's DFG service is currently delivered by the Council's Private Housing Service.

3 SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Following a 2016/17 best value review of Essex County Council (ECC) 'discretionary services', ECC made the decision to no longer commission Home Improvement Services (HIA) across Essex, from 2017 onwards. As a consequence of this decision, the HIA, Papworth Trust, which was used by the Council to administer the local DFG service, made a business decision to close and terminate its agreement with Rochford, end date 31 March 2017.
- 3.2 Work was immediately progressed to ensure a smooth transition and continuation of service for all existing and new DFG clients and as part of this service change, two staff were TUPE'd across from the HIA, that is, a DFG caseworker and a surveyor. These new officers now form part of a new in-house DFG delivery service and work with the wider Environmental Health private housing team, adding resilience and capacity for this wider service.
- 3.3 The DFG journey for residents remains relatively unchanged and all clients continue to be supported with a one to one service, as provided by the DFG caseworker. The process is now more focused on 'self serve', where capacity allows, which gives more control back to the client, for example, choice of contractor, surveyor and, as a result, the journey time of all new cases that have been managed by the new in-house service, are averaging 21 weeks. This performance is within the national guidelines, which continue to recommend end-to-end times of 30 weeks for standard installation works.

- 3.4 A new DFG step by step procedural document is now in place and used to inform all clients. This has been reviewed and commented on by the Council audit and performance officers as good practice. The transition of service has also meant that relationships with existing contractors have had to be managed and a new suggested list of contractors is now available for clients. Customer satisfaction outcomes for contractor performance continue to score highly at 93% and comments include: *‘Work was carried out to a great level, the contractors were brilliant and professional at all times, nothing was too much for them, the difference it makes to my daughter has been life changing’*.

Appendix A: DFG step by step procedures – summarising the new DFG journey.

- 3.5 Earlier in 2016, as part of the ongoing review of the Council’s DFG journey, best practice was explored with neighbouring local authorities, which resulted in a pilot arrangement being tested with Basildon Borough Council. This arrangement was not continued, because Basildon was unable to provide an ongoing service, due to staff changes. Rochford has subsequently offered Basildon the support of the Council’s new DFG surveyor and a new working service agreement is now in place. Over the last 6 months, Rochford has supported Basildon with its DFG surveying work, generating an income that can be recycled back into the local DFG budget.
- 3.6 The new in house DFG service continues to be reviewed monthly and, six months on, officers are providing a core ‘settled’ service but are now looking at ways in which the local DFG service can be improved further, which includes local operational changes e.g. customer outcome monitoring, self serve web pages. A more strategic partnership approach is also being explored and Rochford District officers are currently leading on this and chairing a new Essex DFG forum.
- 3.7 At this forum Essex DFG services are beginning to share thoughts and explore with ECC the wider uses beyond the grant’s traditional use and are looking more closely to align the DFG to health and social care, bearing in mind that there is a very clear national steer that we need to do more to reduce pressure on hospitals. Initial thoughts include funding for ceiling track hoist, home from hospital schemes, handyman services.

Link to business plan priorities

- 3.8 The DFG work is aligned to the Council’s Business Plan in relation to ‘Early Intervention’, with an emphasis on prevention. This is in line with the requirements of the 2014 Care Act and the new duty of promoting health and well being through the ‘suitability of living accommodation’. The DFG outcomes have also been included in the Council’s joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Action Plan.

Consultation

- 3.9 Customers using the DFG service are currently surveyed at the end of the process. The findings reveal that 98% of customers were very satisfied with the final outcome of completed adaptations and they felt officers were helpful. However, it has been recognised that this is an area for improvement and customers' outcomes need to be monitored more effectively via questioning and case studies to evidence, for example, increased independence, reduced reliance on other services and reduced risk of falls.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council could fail to provide consistent value for money should it not have sufficient controls to manage the DFG journey, with particular regard to financial controls and ensuring grants are processed and delivered in a timely manner. The level of assurance as assessed by the Council's internal audit officer remains good and audit officers have worked with the service during the service transition process, commenting on new internal procedures and ensure a continuing separation of duties at each stage of the grant process.
- 4.2 The new DFG service continues to be committed to improving delivery, and performance around timely processing of grants is already showing signs of improvement as a result of recent procedural/'self serve' changes.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Since 2015/16 the DFG has been included in the Better Care Fund (BCF) which is received by Essex County Council, but then transferred directly to the Districts to allow the Council's housing duties to be discharged.
- 5.2 The BCF allocation in 2017/18 totalled £407,921. This allocation was agreed to be 'topped up' by the Council, to meet ongoing need, with a further £150,000 funded from the Council Capital budgets.
- 5.3 The BCF allocation for DFG work has increased over the last 2 years and there is a commitment to further increase this in 2018/19. The reasons for these financial changes, as detailed in the recently published BCF guidance, is to create better opportunities for integrating the DFG programme with social care and health; encourage more pooling of other resources to meet a growing demand in the most cost-effective way and, in two-tier authority areas such as Essex, create new working arrangements between local housing authorities and social care. As detailed, Rochford officers and ECC are currently working on the terms for these new arrangements to ensure funding is allocated within each year, performance reported and there are provisions for dealing with any under-spend or problems with performance.
- 5.4 Having regard to ongoing improved efficiencies, it is anticipated that the total 2017/18 DFG allocation will be both 100% spent and committed by end of

October. At this time a prioritised waiting list will need to be put in place for all clients. In the meantime, the DFG budget will continue to be monitored monthly, with clients' cases being prioritised, so critical needs are met and expectations managed.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a statutory responsibility of the Council under the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
- 6.2 There is no specific part of the legislation that governs a waiting list for DFG, although consideration as to the time limits for dealing with DFG applications is set out in the said Act, that is, six months from date of valid application.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the DFG service delivery changes and ongoing work to demand manage the DFG journey for eligible residents



Louisa Moss

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Background Papers:-

None.

For further information please contact Louisa Moss (Assistant Director, Community & Housing Services) on:-

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Email: louisa.moss@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.



DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) PROCEDURES

The Grant process can be confusing; therefore in order to help you through this process and to answer any questions/queries you may have, below is an explanation of the grant process, step by step.

Step 1 – Occupational Therapist initial assessment

The Occupational Therapist (OT) will have visited you to carry out a full assessment of your needs around the home.

The OT will decide whether to provide everyday equipment and where relevant, will recommend what major/extension adaptation works may be considered reasonable to help you now and in the future.

Step 2 – Formal Recommendation

The Occupational Therapist makes a formal recommendation to the Council's DFG service. The recommendation details the necessary adaptations that are needed to your property to make it suitable for use by the disabled person.

Step 3 – Initial test of resources – means test

The Council's DFG service will first contact you and where applicable, will send you an Initial Test of Resources/means test form to complete.

What is the Means Test?

The Means Test will determine whether you will have to make a financial contribution towards the cost of the recommended adaptation works and an indication of how much this will be.

Note: This is not a Council means test. It is a DFG means test that is specified by the Government and the Council is required to carry out this test, in their role as government administrators for the DFG.

In this initial test of resources, you will be asked a number of questions about your income and savings etc., so that we can give you an indication of your contribution. Please bear in mind, that this can only be an indication based on the information you provide and that a more formal means test is done, when you submit a DFG application form.

Note: Where the works are for the benefit of a disabled child, the maximum mandatory DFG is available, there is no need to undergo the means test and a DFG is available up to the value of the works required.



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To help speed the process up, where possible we would encourage all clients to use and send all completed forms, electronically. Our email address is DFG@rochford.gov.uk.

Alternatively you can post/hand deliver all documents, to the Council Offices in Rochford/Rayleigh. The addresses can be found at the end of this step by step procedure.

Note:

Even if the means test does not apply to you or if you have been assessed as having a nil contribution, applicants may still have a contribution to pay. This will apply under the following circumstances:

- Where the cost of works have been estimated as costing over the maximum grant award of £30,000. Monies would have to be found from your own resources, to fund these costs.
- If during the construction process, unforeseen extra works are necessary and this takes the works to over the maximum grant award (£30,000). As detailed above, monies would have to be found from your own resources, to fund these costs.
- If you wish to arrange for some extra private works to be carried out, this would be a private arrangement between you and the contractor. The grant will not cover the cost of any extra private works.

Step 4 – Formal DFG Application

If the results of the means test, means that your case can be progressed formally, the next stage of the process is to complete an application form, which will be sent to you. This asks for details about the disabled person, their family and most importantly their finances. This information will be used to confirm the final formal means test, it will include seeing copies of your bank statements, savings accounts and any other documents that support this financial assessment.

The Council's DFG service is only a small service and has limited capacity to support all applications, so we do encourage all our clients to see if they manage the DFG process themselves, and/or gain support and help from family/friends. This will always be the quickest way to progress your grant and you control the process throughout.



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We do understand, however, if you cannot manage to do this and in these circumstances, our DFG caseworker can help you complete application forms, and put together all the paperwork that is required, before your grant application can be considered formally.

Do not hesitate to talk this through with the DFG caseworker and let the Council know what route you would prefer to take, so we can support you to manage the next steps.

Proof of Title Certificate

As part the formal application process, it needs to be confirmed that the person who is said to own the property is named on the deeds. The Council DFG Service will contact the Land registry to confirm these details on your behalf.

Owners Certificate

As part of the formal application process, an Owner's Certificate must also be completed, this will be sent to you. This Certificate states that it is the disabled person's intention to live in the property, for a period of at least ten years after the completion of the works.

Step 5 Obtaining Quotes – the process

You will then need to obtain 2-3 quotes from builders of your choice. A list of suggested local contractors is enclosed to assist you, if required.

The builder should provide a detailed itemised quote using the OT's recommended scheme and sketch drawing (where applicable).

Note: The OT recommended works should not be changed. If your Builder has any queries with regard to the scheme they must contact our service direct.

Note

- **The arrangements you make with your builder form a private contract, to which Rochford District Council are not a party (even though grant aid will pay for part or all of the costs involved).**
- **It follows that should any queries arise concerning the work, they should be taken up with your contractor.**



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- **The quality of work, in particular, is a contractual matter between you, and the builder undertaking the work.**

Once you have obtained 2-3 quotes you must submit the quotes to the Council's DFG Service, alongside the grant application form. It is recommended you keep a copy of all estimates for your own records.

Step 6 – Receipt of Grant Application

Upon receipt of the grant application, the Council will confirm formally in a letter, the results of your grant means test, detailing any contribution that will need to be made.

Those clients that have been means tested and assessed as having a contribution to pay towards the cost of the works, will also need to sign a consent form, agreeing to pay their contribution monies direct to the Contractor, on completion of works.

Please note; all consent forms must be signed and returned before the grant can be finally approved.

Step 7 – Checking the Quotes

Your quotes will now be checked by the Council's DFG Adaptation Surveyor, who will carry out a cost checking exercise, in order to determine a reasonable cost for the recommended works.

A DFG grant will only be approved, for the amount that is calculated as reasonable for the job to cost, less any contribution that is required to be made, up to a maximum grant of £30k.

The Council's reasonable/assessed cost will be detailed on the grant approval.

The cost checking exercise will normally be completed within 15 working days, but this timescale will depend on the detail in your estimates and having all the relevant information available from your contractors.

It may be necessary for the DFG Adaptation Surveyor to visit you at this stage, to assess the works in more detail.

Once cost checking exercise is complete, you will be issued a formal DFG Notice of Approval.



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Note

- **No works included in a grant application should begin until the Councils written Notice of Approval has been sent to you, otherwise your application may be disqualified.**

Step 8 – Approval of DFG

The written approval document itself will detail:

- The total cost of the works
- Any administration fees and private surveyor/architect/planning and building consents fees (where applicable)
- Your formally assessed means test contribution
- Any costs you will have to incur where costs exceed the maximum grant.
- Remember, the contract is between you and the builder, certain works will be VAT exempt, which will reduce the total costs of works. Your Builder will need to arrange for you to sign a VAT exempt certificate.
- Rochford District Council will not normally project manage any process of building work, except for those more complex adaptation cases.

Note

- Remember, if you wish to arrange for some extra private works to be carried out, this would be a private arrangement between you and the contractor. The grant will not cover the cost of any extra private works.

Step 9 - Commencement of DFG works

Now that you have been sent your Notice of Approval document, you can arrange to start work.

Note: Any necessary additional works must be agreed by the Council's DFG service/Council's DFG Adaptation surveyor, in order that the cost can be added to the grant, up to a maximum of £30k.

Once works have started, if your builder is requesting an interim payment, you will need to contact the Council's DFG Adaptation surveyor and arrange a visit. An itemised invoice for all works completed to date, will also be needed, before any payments can be authorised by the surveyor.



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If you have been means tested to have a contribution to pay, you will be expected to use this contribution to pay/part pay, your contractor direct. Do not arrange to do this, without the surveyor first checking the works.

At any stage of this process, do not hesitate to contact the DFG caseworker and or surveyor who can support you through these steps.

Step 10 - Completion

On completion of works, please contact the Council's DFG Adaptation Surveyor.

The surveyor will then contact you to make an appointment so that they can check the works have been completed as per the OT recommendation.

Please ensure you have all relevant invoices and paperwork available at the time of the visit.

We aim to complete this step within 10 working days.

Step 11 - Payment.

Following a satisfactory post inspection visit by the Council's Housing Adaptation surveyor, arrangements will be made to pay direct you/your contractor (as per instructions on the DFG application form).

Payment can only be made once we have all invoices and relevant completion certificates e.g. for electrical/gas works

If you have any outstanding contribution to make towards the cost of the works, it is at this stage that this will need to be paid direct to the contractor.

Step 12 – Local Land Charge entry

The disabled facilities grant process allows the council to place a limited charge on adapted properties of owner occupiers, if it is sold within 10 years. This is only applicable where the total cost of the works exceeds £5000. The charge is limited to a maximum £10,000.

If, therefore, your adaptation works exceed £5,000 the Council will make arrangements to place a local land charge entry against your property address. This charge will detail the cost of the works exceeding £5000.00 up to the maximum limit of £10,000. The charge will last for 10 years, starting from the date your works were signed off as complete, by the surveyor.



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If you have to move within the 10 years, it is normal for your solicitors to contact the Council direct to discuss repayment of monies. At this stage, a number of considerations will be taken into account by the council before confirming repayment e.g. whether the disposal is made for reasons connected with the physical health of the occupant.

An example of what is entered onto a local land charge registry is detailed below:

"Housing adaptation works in connection with the above mentioned grant, have now been completed satisfactorily:-

The local housing authority has approved a grant under part 1 of the act

The grant is for a sum exceeding £5000.00

This condition remains in force for a period of 10 years from the date of completion.

- *Completion date*
- *Such part of the grant that exceeds £5000.00*

Note: The meaning of "relevant disposal" means the sale of the freehold or assignment of the lease, or the grant of long lease (one of over 21 years).

Would you please make an entry on the Land Charges Register

Step 13 – After Care Service

Looking after your shower – Please ensure that you run your shower at least once a week and that the shower head is kept clean at all times.

****Failure to do so may have serious health consequences, which includes Legionnaires Disease**.**

To avoid blockages to your shower drain, which may lead to water escaping from your shower tray, you should regularly clean out the gully. This is easy to do although in some circumstances you may need assistance.

Maintaining and cleaning the gully should be carried out at least every two months.



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CONTACT DETAILS:

If you have any queries, questions or require further explanation of the procedures, please do not hesitate to contact: -

Liz Turner

DFG Caseworker: 01702 318108

Paul Kirk

DFG Adaptation surveyor: 01702 318135

Tara Miller

Private Sector Housing Officer: 01702 318050

**All general case enquiries
and where to send forms:**

DFG@rochford.gov.uk

Useful links:

<https://www.gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants>

Where to send information:

By email:

DFG@rochford.gov.uk

By post:

Council Offices
South Street
Rochford
Essex
SS4 1BW

Office Hours:

Monday to Thursday: 8.30am - 5.30pm

Friday: 8.30am - 5.00pm

Telephone switchboard:

01702 546366

**(Always try the officers
Direct Dial numbers first)**