
REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 3 NOVEMBER 2010

**PORTFOLIO: COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION, BENEFITS AND
STRATEGIC HOUSING**

REPORT FROM HEAD OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 That the update on the process involved in administering Disabled Facility Grants, the criteria for approving the Grants and the breakdown of current applications and expenditure be noted.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Disabled Facility Grants are administered by Local Authorities under the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and applications for grant can be made by owners, tenants, landlords and by occupiers of qualifying houseboats and caravans.
- 2.2 Grant is mandatory for essential adaptations to give a disabled person better freedom of movement around the home and to access essential facilities within it. Where necessary it can also provide the essential facilities themselves. Types of eligible work include:-
- widening doorways and installing ramps;
 - provision of a shower in place of a bath;
 - installation of a stair lift to enable access to a bedroom or bathroom, or provision of ground floor facilities;
 - improvement or provision of a heating system.
- 2.3 Grants for owner-occupiers and tenants are means tested, except where the works are for the benefit of a disabled child. The test looks at the income and capital of the disabled person and their spouse or partner and calculates their average weekly income. This is set against an assessment of basic needs represented by a range of premiums and allowances to reflect outgoings. Where the person's resources are more than the assessment, then they will have to contribute to the cost of the works. If the disabled person is in receipt of income support, income based job-seekers allowance or guaranteed pension credit; they will not normally have to make a contribution.
- 2.4 In the case of a landlord's application, the amount of grant is determined having regard to the extent to which the landlord is able to charge a higher rent, because of the works undertaken.
- 2.5 The maximum amount of grant that can be paid is currently £30,000. Local authorities do, however, have discretionary powers under the Regulatory

Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, to top up a DFG. Under current Council Policy, the Rochford Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grant (RH MAG) can be used to provide a top up of up to £10,000.

3 APPROVING AN APPLICATION

- 3.1 A local authority has to be satisfied that (a) any proposed works are necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs, and (b), that it is reasonable and practicable to carry out the works, having regard to age and condition of the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or caravan. In considering (a) above, the local authority must consult the social services authority. In practice the DFG process is initiated by an Occupational Therapist (OT) making an assessment and submitting recommendations to the Council.
- 3.2 The Council will then undertake a site visit themselves, to assess if the works are reasonable and practical and to technically assess the detail of the works. The Council will then send an application pack either to the applicant or more usually to Springboard Home Improvement Agency, who in most cases coordinate the works and act on behalf of the applicant. It should be noted that as of April next year, it will not be Springboard providing the Home Improvement Agency Service, as this is currently out to tender by ECC and they have opted not to submit a tender.
- 3.3 An application must normally be accompanied by estimates from two different contractors, although this may not be required in certain circumstances e.g. where the works are of a specialist nature. Particulars of any preliminary or ancillary charges e.g. architects fees, home improvement agency fees etc., must also be submitted.
- 3.4 An applicant must sign a certificate stating the intention that throughout the five year grant condition period, (or such shorter period as the disabled person's health or circumstances permit), the disabled person will occupy the dwelling as his or her only or main residence. Occupation of the property for less than 5 years would mean that any value of grant over £5,000 is recovered up to a maximum of £10,000.
- 3.5 In the case of an owner's application, proof of a qualifying interest in the property in question must be provided. Where an applicant is a tenant, then proof of ownership and agreement to works being carried out is required from the landlord.
- 3.6 Once the completed application has been received, Local Authorities legally have six months in which to approve a valid grant application. However, in practice this stage is much quicker and is taking between 2-4 weeks. The key stages are all controlled by statute – The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Effectively this means that grants have to be processed in a certain order.

- 3.7 Springboard, if acting on behalf of the applicant, will engage suitable contractors, monitor the works and then notify the Council on its completion, whereby the Council will carry out a site check to ensure that the appropriate works have been carried out to an acceptable standard.
- 3.8 The most frequently recommended adaptations are a level access shower, (technically known as ‘graded floor shower’ as the floor is constructed with a slight slope to enable proper drainage) and a stair lift. Other less common recommendations include access ramps, specialist baths and WCs and major building conversions, e.g. conversion of an integral garage to provide ground floor sleeping and bathing accommodation.

4 PAYMENT OF GRANT

- 4.1 The eligible works must be carried out within a period of twelve months from the date of the approval notice, unless further time is required to carry out other works that could not have been reasonably foreseen at the time of application.
- 4.2 Payment of grant is conditional on the eligible works being carried out to the satisfaction of the local authority and acceptable invoices, demands or receipts being provided.

5 FUNDING/TYPES OF CASES

- 5.1 Funding for DFGs is through the Council’s capital programme. The Government then refunds 60% of expenditure on grants through Specified Capital Grant up to a maximum allocation, which is set annually for each local authority. Any expenditure above the allocation has to be funded entirely by the local authority.
- 5.2 In 2010/11 the budget for DFGs has been agreed at £250,000, which includes Government support amounting to £150,000.
- 5.3 Where there is insufficient funding available, applicants can be prioritised and placed on a waiting list, although this has not currently been necessary to implement.
- 5.4 As at the end of September 2010, £117,800 of the 2010/11 budget has been committed, representing 20 projects. The remaining budget of £132,200 is likely to be committed during the remainder of this financial year but it is not clear at this stage whether this will actually be spent this year or carried forward to next year as a creditor. Attached as Appendix A is also a breakdown of all the grants awarded in 2009/10, giving details of times taken for each stage, value of the grant and any particular circumstances that affected the processing times.
- 5.5 Once the 2010/11 budget has been fully committed, and subject to liaison with the Head of Finance, grant applications will continue to be approved prior to

the end of March 2011, on the basis that they will not be paid until the 2011/12 financial year.

5.6 2009/10

- **Funding:** £196,000 (£118,000 from government + £78,000 RDC capital)
- **Number of grants awarded:** 37 (see detailed breakdown in Appendix A)

Types of Work	Numbers of Grants
Graded floor showers	24
Stair lifts	8
Through-floor lift	1
Vehicle crossover	3
Specialist WC	1
Access path and lighting	1
Total	39

Grants by Tenure	Numbers of Grants
Tenants	5
Home owners	32
Total	37

- **Processing Times**

Types of Work	Number of Weeks
All types of work	47
Stair lifts (all)	44
Stair lifts	35 (without excessive customer led delays) Total no. of delays: 3 1) delay in receiving financial information from means test 2) access difficulties and client abroad on several occasions 3) client changed mind about having a grant and a complicated means test.

Types of Work	Number of Weeks
Graded floor showers (all)	35
Graded floor showers	44 (without excessive customer led delays) Total no. of delays: 7 1) client hospitalised several times during the process 2) client unable to agree scheme with Occupational Therapist 3) delay in receiving information for means test 4 & 5) access difficulties by Home Improvement Agency 6) scheme revised by Occupational Therapist after application sent 7) complicated means test with long time to obtain necessary financial information.
Other works (all)	46

5.7 2010/11

- **Funding:** £250,000 (£150,000 from government + £100,000 RDC capital)
- **Number of grants awarded to date:** 20

- | Types of Work | Numbers of Grants |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Graded floor showers | 12 |
| Stair lifts | 5 |
| Access ramps | 3 |
| Hard standings | 1 |
| Ground floor extension | 1 |
| Total | 22 |

NB: the number of adaptations exceeds the number of grants awarded in both years because some clients had multiple adaptations.

•	Grants by Tenure	Numbers of Grants
	Tenants	2
	Home owners	17
	Total	19

6 POSSIBLE DELAYS TO THE PROCESS

6.1 The key agencies involved in the grant process are:-

- Occupational therapists;
- Home Improvement Agency;
- The Council;
- Building contractors;

6.2 Although delays can sometimes be associated with any of the above organisations, the majority of delays are caused by the clients themselves. The client base is made up of the elderly and infirm, and it is common for clients to delay the process due to their health problems. For example hospital admissions are not unusual at any stage during the process. Clients will sometimes delay the start of works if their health is poor and they cannot cope with any disruption in their home. A frequent source of client led delay is non return of the initial test of resources (ITR) form.

6.3 Delays are sometimes caused by the Home Improvement Agency. They have a permanent staff of two and a part time staff of one person to deal with all grant work including home repairs grants, through either the RHMAg or DFG schemes. Holiday commitments and/or sickness can easily delay those parts of the process where they are involved.

6.4 Delays are possible within the Council offices, due to the comparatively small size of the private sector housing team (3 staff). One of these posts was vacant earlier in the year from November 2009 but delays have now been minimised, with the arrival of the new Senior EHO in April 2010.

6.5 Occupational therapists sometimes revise their recommendations once the grant application process has started, usually due to a change in a client's health or needs. This inevitably causes a delay as any new works have to be scheduled and tendered for, often at a late stage in the process.

6.6 Contractors can introduce delays if they are very busy with other work and cannot start grant aided work promptly once a grant offer has been made. However in the present economic climate, contractor delays are the exception rather than the rule.

7 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 It is the responsibility of the Council to administer the Disabled Facility Grants but processes involved with this administration have been reviewed on a number of occasions over the years. The Council is also currently contributing to the South Essex Commission of Enquiry into cooperation – more effective Health, Housing and Adult Social Care services. This is looking into where there may be opportunities to implement more effective joint working practices and includes a particular work stream - the Home Adaptations Task Group - which it is hoped may produce examples of best practice that would be incorporated into our procedures.

8 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There could be a risk to the Council's reputation if DFGs are not processed within the statutory time scales and applicants are placed on a waiting list.

9 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As stated above, the 2010/11 budget for DFGs is £250,000 made up of £100,000 from the Council's capital programme and £150,000 from central government funding.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As stated above, there is a mandatory entitlement to a Disabled Facilities Grant subject to certain criteria being met.

11 RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 It is proposed that the Executive Board **RESOLVES** to note the contents of this report.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: _____

Head of Community Services

Background Papers:

Executive Board – 26 September 2007.

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If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.

Appendix A

BREAKDOWN OF DISABLED FACILITY GRANTS 2009/10								Appendix A
Grant Number	Value of Grant £	Type of Work	OT recommendation to application pack sent out (weeks)	Application pack sent to receipt of application (weeks)	Receipt of application to approval of grant	Approval of grant to completion of works (weeks)	Total time taken (weeks)	
1	4,182.00	Graded floor shower	24	33	8	6	71	Client hospitalised several times during grant process.
2	2,032.05	Stair lift	3	4	3	12	22	
3	3,425.85	Graded floor shower	4	19	7	20	50	
4	4,938.00	Access ramp and door widening	5	12	8	12	37	
5	3,374.10	Access ramp and door widening	6	14	5	11	36	
6	23,565.00	Graded floor shower and through-floor lift	21	20	7	37	85	Client initially unable to agree scheme with Occupational Therapist, and problems with installation of through-floor lift.
7	5,813.70	Stair lift	6	30	6	9	51	Delays receiving financial information from the applicant for means test
8	1,557.44	Graded floor shower	7	27	6	9	49	Delays receiving financial information from the applicant for means test
9	4,196.35	Graded floor shower	7	27	6	9	49	Access difficulties by Home Improvement Agency
10	5,753.45	Stair lift	7	8	5	8	28	
11	2,926.75	Stair lift	12	28	13	10	63	Access difficulties and client abroad on several occasions
12	1,092.50	Vehicle cross-over	4	26	9	11	50	
13	4,393.00	Graded floor shower	7	8	8	7	30	
14	4,798.95	Graded floor shower and access steps	7	13	4	20	44	
15	3,975.55	Graded floor shower	9	19	4	20	52	
16	3,944.50	Graded floor shower	8	10	3	12	33	
17	5,198.00	Graded floor shower	12	22	15	7	56	Delay in preparing approval due to staff leave and resource.
18	4,269.73	Stair lift	7	35	16	14	72	Client changed mind about having grant and complicated means test.
19	1,651.39	Graded floor shower	2	25	14	18	59	Full means test required.
20	3,346.50	Graded floor shower	3	11	5	17	36	

Appendix A

21	3,346.51	Graded floor shower	8	18	4	11	41	Clarification of contractors estimated required.
22	5,666.05	Stair lift	0	19	5	7	31	
23	3,735.20	Access path and lighting	16	22	3	33	74	Scheme revised by Occupational Therapists during process.
24	3,477.60	Graded floor shower	12	22	10	24	68	Access difficulties.
25	4,393.00	Graded floor shower	9	16	7	13	45	
26	3,921.50	Graded floor shower	5	15	7	10	37	
27	3,679.37	Specialist W.C.	4	9	12	4	29	
28	4,565.50	Graded floor shower	6	17	4	12	39	
29	3,908.85	Graded floor shower	3	35	9	11	58	Scheme revised by Occupational Therapists after application sent.
30	5,497.00	Access ramp and door widening	11	10	7	20	48	
31	3,967.50	Graded floor shower	11	22	3	11	47	
32	3,934.15	Graded floor shower	1	17	23	26	67	Complicated means test - long time to obtain necessary financial information from the applicant.
33	2,861.20	Stair lift	9	23	4	5	41	
34	10,106.20	Stair lift and graded floor shower	5	27	10	11	53	
35	4,612.65	Graded floor shower	7	13	10	18	48	
36	3,804.20	Graded floor shower	6	13	6	6	31	
37	4,864.50	Graded floor shower	11	14	9	14	48	
	*	Average total time taken:	47 weeks					
	*	Shortest time taken:	22 weeks					
	*	Longest time taken:	85 weeks					
	*	Most frequent delay stage:	time taken to receive completed application and sometimes where means test is very in-depth.					