
DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS UPDATE

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on the progress that has been made with regard to the processing of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFGs) applications, following the review that Members of this committee completed in January 2012.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Following the research that was carried out by the Review Committee in relation to DFGs, 10 recommendations were made at the Committee's meeting of 10 January 2012, with all 10 of these being subsequently accepted by the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions.
- 2.2 The various performance indicator figures have continued to be reported to the Executive, as part of the regular quarterly performance report, with the calculations now including the amendments that were mentioned in the Review Committee's recommendations.
- 2.3 Over the last 12 months there has been some positive progress made in relation to the actual process and also with the resulting performance figures. The latest performance report that went to the Executive on 5 December 2012 provided the figures for the end of quarter two (end of September). With regard to Local Performance Indicator (LPI) 571 which measures the average number of weeks from receipt of the Occupational Therapist's recommendation until the DFG works are completed (start to finish), the year to date figure stood at 31.3 weeks, with the second quarter figure being 26.8 weeks. This compares to the year end actual figure for 2011/12 of 50.7 weeks. Each of the other indicators that measure different stages of the process were all also showing improved figures for the year to date, when compared to the actual figure for 2011/12.

3 UPDATE ON REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Recommendation (1)

That the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services agree to:

- i. **Separate the Local Performance Indicators relating to DFGs into the different categories.**
- ii. **For performance management purposes record the timing for the certain applications separately with a full breakdown of the time taken and reasons for each stage.**

In conjunction with the Council's Performance Management team, amendments have been made to the information that is gathered for measuring the average timescales for each stage of the DFG process. Throughout the application process, where there are issues outside of either the Council or the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) control, these are recorded, including the length of the delay and these periods are then deducted from the figures for the appropriate stage of the process. As has been previously mentioned to the Committee, where these delays are incurred this results in the reported figures becoming misleadingly distorted, particularly as the total number of grant applications per quarter is not high.

Works of a more significant scale, such as extensions etc. are also monitored separately, as the normal timescales for these instances would be a lot longer than for the majority of our DFG applications which tend to centre around more minor works such as level access showers, stair lifts, ramps etc. The commentary provided on the quarterly performance reports also now provides a more specific explanation of the extent of impact on the figures by any such grants.

3.2 Recommendation (2)

That copies of the Initial Test of Resources (ITR) form are supplied to the Occupational Therapists at Essex County Council in order that they be handed out to clients as soon as the need for a DFG is identified by the Occupational Therapists.

Copies of the ITR form are now held by the Occupational Therapists at the County Council and this is assisting in streamlining the application process.

3.3 Recommendation (3)

That the Portfolio Holder for the Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services examine ways in which the scheduling, Initial Test of Resources and Means test parts of the process are resourced.

As Members will be aware, the Papworth Trust took over from Springboard as the HIA provider in July 2011 and Council Officers, in conjunction with Papworth's management, have completely reviewed the work involved with the application process in order to ascertain who is best placed to undertake various parts of the process, taking into account each organisation's resources.

This has resulted in the HIA now undertaking a greater volume of the work, including the scheduling, ITR and Means test for the majority of grants rather than the previous set-up whereby the Council undertook this work. This has produced a more efficient process, with less to-ing and fro-ing and exchange of information between organisations and thus contributing to the decrease in average processing time.

This has fitted neatly into the required realignment of resources within the Council's Private Sector Housing section, with the added bonus of an overall cost saving to the Council, albeit without incurring any detriment to the service.

This process review has also been influenced by the implementation of a fixed price process for level access showers, (which will be further explained in response to Recommendation (6)) and there is now a Service Level Agreement in place between the Council and the Papworth Trust that encapsulates which parts of the process each organisation is responsible for.

3.4 Recommendation (4)

That, to ensure all documents are enclosed, the application form should contain a tick list for documents that are required to be submitted with the form.

The relevant application paperwork has now been amended to include a tick list for required documents that again will assist in obtaining all the required information more promptly.

3.5 Recommendation (5)

That all outstanding applications are monitored with the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) on a monthly basis.

These meetings are being regularly held and are attended by Council Officers involved with the DFG process and representatives from Papworth Trust, including their General Manager. The Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collections, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions is also in attendance at these meetings which are considered to be very important in the overall management of the process.

Discussions at these meetings will centre around the specific grants that are currently in progress and will look to resolve any particular issues that may have occurred with particular applications and agree the speediest and most appropriate solution.

3.6 Recommendation (6)

That the HIA be encouraged to agree a schedule of rates and fixed price contracts for level access showers and stair lifts with its list of approved contractors.

The HIA implemented a fixed price process earlier in the year for those grants that require level access showers. For these particular grants this is having a significantly positive effect on the timescales required to complete the works. This is due to the fact that there is not a need to obtain a number of quotes for the work, as a range of contractors have already submitted prices that have subsequently informed the level of at the fixed price has been

set. These contractors have then subsequently signed up to the fixed price and also to committing to start and completion dates of the works, thus reducing the chances for further delays. If the next contractor on the list says that there would be delay in them being able to start the works, they are then bypassed and the next contractor is offered the work. This is of particular benefit to our processing times, as by far the most common work required from a DFG is a level access shower.

It is more complex to implement a similar process for stair lifts but Papworth Trust are at present looking into how this could be implemented.

3.7 Recommendation (7)

That the application process for level access showers and stair lifts be amended so that the schedule of rates and fixed price contracts, agreed by the HIA with its contractors, can be accepted.

As detailed above, the application process for level access showers has been amended to enable the full benefit to be derived from the implementation of the fixed price contract.

3.8 Recommendation (8)

That the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services encourage Essex County Council Social Services Department to investigate the possibility of offering a similar service as St Helens Borough Council and Broadlands District Council.

Essex County Council have been undertaking a review of their input into the DFG process and also their Occupational Therapist service. Officers and the Portfolio Holder have been involved with this process, inputting their views and suggestions into various meetings and also workshops involving other Districts around the County.

The County are now operating a system whereby when they receive an initial enquiry, this is assessed by appropriately experienced staff to ascertain what level of support or provision is required. At this stage if the person's needs can be met by various smaller equipment / adaptations, this is carried out and provided by the County as part of their adaptations budget. It is only where more major works are required that County will then look into the need for a DFG, and as part of their review process, they have highlighted that they have put greater resource into this "assessment" at the first point of contact.

3.9 Recommendation (9)

That all acute health service and social care budget holders are approached via the Local Strategic Partnership to see if they would be willing to fund certain DFGs on the basis that this would reduce their care bill in the longer term.

As yet, approach has not been made to health service and social care budget holders, however it is still intended to implement this recommendation. During the course of the year there have been issues at the County Council with regard to a significantly reduced level of Occupational Therapists, which in turn, has at times, affected the volume of DFG recommendations being received.

This coupled with the fact that we have now received a further £57,000 grant from Government towards DFGs, has meant that we are focusing our efforts on ensuring that we spend the allocation that we have been given, prior to undertaking this particular recommendation that could possibly reduce the number of grants that we are funding.

3.10 Recommendation (10)

That Members are offered a training course on Disabled Facilities Grants in the next phase of Member training.

An afternoon and evening training session on DFGs was provided to Members on 18 October 2012, as part of the Council's overall Member Training and Development Programme.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council has a budget of approximately £307,000 in 2012/13 for the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants. This is made up of a grant received from Government and also a contribution from the Council's own capital budget of £100,000.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the content of the report, the progress made in relation to the Review Committee's recommendations and also the improved average processing times for Disabled Facilities Grants.

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Background Papers:-

None.

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