

DISABLED FACILITY GRANTS – PROCESS REVIEW

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide the Review Committee with information on the process entailed in administering Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs), in order to inform the Committee's review of the statutory and discretionary processes involved and assist in establishing what Agencies are involved in that process and what role they fulfil.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Disabled Facilities 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 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.

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- 2.5 The 2011/12 budget for DFGs is set at £250,000, which includes Government funding of £150,000. This funding is considered part of the Council's Capital programme, rather than revenue expenditure.
- 2.6 As at 11 July 2011, £54,269 of the 2011/12 budget has been either spent or committed. Although it is comparatively early in the financial year, it is still likely that the full budget will be spent, as over a number of years now, there has always been a steady flow of applications and this trend has not changed.
- 2.7 Where the current year's budget becomes fully committed, grant applications can still continue to be processed / approved up until March 2012, as those additional grants will not be paid until the 2012/13 financial year.
- 2.8 Attached as Appendix A to this report, is a table which details all the Disabled Facility Grants that were completed during 2010/11. There will have been additional grants on which some work will have been undertaken but works have not been completed, and therefore, they will come into the 2011/12 figures. The Council's team dealing with the grants will also inevitably receive other applications on which they have to do some work, but ultimately do not qualify for the grant, usually as a result of the means test being carried out.

3 APPLICATION PROCESS

- 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 the Home Improvement Agency, who in most cases coordinate the works and act on behalf of the applicant. This was previously provided by Springboard but following ECC's recent tender process, the new Home Improvement Agency provider, as of 1 July 2011, is the Papworth Trust.
- 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 five

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 currently 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 The Home Improvement Agency, 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 wc's, dropped kerbs, through floor lifts and major building conversions eg: conversion of an integral garage to provide ground floor sleeping and bathing accommodation.

- 3.9 The eligible works must be carried out within a period of 12 months, from the date of the approval of grant notice, unless further time is required to carry out other works that could not have been reasonably foreseen at the time of application.
- 3.10 Payment of grant is conditional on the eligible works being carried out to the satisfaction of the local authority and acceptable invoices or receipts being provided.

4 POSSIBLE DELAYS TO THE PROCESS

- 4.1 The key agencies involved in the grant process are:
- Occupational therapists;
 - Home Improvement Agency;
 - The Council;
 - Building contractors.
- 4.2 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.

- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 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.

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 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.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As stated above, the 2011/11 budget for DFGs is £250,000 made up of £100,000 from the Council's capital programme and £150,000 from central government funding.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 As stated in section 2 of this report, there is a mandatory entitlement to a Disabled Facilities Grant, subject to certain criteria being met.

8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 It is proposed that the Review Committee **RESOLVES** to note the contents of this report and use it to inform the structure of how they wish to carry out their review of the Disabled Facility Grant process.

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Background Papers:-

None

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

Appendix A

				APPENDIX A - BREAKDOWN OF DISABLED FACILITY GRANTS 2010/11				
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)	
								Comments
1	3,266.00	Hardstanding and dropped kerb	14	13	2	6	35	
2	3,409.75	Ramped access	28	12	2	9	51	Delay in receiving initial financial information.
3	5,934.00	Graded floor shower	11	15	6	12	44	
4	3,425.85	Graded floor shower	4	18	7	20	50	Delay in completion due to snagging items.
5	4,938.10	Ramped access and internal works	5	12	8	12	37	
6	3,852.50	Graded floor shower	18	13	2	10	43	Delay in receiving initial financial information.
7	3,967.50	Graded floor shower	13	15	3	14	45	Delay in receiving initial financial information.
8	5,750.00	Graded floor shower	1	21	0	19	41	
9	4,390.03	Graded floor shower	11	17	3	14	45	Complicated means test.
10	5,813.70	Stairlift	6	30	6	29	71	Complicated means test
11	5,198.00	Graded floor shower	12	21	15	8	56	Delays due to incomplete application.
12	3,477.60	Graded floor shower	13	22	11	33	79	Delay in receiving initial financial information. Snagging items when work completed.
13	4,612.65	Graded floor shower	7	13	10	18	48	
14	3,858.25	Graded floor shower	5	13	2	6	26	Unusually quick completion of works.
15	4,249.25	Graded floor shower	9	11	0	12	32	
16	4,128.50	Graded floor shower	4	12	0	14	30	
17	11,351.65	Graded floor shower and stair lift	5	17	0	10	32	
18	1,713.50	Stair lift	7	10	12	5	34	Query re technical specifications in estimates.
19	5,083.00	Graded floor shower and stair lift	2	10	2	16	30	
20	4,554.00	Graded floor shower	5	11	0	14	30	
21	13,266.40	Through floor lift	8	17	13	12	50	Process delayed by applicant wanting to change work specifications.
22	3,370.65	Graded floor shower	4	11	1	8	24	

Appendix A

23	4,577.00	Graded floor shower	3	12	1	15	31	
24	13,023.75	Graded floor shower, stair lift, and ramped access	5	21	11	14	51	Multiple works. Problems with proof of title.
25	3,703.00	Graded floor shower	9	14	3	14	40	
26	4,680.50	Graded floor shower and stair lift	11	10	3	10	34	
27	4,312.50	Graded floor shower	9	16	0	20	45	Delay in completion due to snagging items.
28	4,048.00	Graded floor shower	5	13	2	11	31	
	*	Average total time taken:	42 weeks					
	*	Shortest time taken:	26 weeks					
	*	Longest time taken:	79 weeks					
	*	Most frequent delay stage:	N/A - various delays					