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## **DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS AND PROCEDURES**

### **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report updates the Committee on the current Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) journey for residents and how processes are being reviewed to reduce waiting times.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The provision of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a statutory requirement for the Council and is a service that enables disabled adults and children across all tenures, to live as independently as possible in a home that suits their needs. The service includes the installation of level access showers, ramps and stairlifts, through to complete self-contained extensions, for people with severe disabilities.
- 2.2 The service is currently delivered by the Council's Private Housing Service in partnership with Home Improvement Agency, Papworth Trust Home Solutions.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 A resident is approved as requiring and eligible for a DFG, by an Occupational Therapist and on referral, Papworth Trust (PT) completes the DFG process on behalf of the Council. This includes assessment of liability for financial contribution, design, costing of adaptive works and award and oversight of the works themselves. For each case, the Council pays PT for the cost of the works and a percentage management fee. An annual fee is also paid to PT.
- 3.2 PT as a single delivery agent and single point of contact for DFG funded adaptations, is an example of good practice and the service is able to add further value to the process, as they are commissioned by Essex County Council (ECC) to provide. handyman, gardening and advisory services. Their effectiveness can be demonstrated from their outcomes measures, as detailed in section 3.13.
- 3.3 Over the last year, however, this good practice approach has been outweighed by concerns over performance records, which have shown that DFG cases have taken much longer than expected to complete and performance targets have not been met. On average, end-to-end times in 2015/16 were 37-40 weeks.
- 3.4 National good practice guidelines updated in 2015, recommend end-to-end times of 11 weeks for hospital discharge cases or cases where essential

facilities such as toilet and bathing facilities in the home cannot be accessed, and 30 weeks for non-urgent cases. End-to-end times delivered in the private sector in Rochford are much longer than these recommendations.

### **The new DFG customer journey**



- 3.5 A review of the existing service delivery has now been carried out to develop a map of the current customer pathway and identify issues. The focus throughout this review is on providing a more streamlined, rapid and easily understood customer pathway with joined up service provision.
- 3.6 Appendix 1 shows the process for a typical major adaptation. It reveals a number of critical points, predominately where there is hand-over to PT's design hub, that is, where staff do the technical surveys before the contractors are brought in, to carry out the works.
- 3.7 Ongoing performance review meetings with PT has meant that they are now looking at ways to improve this process stage and in the short term are putting in resources to bring waiting times down. For clients it is important that the reason for the delay and the likely timescale is explained clearly and the PT caseworker has been instructed to ring clients regularly to monitor need and all clients are also being given the option to progress the works privately with the support of PT.
- 3.8 New phased targets, in line with national good practice, as shown in Appendix 1, are also now in place.
- 3.9 Following a recent internal audit of the Council's DFG process, the draft outcome report details that the *'the speed of completing cases, is being actively addressed by management and delivery and performance is showing signs of improvement with recent changes to processes'*. *'Some of the most recently commenced cases are being completed within the new Q1 target of 20 weeks.'*

### **Meeting the need**

- 3.10 As efficiencies are introduced the number of applications that had been held up over the last year are now progressing through the DFG system more quickly. This outcome, together with the ongoing level of need for home adaptations in Rochford, has meant that DFG capital budgets have now reached the stage of being fully paid and committed, which has meant that prioritised waiting lists are now in place for all DFG clients. See Resource Implications section 5.

- 3.11 Table A details the increasing number of DFG applications over the last couple of years but, because of the time delays, the subsequent reduction in the number of DFG approvals carried out by the Council/PT. As detailed, the improved process changes means the service is now in a position of ‘catching up’ to where it should have been performing, which has put an immediate strain on DFG capital resources.

Table A

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 (August)	
<b>Nos. of DFG applications</b>	69	54	74	112	120	50	
<b>Nos. of DFG approvals</b>	36	38	58	36	47	30	

### Link to business plan priorities

- 3.12 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

- 3.13 Customers using the DFG service are surveyed at both the beginning and end of the process. The findings reveal that most customers were very satisfied with the final outcome of completed adaptations and they felt the Papworth Trust staff were helpful, and the quality of work and contractor performance is considered by most customers to be very good. A large number of people said they were now more able to get around their home, were safer from accidents, felt better mentally or helped a carer cope more easily. The benefits are revealed by the following survey outcomes: 95% customer satisfaction, 76% of customers felt an improvement in the suitability of their home and 84% felt more independent.

## 4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

### Level of assurance

- 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. An internal audit of the DFG process has only recently been completed and a draft report indicates a limited level of assurance. However, it has recognised that the Council has committed to improving delivery, and performance is showing signs of improvement as a result of recent changes to processes.

#### **Future provision**

- 4.2 Papworth Trust are contracted by Essex County Council (ECC) to provide home improvement services (handyman/gardening/advisory), across the South of Essex, the services also include a small core of major adaptation works, where adaptation costs are over £10,000. These commissioning arrangements are topped up locally with a locally agreed service level agreement to ensure statutory responsibilities are met to deliver those 'other' major adaptations works, i.e. where costs are £10,000 or below (the average installation will cost £5,000).
- 4.3 ECC is currently doing a best value review of all its 'discretionary services', which includes the future provision of Home Improvement services across Essex. There is a risk that ECC will no longer commission Home Improvement services from next year (June 2017). The current option being explored is that DFG administration will fall to each local authority, who will be expected to pay for staff in-house or pay for an external Home Improvement Service from the additional Social Care capital grant, which, for the first time this year, has now been added to the DFG monies and has increased the budget totals
- 4.4 As part of the ongoing review of the Council's DFG journey, best practice has been explored with neighbouring local authorities, which has resulted in a pilot arrangement being tested with Basildon Building Control service, who provide a proven cost effective DFG service for Castle Point service. While discussions with ECC continue, Rochford will continue to explore its options, with the overall priority of ensuring there is no gap in service for residents and the delivery of any new service meets the new performance times.

#### **Waiting lists**

- 4.5 The main crux of the Housing Grant legislation is to ensure that disabled persons are given fair and equitable access to the DFG. So where funding is not currently available and processing time may be exceeded, although applications will be placed on a waiting list and held outside the process until funding becomes available, the following implications need to be considered, i.e. at what stage the rationing took place and what the consequences were. Prioritised waiting lists and the right communications at each stage is, therefore, critical if the Council is to manage any challenges. Papworth Trust with the support of the Council are managing this case by case and are

continuing to provide on going caseworker support to monitor any change in clients support needs.

## 5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Since April 2015 the DFG has been included in Better Care Fund (BCF) which is managed by Essex County Council. It requires a more targeted service to help people return from hospital, prevent or delay the need for care and support and reduce future hospital admissions.
- 5.2 The BCF allocation in 2015/16 totalled £250,000. 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 2016/17 BCF allocation for DFG's, showed an increase on the previous year, because of the new inclusion of the former Social Care Capital Grant. The total allocation for Rochford totalled £374,747. This year's budget was not 'topped up' by the Council, due to the lack of available Council capital resource.
- 5.4 Having regard to improved efficiencies, the total 2016/17 DFG allocation is now both 100% spent and committed and a prioritised waiting list is in place for all clients.
- 5.5 The DFG budget will be monitored monthly and monies will be released to take clients off the waiting lists, where at all possible. In the meantime, both the Occupational Therapy service and Papworth Trust are managing client's expectations and ensuring all critical needs are being met with either county funded equipment or minor adaptation works e.g. grab rails.

## 6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a statutory responsibility of the Council which is currently delivered by the Papworth Trust under an Essex County Council contract and a local service level agreement with the Council, that is due to expire in June 2017.
- 6.2 There is no specific part of the legislation that governs waiting list for DFG, although consideration as to the time limits for dealing with DFG applications is set out in the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

## 7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the work to streamline the DFG journey and the ongoing need to demand manage the service, as outlined in the report.



Louisa Moss

Assistant Director - Community & Housing

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**Background Papers:-**

None.

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

Phone: 01702 318095

Email: [louisa.moss@rochford.gov.uk](mailto:louisa.moss@rochford.gov.uk)

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

## Major Housing Adaptation Process – time targets

## The DFG Customer Journey

## Time targets for major housing adaptations\* - average working days

\*Most common housing adaptations i.e. stairlift/graded floor shower/ramp

Process stage	Old 2015/16	New	Current June 2016	Comments
<b>Social Care</b>				
Telephone call to ECC Social Care - Referral to the Hub of Independent Practitioners (HIP)				
OT waiting list	0	0	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No waiting list.</li> <li>The OT target is to contact the person within 7 days to make the appointment.</li> </ul>
OT Functional Assessment carried out within:	15	10	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The OT standard is to visit and assess within 28 days from referral. With no waiting list, this is on target.</li> <li>When the appointment happens depends upon the availability of both. Average 15 working days.</li> </ul>
Recommendation and report prepared and forwarded to RDC.	5	5	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The OT standard is to send the recommendations within 5 working days of all the information being gathered.</li> <li>This may require a joint visit or further discussions with the family before the OT can make the recommendations.</li> </ul>
<b>Sub Total Social Care</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>Housing – Papworth Trust Home Improvement Agency</b>				
Comino and Uniform case reference set up and all paperwork forwarded to Papworth Trust (PT) to administer	2	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Referral received at PT and logged on Case Manager and spreadsheet</li> </ul>
PT first contact with client	2	2	3	

PT Home visit to complete to forms, support plan	10	10	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Client dependencies on appt. availability.</li> </ul>
PT Adaptation Surveyor home visit to measure up, prepare works order and drawings (where applicable)	70	15	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waiting times have significantly reduced since May 2016, but performance contract monitoring continues monthly for all active cases.</li> </ul>
Plans drawn up and estimates obtained via PT design hub	40	28	40	<p>CRITICAL POINT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current delays waiting allocation at Design Hub. PT reviewing performance of their design hub and will be reporting monthly via contract monitoring on all active cases.</li> </ul>
Approval of DFG by PT within:	5	3	5	
Works completed within:	40	30	40	<p>CRITICAL POINT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approved contractors used by PT, are managed by the PT Adaptations Surveyor and Business Manager, who are reviewing the performance for each active case.</li> <li>All clients waiting for a contractor are being contacted and given a choice as to using their own builders and regular telephone contact is maintained with the client to ensure basic needs are being met during this waiting period.</li> </ul>
<b>Sub total Papworth Trust</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>125</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b> <b>Client journey</b> <b>Working days</b>  <b>Working weeks</b>	<b>189</b>   <b>37</b>	<b>100</b>   <b>20</b>	<b>145</b>   <b>29</b>	<p>2016/17 performance targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Q1 = 30 weeks ✓</li> <li>o Q2 = 26</li> <li>o Q3 = 22</li> <li>o Q4 = 20</li> </ul>
Internal audit of final invoice/certificates/practical completion				