

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 One of the Council's Key Targets and Actions for 2007/8 is the approval of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and completion of adaptation works to 16 properties.
- 1.2 Further to a request made by Members at the Executive Board 19 July, this report updates Members on progress and predicts that the target will be met. It explains the criteria for approving grants and provides a breakdown of current and forecast expenditure.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Disabled Facilities Grants are administered by Local Authorities under the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
- 2.2 Applications for grant can be made by owners, tenants, landlords and by occupiers of qualifying houseboats and caravans.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.

- 2.6 The maximum amount of grant that can be paid is currently £25,000. 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.
- 2.7 RH MAG can also be used to fund disability adaptations. It is primarily used for discretionary adaptation works, although occasionally it will be used to fund works that would otherwise be eligible under the mandatory scheme, but where there is a need to complete them as a matter of extreme urgency.

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 making an assessment and submitting recommendations.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 In the case of an owners application, proof of a qualifying interest in the property in question must be provided.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 In the vast majority of cases, applicants will request Springboard Home Improvement Agency to act for them, to provide the necessary documents, obtain any consents, engage suitable contractors and monitor the works.
- 3.6 Local authorities have six months in which to approve a valid grant application.

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

- 5.1 Funding for DFGs is through the capital programme. The Government 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 For 2007/8 the budget for DFGs has been agreed at £158,000, which includes Government support amounting to £66,960.
- 5.3 Where there is insufficient funding available, it has been accepted that applicants can be prioritised and placed on a waiting list.

6 CURRENT/PROJECTED SPEND & TARGET SETTING

- 6.1 The DFG process is entirely demand led and the Council has no control over the number of grant applications submitted. Furthermore, predicting when works are likely to be completed can be very difficult and will depend on the nature and extent of the adaptations and the timing of the grant submission and approval. Grants will, for instance, often be approved in one financial year but the works not completed until the following year. Consequently, establishing meaningful targets in terms of approvals and completions is difficult, if not impossible.
- 6.2 As at the end of August 2007, £12,400 of the 2007/08 budget has been spent, representing 3 grants completed. A further £101,400 has been committed relating to 16 grants approved, and it is anticipated that these grants will also be completed by the end of March 2008. The remaining budget of £44,200 is likely to be committed within the next three months but it is not clear at this stage, whether this will also be spent this year or carried forward to next year as a creditor.
- 6.3 In total, therefore, approval of grant and completion of works is expected for at least 19 properties during 2007/08. In addition, £71,000 has also been carried forward as a creditor from the 2006/07 budget, relating to 12 grants, and the works in these cases should also be completed this year.
- 6.4 Once the 2007/8 budget has been fully committed, and subject to liaison with the Head of Finance, Audit & Performance Management, grant applications will continue to be approved prior to the end of March 2008, on the basis that they will not be paid until the 2008/09 financial year.
- 6.5 With a growing demand for DFGs, the provision of sufficient budget will become more difficult. The need to place applicants on a waiting list will therefore become increasingly likely.

7 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 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.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 As stated above, the 2007/08 budget for DFGs is £158,000.
- 8.2 Although the 2008/09 capital programme has not been decided yet, the draft budget includes £108,000 for DFGs, including the Government support element. In view of the anticipated demand for grant aid this would not be considered to be adequate and a bid will be made during the budget setting process, to maintain the funding at least at the current level.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

10 RECOMMENDATION

- 10.1 It is proposed that the Executive Board **RESOLVES** to note the contents of this report and determine not to set targets for completion of Disabled Facilities Grants for future years, given the difficulties highlighted in this report.

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Background Papers:-

None

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