



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

**to
COMMUNTIY SERVICES COMMITTEE
28 AUGUST 2018**

UPDATE ON DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT 2017/18

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a summary of the allocation and outcomes of the Council's Disabled Facilities Grant programme (DFG) for the previous year and an indication of key activities planned for the current financial year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) Members are asked to note the key achievements from the previous year and approve proposals, as detailed in section 3.4, for further expansion of the scope and intended outcomes for the DFG programme in this current financial year.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council is required under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to provide financial assistance to those who need adaptations made to their home, as recommended by an Occupational Therapist. In 2016 the government ceased awarding funding directly to the Council and funding to meet these costs is now paid via Essex County Council under the Better Care Fund. The intention of this change is to help build closer links between those agencies who should be working in collaboration under the Care Act, i.e. health, housing and social care.
- 3.2 Since this change, almost all local housing authorities in Essex have received an increase in annual funding from government via Essex County Council in recognition of increasing demand. Some of the additional funding is also intended to encourage innovation and more flexibility in some ways of working, providing the primary duty of ensuring there is adequate funds to meet the mandatory grant requirements.
- 3.3 In 2017/18 the allocation for funding was £460.152, this has been increased to £499,961 for the current financial year. For some time now the Council has helped meet the operating costs by charging a fee for administration, this has now become widely adopted throughout Essex and most local authorities are now basing the level of fee income at 15% in line with Maldon District Council. This helps ensure the service is adequately resourced and has helped overcome the problems some Members may recall from some years ago when the Council had significant backlogs of cases and an underspend from one year to the next against the allocation of funding and the profile of spend against identified need. This is no longer the case and since last year, officers have worked to reach an agreement with each other and Essex

County Council that any underspend in one district, identified within the current financial year, could be used in part or full to meet the needs in other districts where demand may be much higher. To date the Council has not needed to offer any transfer of funds to other areas and is managing to meet demand within each year's allocated budget.

3.4 Income from fees for the previous year was £40,600 and contributions from housing associations amounted to more than £17,000, creating a supplementary receipt of nearly £60,000 making the service almost financially self-supporting.

3.5 Through agreement with Essex County Council as the administering authority, the Maldon District Council has gained approval to top-slice some of the additional funding to further improve capacity and resilience as well as meet some wider strategic aims. This meets the government's aim of encouraging local authorities to take a greater role in responding to the growing impact of an ageing population and working more effectively across agencies. For the current year this includes proposals and actions for the following:

- i. Approval to fund an apprentice surveyor – helping manage succession planning, improving capacity and resilience to meet longer term demands on the service;
- ii. Agreement to use some additional funding to contribute towards the cost of a 'home from hospital' scheme, linked with Community Led Housing, helping local housing associations provide dedicated facilities to help local people leave hospital sooner, move closer to family and undertake a programme of reablement;
- iii. Explore the potential to create a local home improvement agency type service, providing practical help, support and advice to older people and those with disabilities so that they can continue to live independently in their own homes, and,
- iv. Begin discussions with mid Essex Occupational Therapist Services (OTs) to consider the possibility of dedicated OTs to improve service and opportunities for those who may need adaptations.

3.6 Officers have also continued to work closely with local housing associations, seeking contributions towards the cost of adaptations (helping to extend the number of cases that can be funded each year) and making best use of property and resources. The benefits of closer working with housing providers and Occupational Therapists is illustrated by one of the Home Improvements Team's success stories from last year, a local family required extensive works to their home which would have exceeded the limit for grant funding. The Home Improvements Team, working with others in the Council's Housing Service, noticed that another property, which had previously been adapted had become vacant and was about to be re-let. Although some minor adaptations were still required, the alternate property would provide more space and a better living environment for the family. By using the flexibility of the Better Care Fund, the team was able to use funding to meet the costs of moving and adjusting the adaptations in the other property, which came to a total of £6,800 meaning a saving to the Council of approx. £23,000.

3.7 Last year there were over 100 referrals, this is higher than in previous years, but the team is also seeing a growing number of applicants withdrawing due to unwillingness

to disclose financial details. Of those cases that have progressed, there has been an increase in the complexity of cases and consequently the time and financial cost involved.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Council's Home Improvement Team continues to keep pace with the growing demands placed upon the service. The number of applications continues to rise, although some do not progress, this still places some additional demand on the team. There has been a continued increase in the complexity of cases requiring additional skill and expertise, but this will be helped by the proposed appointment of an apprentice surveyor.
- 4.2 The Service has continued to be successful in recovering funds to help stretch the team's operational budget and also using the additional funding to begin expanding the scope of the service into complementary and strategic services that help meet existing gaps in local services and support government proposals for developing locally based services.
- 4.3 For some time now the Home Improvements Team has been monitoring customer satisfaction. A record of this for the last financial year is provided in **APPENDIX 1** and shows that for all aspects monitored, scores were above 90%. The Home Improvements Team is therefore providing a highly valued and cost-effective service. This is a good basis upon which to begin building more strategic links across key agencies, especially health and social care, supporting local organisations in the process to meet the needs of older and disabled people in the local area.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

- 5.1 This initiative supports the corporate goal of strengthening communities to be safe, active and healthy.
- 5.2 The provision of this service meets the corporate goal of delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (ii) **Impact on Customers** – the provision of a Disabled Facility Grant service benefits those less able within the community.
- (iii) **Impact on Equalities** – None identified.
- (iv) **Impact on Risk** – None identified
- (v) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Met from the existing budget allocation.
- (vi) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None identified.
- (vii) **Impact on the Environment** – None Identified

Background Papers: None

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