



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY
to
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
2 APRIL 2019**

UPDATE REPORT ON DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT RELATED ISSUES

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 provide feedback on proposals raised at the Community Services Meeting on the 28 August 2018 (Minute 372 RESOLVED refers).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That Members note the key achievements from previous years;
- (ii) That Members receive and note the current status of proposals outlined at the meeting in August 2018 and detailed in section 3.5 below.

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 (OT). In 2016 the government ceased awarding funding directly to the Council and funding to meet these costs is now paid via Essex County Council (ECC) 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 ECC 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 2018/19 the allocation for funding was £499,961.00, this has been increased to £559,136.00 after a successful bid to The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government who released an additional £55 million Better Care Fund budget to be utilised this 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 (MDC). 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 ECC 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 this year to date is £58,900.00 and contributions from housing associations currently stand at £10,700.00, creating a supplementary receipt of almost £70,000 making the service almost financially self-supporting.

3.5 **Update on the 28 August 2018 Committee Proposals (Minute 372 refers)**

3.5.1 Through agreement with Essex County Council as the managing authority of the Better Care Fund, Maldon District Council has gained approval, as part of its administration of Maldon's allocation of the Better Care Fund, 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. Below is an update on the proposals made at the Community Services Committee meeting of the 28th August 2018.

- i. *Approval to fund an apprentice surveyor – helping manage succession planning, improving capacity and resilience to meet longer term demands on the service;*

There is no current provision for an apprentice surveyor within the future model however this matter will be reviewed as part of the detailed design work which will be carried out over the summer of 2019 to ensure the Council is able to deliver its services effectively

- 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 enable local people to leave hospital sooner, move closer to family and undertake a programme of reablement;*

Negotiations are on-going in connection with the Community Led Housing Project regarding a re-ablement programme.

A Home from Hospital Task and Finish Group and a Handyperson Task and Finish Group has been set up. MDC Officers are part of both groups. These Groups have identified the need for a Countywide Handyperson Service with particular focus being given to minor works, (such as key safe and level thresholds etc.) These works are often required to prevent delayed discharge and enable safe efficient return home from hospital. This service should also

reduce/prevent hospital admission and promote an individual's independence. Continued work is ongoing to establish how this can be achieved, focussing on the feasibility of each Authority contributing towards a Handyperson Service to undertake these minor works.

Both Groups need to do further work to ensure an effective service is provided avoiding duplication of the current Essex Carers and Care Support Services (ECL) contract.

- 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 homes;*

The Home Improvement Team is providing an Informal Home Improvement Agency type service which generates substantial income from fees. The Team is in an excellent position as part of the Housing Team to be informed of properties that are to be advertised on Choice Based Letting before the advertisement is placed. The Team is continuing to facilitate relocations to previously adapted properties therefore making better use of housing stock as required by the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy. Local knowledge within the team coupled with the fact that two of the team are former Home Improvement Agency (HIA) staff, allow positive discussion with clients at the initial visit stage. The recommendations provided by the Occupational Therapist are reviewed and early identification made where these works are not practicable to undertake in the property. The possibility of moving is then discussed at the outset, thus avoiding unnecessary delays in meeting the client's needs.

The Team works very closely with all Housing Associations across the Maldon District securing contributions for works to be undertaken at these Housing Association's properties. Advice and assistance are given regarding Attendance Allowance, which is a much-underutilised allowance for older people, the additional income achieved as a result of this assistance allows vulnerable residents to employ people to assist them with various tasks (such as handyperson) which are beyond their capability thus reducing the risk of slips, trips and falls and subsequent hospitalisation. This matter will be kept under review.

- iv *Begin discussions with mid Essex Occupational Therapist Services (OTs) to consider the possibility of dedicated OTs to improve service and other opportunities for those who may need adaptations.*

Discussions have been completed, Countywide, regarding the provision of an in-house Occupational Therapist (OT). An agreement has been completed for Maldon District Council, Braintree District Council and Chelmsford City Council to share an in-house OT. The use of this service is based upon the number of recommendations received. Chelmsford and Braintree will utilise the OT for two days and Maldon for one day. MDC contribution towards this is pro-rata and funded from Maldon's Better Care Funding allocation.

In conjunction with the OT, Council Officers will be looking to develop a pathway from hospital/hospice to home and will also be on hand to discuss any general queries we may have regarding recommendations.

- 3.5.2 During the debate a number of other issues were raised and the Director of Service Delivery's response to those is attached at **APPENDIX 1** for Members information.
- 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. Two house moves have been undertaken so far this year, one alleviating a Disabled Facilities Grant as the property was fully adapted. A discretionary grant was approved for the cost of a van to facilitate the move therefore saving approx. £10,000.00. The other was a tenant moving from a Tied property to a MOAT property where the cost was split 50-50 with Moat. Two grants were approved for major works incorporating step lift access and bathroom adaptations. One couple worked closely with the Team to enable them to implement their preferred option works to meet the needs of their child. The through floor lift was funded by a DFG along with a small contribution towards the graded floor shower facility. The remainder of this major project was funded by the client. Another of the larger projects was a garage conversion to form a Graded Floor Shower and toilet plus full access to the rear of the property.
- 3.7 The number of recommendations has slowed down, however, the complexity of case referrals has increased therefore greater surveying capacity is required to service that need. The 34% of grants approved this financial year exceeded the average grant in 2017/18. Recruitment for a Surveyor proved unsuccessful as neither applicant had the specialist knowledge or qualifications required, the post is to be re-advertised. All clients receive an evaluation form, the % is a sample size of 169 forms most recently recorded. OT recommendations are reviewed by Officers and Surveyors at the initial visit. Discussions are undertaken, and further input sought from the OT if necessary. Officers have considerable experience regarding recommendations and the Surveyor is able to determine if the OT scheme is reasonable and practicable to complete.
- 3.8 Clients' reluctance to disclose financial details means a number of DFG enquiries are not proceeding. However, two clients assessed as having to make a substantial contribution have chosen to progress their adaptation projects using the Council's informal agency service. To date the committed spend is approx. £527,000.00

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Growing demand is being placed upon the service to deal with the continued increase in the complexity of cases. As part of the detailed design work being undertaken during the summer of 2019 this matter will be reviewed. Officers will be exploring resources available within the Council to meet service demands.
- 4.2 The Service has continued to be successful in recovering funds to help stretch the team's operational budget and 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.

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

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

Background Papers: None

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