



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
24 NOVEMBER 2020 (SPECIAL MEETING)**

UPDATE ON DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT RELATED ISSUES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide update on the Council's Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) programme up to Quarter 2 (Q2) 2020 / 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That Members note the impact of the ongoing Covid issues on service provision;
- (ii) That Members receive and note the status up to Quarter 2 - 30 October 2020.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Changing focus from the Disabled Facilities Grant to the term Private Sector Housing objectives are:

- Impacts of effecting service delivery;
- Headline figures from 2019 / 20;
- Headline figures for 2020 / 21.

4. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT / PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING OBJECTIVES

4.1 The Council is required to provide a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. This Act explicitly covers mandatory DFGs offering assistance once an Occupational Therapist recommendation has fulfilled the criteria of an adaptation being:

‘necessary and appropriate’ and
‘reasonable and practical’.

4.2 Applicants also must satisfy a Test of Resources looking at income and savings which determines whether they will have to contribute towards a Grant.

- 4.3 The DFG monies are now part the Better Care Fund and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Housing has increased the amount given to Local Authorities significantly in recent years.
- 4.4 In 2016 / 17 the amount rose from £220m to £395m, reaching £505m in 2019 / 20.
- 4.5 While many Officers and Members refer to the associated works as the Disabled Facilities Grant, it is actually part of wider a statutory responsibly better referred to as the Private Sector Housing objectives.
- 4.6 As such, reference to the Disabled Facilities Grant should be amended and referred to under the Private Sector Housing (PSH) title.

5. IMPACTS EFFECTING SERVICE DELIVERY

- 5.1 The main factors affecting service delivery in 2019 / 2020 and 2020 / 2021 were:

5.2 Transformation

- 5.2.1 The Council went through a major transformation programme which implemented the Ignite working model, going live in October 2019. The model delivered a completely new way of working for Council Officers. As with any large-scale transformation program, there were impacts in relation to service delivery, as job roles were redefined and some staff left while new staff joined.

- 5.2.2 Since October 2019, the new model and way of working has started to embed. New temporary Officers are now in post reorganising the PSH workstream and are appointing new Contractors as part of a refresh exercise. This work is progressing well, despite the challenging climate.

5.3 Covid-19

- 5.3.1 The impact of Covid-19 on the Councils ability to deliver services has been substantial. The 'Covid Lockdown' commenced on 23 March 2020 in the last quarter of 2019 / 20.

- 5.3.2 Requirements for people to shield, work from home and for businesses to lockdown massively limited the delivery of DFG related work. Home assessments, technical surveys, administration of applications, and all programmed adaptation works had to be suspended.

- 5.3.3 However, recent relaxation measures have provided for incremental resumption of services with a shift of focus to progressing the administrative elements of applications / cases, as far as possible by taking a more flexible approach with enhanced safeguarding considerations for vulnerable residents who could still be shielding.

5.4 Staffing update

- 5.4.1 In addition to the relaxation of Covid restrictions, successful recruitment has resulted in the appointment of one DFG caseworker in July 2020. Further recruitment is underway to appoint a Housing Specialist in this area. This will provide a much-needed boost to the delivery of the programme and future planning.

6. WORK PERFORMANCE FOR YEAR 2019 / 20

- 6.1 In 2019 / 20 the allocation for funding for PSH functions amounted to £499,961
- 6.2 The Council approved 36 cases over the 2019 / 20 period.
- 6.3 DFG expenditure for 2019 / 20 was £351,000.
- 6.4 The remaining balance of £148,961 was carried over for continued use of DFG functions

7. WORK PERFORMANCE FOR Q1 TO Q2 2020 / 21

- 7.1 The current PSH budget from MHCLG 2020/21 is £539,488 with any underspend being carried forward to 2021 / 22.
- 7.2 From 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020 (Q1 to Q2) the Council has received 74 referrals for DFG. A further 49 open cases are at various stages of the DFG process.
- 7.3 The current DFG approved / committed expenditure for 2020 / 21 is £79,113.
- 7.4 With the significant number of applications in progress it is estimated that DFG commitment for 2020 / 21 will be in the region of £250,000 to £300,000 by the end of the financial year.
- 7.5 It is expected that the Government will continue with the Better Care Fund programme to support Local Authorities to help older and disabled people to live independently and safely in their own homes which will be delivered through the DFG process.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The sustained impact of Covid and the delayed recruitment of staff had a negative impact on service delivery and the administration of DFG applications in the first two quarters of this year. However, with the incremental relaxation of Covid restrictions and successful recruitment, a measure of confidence and normality has resumed to service provision.
- 8.2 The demand for DFG's has increased and there has been a steady flow of referrals received from Adult Social Care - Essex County Council. In turn, there has been improvement in the processing of applications to approval which will result in

increased PSH expenditure in the second half of the financial year with substantial commitment carried forward to 2021.

- 8.3 The Council remains committed to the delivery of the DFG programme to qualifying residents. Applications received will be administered to approval as appropriate under the Act. The current budget allocation for 2020 / 21 will be monitored and at present is satisfactory to meet demand.

9. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 9.1 The Private Sector Housing provision of DFG's supports the Council's Strategic Themes.

10. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The provision of a Disabled Facility Grant provides older, vulnerable residents in the District the ability to live independently in their home.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None identified.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – Failure to administer The Better Care Fund would be a breach of statutory duties under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act (1996) and the Care Act (2014)
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Met from the existing budget allocation. (The Better Care Fund is apportioned by Essex County Council on a yearly basis).
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None identified.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None Identified.

Background Papers: None.

Enquiries to:

Damien Ghela, Lead Specialist Community
Paul Duguid, Housing Specialist DFG