
Report to
Cabinet Member (Community Services)

10 October 2006

Report of
Director of Community Services

Title
Disabled Facilities Grants

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet Member of the measures put into place to reduce the waiting time for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet Member approves the actions detailed in Sec 4 of the report.

3 Background Information

- 3.1 A report was taken to the Cabinet Member (Health and Housing) on the 14 September 2004 recommending revised criteria for major adaptations to the homes of people with a disability and the approval of the re-assessment of the needs of service users who were awaiting a DFG.
- 3.2 The reason the work was initiated was because, for a number of years, the capital resources for DFG's had fallen far short of the amount needed to meet the demand, even though the City Council had supplemented the government allocation with additional monies from its own resources over recent years.
- 3.3 At the time of the report there was a waiting list of 450+ referrals with the longest wait being 19/20 months. Following approval of the recommendations action was taken to reduce the waiting list and the waiting time. This included applying tighter eligibility criteria, increasing the capital allocation for DFG's, ensuring that anyone who would benefit from an "enablement approach" received that assistance before a DFG was considered and looking at ways to speed up the DFG process.
- 3.4 Following these actions the waiting list has been reduced to 130/140 referrals, with the oldest being received in October 2005. Whilst the service continues to promote an individuals independence through an enablement approach, referrals for adaptations are still, however, averaging 20 per month. The waiting list continues despite a significant capital investment from the Council and the tighter eligibility criteria. The continued delay is not only of concern to your officers but to both the Commission for Social Care Inspection and the Housing Inspectorate of the Audit Commission have been critical of it.

4 Actions being proposed

- 4.1 In order to reduce the waiting times still further action is being proposed to address the problem on a number of fronts. These include:-

- a) Stricter guidance being issued to Occupational Therapists to ensure that assessments provide the minimum adaptation necessary to meet people's needs. Service users who want more extensive schemes will be advised on alternative funding to meet these additional costs, notably "equity release".
- b) Those referrals on the waiting list and those in the early stages of scheme preparation are being re-assessed to ensure that only the minimum adaptation necessary to meet the service users needs is developed.
- c) Where possible service users will be encouraged to take a "Direct Payment" for the adaptation and arrange the work themselves.
- d) Investigating the use of modular shower units rather than the provision of new build ground floor shower/wc's.
- e) "Bath out/shower in" adaptations to be "fast tracked" and where possible a direct payment offered.
- f) Where there are wider social care issues in the delivery of a DFG, a joint assessment will be undertaken by a social worker and an OT.
- g) Any scheme likely to exceed £25000 to be authorised by the Housing Grants Manager and the Head of Therapy Services.
- h) Everyone on the waiting list has a care plan in place and this is reviewed every six months.

4.2 The review process has commenced with those referrals "in preparation" which resulted in 76 being re-assessed. Of these, 22 cases require further investigation/visit before a decision can be made as to the best way forward. Of the remainder (54) one has been cancelled, 21 schemes have been reduced in specification and 1 has increased due to changing needs of the service user. 31 are to proceed with no change. The total estimated reduction in cost of the 54 schemes is:-

Total original estimated costs	£855,500
Total new estimated costs	£606,500
Total reduction	£249,000

The remaining 132 cases on the waiting list have been broken down into various categories. Where the referral is for a "bath out/shower in" (45 cases) the service user is being contacted to see if they wish to accept a Direct Payment for the work, which would enable them to receive a payment and arrange for the works themselves, without the need to go through the DFG process. Those that do not wish to follow this route will be processed through the normal DFG route. Information will be presented at your meeting on the 10 October about the response.

A further 10 cases requiring access works (ramp/step lift) and 6 where a ground floor WC is required will be processed as normal. The remaining 71 cases will need a full re-assessment of the adaptation recommendation. These will be undertaken in the order in which they have been received, ie oldest first.

In the meantime any new referrals will be assessed under the new guidelines to ensure that the assessment provides the minimum adaptation necessary to meet the service users needs.

4.3 As indicated in paragraph 3.2 the Council has supplemented the allocation given by Government to finance DFG work, by resources from elsewhere in the Housing Capital Programme. This year the Government allocation of £1.08 million is being supplemented by a further £1.80 million.

4.4 In undertaking a review and reassessment of the cases on the waiting list it is proposed that a further report is presented to members highlighting the lessons learnt, and recommendations made for the future process of managing applications for disabled

facilities grants. The recommendations will focus on efficiencies within the process as well as with cost. It is anticipated that by reviewing contractual arrangements for low level adaptations, these could be provided at a more reasonable cost and provided quicker than current practice. The report will also assess the estimated financial implications and make recommendations about whether the funding for DFG's should be increased still further in order to further reduce the waiting times.

5 Other specific implications

5.1

	Implications (See below)	No Implications
Neighbourhood Management		✓
Best Value	✓	
Children and Young People		✓
Comparable Benchmark Data		✓
Corporate Parenting		✓
Coventry Community Plan		✓
Crime and Disorder		✓
Equal Opportunities	✓	
Finance	✓	
Health and Safety		✓
Human Resources		✓
Human Rights Act		✓
Impact on Partner Organisations		✓
Information and Communications Technology		✓
Legal Implications		✓
Property Implications		✓
Race Equality Scheme		✓
Risk Management		✓
Sustainable Development		✓
Trade Union Consultation		✓
Voluntary Sector – The Coventry Compact		✓

5.2 Best value

The introduction of tighter criteria for DFG referrals and the re-assessment of the existing waiting list will enable additional DFG's to be approved within the overall capital programme allocation.

5.3 Equal opportunities

The changes to the assessment process will enable more disabled service users to have speedier access to adaptations to meet their needs.

5.4 Finance

The council receives external grant funding via the Government Office for the West Midlands of £1.008m per annum towards the cost of DFG's. In addition the Housing Capital Programme has supplemented this by another £1.8m per annum from the grant received from the Regional Housing Board. The council currently commits no corporate capital resource to the DFG programme.

The changing priorities of the Regional Housing Board has resulted in a significant decrease in the amount of grant awarded to the council in 2006/07 (down £1.463m from 2005/06) and this is expected to remain consistent for future years. Consequently, the ability of the Housing Capital Programme to supplement the DFG programme still further is limited. A report was approved at the Cabinet Members meeting on the 20 June 2006, which made alterations to the programme because of the reduced allocation.

Work is currently on going to identify alternative sources of funding which will enable a reduction in the current number of applicants waiting for a DFG.

Monitoring

- 5.5 Regular progress meetings will be held to ensure that progress is maintained in reviewing and progressing the DFG referrals on the waiting list. A Capital Monitoring group exists within Housing Policy and Services to ensure that the programme is delivered.

6 Timescale and expected outcomes

- 6.1 The review of the existing waiting list should be completed by the end of November. All new referrals are now being assessed under the new guidelines. The expected outcome of these actions is a reduction in the average DFG costs and a subsequent reduction in the waiting time for a DFG.

	Yes	No
Key Decision		✓
Scrutiny Consideration (If yes, which Scrutiny meeting and date)		✓
Council Consideration (If yes, date of Council meeting)		✓

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

Location

None