

COMMUNITY & SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

18TH MARCH 2014

REPORT OF HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFG's)

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Members requested an update regarding the underspend on the DFG budget in 2013-14.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Members note the process for administering the DFG process.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 DFGs are most frequently used for bath out and level access shower installed or a stairlift, (enabling easier access to bathing/ toilet facilities and bedrooms). Adaptations for children with life-long conditions may involve an extension for a ground floor bedroom and bathroom access. Occasionally adaptations may involve ramps, door widening or kitchen adaptations to enable wheelchair access.
- 3.2 In order to approve a DFG, there are two distinct stages. The first is that a recommendation for the adaptation must be received from an appropriate Adult or Children's Occupational Therapist (OT) from Social Care Services at Leicestershire County Council. The second is that a means test needs to be carried out by the Grants Officer of Melton Borough Council. This would involve establishing whether the applicant is in receipt of a passporting benefit (for example guaranteed pension credit) or alternatively assessing all of their income and savings utilising a methodology specified by Government to determine how much they can afford to contribute to the works.
- 3.3 These two processes can run concurrently because if a means test is carried out and the applicant is not eligible for a grant they usually go ahead and sort out the adaptation themselves rather than waiting for the OT visit.
- 3.4 Equally, Social Care may be dealing with an individual on a graduated approach. This means that following their initial visit they may recommend that minor adaptation (i.e. grab rails/temporary ramp) and/or specialist equipment is installed for the client to trial to see whether that is sufficient to help them in their circumstances. Should this subsequently be determined to be inadequate the OT may then put a referral through for a DFG, at which point a means test would be carried out.
- 3.5 Once the Grants Officer has determined that the applicant is eligible for a DFG, they **MUST** obtain the referral from the OT which specifies the works necessary for that applicant. From this a design and specification can be produced and estimates obtained from suitable contractors.

3.6 Without the OT referral the Grants Officer cannot proceed. Although there are funds in the budget to be allocated, they cannot be allocated. This is where the blockage is in the current system. The OTs for Melton and the Head of Service at Leicestershire County Council are aware we have funds to be allocated and they have employed an additional temporary resource to try and deal with their waiting list. If a graduated approach is determined to be necessary it may still take a number of weeks before a referral is made to us.

3.7 Once a DFG is approved, the Regulations state that the work must be completed within a year, so in addition to the spent budget there is always an additional committed budget, which is not always shown on budget papers. Usually the contractors carrying out such adaptations do the work as quickly as their schedule allows for the benefit of the applicant.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There is a national priority to enable people to be able to remain in their own home, rather than being in hospital or transferred into the Care system. Apart from the financial benefit, people are generally happier in their own home.

4.2 A priority of Melton Borough Council is to support vulnerable people in the Borough and to improve their wellbeing. This process contributes to this.

4.3 Benchmarking is carried out across Leicestershire from receipt of referral from the OT to completion of work. Over recent years the timescales involved have improved. Challenging Service standards were set in 2011 and are generally met in Melton. In order to develop true start to finish times we are trying to obtain the original referral date from the OT service, but this is not always supplied.

4.4 Currently the cost of providing DFGs to local authorities is partially met by a grant from the DCLG. From 2015-2016 this will be pooled into a new budget currently referred to as "The Better Care Fund" which will be distributed by the Department of Health. Plans for this funding are expected to be developed by Clinical Commissioning Groups and top tier local authorities. This could result in a reduction or removal of DFGs and housing related support. This grant has been around £100k each year for Melton in the past. Leicestershire authorities are working together to be involved to influence and manage the changes.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Due to the lag time in referrals from the OT at Social Care Services, the budget will not all be allocated for this financial year.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 DFGs are mandatory grants; the Council have a duty to approve eligible applications.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 DFGs enable disabled and vulnerable residents to remain in their own home rather than utilising more expensive Health Care or Care Services.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 There is a positive impact on vulnerable residents

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

9.1 There are no climate change implications relating to this report

10.0 CONSULTATION

10.1 The Head of Finance has been consulted with regard to this report.

11.0 WARDS AFFECTED

11.1 Every ward is likely to have some eligible applicants residing there.

Contact Officer Victoria Clarke

Date: 6th March 2014

Appendices :

Background Papers:

Reference : X : Council\