

REPORT TO: Health Policy & Performance Board
DATE: 27th June, 2023
REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adults
PORTFOLIO: Adult Social Care
SUBJECT: Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Review
WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To present the Board with the results of the benchmarking exercise of current practice against the new Disabled Facilities Grant Guidance

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board:

i) Note the contents of the report

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) was established 34 years ago and are mandatory capital grants that are available from Local Authorities to pay for essential housing adaptations to help disabled people stay in their own homes. It is available to owner occupiers, private sector tenants and housing association tenants. The grant is able to pay for changes that the Council consider essential for the disabled person to live an independent life. The changes must be 'necessary to meet needs and the work must be 'reasonable and practical'.

3.2 Applications are means tested with the maximum grant award being £30,000. To ensure that the grants reach the people most in need a means test for adults (not children) is carried out to determine the amount of grant and looks at the income and capital of the disabled person and their spouse or partner collectively. For families with a disabled child under 19 years the grant is not means tested.

3.3 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) gave local housing authorities the power to adopt discretionary policies with regard to housing interventions to promote independent living and wellbeing. In 2008 a number of changes were made to the way DFGs were administered allowing DFG monies to be used more flexibly to help keep people safe and well at home.

3.4 The social care White Paper, People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform promised several developments in respect of the DFG including an increase to the maximum grant limit; potential changes to the DFG means test; a review of how DFG funding is allocated; and a new fund for minor repairs and changes.

Consultation on these matters was expected in 2022 but is still outstanding.

- 3.5 The Government's National Disability Strategy (July 2021) promised new DFG guidance for authorities in England. The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) issued this guidance in 2022 to advise local authorities how they can effectively and efficiently deliver DFG funded adaptations. It brings together existing policy frameworks, legislative duties and powers, together with recommended best practice, to help local authorities best serve disabled tenants and residents in their area. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-dfg-delivery-guidance-for-local-authorities-in-england>.

3.6 **Current Issues**

High demand for the service continues across Halton. Demand for adaptations has always outstripped supply and this is likely to continue as the population ages and with the continued increase in complexity of children's adaptations.

- 3.7 The impact of the pandemic resulted in a reduction in service demand during 2020/21, however, there has been an increase in demand since this time both from the social landlord route and direct applications to the service.

- 3.8 The capacity of the construction sector locally has not yet recovered from the pandemic. This has been compounded by the delays in the delivery of materials and higher than expected costs overall.

- 3.9 Within Halton it was agreed to use the powers within the RRO 2002 to provide discretionary DFG assistance and that a flexible approach to the use of discretionary DFGs was adopted and designed to give equal consideration to people's needs with additional resources made available to the sum of £10,000. The aim of the discretionary element is to assist those meeting certain criteria and whose application would cost in excess of the maximum mandatory award of £30,000 and who would otherwise have to make a financial contribution themselves. Access to the discretionary funding is increasing adding further pressures to the DFG budget.

3.10 **Benchmarking Exercise**

A benchmarking exercise was undertaken to compare Halton practice against the newly issued government guidance to establish baselines, define best practice, identify improvement opportunities and gain a perspective of how well we perform against other areas.

- 3.11 A task and finish group was formed which reviewed HBC current practice against the best practice guidance. The group consisted of representatives from Occupational Therapy and the Home Improvement Agency. They identified a set of opportunities for development and subsequent recommendations for the service which include:

- Wider publication of DFG provision – including self assessment opportunities
- Consideration of additional joint initiatives with key partners such as housing

- Provision of a wider range of assistive technology via discretionary loans or grants.

There were further considerations contained within the guidance which were dependent upon local need.

- Targeting financial help to specific groups – such as waiving the means test.
- Provision of dementia grants
- Ignoring the earnings of a person specifically with MND within the means test where large scale works are required.
- A fast track process with no means testing for works up to £5,000 for people with MND

3.12 It is difficult to prioritise one disability above all other life limiting disabilities. Within Halton there are 12 people living with MND. The group looked at MND cases and specifically considered their progress through the DFG system.

3.13 The group felt that the current practice is able to prioritise people with life limiting diseases to access assessments in a timely fashion and give them access to the DFG quickly and efficiently. However, in order to offer a financial passport to people who suffer from MND would require additional investment into the grant.

3.14 Similarly with some of the other preventative aspects of the guidance in relation to disease specific grants, self assessment portals and assistive technology could not be facilitated within the current budget.

3.15 The benchmarking exercise has provided assurance that current DFG practice is working well for the people of Halton. It has also highlighted the need to further review policy and processes in the light of the published DFG guidance. It is anticipated that a steering group will be established to explore these options and report back to the Board at a future meeting with their findings.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Any changes in processes or procedures will require review and revision of Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) and Housing Assistance Policy

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Any changes to DFG provision will have financial implications for the DFG budget. The budget is already under pressure as adaptations are much more complex and exceed the mandatory levels of the grant. The DFG mandatory maximum upper limit of £30,000 has not been increased by government despite the increasing pressures on the budget.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

N/A

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

N/A

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Effective and efficient DFG provision will support this priority

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

N/A

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

N/A

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The DFG Guidance is to advise local authorities how they can effectively and efficiently deliver DFG funded adaptations and it is currently not a statutory requirement, however, it offers best practice and would ensure that Halton is in a strong position to deliver necessary and appropriate services to the people of Halton.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Need to ensure that decisions made to do not discriminate between different groups of disability.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 This report is for information only, therefore there are no environmental or climate implications as a result of this report.

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection