

HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
10 SEPTEMBER 2018

AMENDMENT TO DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT POLICY- DISCRETIONARY FUNDING

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek Members approval for a interim amendment to the policy covering the maximum amount of funding eligible from the discretionary element of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG).

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The Policy on Disabled Facilities grants was approved by Homes and Communities Committee in March 2016.

3.0 Introduction

- 3.1 Disabled Facilities Grants are the mandatory grants that are designed to provide adaptations to the home to allow a disabled person to continue living in the community. These grants are subject to a means test and some applicants do have to pay a contribution towards the cost of the work. Referrals for these grants come from the Occupational Therapy team of the County Council.
- 3.2 In addition to outlining the mandatory grants procedure the Policy also sets out the limited circumstances under which the Authority might consider using discretionary powers to provide additional grant over and above the mandatory maximum or DFG in circumstances that would fall outside normal grant eligibility.
- 3.3 The mandatory DFG scheme is currently restricted to a maximum award of £30,000. On occasion complex/comprehensive adaptations, generally involving the construction of bedroom/bathroom extensions, can exceed this threshold. In a limited number of cases low income and vulnerable households require additional financial assistance to ensure the essential works can proceed. The policy provides discretion for the Authority to award additional grants in these specific circumstances subject to the availability of sufficient budget.
- 3.4 The section on discretionary help can be found in part 2 of the policy and the relevant paragraphs are set out below.

Although the maximum amount of grant available for a mandatory DFG is currently £30,000 the Authority has agreed through this policy to potentially provide an additional maximum amount of up to £10,000 as a discretionary top-up where circumstances are such that the cost of work exceeds £30,000 (either as a result of unforeseen works or the extent of the original work that is recommended to the Council). This type of assistance will only be offered as a top up for schemes that fall within the mandatory grant headings as previously described.

When determining any application for discretionary assistance the Authority will consider any agreed Nottinghamshire County Council funding plus the ability of the

applicant to self-fund the identified additional costs. Subject to this assessment discretionary award will potentially make up the difference between the maximum grant and the cost of eligible works (up to a maximum £10,000). Any discretionary top-up will be repayable on the eventual sale of the subject property and will be recorded as a Land Registry charge.

Any discretionary top-up will only be considered having regard to the amount of resources the Authority has at the time. If it does not have sufficient resources left to deal with other referrals that have been passed to the Authority by the Occupational Therapy Service at the time, the Authority reserves the right not to approve any discretionary top-up.

- 3.5 Since the Introduction of this policy the authority has seen rising building costs and this allied with schemes addressing more complex needs that are now a small number of schemes that are likely not to progress without additional funding. As an example there is a scheme currently being processed that has an overall cost of £55,065

The funding for this scheme is made up of:

NSDC Mandatory DFG - £30,000.00
NSDC Discretionary DFG - £10,000.00
Charitable funds - £4,000.00
NCC Top Up - £8,000.00
Total - £52,000.00
Shortfall - £3,065

- 3.6 The means test for the applicant has identified that they have a nil contribution to the grant and the further review of the household finances undertaken as part of the county council top up process has also revealed that there is no potential for the household to contribute monies towards the scheme.
- 3.7 In this scenario it is unlikely that the scheme will progress and therefore the applicant will have to continue to reside in the property that does not meet the needs of the occupant.
- 3.8 The number of cases where this is happening is still relatively small but is likely to increase overtime.
- 3.9 It should be noted that the DFG framework has been subject to a national review, the findings of which will be reported to this committee when they are available. It has been suggested that one of the outcomes of the review will be to raise the mandatory limit for grants from £30,000 to a higher figure (possibly £50,000). If this is the case it will reduce the demand for additional discretionary assistance.

4.0 Proposals

- 4.1 In order to address the issue of grant schemes exceeding current limits it is proposed that in exceptional circumstances the discretionary DFG grant can be increased to £15,000. This additional £5,000 discretion over the current £10,000 limit will only be exercised in cases

where all other sources of funding have been exhausted and where the scheme will not progress without the provision of the additional funding.

4.2 Currently the Business Manager Environmental Health and Licencing has the delegated authority to award the discretionary element up to a value of £10,000. It is proposed that the additional funding will only be awarded following consultation with the Director - Safety.

4.3 It is proposed that this is an interim arrangement that will be reviewed within 12 months and a further report brought to Committee at this stage, or sooner if the outcomes from the national review of DFGs are known.

5.0 Budgetary Implications

5.1 The funding for discretionary elements of the DFG system is via the Better Care Fund. The discretionary funding for £2018/19 is £148,790. This is made up of the £30,000 from the 2018/19 BCF allocation and a carry forward from the previous year.

5.2 It is anticipated that the small number of scheme start will require the additional funding can be accommodated with the existing budget.

5.3 The Council's allocation for 2015/16 has been set for the first operational year of the BCF by central government at £465,000, an increase in comparison to recent years and closer to our actual spend on DFG's. At present the Authority is not aware of the proposed allocation methodology the BCF/Nottinghamshire County Council will utilise for future funding arrangements but the Council retains its statutory duty to provide DFG's within the district and a duty to cascade resources to second tier Councils has been built into the BCF's operating guidance.

6.0 Comments of Director – Resources

6.1 Budget for the Disabled Facilities Grants is included within the Capital Programme and is fully funded by the BCF allocation.

6.2 2019/20 funding from the BCF is currently unknown, but the Capital Programme assumes no changes to the funding levels. If the level of grant reduces, creating a funding gap Policy and Finance Committee will need to consider funding this from the Council's own resources.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that:

- (a) Members are asked to consider providing an additional £5,000 of discretionary funding for DFG schemes in exceptional circumstance; and that,**
- (b) The additional discretionary funding will only be awarded following consultation with the Director- Safety; and that,**
- (c) A review of this policy will be undertaken within 12 months and a further report be brought back to Homes and Communities Committee**

Reason for Recommendations

To ensure that there is a clear and transparent and up to date policy for Disabled Facilities Grants

Background Papers

NSDC Disabled Facilities Grant Policy

For further information please contact Alan Batty Business Manager - Environmental Health and Licensing on extension 5467.

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Director – Safety