

HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

11 MARCH 2019

NATIONAL REVIEW OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Members of the findings of the national review of Disabled Facilities Grants.

2.0 Background

2.1 In early 2018 The Department of Health & Social Care appointed the University of West of England to carry out an independent review of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) in England. The University worked with Foundations, the Building Research Establishment, Ferret Information System and an experienced Occupational Therapist to look at both the operation of the grant and the wider delivery of home adaptations to support the independence of disabled people living in their own homes

2.2 Despite increases to the annual DFG budget, demand for adaptations has always outstripped supply and this is set to continue as the population ages. The review sought to ensure that home adaptation policy remains fit for purpose and that funds are being allocated as effectively as possible.

2.3 A series of consultation workshops were held during March in London, Leeds and Wolverhampton to debate the issues and draw conclusions for the final report.

2.4 The review reported back in June 2018 with evidence-based recommendations on how the grant could operate in the future. A copy of the Review (in summary) is attached as **Appendix One**.

3.0 The National Review

3.1 This Review looks at how the DFG currently operates and makes evidenced based and practical recommendations for how it should change in the future. The review is split into discreet sections and gives recommendations on each of these issues. This report identifies the main issues raised in each chapter and offers some narrative to give the national recommendations some local context.

3.2 Challenges Identified

The aim of the review was twofold.

- (1) support more people of all ages to live in suitable housing so they can stay independent for longer;
- (2) make the case for more joined up action across housing, health and social care.

3.3 The review was looking at a national picture and identifies a number of challenges inherent in the current DFG system. Having reviewed the challenges identified the Business Manager responsible for delivering the DFG programme in Newark & Sherwood does not believe that they accurately reflect the local picture of service delivery. For example, one of the challenges identified is:

The increase in central government resources has not yet resulted in more people being helped due to reduced financial input from local authorities, lack of revenue funding, more complex cases and higher cost of work

The spend on DFGs in 2018/19 is likely to be close to £700,000. This has increased over the past few years and is way above the figures that were being spent as little as four years ago.

3.4 Joining It Up Strategically

The report finds that the responsibility of providing care to enable independent living (in both single tier and two tier areas) can be disjointed and not have the same strategic objectives.

3.5 IT makes a number of recommendations to address this problem. The two worthy of most note are set out below.

- A Housing and Health Partnership Board in each area as a requirement of DFG funding with representatives from housing, health and social care.
- Housing and Health Partnership Boards to have a similar structure to Local Safeguarding Children's Boards.
- A single adaptations policy based on the needs of the locality, reviewed annually and signed off by the Health & Wellbeing Board.

3.6 Following the introduction of the Better Care Fund, a Programme Board was established (chaired by the County Council) to oversee the DFG delivery across the county and to have oversight on other social care projects. Each local authority is represented on the BCF programme Board along with representatives from Clinical Commissioning Groups and Adult Health and Social Care. Whilst co-ordination across the various sectors could be improved the creation of a further group to oversee DFG delivery appears burdensome and unnecessary.

3.7 Each local authority has adopted its own policy in relation to DFG and this is based on local demand and circumstances. Efforts have been made, where possible, to provide a consistent approach within the Policies but each authority will require a policy that delivers the needs and requirements of its local residents within the budget that it has for this service.

3.8 Joining It Up Operationally

The review finds that at an operational level *'Existing DFG systems are usually a two-part process, starting with an assessment by social care services and then a grant application to housing. For customers this can mean a long and difficult journey involving delay and frustration.'*

3.9 The two tier system of local government does make the customer journey more difficult, however, much work has been done at both a county level and a district level to address these problems. The Authority has already put in place integrated approach to housing and health to assist independent living and is currently working well within Newark and Sherwood.

3.10 The review recommends that a major transformation in how services are delivered needs to be considered. A number of models that are operating around the county are highlighted. It is suggested that this transformation can be funded by top slicing the DFG budget. It should be remembered that the DFG is capital fund and therefore careful consideration will need to be given to the use of capital funds for transformational projects.

3.11 Distribution Formula

The single recommendation in this part of the review is that a new formula for the allocation of funds needs to be developed. Any new formula will need to ensure that there is managed transition to take account of any significant changes in the funding being provided.

3.12 Updating The Regulations

All grant(s) application(s) for adults are subject to national means test. The current test is linked to eligibility to some existing benefits. The Review highlights a number of options for modernising the current means test. It also recognises that any change will give rise to winners and losers and so will need careful consideration.

3.13 The current upper limit for a mandatory grant is £30,000. It was anticipated that the review would recognise that this upper limit is now outdated and requires an uplift. However, the Review suggests that this upper limit is only an issue in a small number of cases across the country and that it should only be increased by inflation. The local position is at odds with this conclusion. There are an increasing number of schemes that are exceeding this upper limit and Members will recall that the Newark & Sherwood DFG policy on the award of discretionary funding was amended in 2018 to take account of this fact. It is disappointing that the Review did not recommend a substantial increase in the maximum mandatory grant.

3.14 This part of the Review also recommends that the means test is removed for grants relating to stair lifts and palliative care schemes. Whilst there is merit in this it could decrease the number of grants given as there would be no contribution in an increased number of cases.

3.15 Developing A Market

This section of the Review focuses on the availability of advice and information provided to clients and the quality of the work provided during the adaptation process.

3.16 Local evidence would suggest that in Newark and Sherwood the quality of information provided to clients that are within the grants system is of good quality and readily available. The DFG process within Newark and Sherwood does provide an opportunity for clients to receive help via the Agency Service that officers deliver. This helps clients choose a contractor, moderate the costs and arrange start dates.

3.17 The use of Assistive Technology is also discussed in the part of the Review. The recommendation is that every DFG should provide, as a matter of course, a smart home starter kit. Whilst there is no doubt that Assistive Technology can be a useful tool the assertion that it is a useful tool in every DFG case is questionable.

3.18 Tenure Issues

There are no specific recommendations in this section of the report other than to highlight that DFG provision across all tenures is not equitable and requires further review.

3.19 Common Parts

The potential to use of DFGs to provide adaptations to common parts is limited and the Review recommends that further work on this is required once parts of the Equalities Act are implemented.

3.20 Measuring Outcomes

The recommendation is:

Use of NHS number on all files, data sharing protocols, aligned IT systems and improved local and national reporting.

3.21 This could prove a real challenge as it is hard to envisage that this could be delivered in any meaningful timescale. However, the Nottinghamshire authorities have begun work on aligning performance indicators and looking at joint protocol for DFG's.

3.22 Implications for Newark & Sherwood

The review of the DFG system was requested by the Department of Health and Social Care. There has so far been no formal government response to the published report.

3.23 Whilst some parts of the report provide some recommendations that should be welcomed it does not appear to reflect the concerns that were raised by practitioners at the consultation meetings

3.24 The Better Care Programme Board have yet to consider the Review. However, work on delivering a coherent joined up adaptations serve across the county continues to progress at both local and county level.

4.0 Equalities Implications

4.1 There are no immediate equalities implications arising from this report. However, if the Review leads to changes in local or national policy the implications of these changes will need to be assessed.

5.0 Financial Implications – Fin

5.1 Some of the Review recommendations make reference to the use of the DFG allocation. If the review leads to changes in local or national policy the implications of these changes on the budget will need to be assessed.

6.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

Members are asked to note the recommendations of the National Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Alan Batty - Business Manager on extension 5467.

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