

COMMUNITY, HOUSING & ASSETS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 27 th September 2022
Report Subject	Disabled Facilities Grant
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration
Report Author	Chief Officer (Housing & Communities)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 places a mandatory duty on Local Authorities to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). The grant is available for adapting or providing facilities for a disabled person in a dwelling.

Due to the current climate since Brexit and Covid19, there has been an increase in costs in the construction industry. Although a new Discretionary Policy was developed last year it has been recognised that a review of the policy is required to ensure we are still meeting the needs of the customer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Community, Housing and Assets, Overview and Scrutiny Committee to support the updated DFG policy and note the ongoing work to improve the service.
2	Community, Housing and Assets, Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the amendment to Appendix 2 in the policy for removal of the means test for medium sized adaptations.
3	Community, Housing and Assets, Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the changes to Land Charges, whereby they now only apply to large adaptations in-line with Welsh Government Revised Housing Standards, previously they applied to any adaptation over £20,000.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT
1.01	<p>Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 places a mandatory duty on Local Authorities to provide disabled facilities grants (DFGs). The grant is available for adapting or providing facilities for a disabled person in a dwelling.</p>
1.02	<p>A DFG is a capital grant which is utilised to help individuals living with a disability with financial support towards the cost of adapting their homes to enable them to continue living at their home with the maximum amount of independence.</p>
1.03	<p>The statutory limit for any DFG is set by the Welsh Assembly Government and is currently £36,000 per application within a five year period.</p> <p>However, further applications can be made within this period if the customer's medical condition has changed. This case would then be reviewed with the Occupational Therapist upon application.</p>
1.04	<p>A DFG is available to owner occupiers, private tenants and local authority tenants. For persons living in social housing with a registered social landlord, the tenant is required to request any adaptations directly with their landlord.</p>
1.05	<p>Where the application is for a child, or the applicant is in receipt of certain qualifying benefits, there is no means test and the cost of the adaptation up to the maximum grant will generally be awarded.</p> <p>DFGs for Local Authority tenants are not means tested.</p>
1.06	<p>For other applications the amount of the grant will vary from zero to the maximum grant depending on the cost of the approved works and the financial circumstances of the applicant.</p> <p>A means test will be carried out to establish, based on the financial circumstances of the applicant, whether the applicant will be required to make a financial contribution to the adaptation costs.</p>
1.07	<p>The Welsh Government Housing Adaptations Service Standards (revised March 2021) provides all Local Authorities DFG teams with the guidance on the level of service expected including adaptation categories, timeframes and performance measures to ensure consistency in approach.</p> <p>As such the applicant must own the property or be a tenant and intend to live at the address during the grant period (currently 10 years).</p> <p>In the case of private tenants the landlord may apply for the grant if they have a tenant who is disabled.</p>

1.08	<p>The council must satisfy itself that the work is necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person; that it is reasonable; and can be done – the age and condition of the property must also be taken into account.</p> <p>In order to do this, the property is assessed by a surveyor and an occupational therapist and appropriate considerations will determine the best option for the individual taking into account their needs and the most cost effective solution.</p>
1.09	<p>The council must ensure that any adaptation works will provide the most effective long-term solution to meet the needs of the disabled person.</p>
1.10	<p>The current policy has an agreed limit of £10,000 for non means testing of medium sized adaptations. This discretionary grant was created to meet the request of Welsh Government in the revised Housing Adaptations Service Standards.</p> <p>However, due to the current climate and rise in costs in the construction industry, this now seems unreasonable as we cannot deliver the majority of medium adaptations, especially when there are a combination of medium adaptations, within this cost limit.</p> <p>Therefore, to fully remove the means test for all medium sized adaptations would not only meet Welsh Government guidelines, but would also be more equitable and consistent.</p> <p>As this is a Discretionary Grant it will still be at the discretion of the DFG Manager to determine whether to means test a case or not particularly if the works are complex in nature resulting in a combination of medium adaptations which are comparable to the cost of large scale works around £20,000 or above.</p>
1.11	<p>There may be instances where the disabled person's existing home is not suitable for adaptation, and with the agreement of all parties, the council may decide to assist the household to move into more suitable accommodation.</p> <p>For owner occupiers and private tenants the Council can offer a Relocation Grant up to the value of £20,000 to assist with the moving and legal costs. This can be considered even if the alternative accommodation needs some minor adaptations to make it fully suitable.</p>
	<p>Private Sector DFG Delivery & Performance</p>
1.12	<p>The following table shows the numbers of medium and large adaptations delivered by the Private Sector DFG team over the past 6 years:</p>

	Number Completed	Total Cost	Days to deliver (average) Target 209
2016/17	105	£1,044,440	209
2017/18	61	£ 817,372	234
2018/19	40	£ 386,978	220
2019/20	45	£ 354,035	185
2020/21	41	£ 477,000	231
2021/22	89	£ 1,175,000	278

1.13

Please see below a review of each year to explain the increases and decreases in the figures above;

2017/18 – Work on DFGs was ceased during late Autumn which meant that applications and works were delayed until April 2018 due to budget constraints in the service at that time.

2018/19 - There was a reduction in the numbers of applications received for an adaptation and some resource issues around staffing levels.

2019/20 – Due to resource issues it was decided with certain types of adaptations previously delivered via DFG were to be delivered via Care & Repair.

2020/21 – Covid19 meant all jobs were stopped in March 2020 apart from priority cases, most of these were small adaptations which increased due to hospital admissions/returning home. Work restarted late 2020, but a lot of clients were still unhappy to restart works due to some clients still self-isolating or being in the high risk category.

2021/22 – All jobs restarted and most that were previously on hold are now completed or have commenced. However, due to the Covid delay and some jobs being outstanding prior to the pandemic, there has been an adverse impact on the average number of days to complete the work. There was also an issue whereby many of our contractors were extremely busy after Covid19 and therefore we had a number of jobs with delayed start dates.

1.14

Care and Repair currently deliver all of the small adaptations for the private sector. Please see below information on the number completed and the total costs. These have not previously been recorded and this year we intend to include number of days to complete.

	Number Completed	Total Cost
2020/21	349	£ 78,000.00
2021/22	531	£ 185,000.00

Service Improvements

1.15 The team previously consisted of temporary/agency staff which did not provide any stability or resilience. New permanent team members have now been recruited.

Implementation of new Procurement system and contract management is currently being processed, with an expected start date early 2023.

Performance reporting is now being monitored more closely to ensure targets are being met.

Service delivery should start to improve, Covid19 caused a delay for all works, however the 58 cases that were on hold in 2020 have now been completed except 2 cases which are due to commence imminently. There were 78 cases that had been received since April 2021, of these there are still 8 cases outstanding, however all but one has either now commenced or is due to commence. The one case pending is currently with the Planning Service.

Recycling of equipment – new processes have been created to ensure we recycle as many stair lifts and ceiling track hoists as possible.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Capital: The removal of means testing for medium sized adaptations should not have huge implications for the approved capital programme for the current year or for future financial years.</p> <p>It has been calculated that we only had a few cases that were means tested and were not entitled to any assistance. These jobs equated to around £60,000, therefore going forward these cases would be approved, but would not have an adverse effect on the capital budget limit.</p> <p>I have included some figures below for last year's spend and this years projected budgeted spend which includes providing the Discretionary grant;</p>

	Budget	Spent	Projected Spend
2020/21	£1,898,000	£1,561,609	
2021/22	£1,898,000	£581,406 (up to 01/08/2022)	1,743,000

3.00 IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

3.01 Under the five delivery principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act the revised Disabled Facilities Grant Policy can have the following impacts:

Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact

Long-term	Positive impact on longer term solutions to enable disabled people to remain in their own home for longer.
Prevention	Positive - Enabling the grant will have a significant positive preventative impacts for people.
Integration	Positive- The Grants policy and the wider best practice group that reviews and aligns best practice is a positive example of integration across sectors.
Collaboration	Positive - As above.
Involvement	Positive - The policy has been through a consultation process and user/customer satisfaction is built into the process to ensure user involvement in shaping improvements to service.

Well-being Goals Impact

Prosperous Wales	No Impact
Resilient Wales	No Impact
Healthier Wales	Positive - The Disabled Facilities Grants are there to support disabled people to be in a position to live safely and more comfortably in their own home for longer. The revised policy sets out the process for disabled facilities grant in a clear and easy to understand way.

	More equal Wales	Positive - By supporting disabled people to live more comfortably and safely in their own homes will also contribute to enabling them to fulfil their potential no matter what their background.
	Cohesive Wales	No Impact
	Vibrant Wales	No Impact
	Globally responsible Wales	No Impact
<p>The revision of the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy, when implemented will contribute to the Council's Well-being objective of 'Caring Council' through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of appropriate interventions (i.e. support or adaptations) to assist people to remain in their homes wherever possible 		

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	None.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Draft Policy
5.02	Appendix 2 – Revised Housing Standards

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Jen Griffiths, Service Manager, Housing, welfare and communities Telephone: 01352 702929 E-mail: jen.griffiths@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) – A statutory grant of up to £36,000 to help individuals living with a disability with the cost of adapting their homes

	to enable them to continue living at their residence with the maximum amount of independence.
8.02	<p>Small Adaptations - anything which is not classed as medium or large. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grab Rails • Small Ramps • Stair/Mop stick Rails • Key Safes • Additional electrical sockets or accessible taps, etc
8.03	<p>Medium Adaptations - anything which is not classed as small or large. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level Access Showers • Stair lifts • Ceiling Track Hoists • Large ramps • Or a combination of these adaptations installed as one job
8.04	<p>Large Adaptations - these are works which will require specialist assessments, statutory approvals and major adaptations to a property such as extensions and through floor lifts. An Occupational Therapists assessment will be required and planning permission may be needed. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building an extension to provide a downstairs bedroom and/or bathroom • Through floor lift • Significant internal structural modifications e.g. relocate bathroom or kitchen