

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

DECISION

meeting date: 28 OCTOBER 2021
title: APPROVAL OF AMENDMENTS TO THE DFG POLICY
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
principal author: RACHAEL STOTT – HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 Propose amendments to the DFG policy to improve the overall offer to applicants and ensure vulnerable households are able to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

- Community Objectives – To address the housing needs of all households in the borough.
- Corporate Priorities – To be an efficient Council.
- Other Considerations – Maximise use of grant awards.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Delivering DFG adaptations is a mandatory function of the Council which must be set out in an approved policy. Within the Better Care Fund award there is a requirement that any money paid under this grant determination must only be used for the specific purpose of funding adaptations for disabled people who qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant. This is made under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 or under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 or any other social care capital projects where otherwise agreed as above.

2.3 If agreed the policy is required to go through a consultation period for 6 weeks with relevant parties made aware of the changes, including Occupational Therapists (OT), LCC and Social Services departments.

3 ISSUES

3.1 Over the past few years there has been annual slippage of commitment of the monies, in addition, for the past 18 months during the pandemic, spend has been particularly difficult. The underspend was reported to Health and Housing Committee in September (minute 244) and Members asked that we consider ways of increasing approvals and the DFG offer available to applicants. A number of changes have been considered to help increase delivery and have been included within the revised policy attached as Appendix 1.

3.2 The proposed amendments are as follows

- Increase the discretionary grant (RVA) from £7k to £10k.
- Remove the restriction of allowing only 1 item to be included as an Ribble Valley Adaption (RVA)

- Include the option to use trained assessors for assessing minor adaptations to remove the requirement for OT assessments on non-complex cases.

3.2 It is considered by introducing these measures the programme will see an increase in the opportunity for qualifying residents to access the grants, improving services for the local community and addressing the desire to increase delivery.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The Better Care fund allocated annually supports DFG delivery in the borough. The measures proposed will be contained within existing ring-fenced capital budgets and will continue to be regularly monitored.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – There will be training costs to enable staff to become trained assessors and increased time in carrying out assessments.
- Political – Providing an efficient and responsive service is essential for this mandatory function.
- Reputation – Vital that the funding is utilised effectively and awarded to give the best value.
- Equality & Diversity – The service is accessible for all qualifying residents and promoted to ensure maximum access.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Approve the proposed amendments to the policy and that the revised document be subject to appropriate consultation.

5.2 Delegate consideration of the consultation responses to the Director of Economic Development and Planning, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee, and subject to there being no issues raised, adopt and publish the policy as soon as practicable.

RACHAEL STOTT
HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

NICOLA HOPKINS
DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

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Ribble Valley
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Proposed amended Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Policy

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales)

Order 2002

Reviewed October 2021

1. Introduction

Housing is a key determinant of health and poor housing is directly linked to poor health. This disabled facilities grant policy details the financial assistance that the Council aims to provide to support improvements to enable disabled occupants to remain in their own home through the use of the Better Care Fund allocation.

The Council is required to adopt a Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Policy which sets out how it intends to use its discretion to develop schemes having regard to the needs of the Borough, the availability of funding, and the Council's priorities.

This Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Policy forms part of the Council's over-arching Housing Strategy. This policy was first adopted January 2018 and has proved to be successful in supporting the householder to maintain independent living.

2. Aims and priorities

Improving the housing conditions across the Borough will support improvements in health and well-being as well as having a positive impact on the quality of local neighbourhoods, particularly for those residents who are vulnerable and cannot access their homes and gardens due to their disability.

This policy sets out in greater detail our offer to disabled occupants and their families. It also details to local Councillors, local residents and our stakeholders how we will work to maintain and improve the provision of adapted property across the borough.

Appendix 1 details the assistance schemes that the Council intends to offer during the life of this policy and sets out specific eligibility criteria relating to each scheme.

The health and well-being of disabled and vulnerable residents is often compromised due to their homes not meeting their specific needs, and this can impact on their ability to live with dignity in their homes. The need for any adaptation will be assessed by an Occupational Therapist unless it is a non-complex medical condition and then a trained trusted assessor may carry out the assessment.

3. Disabled Facilities Grants

The Council has a statutory obligation to administer mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to provide aids and adaptations to enable disabled residents to live independently within their own homes.

The eligibility requirements, scope of works, and the general requirements governing mandatory DFGs are prescribed and the Council is unable to deviate from these requirements.

The Council is required to administer Disabled Facilities Grants to all eligible applicants irrespective of their tenure, and the Council aims to work collaboratively with housing associations to fund aids and adaptations within social housing wherever possible to ensure everyone has the same opportunity to have their home adapted.

In some cases the use of Disabled Facilities Grants is able to assist with reducing the length of stay in hospital and facilitating a quick return to home. This also reduces the demand for residential care placements.

4. Discretionary Top-up Grant

The Council have agreed to use discretionary powers to provide in eligible cases a top-up award in addition to the £30,000 mandatory grant. In more complex cases the work required often goes over the mandatory grant award maximum. This top-up of a maximum of £25,000 will assist to provide all the required work identified by the Occupational Therapist. In addition to this, the 10% administration fee will also be eligible for the discretionary grant. The additional £25,000 can only be accessed where the full £30,000 of mandatory grant has been utilised. The discretionary element will be registered as a land charge if the works include alterations to the property on owner occupied properties and, in the event the property is sold within a 10 year period, the Council require repayment. * Please see exception policy. In exceptional circumstances where more than one DFG is approved, more than £25,000 may be registered.

The availability of the top-up grant is at the discretion of the Council and subject to availability of funding. Any applications for the discretionary top up over £10,000 will be considered by the Chair of Health and Housing Committee and the Director of the service.

5. Ribble Valley Adaptation Grant

For some households the means testing requirement makes them not eligible for assistance. This often means the works are not carried out or don't fully meet the person needs. The Ribble Valley adaptation allows a grant to provide 2 items and the associated works to address the needs of the applicant as recommended by the Occupational Therapist up to a maximum of £10,000. This will fund the cost of 2 items prioritised by the Occupational Therapist. Where the RVA is providing the calculated contribution, the applicant will still be eligible for further items to be provided as a DFG. The applicant can then choose as to whether they fund the remaining works themselves. The full grant will be registered as a land charge if the works include alterations to the property on owner occupied properties and, in the event the property is sold within a 10-year period, the Council require repayment. * Please see exception policy.

The availability of the Ribble Valley Adaptation Grant is at the discretion of the Council and is subject to the availability of funding.

6. Review of the policy

The ability to provide Discretionary Top up and Ribble Valley Adaptation grants will be reviewed quarterly with regard to financial capacity to award the discretionary element. Mandatory grants will take priority.

The provision of Discretionary Top up and Ribble Valley Adaptation DFGs will be reported to each Health and Housing Committee.

The policy will be reviewed annually by the Health and Housing Committee.

Priority 1 – Assist disabled and vulnerable residents to remain in their homes through the provision of aids and adaptations

Scheme	Assistance Available	Purpose	Scope of Assistance	Eligibility	Scheme Conditions
<p>Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant</p>	<p><u>Maximum assistance per application:</u></p> <p>Statutory maximum: £30,000 from Better Care Fund allocation</p>	<p><u>Assistance to:</u></p> <p>Meet the Council's statutory obligation to assist disabled residents to live independently in their homes</p>	<p><u>Aids and adaptations to:</u></p> <p>a) be recommended by an Occupational Therapist or a trained assessor;</p> <p>b) meet the regulations governing eligibility for works, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ adaptations to aid access into and around the property; ▪ works to ensure the safety of the applicant; ▪ provision of suitable bathroom or sleeping facilities, heating, and access to lighting and power; ▪ provision of suitable kitchen facilities or adaptation of existing kitchen, and; ▪ works to enable a disabled resident to care for dependent residents. 	<p><u>Applications considered from:</u></p> <p>a) disabled home owners;</p> <p>b) disabled tenants (both in the private and social housing sectors);</p> <p>c) disabled persons living at home with their family, and;</p> <p>d) parents or guardians of a disabled child;</p>	<p><u>Applications to include:</u></p> <p>a) completed application form, and;</p> <p>b) two estimates for the works in the required format</p> <p><u>Applications subject to:</u></p> <p>a) means test through standard test of resources, except where;</p> <p>b) the grant is approved in respect of a disabled child under the age of 19</p> <p><u>Works to be:</u></p> <p>a) completed within 12 months of grant approval;</p> <p>b) completed to the satisfaction of the Council</p> <p>c) 10% admin is charged for the technical support and administration of the grant</p>

Scheme	Assistance Available	Purpose	Scope of Assistance	Eligibility	Scheme Conditions
					<p><u>Grants in excess of £5,000 to be:</u></p> <p>a) registered as a local land charge against the property if the works include alterations to the property on owner occupied properties (ie, not equipment)</p> <p>b) a maximum of £10,000 be repaid if the property is sold, transferred, or assigned within 10 years.</p>
Ribble Valley Adaptation Grant	<p>Maximum individual grant £10,000 + 10% admin fee</p> <p>Only 1 application per 5 years.</p>	As per Mandatory DFG	<p>Ribble Valley adaptation DFG only applicable for 2 items and associated works to address the needs of the applicant;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provision of stair lift • conversion bathroom to wet room • ceiling track hoist • wash only bidet • provision of ramps, half steps and galvanised rails 	As per mandatory DFG	<p>All scheme conditions are the same as Mandatory DFG above except:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no means test

Scheme	Assistance Available	Purpose	Scope of Assistance	Eligibility	Scheme Conditions
	To be funded from Better Care Fund		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access inside or outside the property • Any other adaptation as recommended by the OT or a trained assessor 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the full grant will be registered as a charge against the property for 10 years, if the works include alterations to the property owner occupied (ie, not equipment).
Disabled Facilities Discretionary Top up Grant	<u>Maximum assistance per application:</u> £25,000 from Better Care Fund allocation + admin fee	<u>Assistance to:</u> a) provide top-up funding to meet the reasonable cost of aids and adaptations to assist the applicant to live independently in their home, where a Disabled Facilities Grant is approved at the statutory maximum and the eligible expense less contribution also exceeds the current maximum (currently £30,000).	<u>Aids and adaptations to be:</u> (As set out above for Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants)	<u>Applications considered from:</u> a) applicants for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant, where the eligible costs of the work exceed the mandatory grant b) To be approved by Chair of Health and Housing Committee and the Director of Economic Development and Planning on an individual basis	<u>Applications to include:</u> a) No separate application - assistance linked to Mandatory DFG application <u>Applications subject to:</u> a) means test through standard test of resources, except where b) the grant is approved in respect of a disabled child under the age of 19

Scheme	Assistance Available	Purpose	Scope of Assistance	Eligibility	Scheme Conditions
					<p><u>Works to be:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) completed within 12 months of application approval b) completed to the satisfaction of the Council <p><u>All the discretionary top up grant amount to be:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) registered as a local land charge against the property if the works include alterations to the property on owner occupied properties (ie, not equipment) b) the full grant to be repaid if the property is sold, transferred, or assigned within 10 years.