

REPORT OF: HOUSING, HEALTH AND ENGINEERING SERVICES
MANAGER

TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

DATES: 21st NOVEMBER, 2019

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DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT UPDATE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Committee of the current position regarding the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the current position is noted.
2. That a future report is brought to Committee regarding a discretionary grant for 2020/21 when the level of funding is known.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To keep the Committee informed.
2. The Better Care funding allocation for 2020/21 is not known so approval of a discretionary grant at this stage could impact on delivery of our mandatory responsibility.

ISSUE

At the meeting on 27th June 2019 the Committee received a report that set out changes that were being implemented to speed up delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). It was requested that a further update report be provide in six months.

DFGs are a mandatory grant to provide adaptations to enabled disabled people to remain in their own homes. The Government provides funding for these grants through the Better Care Fund. For many years Pendle Council has not received enough funding to meet the number of referrals that we receive which has led to a significant backlog of cases building up.

Whilst DFGs are a mandatory grants and many of the rules regarding them are set out in the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 there has been changes to legislation

that allow Local Authorities to make changes to the delivery process. This relaxation has enabled us to look at our procedures and over the last few months we have implemented several changes to reduce the time taken to approve a grant.

These changes include revision of our fee structure, removal of the need to carry out financial test of resources (means test) for grants assessed as costing under £10,000, approval of stair lifts on receipt of the referral, Introduction of a “schedule of rates” for bathroom adaptations. We have also increased the numbers of contractors carrying out this type of work and are currently assessing three new contractors.

Whilst the above changes have reduced the time taken to approve the grant that alone would not have had the impact on the outstanding cases. So we have also increased our staff resources and have employed a temporary technical officer for 6 months to help us tackle the outstanding referrals. This has enabled us to reduce the numbers from 115 at the start of the year to 43 at 12th November 2019

Were ever possible we are using local contractors to carry out this work and currently have 12 who have agreed to work to the schedule of rates. All these contractors are based in East Lancashire and 10 are based in Pendle.

The removal of means testing for grants assessed as below £10,000 and the introduction of the “schedule of rates” has removed around 6 weeks from the approval process. Since the introduction of the schedule of rates on the 1st October we have approved 51 grants (£486,000) and officers are currently working on a further £766,000 which we expect to be approved by the end of the financial year. The table below shows the position at the 12th November 2019.

Year	Number of approvals	Better Care Fund allocation	Budget Inc Slippage	Committed	Work in progress	Spend
17/18	96	815,741	1,312,476	1,372,533		680,571
18/19	70	902,362	1,441,461	1,349,922		615,779
19/20 to date	124	973,703	1,957,413	1,292,000	766,000	513,445

Whilst we have reduced the time taken to approve a grant there is still a lag between approval and spend as grant recipients have 12 months in which to complete the work. However, contractors are working on £680,000 which is expected to be completed by February 2020.

Whilst we have made several changes to our procedure we are working with Foundations to review our procedures to see if we can reduce the time taken from receipt of the referral to completion of the adaptation even further.

Given the increasing numbers of grants that are being estimated to cost over the maximum mandatory grant of £30,000, and the time delays in trying to secure additional funding, this is a further area we can look at. There is the opportunity to provide a discretionary grant, possibly up to £10,000 per case. However, given that we still have a number of outstanding referrals and that we will commit the total budget for 2019/20 we feel that it would be better to bring a report back to a future Committee once we know what the level of better care funding for the financial year 2020/21.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: All policy changes have been approved by full council

Financial: Nothing arising from this report

Legal: Nothing arising from this report

Risk Management: There is a low risk to the Council of over committing grants should we not receive any better care funding in 2020/21

Health and Safety: Nothing arising from this report

Climate Change: Nothing arising from this report

Community Safety: Nothing arising from this report

Equality and Diversity: Nothing arising from this report

APPENDICES

None

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None