

REPORT OF: **HOUSING, HEALTH AND ENGINEERING SERVICES
MANAGER**

TO: **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

DATES: **24th JUNE, 2021**

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DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS UPDATE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Committee of the current position regarding the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants and seek approval for a discretionary budget

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the current position is noted
2. That the Committee approve a budget of £50,000 for discretionary disabled facilities grant for 2021/22 from the Better Care funding for this year

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

1. To keep the Committee informed
2. To allow adaptations costing over the mandatory grant to proceed where the applicant is unable to fund the additional costs themselves.

ISSUE

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 years 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 new contractors to speed up delivery on site.

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 to help us tackle the outstanding referrals. This enabled us to reduce the numbers during 2019/20.. However much of this advantage has been lost over the last 18 months due to the Coronavirus restrictions preventing us from not only designing adaptations but also delivering the adaptations into people’s homes. This has led to a current backlog of 107 cases.

Where ever possible we are using local contractors to carry out this work and currently have 15 who have agreed to work to the schedule of rates. All these contractors are based in East Lancashire and 12 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. The table below shows the position at the 1st June 2021.

Year	Number of approvals	Better Care Fund allocation	Budget Inc Slippage	Committed	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	124	973,703	1,957,413	1,292,000	513,445
20/21	64	1,104,815*	2,009,122	2,036,258	1,038,125
21/22 (to date)	7	1,104,815	2,250,843**	1,124,013	260,786

*includes £131,112.00 additional grant received in January 2021

** Estimated slippage final figure not yet available

Whilst we have reduced the time taken to approve a grant there is still a lag between approvals and spend as grant recipients have 12 months in which to complete the work. However, contractors are working on over £900,000 which is expected to be completed shortly allowing capacity to carry out the adaptations that will be approved in this financial year.

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, In the financial year 2019/20 and 20/21 we have used £25,000 and £30,000 respectively to provide a discretionary grant, of up to a maximum of £10,000 per case. This has been funded from the Better Care funding that we receive from the Government. This has enabled us to support 7 applicants that would otherwise not have been able to have funded the adaptation.

Given the increasing cost of adaptations we are now seeking approval to provide a discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant budget of £50,000 to support applicants who are unable to fund the extra cost of the adaptations, up to a maximum of £10,000 per case. The funding for this discretionary budget will come from the better Care funding received fro Lancashire County Council for the financial year 2021/22

The approval of the discretionary grant is used in conjunction with funding from Lancashire County Council or where County Council funding is not available the discretionary grant provides the additional funding to allow the adaptation to take place.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: All policy changes have been approved by full council

Financial: The funding for the discretionary Disabled facilities grant is taken from the Better Care allocation that we have received in this financial year

Legal: Nothing arising from this report

Risk Management: Nothing arising from this report

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