

West Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board 7th June 2022

Report Title	Disabled Facilities Grant End of Year Report 2021/2022	
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List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – DFG Data 2021/2022

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To update the Board on Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation and spend across West Northamptonshire for 2021 – 2022

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 DFGs are an allocation provided by central government in order to enable people with a disability to remain in, or return to, and live independently in their own homes, thereby avoiding them having to be looked after in a care home or in hospital. This report provides an overview of how the DFG 2021/2022 allocation was spent and the issues that occurred during this period.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Board are asked to note the DFG spend for 2021/2022
- 3.2 It is a statutory requirement of Health and Wellbeing Boards to oversee local DFG arrangements.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 DFGs are provided in order to enable people with a disability to remain in, or return to, and live independently in their own homes, thereby avoiding them having to be looked after in a care home or in hospital. The adaptations funded by DFGs range from level-access showers, stairlifts and ramping to major property extensions and are granted in consultation with the Council's Community Occupational Therapist (COT) Service. Costs vary from around £3,000 for the former to £30,000+ for the latter. Mandatory DFG funding is limited to £30,000 per application, with any additional funding being through the Council's Discretionary policy or through client contribution.
- 4.2 The timescale to process a DFG application can vary hugely and is dependent on the requirement and availability of various professional partners; requirements for a COT assessment and/or architects' drawings, permissions granted from landlords and planning departments and building control approval. Inevitably, this means that some of the grant funding committed as at 31st March in any given year will not be paid until the following financial year, and the committed but unspent amounts can vary significantly from one year to the next.

5. Issues

- 5.1 The total national funding for DFG in 2021/2022 remained the same amount as the previous year (£505 million) therefore the allocation and breakdown for Northamptonshire stayed unchanged.
- 5.2 Funding locally, within the West Northamptonshire being £2,558,938 for the 2021/22 financial year
- 5.3 High demand for the service continues across West Northamptonshire. As reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board previously the impact of the Covid19 pandemic resulted in a reduction in service demand during 2020/21. This demand has been recognised in the increased demand for service during 2021/2022 with clients, previously shielding, now approaching the Council for assistance.
- 5.4 Impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on the construction trades, however, continue to impact on the service and the completion of home adaption works. The capacity of the construction sector locally has seen, subjectively, a reduction during the pandemic and has not yet fully recovered. This is compounded by delays in the delivery of materials, and high inflation rates on materials, which has resulted in delayed delivery and higher than expected costs.
- 5.5 The new Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy for West Northamptonshire, adopted in April 2021, has continued to be promoted within our community, and our sector contacts particularly the health and VCSE sectors. This has seen the range of options for discretionary home adaptation assistance being offered by the service, see data in Appendix 1. The aim of the discretionary element is to assist those meeting certain criteria and whose application would cost in excess of the maximum mandatory award of £30,000 and who otherwise would have to make a financial contribution themselves.

- 5.6 The Council's discretionary elements also respond to needs identified in our communities, though the local health agenda and wider national health demands. Examples include the provision of assistance relating to ensuring effective hospital discharge, supporting palliative care at home, and responding to the increasing demands of cognitive impairment in our community.
- 5.7 With the Council's appointment to the role of Interim Head of Private Sector Housing in February 2022, the strategic lead for the delivery of Home Adaptation assistance across all three historic sovereign District Councils, the team has started the journey to provide a single consistent service. Whilst this started in April 2021 with the adoption of the single policy, the alignment of the strategic leadership allows this journey to accelerate during 2022/23.
- 5.8 This transformational work, supported by the Directorates Transformation resources, will see the recognition of existing best practice, benchmarking with our services, engagement with service users, and the development of a new operating model that seeks to reinforce the Council's vision for a 'great place to live, work and thrive' being at the heart of the team's delivery culture.
- 5.9 The Home Adaptations Team across the whole of West Northamptonshire Council, whilst not seeking affirmation of the impact of their work, regularly receive comments and compliments from customers, some examples of these are reproduced below:

Following major life-changing surgery a gentleman was referred to us with very pressing needs for major adaptations to his flat within a sheltered accommodation scheme. His home was unfortunately unsuitable to adapt for his long term needs. His landlord had more suitable ground floor accommodation available and we were able to provide a discretionary resettlement grant to cover the cost of the move to more suitable accommodation that could be adapted. We worked with the Housing Team's Tenancy Support Officer and the Money Advice Team to clear the rent arrears that were preventing him from taking up a new tenancy. The new West Northamptonshire Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy enabled us through a discretionary special purpose grant, to undertake critical and urgent works to enable him to move into his new home by providing an automatic door and external works giving him access to his new flat, provision of specialised bathroom facilities and some minor kitchen works to enable him to live independently. Less critical works to enable him to use his kitchen fully were then undertaken by way of a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant. The gentleman is over the moon and thanks everyone that has made this possible, he says he just didn't think that something like this would be available to him and it has made all the difference to his ability to maintain independent living. It has been noted that he has also now reengaged with his family who he had kept uninformed of his situation.

Extensive works were delivered for a child via both a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant of £30k and a discretionary top up grant of £15k. The extensive works included:

- *Garage conversion for a ground floor bedroom*
- *New on suite bathroom*
- *Hoist in both bedroom and bathroom*
- *Ramping to the main access*
- *Door widenings*

The family say the adaptations are amazing and were very pleased with speed at which the works were completed and the high standard of work and aftercare they experienced. The creation of the new ground floor space has provided the child and carers an easier and safer transition through the property; has made bathing safer for all and more enjoyable for the child. The adaptations have also enabled the family to proceed with the process of adoption of another child, a sibling of their existing adopted children, which the family are very relieved about as they have been trying to do this for nearly two years.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 There are no resources or financial implications arising from the report.
- 6.1.2 Funding for the disabled facilities grant regime is confirmed annually from the Department of Health and Social Care, and forms part of the Better Care Fund. This money is ring fenced for the delivery of the grant scheme. The Council has received confirmation that funding will remain at the same level for 2022/2023.

6.2 Legal

- 6.2.1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to ensure the effective delivery of a mandatory disabled facilities grants. The delivery of additional discretionary grants is activity encouraged, but not statutory, by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. In 2020, the MHCLG advised that 85% of local authorities had a discretionary policy.

6.3 Risk

- 6.3.1 Applications for significant grants, particularly where substantial alterations to someone's home are required, can take several months to process, and the DFG grant may not be fully spent in the year to which it relates.
- 6.3.2 As Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, an increase in demand is likely, as existing cases are progressed at the same time as new cases come forward. Internal staffing and contractor availability, supplies and lead times remain ongoing risks.

6.4 **Consultation**

6.4.1 Not applicable.

6.5 **Consideration by Scrutiny**

6.5.1 Not applicable

6.6 **Climate Impact**

6.6.1 Not applicable

6.7 **Community Impact**

6.7.1 Not applicable

7. Background Papers

7.1 Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) order 2002.