

## **BARNSELEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**This matter is a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has been included in the relevant Forward Plan**

**Report of the Executive  
Director - Communities**

### **Proposal to adopt a revised Policy for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants**

#### **1. Purpose of report**

To inform cabinet about the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants, changes to funding of Grants and to introduce the proposed Disabled Facilities Grant Policy 2016 as a replacement for the Authority's 2009 Policy.

The proposed Policy includes changes to discretionary financial assistance, details of links with other schemes that exist to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable people, and introduces a fast track process for specified adaptations intended to shorten waiting times for customers, improve the throughput of referrals and increase grant spend.

#### **2. Recommendations**

Cabinet members are asked to adopt the Disabled Facilities Grant Policy 2016 as set out in Appendix 1

#### **3. Introduction**

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are a mechanism to provide financial assistance to disabled people who meet the eligibility criteria for housing adaptations which enable the person to live independently in their own home.

In Barnsley the Communities Directorate administers the DFG. The scheme is for children and adults living in private sector residential properties who require home adaptations costing more than £1,000 where it is deemed that the adaptation work is necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs, and it is practical and reasonable to undertake depending on the age and condition of the property.

The delivery of DFGs is heavily governed by legislation the Housing, Construction and Regeneration Act, 1996. Under this Act all adults who apply for a grant are subject to a financial assessment of means except those who receive certain types of income who will be deemed to be automatically eligible for a grant.

The maximum grant award available is £30,000 although the Council can apply discretion to 'top up' this amount if it is in the interest of the Council and the applicant concerned to do so and an approved policy is in place.

Work funded through a DFG comes under the category of major adaptation work and includes; stair lifts, ramps, provision / building of level access facilities. Minor adaptation work and equipment (costing less than £1000) to support community care and promote independence for the person is managed by the Equipment and Adaptations team and supplied by the Community Equipment Service.

In the three years from April 2013 to March 2016 the DFG team received 905 referrals, processed 426 completed applications, and managed 412 major adaptations.

The Government allocation to Barnsley in 2016/17 for DFG's was £2,330,936.00 compared to £1,326,250.00 for 2015/16.

The average waiting time before a standard referral is picked up by the DFG service is currently 12 months.

The review of DFG processes in Barnsley highlighted the need for the greater flexibility in how the grant was administered and implemented using the powers afforded to Councils by the Regulatory Reform Order, 2002 (the Order).

#### **4. Proposal and justification**

There is no single written policy in respect of DFG's, and it has been recognised following an independent review of the DFG's process in Barnsley that a broader policy is needed to assist with the interpretation and implementation of the legislation relating to the adaptation of the homes of disabled people.

The majority of the proposed policy clarifies legislative requirements and provides a practice framework for Officers. However it also includes local elements. For example a fast track process for specified equipment, links to other schemes concerned with improving the well-being of vulnerable people, the spot purchase of project management services from a third party for larger adaptations in circumstances where it is of benefit to the Council and applicant(s) to do so and improved procurement of frequently identified adaptations to ensure best value.

In June 2013 the Government announced the intention to create the Better Care Fund to support the integration of Health and Social Care service delivery. Consequently in 2015 Barnsley's DFG allocation increased significantly to just over £2.3million compared to just over £1.3m the previous year. In light of this increase it is clear the DFG in Barnsley needs an effective policy and be sufficiently resourced to be able to respond quickly and successfully to meet the needs of disabled people living locally and more quickly.

Within the grant there is also scope to recruit support for the DFG process. This will add value to the service and enable work to be undertaken that will facilitate more timely and cost effective delivery of DFG's locally. Recruitment of a full time Caseworker and additional Project Officer is the subject of a delegated decision report.

A majority of other Councils have adopted a policy outlining the way DFGs are delivered to meet local need.

Approving this policy will contribute to the delivery of an enhanced DFG service.

## **5. Consideration of alternative approaches**

The only other approach is not to adopt this policy. If this policy is not adopted the Council will continue to struggle to meet demand for DFG's and waiting times for standard referrals will continue to exceed 12 months from the date a referral is received.

Failure to implement the proposed policy and improved demand management arrangements will inevitably increase pressure on adult social care budgets, due to the inability to timely respond to meet people's needs to remain in their own home, 75% of the current customer profile is people aged 65 years plus.

Sufficient levels of grant spend will not be achieved with a risk that future allocations for DFG's will reduce.

There is a risk that the Council will increasingly be open to challenge in respect of its DFG processes and administration from applicants and others as incomes and service budgets are placed under pressure.

## **6. Implications for local people / service users**

Eligible disabled people living locally, their families and carers will benefit from a fast track grants process for some adaptations / equipment as their need will be met more quickly. Having a fast track grants policy for stair lifts and other such adaptations is now considered nationally as best practice.

Where the top up grant is increased from £5k to £10k in certain cases this will result in the disabled person being able to have a home adaptation when previously this would not have been an option for them due to cost.

Extending funding to cover replacement of boilers, central heating systems, home insulation and to provide generic adaptation to Shared Lives Carer homes will improve service user wellbeing. It could also reduce the risk of housing related problems such as heating or damp conditions causing a higher than necessary admission rate into hospital/ care or a longer than necessary hospital or respite care stay for vulnerable person.

Introducing a fast track grants process for certain applicants requiring a stair lift or other specified adaptations may lead to increased demand however processes to establish need remain in place and will be applied in all cases.

## **7. Financial implications**

There are none specific to this report.

All expenditure will be contained with existing Disabled Facilities Grant allocations.

## **8. Employee implications**

The adoption of this policy has no employee implications for the Council.

## **9. Communications implications**

Information will need updating to reflect changes to the Councils policy for providing assistance for major home adaptations. It should be anticipated that the introduction of a fast track process for certain applicants may lead to an increase in demand for the provision of some adaptations. However existing assessment processes in place to establish need will still be applied in all cases.

## **10. Consultations**

When developing the policy and proposals within Appendix A discussions were held with Occupational Therapists in relation to referral processes, adaptation pressures and priorities.

All members of the Communities DMT have had the opportunity to comment on the proposed policy and their comments acknowledged.

Better Homes Barnsley in relation to the energy efficiency programme and consideration of how to integrate this scheme with home adaptations across housing, health and social care systems to achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes.

Shared Lives Manager's in relation to legislation and the DFG's flexibility to assist with providing generic adaptations within Shared Lives Carer homes.

The Northern Adaptations Group (NAG) in respect of DFG policy development and interpretation of legislation specifically post implementation of the Better Care Fund.

## **11. The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework**

The Council aims to ensure that housing needs and aspirations are met by enabling access to a home that is well maintained, warm, and affordable in a peaceful and secure environment.

Barnsley is working towards a better future for people living in the Borough with the aim of making the Borough a thriving, unique place to live, work, visit and trade.

The Housing Delivery Plan 2014-2033 has a number of key ambitions one of which is to support young, older and vulnerable people to live independently. The delivery of DFG's contributes to achieving this ambition.

## **12. Promoting equality, diversity, and social inclusion**

Assistance for the improvement or adaptation of properties is an essential element of providing an effective response to meet the needs of an aging population and vulnerable people.

Grants such as DFG's support disadvantaged and low income households and more specifically DFG's enable older and disabled people to live independently in

their own homes and has a positive impact on their physical, emotional and social wellbeing and equality and diversity issues.

**13. Tackling the Impact of Poverty**

Grants such as DFG's and the flexible application of discretionary amounts such as those proposed within the policy support disadvantaged and low income households

**14. Tackling health inequalities**

Primary Care Services are putting in place support and interventions to reduce reliance upon acute services.

More disabled children are remaining in their home with appropriate albeit often increasingly costly adaptations.

Grants such as DFG's and the flexible application of discretionary amounts such as those proposed within the policy support disadvantaged and low income households.

**15. Reduction of crime and disorder**

There are no crime and disorder implications

**16. Risk management issues**

With the introduction of more flexible funding options there is a risk that some activity will not be reported via the DFG mandatory grant reporting framework

To lessen any potential impact of this any activity not reported through the DFG reporting framework will be monitored and reported internally.

**17. Health, safety, and emergency resilience issues**

There is no health, safety and emergency resilience issues identified resulting from the implementation of the policy.

All approved adaptations are subject to schedule of work, pre-construction and construction phase plan and risk assessment. A programme of announced and unannounced site inspections by the Council and Health & Safety Executive exists.

The Council has comprehensive Health and Safety management and monitoring procedures in place.

**18. Compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights**

The provision of DFGs and the delivery of these in a flexible way to meet the needs of the local disabled population support the individual to live as independently as possible within their own home and community. In addition provision of home adaptation not only supports the wellbeing of the disabled person, their safety and security but can also contribute to the reduction of carer stress and supports the right to a family life

**19. Conservation of biodiversity**

In respect to the conservation of biodiversity all approved adaptations are subject to a specification of works, pre-construction and construction phase plan that considers conservation of biodiversity issues as appropriate.

**20. Glossary**

N/A

**21. List of appendices**

Appendix 1 – Disabled Facilities Grant Policy

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment – Changes in Policy Community Impact

**22. Background papers**

Barnsley Council Disabled Facilities Review – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016 prepared by Astral Advisory

Officer Contact: Carol Hughes

Tel: 01226787920

Date 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016

Financial Implications /



Consultation .....

*(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer where no financial implications)*