

REPORT TO CABINET

13 MARCH 2025

**REPORT OF PEOPLE
SELECT COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

Lead Cabinet Member – Adult Social Care – Cllr Pauline Beall
Lead Cabinet Member – Regeneration and Housing – Cllr Nigel Cooke

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

SUMMARY

The attached report presents the outcomes of the People Select Committee's review of Disabled Facilities Grant.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) / DECISION(S)

This topic was included on the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2024-2025. The review is now complete, and the recommendations have been endorsed by the People Select Committee for submission to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommend that:

1. In relation to the recent announcement from the Department of Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government regarding extra funding for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), officers be requested to monitor the impact of this extra funding on the Council's waiting list; updates to be provided to the Select Committee as part of the monitoring of the review recommendation.
2. Officers explore the potential to engage with Teesside University to produce a study on the impact of DFG's on people lives in the Borough and how long this potentially allows them to remain living in their own home.
3. Housing Investment & Migration Support team work with Planning to explore building upon the requirements for accessibility/adaptability in new build properties when the Local Plan is next updated and, prior to this, lobbying government to make the relevant Building Regulation mandatory.
4. The Leader and Chief Executive support officers in their ongoing discussions with Registered Provider's to explore their current and future plans for adaptations and also explore joint working to support Registered Providers to take up their responsibility, to ease pressure on the waiting list.

5. Officers explore with Registered Providers a register of adapted properties within the Borough which details the type of adaptations, to assist the Nomination and Lettings Team in advertising and matching individuals with appropriate properties.
6. Communication to residents and applicants be improved by:
 - reviewing and updating information on SBC website and explore whether the Foundations template and link to adaptmyhome.com will give residents sufficient information to decide whether to apply for an assessment/DFG
 - exploring introducing a system to ensure clear and consistent communications to keep applicants informed of their position in the process at regular intervals to reduce misunderstandings and manage expectations.
 - Sharing key information of DFG scheme available with external stakeholders to ensure potential applicants are aware of support available.
 - ensuring an appropriate route for residents to communicate with the Housing Investment & Migration Support team is in place.
 - a singular customer feedback survey covering all processes and services involved in a DFG is developed, to ensure this is only collected once.
7. Officers explore streamlining processes to understand their impact and benefit of implementing:
 - referral form used by the Occupational Therapy Team be reviewed to ensure it captures all relevant information to enabled to make a decision on eligible works.
 - removing the requirement for Occupational Therapist to approve the scheme of works for straightforward cases
 - allowing electronic forms to be uploaded
 - requiring only two quotes rather than three for the application
8. Further examination of if/how the Home Improvement Agency can be utilised to provide early help and prevention, to ease budgetary pressure for DFG
9. Use of flat pack extensions is explored in more detail to see if they would provide a viable and cost-effective option.
10. Following correspondence from the Royal British Legion to the Council, officers review whether it is possible for military compensation to be exempt from the means test for DFG's and report back to the Committee.

DETAIL

1. Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide grant aid for a range of adaptations to eligible individuals (following an assessment) home and this is carried out via Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) which is a capital grant governed by the Housing Grants and Construction Act 1996. It is funded as part of the Improved Better Care Fund (IBCF) programme, a pooled budget between the NHS and Local Authorities (LA) and passed to the LA's to administer. They enable people to continue living safely and independently in their own home.
2. Demand for DFGs is rising at a time when building costs have significantly increased. As a result of this there is an increasing number of DFG applications costed above the maximum threshold of £30k. There is also a growing waiting list of both residents waiting for a DFG and the time taken from the point of application to DFG works commencing. This impacts on the health and wellbeing of individuals and potentially their ability to remain living independently in their own home. The aim of this review was to explore both current and potential alternative options to ensure the service is delivered in an efficient, effective and customer focused way.
3. The Committee has taken evidence from several relevant SBC services and stakeholder organisations, including representatives from the Housing Regeneration and Investment, Occupational Therapy, and Building Services teams, Foundations who are the national body for

Home Improvement Agencies and Disabled Facilities Grant, and Stockton & District Information & Advice Service. In addition to considering customer satisfaction survey results, consultation also took place with residents via Stockton Parent Carer Forum. Members of the Community Partnerships, Eastern Ravens Trust and Teesside & District Society for the Blind were approached for their comments but only one, from Teesside & District Society for the Blind, was received.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

4. DFG's helps some of the most vulnerable residents with disabilities in the Borough live independently in their own homes for longer and supports the Stockton-on-Tees Plan Priority 2: Health & Resilient Communities key move "Working with our residents to build resilience and independence in their own homes". As noted in the report, the long-term implications of delays in provision of a DFG adaptations could have negative impact on an individual's quality of life and health outcomes, along with a need for re-housing or admission to long term residential care. SBC's delivery model for DFG's of providing caseworker and technical officer support ensure that residents are supported throughout the process to receive the adaptations they need to live independently, however improvements can be made to streamline the process and improve communication.
5. An Equality, Poverty & Impact Assessment has been completed for the review. As the recommendations concentrate on further exploration of improving the current service they were assessed as having a positive impact on the protected characteristics of age and disability, as well as poverty.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

6. There are no direct implications in the report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7. The increase in both the number of people applying for a DFG as well as the increase in the average cost, is causing budget pressures. The DFG budget must have a nil return each year, overspend in 2023/24 had to be met from other budget sources.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8. There are no direct implications in the report.

RISK ASSESSMENT

9. The review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

10. This review is relevant to all Wards across the Borough.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

11. None.

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