

PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of People Select Committee was held on Monday 3 June 2024.

Present: Cllr Marilyn Surtees (Chair), Cllr Paul Weston (Vice-Chair), Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Lynn Hall (sub Cllr Hugo Stratton), Cllr John Gardner, Cllr Elsi Hampton (sub Cllr Niall Innes), Cllr Eileen Johnson and Cllr David Reynard.

Officers: Sam Dixon (Adults, Health and Wellbeing) and Michelle Gunn (CS).

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Niall Innes, Cllr Hugo Stratton and Cllr Barry Woodhouse.

PEO/13/24 Evacuation Procedure

The Committee noted the evacuation and housekeeping procedure.

PEO/14/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PEO/15/24 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PEO/16/24 Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grant

The Committee received a presentation from the review's link officer, the Housing Regeneration & Investment Manager. The presentation covered:

- SBC Duties
- SBC DFG Policy
- Eligible works
- Enquiry Process
- Application Process
- Approvals Process
- Grant Conditions
- Land Charges
- Undertaking Works
- Local Discretion and Flexibilities
- Government Recommendations 2018

Key issues discussed included:

- The assessment of need is carried out by the Occupational Therapist. As part of this assessment, they would question if the person would consider moving e.g. move to a bungalow/ground floor flat if they have mobility issues.
- Discussion took place regarding the mean testing of the grant, the baseline of which had not changed since 2008, and contributions. Some people applying might qualify for a DFG but would not be given the full amount to cover the cost

of adaptations due to their income. Also, dependent on the adaptations needed to be carried out, works could cost over the £30,000 limit, and the example was given of an extension that cost £90,000. In these cases, the person would have to contribute the remaining cost of the works. Those that were in receipt of certain means-tested benefits were 'passported' to a full grant and would not need to contribute to adaptations up to £30,000.

- SBC would pay the costs of adaptations to a property outside of the Borough if it was for a child placed in care outside of the Borough. This system was reciprocated, and it was noted that Durham Council had paid for adaptations to a property in the Borough where a child under their care was living.
- The number of people on the waiting list had increased since reporting at the previous meeting and was now at 284. The Occupational Therapist could decide if a person was fast tracked to the top of the list due to their need following a detailed risk assessment. People on the waiting list were sent an income form to see if they would qualify to save them being on the list if they did not qualify. Each person on the waiting list was contacted every three months to keep them up to date on the process and how long it was expected to take. It was questioned if the NHS were installing at a quicker pace to SBC to aid hospital discharge, but the link officer was not aware of this and explained that hospital discharge usually came through SBC's Occupational Therapist Team.
- SBC would only fund the minimum specification required to meet the persons need, and would refuse anything that was above this, however the person would be able to fund adaptations above the basic offer themselves.
- Equipment was recovered when the person no longer required it so that it could be reused. It was indicated in the contract when adaptations were provided that they/the family would need to get in contact when they were no longer needed so they could be recovered.
- If a person broke the conditions of the grant, for example using a different contractor to the one specified, then SBC could ask for repayment of any funds granted.
- When Occupational Therapists assessed the person, they recommended adaptations that would meet their needs for the next five years. After this time, or if their needs changed before five years, they may be reassessed and make a further application.
- When a person was required to contribute to works being carried out, and they advised they could not afford the contribution, they would be referred the Local Administrator, Five Lamps, who would check whether they were able to secure a mainstream loan on the open market. If they could, Five Lamps would signpost them to these market lenders. If it was confirmed they could not obtain a loan on the open market then they would offer them a SBC loan. This prevented people from dropping out/cancelling their application. The policy for these local discretions had not been reviewed since 2017.
- Adaptations in Registered Providers properties were discussed, and it was noted that their standard for adaptations were higher than the basic that DFG would fund. It was questioned if there was a register of properties that had adaptations which people could be matched with, rather than the Registered Providers removing these when the property became empty. It was noted that the Director of Adults, Health & Wellbeing was due to meet with a Housing Provider regarding the adaptations in their properties. Members welcomed this and requested that the Director report back to the Committee.
- Foundations provided a simple toolkit online which advised those looking to apply for a DFG if they would be likely to qualify. It was suggested that

signposting to this toolkit could reduce the waiting list, as those who were informed that they would not qualify would not join the local waiting list for an assessment. Members raised concern that people may need assistance to complete this assessment, or be put off from applying, however were informed that it was a simple tool to advise if they would be likely to be approved a DFG and not the application.

- Members questioned who assessed the quality of the work that had been carried out and it was confirmed that the Housing Regeneration and Investment Team would do this and sign off the work. If there were any issues within the first 12 months the person could contact the team who would rectify the issue, but after this it was up to the individual to maintain it.
- Private landlords were discussed, and it was noted that they had to provide two quotes for any adaptations/works which would then be reviewed by a technical officer. Following the completion of works the officer would visit the property to check the standard.
- It was questioned whether best practice was shared between Local Authorities across the country, and it was noted that SBC shared best practice with colleagues in the North and this could be brought to the Committee.
- It was noted that in 2023/24 123 entry level showers had been fitted by the HV&E team.

AGREED that the information be noted.

PEO/17/24 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025

Consideration was given to the Work Programme.

The next meeting would be held on Monday 8 July 2024. The Committee wished to invite Foundations to the meeting to give evidence regarding best practice in other Local Authority areas as well as a review of SBC's policy. Members also indicated that they wished to invite the Director of Adults Health and Wellbeing to a future meeting to feedback on the meeting with Registered Providers.

AGREED that the Work Programme be noted.

Chair.....

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