



Committee Report: Amendments to Disabled Facilities Assistance

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	17 February 2005
Subject:	Amendments to Disabled Facilities Assistance
Report of:	Director of Community Protection
Contact officer:	Mr Anees Mank – Ext: 6825
Purpose/summary:	Following changes to the criteria for services to disabled people under Fair Access to Care and a lower than expected Disabled Facilities Grant ("DFG") capital allocation from the Government, it has become necessary to prioritise access to the Council's DFG Agency Service and withdraw the provision of discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance.
Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended:	To make no change to the eligibility for the Council's DFG Agency Service and continue the provision of discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance. However, this would result in long delays for all cases and scarce resources being used for discretionary assistance at the expense of mandatory DFGs.
Recommendation/decision:	1. Only the critical and substantial need cases be eligible for the Council's Disabled Facility Grant Agency Service.2. The provision of Discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance, including top-up loans, be withdrawn.3. Representations be made to the Government for an increased Disabled Facility Grant capital allocation in future years.
Key Decision:	This report involves a key decision within ground(s) 7. The decision made as a result of this report will be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five working days have elapsed after that (making a total of seven working days after the meeting) i.e. before 1 March 2005
	This item is not included in the Forward Plan.
Implications:	
Financial:	Only £871,000 allocation for DFGs in 2005/06, policy change aims to ensure those in most need receive assistance.
Staffing:	None
Policy:	Enforcement and Assistance on Housing Renewal Policy Framework
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	No
Wards affected:	All
Special Interest Members – Which have been consulted	None

Categorisation of the report:

Discussion leading to a decision	x	Discussion	
Monitoring		Decision	
Sharing for corporate understanding		Information	

Tracking/Process:

-	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
-	Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Legal and Property Services/Director of Social Services	-	-
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
-	-	17 February 2005	-

There are no Background Papers to this Report within the meaning of Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Proper Officer	Bob Saunders
Date	8 February 2005

Background:

On 3 February 2005, the Director of Social Services recommended to Cabinet that the eligibility criteria for services to disabled people under Fair Access to Care be raised to meet only critical and substantial need. Whilst this covers the majority of services to disabled people, it excludes the Council's Disabled Facility Grant ("DFG") Agency Service for those living in owner occupied or privately rented homes, which is co-ordinated by the Community Protection Department.

This operates within a different legislative framework and Cabinet was informed on 30th September 2004 about a three fold increase in the number of DFG referrals since 2002. In order to meet this demand, a bid for increased resources for 2005/06 totalling £2 million was made to the Government. Despite assurances that we would receive substantial funding, we have recently been informed that our allocation is only £871,000. In terms of commitment, £550,000 worth of DFGs have already been approved out of the 2005/06 allocation and a further £1 million worth of referrals are awaiting approval.

Consequently, it has become necessary to prioritise access to the DFG Agency Service and ensure that scarce resources are targeted at those in greatest need. In developing a revised policy framework for Disabled Facilities Assistance/Grants, account has been taken of the Fair Access to Care policy approved by Cabinet on 3 February 2005.

Proposals:

1. DFG Agency Service

Currently, most referrals for disabled adaptations in the private sector are processed through the DFG Agency Service, which involves (as appropriate):

- an assessment of need and recommendation of works by an Occupational Therapist;
- production of sketches, architects plans and structural drawings;
- obtaining Planning Permission and Building Regulations Approval;
- obtaining estimates for the works;
- monitoring works in progress; and
- ensuring satisfactory completion.

In order to ensure that the most urgent cases are prioritised, it is proposed that from 1 March 2005, only the following categories of referrals be eligible for the DFG Agency Service:

- all adaptations assessed as "Critical" or "Substantial" under Fair Access to Care Services;
- all adaptations for children; and
- all adaptations for those awaiting discharge from hospital.

For those less urgent cases, assessed as "Low" or "Moderate" under Fair Access to Care Services, it is proposed that clients be advised of their possible eligibility for a DFG and provided with leaflets informing them of the DFG procedure and agencies who

can help with the application process.

The revised policy should significantly reduce the demand for the DFG Agency Service. Moreover, as Cabinet members have already approved that the same criteria be applied for eligibility to the Adaptations Service for Council homes, the policy would ensure that people living in all tenures are treated equally.

Cabinet needs to be aware that the Council is under a statutory duty to provide Disabled Facility Grants to disabled people for a range of adaptations to their homes under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1990. The obligation to provide DFGs is primary and absolute and the Council must only determine an application in accordance with the statutory framework.

2. Disabled Facilities Assistance

In addition to mandatory DFGs, the Council currently provides discretionary assistance for disabled adaptations, such as top-up loans, which were introduced under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 in the Council's Enforcement and Assistance within its Housing Renewal Policy.

It is proposed that from 1 March 2005, all discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance, including top-up loans, be withdrawn and that the Policy Framework be amended accordingly. This would allow scarce resources to be concentrated on mandatory DFGs.

Any adaptations for children costing over the maximum eligible expense limit for mandatory DFGs of £25,000 will be referred to the Director of Children's Services for potential top-up assistance under their duties under the Children Act 1989 and related legislation. Discussions are taking place with Age Concern to promote their Equity Release scheme. These two approaches will deal with the vast majority of DFG clients but within the existing housing renewal assistance policy a contingency exists to consider assistance in exceptional cases, notably where hardship is involved. It is intended to monitor these policy changes closely and to inform Cabinet of any significant difficulties arising.

The authority is required to issue a public notice on its Housing Assistance Policy under the Regulatory Reform Order.

Alternative options considered and reason for the recommended option:

It is possible to provide the DFG Agency Service to all referrals. However, this would result in long delays for all cases and no distinction being made between those in high and low priority need.

It is also possible to continue the provision of discretionary Disabled Facilities Assistance, including top-up loans. However, this would mean scarce resources being used for discretionary assistance at the expense of mandatory DFGs.

Conclusions:

These changes will concentrate our limited resources on those most in need of an adaptation and they are needed to cope with a situation brought about by a wholly inadequate DFG capital allocation by Government Office for the North West which does not enable the authority to meet local need. Therefore, it is recommended that representations be made to increase future allocations in line with the assessed need for the Borough.

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