

Agenda Item No: 8
DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT REVIEW

To: Adults Committee

Meeting Date: 3 November 2016

From: Wendy Ogle-Welbourn, Interim Executive Director: Children, Families and Adults Services

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: Not applicable

Key decision: No

Purpose: To provide an update on the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Review

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to note the update on the DFG Review and approve the Joint Housing Adaptations Agreement which replaces the County Council's existing Disabled Facilities Grant Top-up Policy

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1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 The Cambridgeshire DFG Review was established in February 2016 as a work stream of the Older People's Accommodation Board. The aim of the review was to take a more strategic approach to housing adaptations, encompassing the current service model and the capital and revenue funds contributed to the DFG process by a range of partners. The review group comprises representatives from each District Council, the County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Foundations (the national body for Home Improvement Agencies).

1.2 Disabled Facilities Grant is administered by District Councils who receive a financial allocation from Government (the DFG Capital Allocation) to spend on adaptations. This has been received via the Better Care Fund (BCF) since 2015/16. In 2016/17, there was a significant uplift in the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) from £1.9 million in Cambridgeshire in 2015/16, to £3.4 million in 2016/17. This was passed in full to District Councils by the County Council in line with national policy, while the DFG review project examined our overall approach and considered the implications of these changes.

1.3 The County Council and CCG also contribute revenue funding to each District for the operation of the three Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) in the County – the Council contributes £314k and the CCG £80k. This funding is also included within

the BCF budget. The BCF creates a joint budget to enable health and social care services to work more closely together across each Health and Wellbeing Board area.

2.0 DFG REVIEW - KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The DFG draft report, attached at Appendix 1, highlights three key findings:

- New services are needed that consider people's needs in context, including early conversations and planning for the longer term: services need to engage with people before they need an adaptation, and should encourage people to think about whether the accommodation they are living in is suitable for the longer term
- Existing services need to adapt to support a growing population: performance in many parts of the county is too slow in the implementation of adaptations funded through DFGs. It is recommended that the ability to 'fast track' commonly requested small adaptations (e.g. level access showers) be introduced and that a full review of existing processes and procedures is needed to speed up the DFG process.
- Funding arrangements across the system will need to change to support a shift in focus: the significant increase in capital funding offers new opportunities for the HIAs to generate more fees and become financially self-sustainable.

2.2 HIAs are able to charge fees for the adaptation work that they undertake. This is often in the region of 15% of the cost of the work. The charge is levied against the overall grant, not attributed to the individual service user. HIAs that are dependent on fees as their sole source of income have an incentive to complete work quickly and in so doing increase the overall number of adaptations completed in the year. It is recommended that a proportion of existing revenue funding should be diverted to prevention and early intervention services in order to put in place other measures as an alternative to housing adaptation.

2.3 To inform the DFG Review, current levels of need and the performance of the existing HIAs were reviewed by Public Health, and by Foundations, the national body for Home Improvement Agencies. This exercise found that the need for adaptations will continue in line with the increasing older population. However, performance of the existing HIA arrangements in terms of time taken to deliver adaptations needs to be improved. For example in Peterborough the typical time for completion of a level access shower is 30 days. This compares to six months in the combined Cambridgeshire HIA (Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire) although is a more straightforward process for a unitary authority.

2.4 The review findings have been accepted by the DFG Review Group, and discussions on how to take the findings and service recommendations forward are in progress. These include the development and funding of new prevention pathways, whilst continuing in the short term to support the HIAs to improve their performance. It is proposed that this will be achieved through a tapering of County Council/CCG revenue funding and more effective use of the DFG capital allocation.

2.5 It has been agreed that (District Councils will receive a reduced level of revenue funding for a period of 12 months from 1 April 2017 to provide transitional support. In return, a proportion of the DFG capital allocation will be passed back to the County Council. The precise levels of capital and revenue funding are currently under discussion. This will provide support to the HIAs to transform their operations, whilst also supporting the County Council to meet its savings requirements in the context of the removal of the Adult Social Care Capital Grant. This arrangement would cease on 31 March 2018. This approach will produce a saving to the Council of £150K in 2017/18, as set out in the Council's draft business plan. An agreement setting out key indicators to support the change management process would be provided for the Home Improvement Agencies. It has been agreed with District Councils that 10% of the current revenue (£38k) would be retained in 2017/18 to support the development of the Early Help/Housing Options pathway.

2.6 Further discussions are taking place to develop a more flexible approach to using the DFG capital allocation. The regulatory framework (Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002) provides considerable scope to use capital to deliver improved outcomes through the development of a Housing Adaptations Policy.

2.7 While the district housing authorities aspire to reach agreement on a Cambridgeshire Joint Adaptations Policy this will take some time to develop. In the meantime a Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations Agreement has been drafted (see Appendix 2) containing principles that all partners can sign up to, including flexible use of the DFG Capital allocation for other grants, relocation expenses and 'fast track' adaptations. It also includes provision for the District Councils to use an element of the DFG Capital Allocation to provide Top-Up grants or loans that are currently the responsibility of the County Council. This means that the current DFG Top-Up Policy adopted by the County Council will cease to exist. This will remove a significant amount of duplication of officer time and confusion for vulnerable households who currently apply to both district and County Councils.

3.0 ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

3.1.1 There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

3.2.1 The overall approach described in the key findings is to promote a shift in how support is provided – towards support that is focused on promoting independence and keeping people independent and well through advice and support to access appropriate housing at an early stage. This compliments the Council's Transforming Lives approach to social work. The transformation activity described in the recommendations from this report will make a strong contribution to this priority.

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

3.3.1 The development of a Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations Policy will ensure that as far as possible there is a consistent approach to adapting the homes of vulnerable households across the County. The development of additional Early Help prevention options promoting a more joined up approach across housing, health and social care presents additional safeguarding opportunities.

4.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource implications

4.1.1 The intended withdrawal of a proportion of the revenue funding revenue by the County Council in 2017/18 will deliver a £150k saving. The withdrawal of the remaining revenue from 2018/19 will allow the Council to redirect this towards developing and funding new prevention pathways. It is possible that an element of the DFG Capital Allocation can be retained by the County Council with the agreement of all partners in future.

4.1.2 The ability to fund Top-up grants from the DFG Capital Allocation rather than from the Councils own resources provides more financial certainty in this area.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

4.2.1 The DFG Review considered the districts' statutory duty to provide DFGs for vulnerable households. The resulting policy is sufficiently flexible to allow the districts discretion in their application of the policy, providing it meets the joint principles of partnership working and prevention.

4.2.2 The revenue funding withdrawal provides an element of risk for the districts with regard to resourcing home improvement agency services. However officers are working closely with districts to mitigate this risk and ensure that the HIAs can continue to deliver services in the medium term while they work towards improved performance and financial sustainability.

4.2.3 While there is no statutory requirement for the County Council to provide topup funding for DFGs there has in recent years been a policy to allow this in order to meet the social care needs of vulnerable households. In 2014 this Policy was amended to provide top-up by way of a loan rather than a grant and demand has subsequently fallen. The new Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations Agreement allows the district housing authorities to manage and administer Top-up funding on behalf of the County Council therefore the Councils' own Policy will end when the new Agreement comes into force on 1st April 2017.

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

4.3.1 There are no significant implications within this category. Disabled Facilities Grants are by definition provided for vulnerable households that include an adult or child with a disability.

4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

4.4.1 There are no significant implications within this category. All partners have been fully engaged and consulted throughout the Review process through workshops and multi-agency project group meetings. As there will be no direct impact on service users (other than increased funding and a desire to speed up adaptations) it has not been felt necessary to consult directly with them.

4.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement

4.5.1 There are no significant implications within this category.

4.6 Public Health Implications

4.6.1 Better coordination of services and access to suitable adapted housing for vulnerable households is important for the overall health of the local population. A shift towards a more preventative approach to housing adaptations that considers people's needs in context, including early conversations and planning for the longer term, will form part of a wider shift towards more preventative services which support the overall aims of Cambridgeshire's Better Care Fund Plan and Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Source Documents Location

DFG Review Report
2nd floor, Octagon, Shire Hall
Draft Housing Adaptations
Agreement
2nd floor, Octagon, Shire Hall

Implications Officer Clearance

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?

Yes

Name of Financial Officer:

T Kelly (Adults)

Has the impact on Statutory, Legal and Risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law?

No

Name of Legal Officer:

Lynne Owen

Are there any Equality and Diversity implications?

Yes

Charlotte Black

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

No

Name of Officer:

Simon Cobby

Are there any Localism and Local Member involvement issues?

Yes

Charlotte Black

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health

Yes

Tess Campbell