



PRCC.40 14/15

Committee: Prosperous
Communities

Date: 16 December 2014

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Subject: Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Service Update and Summary of Service Improvements and Efficiency Savings.

Report by:

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Purpose / Summary:

To provide members with an update on improvements to the Disabled Facilities Grant service under the new in-house service.

RECOMMENDATION(S): Elected members are asked to:

- Note the content of the report
- Note the ongoing work regarding alternatives to DFG and the proposals for taking this forward
- Recommend that Policy and Resources Committee approve the proposal for distribution of the remaining funding available for DFG alternatives as shown 6.2

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: The improvements set out in this report demonstrate that the council is now fully compliant with the legislative requirements of DFG provision.

Financial: FINREF is FIN/79/15 The report sets out a number of efficiency savings, including an annual revenue saving of £40k and enhancements to the use of DFG budget.

Staffing: None as a result of this report

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights: The report details customer service improvements for those eligible for disabled facilities grants.

Risk Assessment: The corporate risk register has recently been updated to include one area of potential risk concerning DFG data withheld by the previous service provider. This is currently being handled by Shared Legal Services.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: N/A

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Future Delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants in West Lindsey, 12 Feb 2013
<http://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/your-council/decision-making-and-council-meetings/meetings-agendas-minutes-and-reports/committee-information-post-april-2011/prosperous-communities-committee/prosperous-communities-committee-reports/prosperous-communities-committe/114927.article>

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

x

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

x

1. Background

- 1.1. This paper updates members on the improvements made to the DFG service since it was brought in house in April 2014 and the enhancements made to the service to achieve added value for money during this time.
- 1.2. In April 2014 the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) service was brought back in house to the Council, ending previous arrangements with the Lincolnshire Home Improvement Agency (LHIA). This decision was ratified by both the Prosperous Communities Committee and Policy and Resources Committee and was made to ensure that a number of essential service improvements were implemented.
- 1.3. Bringing the service back in house has been a gradual process and one which has already brought clear benefits to both the customer and the Council. Between 2009 and 2012/13 the service was delivered via a pilot project, hosted by the LHIA, that provided the DFG service for WLDC plus three other local authorities in a shared service approach. In 2013/14, due to issues with the pilot project and with evidence that these issues were not improving under the shared service model, the Council put interim measures in place to manage the service directly with the LHIA. Following this the service has been brought back in house completely.

2. 2014/15 Summary

- 2.1. The initial progress made in regards to delivering the grant service in house can be seen in the table below:

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015 (1/4 to 1/9)
Average spend per grant	£7,847	£4,526.41	£3,607.95
Number of approvals	48	100	32
Approval amount	£376,697.19	£452,641.24	£132,716.23
average days from referral to approval	359	226	154
average days from approval to completion	100	91	41

- 2.2. The key points to note are as follows:

- The average spend per grant has decreased by over 50% since 2012/13 as a result of Council officers taking control of the grant process
- A lower average grant cost, alongside consistent decision making and an improved process has increased the number of grants offered and volume of adaptations completed. (Please note 14/15 figures only includes 1st April to 1st September).
- The average number of days taken from referral to approval*, and from grant approval to completion of works**, have reduced significantly.
- Officers expect that for 14/15 the average days taken to complete works, and the average cost per grant will continue to be lower than that of 13/14
- The whole grant budget is scheduled to be allocated and spent in year. This has not been the case for a number of years.

*please note: the timescales for approving a DFG are largely dictated by the applicant. Following referral from Adult Social Care all cases require an application

and the applicant must then provide all the necessary supporting documents to enable a means test to be completed to confirm eligibility. Once the application is approved, the grant offer is in place for 12 months (set out by legislation) and it is then up to the applicant to determine when works commence.

** Please note: the legislative requirements are that the Council must approve all valid applications within 6 months (currently the team is approving all valid applications within 8 weeks but this is subject to funding being available to do so). Once a grant is approved the applicant can arrange for work to start as soon is convenient and the grant offer remains in place for one year. Officers work with the applicant to ensure that all works are completed during this time.

3. Financial Benefits

3.1. Prior to April 2014 the Council paid £35k per annum to the LHIA as part of the shared service for DFGs. Parallel to this there were significant internal staff costs required to ensure that this agreement was operating effectively.

3.2. This annual payment is no longer necessary and bringing the service in house has resulted in total revenue savings to the Council of £40k per annum.

3.3. In addition to the financial savings outlined above there have been significant direct financial benefits to the council's grant funding, making the funding go further so that a higher number of grants can be awarded. This has been achieved by;

- i) closer and more effective ways of working with contractor
- ii) reduction (or elimination in some cases) of all technical costs to the service
- iii) achieving the most cost-effective solution by ensuring that each adaptation focuses solely on the home improvements that DFG is there to provide, and
- iv) eliminating peripheral and extra work that was frequently discovered upon closer scrutiny of grant work completed during the pilot.

4. Service Improvements

4.1. Key areas of improvement introduced by the Council are:

- An Improved application process, redesigned in conjunction with partners to ensure that those in greatest need are the primary focus
- An appropriate test of resources (means test) to confirm eligibility at the earliest opportunity. Officers provide support to applicants to complete the assessment
- Clear and understandable policy and guidelines
- Improved service consistency and communication to ensure the Council is now meeting its legal responsibilities to provide an effective grants service

4.2. The decision to bring the service back in house was based on the need to make improvements in a number of areas to the way that DFGs were provided in West Lindsey, as detailed in previous reports to the Prosperous Communities Committee. These issues have all now been addressed, resulting in the following achievements:

- All cases over 12 months old have been resolved.
- All the remaining new and existing applications have been determined well within the required 6 months and most within just a few weeks.

- High risk home environments are identified at the start of the process and immediate action taken where necessary to eliminate risks. This assists not only the applicant but also partners who are dealing with high risk cases.
- Officers are using contractors that can offer better value for money and that will undertake all aspects of the technical work themselves (this includes the scheme design that was typically the main revenue cost to the service).
- Customer satisfaction is now measured for every case and data on this will be available at a later stage in the year. Initial responses are extremely positive.
- Prior to bringing the service in house communication with customers had been inconsistent and a key area for concern. This is now fully addressed; all customers receive regular updates and a named contact throughout the process.
- The Council is now in complete control of the process and as the accountable body has improved assurance that grants are provided appropriately, that correct records are maintained and that an auditable, best value process is in place.

5. DFG Alternatives

- 5.1. The significant improvements outlined above have been achieved via the redesign of the DFG service and also simultaneously through the new and enhanced focus on independent living and alternatives to DFG. There are four elements to the alternatives provided, these are as follows:
- 5.1.1. Improved Pathway – this is the process followed when a customer makes a grant enquiry. All grants must be supported by an Occupational Therapist referral. Under the new process, before this referral is made, officers work closely with OTs and the Home Choices Team to assess eligibility and property suitability at the outset. This ensures that all Independent Living options are considered with the customer, not only DFG, and sets out alternative support in the cases where DFG is unlikely to be available. The need for this arose from the high number of abortive referrals, where customers were found to be ineligible or their home unsuitable for the grant, but who had been held in the system for some time before this was identified.
- 5.1.2. Assisted Move Scheme – the Council have been offering an assisted move scheme as one alternative for people that either had a home not suited to adaptations they needed or who could not be provided with a DFG. The scheme was open to persons over 61 or those with a disability. To date this scheme has helped 14 households move to more suitable homes, 8 of which have required financial support. This has reduced the likelihood of a DFG in the future and on average costs the Council £350 per move (versus an average DFG grant of £3,600).
- 5.1.3. Planned Maintenance – where a customer is already in a ground floor flat or bungalow and is due for a bathroom replacement by Acis under their planned maintenance programme, officers have worked with Acis to make available a financial contribution to upgrade standard bathrooms to full wet rooms. This ‘top-up’ payment costs the Council circa £1,500 per adaptation. Had the Council needed to provide a bathroom at a later stage it would have cost at least an additional £2,000 per adaptation. To date 10 bathrooms have been installed this way, with a further 10 scheduled in this financial year. Long term this increases the overall adapted stock available and significantly reduces the risk of slips or falls whilst bathing for tenants.

5.1.4. Future Proofing – this is similar to the planned maintenance programme but applies to properties that are not scheduled for planned maintenance by Acis. The focus is to upgrade and make the property safer for elderly or disabled tenants. The process includes seeking advice from an Occupational Therapist, and as with the scheme above it is aimed solely at properties suitable for disabled or elderly tenants. This scheme has also provided adaptations for persons that have moved under the assisted move scheme, to ensure that the property is sustainable both now and long term for the older demographic in West Lindsey.

6. Further Improvements

6.1. The service is now embedded within the Council, therefore additional improvements will be looked at where required. These may include:

- Further Improvements to contractor arrangements
- Increased level of alternative Independent Living options provided
- Policy and guidance reviews (these will be 'living documents' and updated regularly)
- Alignment with the Better Care Fund from 2016
- Continuation of the Planned Maintenance and Future Proofing initiatives, expanding this work to include other Registered Providers
- Fast tracking stair lift adaptations
- Continuation of the assisted move scheme as an alternative offered to customers where an existing property is not suitable for adaptation under DFG (revised policy to go to committee)

6.2. It is proposed that the remaining balance of funds for the DFG alternatives project will be distributed as follows:

Year	Staffing Contribution	Assisted Move Scheme Funding	Capital monies for future proofing and planned maintenance
15/16	£5k	£2.5k	£64k
16/17	£5k	£2.5k	£64k

6.3. Elected members should be aware that conversations regarding the future delivery of DFGs in the County are taking place and due to the information provided in this report and the issues identified in previous reports officers would clearly recommend that maintaining the service in house and improving as proposed is the best option currently for the Council.

6.4. It is recognised that there are significant differences in delivery and approach to DFGs across the County. The success of the in house service has been achieved through the Council regaining accountability and responsibility for making sure that the residents of West Lindsey receive the best service available. Currently this is being achieved whilst also realising financial savings for the Council.

6.5. Any decisions regarding this issue will be brought to elected members should they be required.

7. Summary

- 7.1. The data provided clearly demonstrates that bringing the service in house has resulted in improved performance during the initial months and ensured that the areas of concern raised by elected members have been addressed fully.
- 7.2. Customer service is now consistent and clear, therefore providing all applicants with the right information at the right stages and is not leading to increased expectations in terms of what will be provided via the DFG.

8. Recommendations

Elected members are asked to:

- 8.1. Note the content of the report;
- 8.2. Note the ongoing work regarding alternatives to DFG and the proposals for taking this forward.
- 8.3. Recommend that Policy and Resources Committee approve the proposal for the distribution of the remaining funding available for DFG alternatives as shown at 6.2

END