

## DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES	ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND HOUSING	5 NOVEMBER 2019	4
<b>DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT UPDATE AND AMENDMENT TO THE HOUSING SERVICES PRIVATE SECTOR ASSISTANCE POLICY</b>			

### PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

#### SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the Disabled Facilities Grant programme within Fylde and seeks approval of an amendment to the housing assistance policy, particularly with regard to adaptations grants.

The Housing Services Private Sector Assistance Policy approved by Committee in June 2017, amended in June 2018, included recommendations intended to increase the take up of Disabled Facilities Grants such as the removal of the test of resources and an increase in the upper grant limit.

This policy change achieved its aim, but a review of the policy is necessary to take account of an increase in the number of Disabled Facilities Grant applications without a corresponding increase in the Better Care Fund budget allocation.

This report recommends that the flexible use of its Better Care Fund allocation should continue but with the re-introduction of a test of resources. It is anticipated that this will avert a funding shortfall and deliver the best service to our customers.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the content of the report and the progress made in administering the Disabled Facilities and Adaptations Grants in Fylde provided under the Better Care Fund.
2. To approve the amendments to the Housing Services Private Sector Assistance Policy in respect of Adaptations Grants as detailed in Appendix 1 as the council's adopted policy to apply to all new applications received on or after 6 November 2019.

#### SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

The Housing Assistance Policy which introduced adaptation grants can be found here and was approved at Environmental, Health and Housing Committee on the 20 June 2017: [Housing services private sector assistance policy.docx](#)

The Policy was amended to extend the availability of adaptation grants and agreed by the Environmental, Health and Housing Committee on 5 June 2018: [Housing services private sector assistance policy v.2.1.docx](#)

CORPORATE PRIORITIES	
Spending your money in the most efficient way to achieve excellent services ( <b>Value for Money</b> )	√
Delivering the services that customers expect of an excellent council ( <b>Clean and Green</b> )	√
Working with all partners ( <b>Vibrant Economy</b> )	√
To make sure Fylde continues to be one of the most desirable places to live ( <b>A Great Place to Live</b> )	√
Promoting Fylde as a great destination to visit ( <b>A Great Place to Visit</b> )	

## REPORT

### Background

1. The Housing Services Private Sector Assistance Policy adopted in June 2017 created a framework for the delivery of various forms of grant assistance to benefit Fylde residents. The most significant was the introduction of Adaptations Grants which were to be administered in much the same way as Disabled Facilities Grants, but with greater financial flexibility. From June 2017, the “test of resources” was no longer a requirement for grant works costing less than £6,000 for a single adaptation.
2. In June 2018, Committee approved amendments to the policy:
  - to remove the “test of resources” where 2 adaptations are required costing under £10,000
  - to remove the “test of resources” from adaptations requested by an occupational therapist where the equipment is procured by Lancashire County Council
  - to increase the grant award by up to £20,000 above the Disabled Facilities Grant maximum of £30,000 to carry out eligible work identified by an occupational therapist

### Overview of the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and Adaptations Grants

3. The grants enable eligible applicants to make changes in their home environment, such as the installation of wet room showers, stairlifts and ramps, which allow them to live more independently in their homes.
4. The grants also have a key role to play in reducing admission to hospitals, providing safer and more effective discharge from hospital, preventing an increase in demand for social care and delaying or reducing admission to residential care.
5. Initial customer requests are taken by Social Care teams (County Council), customer assessments are then carried out by Occupational Therapy teams (County Council) and adaptation recommendations are sent to Fylde Council who then provide casework support, check the customers eligibility, undertake technical surveys, contractor procurement and monitor quality of work.
6. Applicants who would not be financially eligible for a standard Disabled Facilities Grant generally opt for the Adaptations Grant which achieves the same outcome in terms of the adaptation delivered.

### Summary of grant delivery in 2018/19

Table 1: Better Care Fund allocation in 2018/19 and the number of grants completed.

2018/19 BCF allocation received in June 2018	Supplementary allocation received in December 2018	Total BCF funding received	Number of grants completed between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019
£ 1,010,510	£ 178,183	£1,188,693	150

7. Adaptions delivered include the following:

- Level access shower
- Wet room
- Ramp access
- Equipment such as stair lifts etc

8. It is quite common for both ramp access and a wet room (or level access shower) to be part of the same application and under the current policy these adaptations are provided without applying a test of resources, provided the grant does not exceed the threshold maximum.
9. The current housing assistance policy achieved the aim of delivering adaptations to effectively address Better Care Fund priorities and delivery of grants for disabled adaptations in 2018/19 was achieved within budget although some payments were delayed and grant approvals held back at the end of the financial year pending announcement of the new funding allocation.
10. On completion of a disabled adaptation customers are requested to complete a customer satisfaction survey. Table 2 below demonstrates that customer satisfaction levels throughout 2018/19 on the service delivered by Fylde Council were high, and continue to be high in the first half of the current financial year.

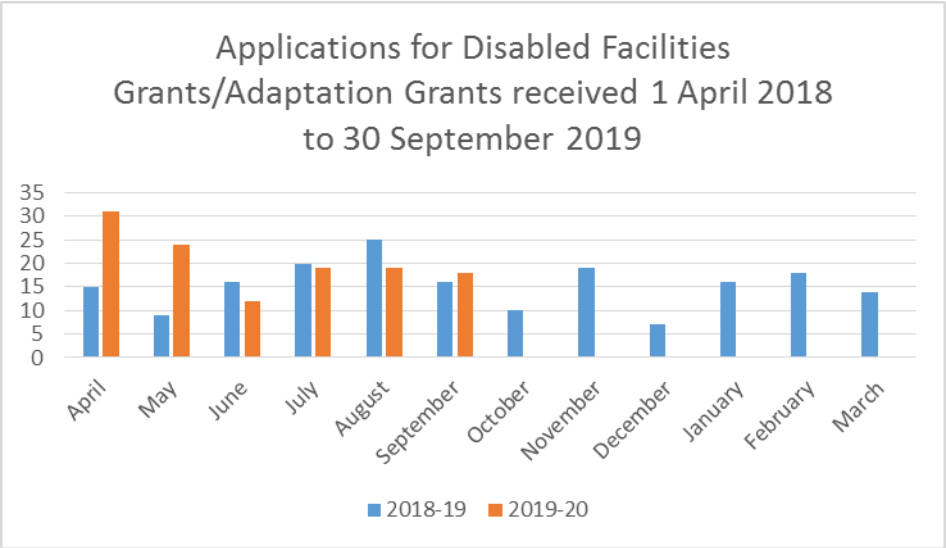
**Table 2: Customer satisfaction with the service in 2018-19 and 2019-20 (to date)**

	1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018	1 October 2018 to 31 March 2019	1 April 2019 to 30 September 2019
Customers who agree or strongly agree that the adaptation has increased their independence	98%	94%	98%
Customers rating the DFG service as good or excellent	99%	100%	98.5%

**Grant delivery in 1919/20**

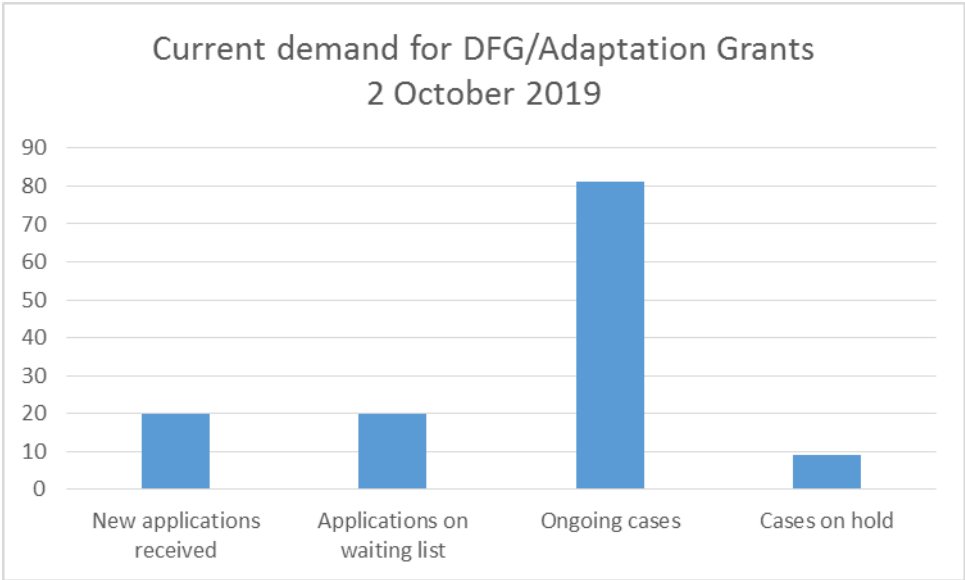
11. Fylde Council has been awarded £1,090,401 from the Better Care Fund to deliver adaptations in the current financial year. This is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the increased demand for this service. The

following chart illustrates how the number of referrals for adaptations has varied between 1 April 2018 and



30 September 2019. sp

12. The above chart illustrates the increase in the number of applications received in the first half year of 2019-20 compared with last year. However, there is no increase in the BCF budget to fund the increased number of adaptations and it has been necessary to have a waiting list in order to ensure that the service can be delivered within the available budget. The following chart summarises the demand for the DFG and adaptation grants up to 2 October 2019 and how these applications are being managed.
13. On a monthly basis, applications are assessed and awarded priority taking account of Occupational Therapist recommendations.



**Proposed amendments to the Housing Assistance Policy**

14. The statutory means test for Disabled Facilities Grants, as applied prior to 2017, was found to be very restrictive. It excluded many customers from receiving financial assistance and led to an underspend of the Better Care Fund allocation. However, the Better Care Fund budget for 2019-20 will not be sufficient

to continue to meet the demand for the DFG/adaptation grants this year under the current Housing Assistance Policy.

15. Currently, one adaptation up to a value of £6,000 or two adaptations up to a value of £10,000 are paid without a test of resources being applied. An evaluation of the contribution that would have been payable by applicants last year, applying the standard means test, suggests that a simple means test that is easy to understand and simple to apply would be sufficient to bridge the funding gap.
16. Data from 2018-19 has been analysed to determine an appropriate means test structure, refocussing assistance on customers less able to pay for the adaptation themselves. The supply and installation of equipment (which is procured and supplied externally to the Council) will continue to be excluded from the means testing process.

#### **Proposed test of resources**

17. For a single adaptation of a value of up to £6,000: The standard means test is carried out and, if the applicant would have a contribution of £12,000 or more towards the cost of the work, they would be ineligible for grant aid.
18. For two adaptations of a value of up to £10,000: The standard means test is carried out and, if the applicant would have a contribution of £20,000 or more towards the cost of the work, they would be ineligible for grant aid.
19. In 2018-19, the application of the proposed criteria would have resulted in 22 applicants being ineligible for grant assistance, but with resources of their own to proceed with the works, if they chose to do so. This would have enabled the Council to assist an additional 22 applicants who had no (or limited) means to pay for the work.
20. The Housing Assistance Policy has been amended to reflect the proposed change and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

#### **Other amendments to the Housing Assistance Policy**

21. In addition to the changes to the adaptation grant policy section, minor amendments have been made to ensure that the contents remain accurate, such as the refresh of hyperlinks and removal of outdated contact details.

#### **Equality Impact Assessment**

22. In the course of developing this proposal, we have considered whether there could be unintended adverse impacts on people because of characteristics protected by the Equality Act. For most protected characteristics we believe the new policy will not have any effects. However, there will clearly be impacts on disabled and older people in that the new procedures restrict access to the grant.
23. A consultation process has been undertaken to raise awareness of the proposed policy change and persons who believe they will be negatively affected by the change have had opportunity to express their views.
24. We believe the change is necessary, for the reasons set out in the report and the effect of not proceeding would result in disabled people who cannot themselves afford these adaptations losing out.

#### **Conclusion**

25. It is anticipated that the current demand for grant assistance for the rest of the financial year will be manageable if the requested changes to the adaptations grant policy can be implemented for new referrals received from 6 November 2019.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
Legal	The council has a statutory responsibility to provide disabled facilities grants under the Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
Community Safety	Enabling customers to live safely at home reduces the likelihood of hospital admissions and enhances their ability to remain within their community.
Human Rights and Equalities	Adaptations to the homes of disabled persons improves their quality of life. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and a consultation exercise undertaken to invite views from any persons who feel they may be impacted by the policy change.
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	No implications
Health & Safety and Risk Management	There is a financial risk to the council if the Better Care Fund budget is not properly managed

LEAD AUTHOR	CONTACT DETAILS	DATE
Ursula Seddon	Ursula.seddon@fylde.gov.uk Tel 01253 658691	7 October 2019

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
Housing Services Private Sector assistance policy	20 June 2017	<a href="#">Housing services private sector assistance policy.docx</a>
Housing Services Private Sector assistance policy v2	5 June 2018	<a href="#">Housing services private sector assistance policy v.2.1.docx</a>

Attached documents

Appendix 1 Draft Housing Services Private Sector Assistance Policy