

## DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTORATE	ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND HOUSING COMMITTEE	4 JANUARY 2022	7
<b>DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY UPDATE 2020/21 AND CURRENT POSITION UP TO QTR 3 2021/22</b>			

### PUBLIC ITEM

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

### SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) programme within Fylde Council and seek approval of an amendment to the Housing Assistance Policy.

Part 1 of the Housing, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, disabled facility grant, and the Better Care Fund 2013 provide funding for the wellbeing of residents to remain in their home and reduce the burden on the NHS. In 2021/22 Fylde Council were awarded £1,317,263

The Housing Services Private Sector Assistance Policy was first approved by Committee in June 2017. It was amended in June 2018 to include recommendations intended to increase the take up of disabled facilities grants.

In November 2019 a further review was required, due to the increase in the number of disabled facilities grant applications, without a corresponding increase in the Better Care Fund allocation.

Additional amendments are required to update the Housing Assistance Policy to reflect the recent increase in the cost of materials and expected increase in the cost of labour. This report proposes increasing the maximum value of adaptations and reducing the administration fees for child adaptations, to increase the value of the grant available. The report also recommends amendments to the policy to reflect the recent DFG audit recommendations and a proposed approach to enabling extensions to social landlord accommodation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### The Committee are requested to:

1. To note the update on the delivery of the DFG grant programme in 2020/21, and part year 2021/22, together with the progress update on the Handyperson and Sanctuary Scheme with Preston Care and Repair.
2. To approve the increase in disabled facilities grants for small adaptations from £6,000 to £7,000 together with an increased contribution from the applicant rising from £12,000 to £14,000.
3. To approve the increase in disabled facilities grants for two adaptations from £10,000 to £14,000 together with an increased contribution from the applicant rising from £20,000 to £24,000.
4. To approve a reduction in the fees from 15% to 5% for child adaptations, and for complex cases, complete removal of fees.
5. To approve a trial of match funding with social housing providers for extensions to property.

## 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 20th of June 2017: [Housing Services Private Sector Assistance Policy](#)

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 V2.1](#)

The policy was amended to include the handy person and sanctuary scheme agreed by the Environmental, Health and Housing Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021: [Fylde Council 'Handy Person and Sanctuary Scheme Pilot Service'](#)

## CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Economy – To create a vibrant and healthy economy	√
Environment – To deliver services customers expect	
Efficiency – By spending money in the most efficient way	√
Tourism – To create a great place to live and visit	

## REPORT

### Background

#### Fylde Council Private Sector Assistance Policy, Disabled Facilities Grant

1. Disabled adaptation grants enable eligible applicants to make changes in their home environment, such as the installation of wet room showers, stairlifts and ramps, which allows them to live more independently in their homes.
2. The adaptations brought about by the provision of these grants help to reduce future hospital admissions and assist in reducing the demand for social care. Putting adaptations in place also allows for more effective discharge from hospitals as residents are able to return to their homes knowing that adjustments are to be/have been put in place.
3. It is common for disabled facilities grant applications to be multi-faceted, for example, to include as a part of the same application ramp access, wet room (or level access showers) and stair or through floor lift.
4. In June 2018, the Environment, Health and Housing Committee approved amendments to the policy with recommendations intended to increase the take up of Disabled Facilities Grants, these included:
  - a. To remove the 'test of resources' where 2 adaptations are required costing under £10,000;
  - b. To remove the 'test of resources' from adaptations requested by an Occupational Health Therapist where equipment is procured by Lancashire County Council;
  - c. To increase the grant award by up to £20,000 above the Disabled Facilities Grant maximum of £30,000 to carry our eligible work identified by as Occupational Health Therapist.
5. In November 2019, a review of the amendments from June 2018 was required to consider the increase in the number of disabled facilities grant applications, without a corresponding increase in the Better Care Fund allocation. These included:
  - a. 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.
  - b. For two adaptations up to a value of £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.

### **Increasing the value of adaptations**

6. Rising costs in fuel, materials, and energy, together with difficulties in sourcing materials and contractor availability are placing increased pressures on this area of activity.
7. The maximum disabled facilities grant award is £30,000. However, there is a need to review this maximum award to consider the additional cost pressures.
8. Additionally, adaptations for children are usually the most complex and can be more costly. The council sets fees for processing DFG grants that are currently set at 15%. One option is to reduce the fees charged on the aforementioned adaptations to increase the value of the grant award.
9. The first proposal is to reduce fees to 5% for an adaptation for children, and to waive the fees in more complex cases. This will increase the value of the grant enabling works to be carried out without having to rely on discretionary payments for unforeseen additional works or to have to submit a further DFG application.
10. During 2020/21 there were 10 adaptations for children, one of which was complex. The total grant funding spends for adaptations for children in 2020/21 was £121,711.
11. The second proposal is to increase the maximum grant value available for a single adaptation from £6,000 to £7,000. For households who are expected to contribute, this will be increased from a maximum of £12,000 to £14,000, depending on the means test.
12. The third proposal is to increase the maximum grant value available for two adaptations from £10,000 to £14,000. For households who are expected to contribute, this will be increased from a maximum of £20,000 to £24,000, depending on the means test.

### **Extensions work on social housing**

13. In the past, council policy has not supported funded extensions to social housing properties. However, recently the service has seen an increase in requests for extensions from social landlords for families with children.
14. The proposal is for the council to offer social housing providers an opportunity to match fund to the maximum DFG amount of £30,000 for equipment installation and property extensions.
15. It is proposed that the addition of match funding be added to the policy from Registered Social Landlords. In doing this, families in social housing can remain in their home without the worry of having to relocate.

### **DFG Audit 2021 recommendations**

16. A recent DFG audit conducted by MIAA, the council's internal audit provider, rated the service as good. However, there were a number of recommendations required to improve the Policy.
17. The first recommendation was that the policy regarding the register of land charges on adaptations of less than £5,000 be reworded. The previous policy referred to owner occupiers but excluded tenants and housing associations.
18. As a result, the policy now includes, "If a DFG exceeds £5,000 then the council will register a Local Land Charge for the amount above this, up to a maximum of £10,000. However, a local land charge will not be registered on properties that are rented from a private landlord, or a housing association".
19. The second recommendation was to clearly define the approach to non-essential works that are recommended by the Occupational Therapist. The council will now consider nonessential work, but only in exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis.
20. The relevant section of the existing Housing Assistance Policy has been amended to reflect the proposed change (page 7) and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.
21. The third recommendation is to clearly define at Officer level approval of discretionary payments above the maximum grant value of £30,000. This is now clearly defined within policy as the Housing Services Manager in consultation with the Head of Housing and Planning.
22. The fourth recommendation was to replace the timeframe in which adaptations would be completed to be in line with the Housing Grant Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 - this being 12 months.

## Handyperson and Sanctuary Scheme with Preston Care and Repair

23. In July 2021, a 'Handyperson and Sanctuary Scheme Pilot service' was introduced in Fylde for 12 months in order to gauge the level of demand for the service and to inform a formal procurement of the service in 2022.
24. Preston Care and Repair were awarded the contract for Minor Aids and Adaptations within Fylde in 2020 by Lancashire County Council (LCC). This is a statutory function provided by LCC, Adult Social Care.
25. The Handy Person pilot runs alongside the minor aids and adaptations service. The pilot includes a Sanctuary Scheme for clients experiencing domestic abuse, to respond to new duties placed on Local Authorities under the Domestic Abuse Bill 2021.
26. Since the launch of the scheme there have been 39 enquires, with 12 during the first quarter. Leaflets advertising the service were circulated to churches, community centres, medical centres, and surgeries and since this promotion began there has been an increase in referrals. Works undertaken include minor works, healthy home checks to improve home safety and security, advice and assistance with larger adaptations and home repair, and practical support to people returning from hospital.

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

27. 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.
28. The grants have a key role 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.
29. Initial customer requests are taken by LCC and customer assessments are then carried out by occupational therapy teams. Adaptation recommendations are then passed to the council and we undertake casework support, checking the eligibility of customers, undertaking technical surveys, contractor procurement and monitoring the quality of work.

## Summary of DFG grant 2020/21

2020/21 BCF allocation received in June 2020	Supplementary funding allocation 2020/21	Progress Association Contribution	Housing Contribution	Total Better Care Fund Allocation
<b>£1,090,401</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£80,000</b>		<b>£1,170,401</b>

## Summary of DFG grant 2021/22

2021/22 BCF allocation received in June 2020	Supplementary funding allocation 2020/21	Progress Association Contribution	Housing Contribution	Total Better Care Fund Allocation
<b>£1,237,227</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£80,000</b>		<b>£1,317,227</b>

30. The Better Care Fund Allocation remained static at £1,090,401 in 2020/21. This allocation increased by £146,826 for 2021/22 at £1,237,227.
31. From 1/04/2021 and 30/11/2021 the service has awarded £899,859 of the funding. The service is confident that the full BCF allocation will be spent in 2021/22
32. There have been 98 approvals between 1/4/2021 and 30/11/2021 which is a decrease of 2020 approvals but an increase on 2019/20.

## Conclusion

33. Members are invited to note the contents of the report and update on delivery of the DFG grant programme in 2020/21 and to date in 2021/22, together with the progress of the Handyperson and Sanctuary Scheme delivered by Preston Care and Repair.
34. Members are also invited to approve an increase in disabled facilities grants for small adaptations from £6,000 to £7,000 together with an increased contribution from the applicant rising from £12,000 to £14,000;

an increase in disabled facilities grants for two adaptations from £10,000 to £14,000 together with an increased contribution from the applicant rising from £20,000 to £24,000.

35. Members are also invited to approve a reduction in the fees with regards to the child disabled facilities grant adaptations from 15% to 5%, and for complex cases, complete removal of fees.
36. Members are also invited to approve a trial of match funding with social housing providers for extensions to property.

**Housing Service Show and Tell**

37. On the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2022 Fylde Council Housing Services are running our second Housing Service Show and Tell. The event will be open from 10am to 3pm in the Town Hall and will have displays and information from all services with staff available to answer queries and questions. Services include: Affordable Housing Delivery; Disabled Facilities Grants; Homelessness and Housing Advice; Private Sector Inspection; and Tenancy Support.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	No implications 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.
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	No implications from this report.
Health & Safety and Risk Management	No implications from this report.

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Attached documents  
 Appendix 1 - Housing Assistance policy Proposed Amendments 2021