

Report subject	Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Policy
Meeting date	01-09-21
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The report seeks approval of the DFG Policy, attached at Appendix 1, which consolidates the three policies from the legacy Councils and takes account of current legislation and national guidance. The policy includes the following major changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of discretionary funding to assist applicant's who require works costing over £30,000, are unable to meet the assessed contribution following means testing or require assistance which does not meet the mandatory criteria and is deemed by the Council to benefit the applicant's health and wellbeing. • Commitment to utilise Seascope South Limited for grant works as part of a comprehensive in-house service <p>Implementation of the new policy is proposed for January 2022 by which time the Grants Team will be fully staffed and the new BCP procedures will be in place in line with the Action Plan at Appendix 3.</p> <p>DFG's enable BCP residents to receive adaptations which assist them to remain independent in their own homes, reduce the need for care services and in some cases prevent moves into residential care. Adaptations reduce accidents and assist in hospital discharges back home. At the height of the pandemic BCP Council still assisted 130 people through the DFG scheme. This does not take into account the applicants that we could not help under the legacy policies but will be able to in future under the new policy.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>The proposed policy be considered and approved.</p>
Reason for recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To meet our statutory obligation under the The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996; as amended by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England & Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) to have a published document in place setting out Council policy on the aims and application of the local grant scheme

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To update and replace legacy Councils policy• To provide clear and transparent policy for applicants and staff• To increase our offer to applicants in respect of discretionary funding to maximise use of the grant in line with national good practice and the aims of the Better Care Fund.
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Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Robert Lawton Portfolio Holder for Homes
Corporate Director	Kate Ryan, Chief Operations Officer
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Approval

Background

1. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) provide funding to improve accessibility and enable people to remain living independently in their own homes.
2. Legislation requires all Local Authorities to have a published document in place setting out Council policy on the aims and application of the local grant scheme.
3. This new policy replaces legacy Council policies.
4. The grant scheme is funded through the Better Care Fund who agree a budget amount on an annual basis. The Government's indicative figure and terms of the grant provides flexibility and enables the funding to be allocated to Social Care and Housing to fund a range of services to meet the needs of people. These services include the community equipment service and the disabled facilities grant.
5. To date the legacy Council's DFG Policy has only reflected mandatory grant funding assistance and the new BCP Council policy proposes to use powers to provide discretionary assistance as needed to better meet the needs of applicants, fulfil the aims of the Better Care Fund and maximise use of the grant.
6. This ringfenced grant is used for both adaptations and the staffing to facilitate the grant process. There is a current underspend as set out in the Summary of Financial Implications however, with the additional powers in place, the expected increase following lockdown and the recruitment required to manage the whole scale programme across the BCP area, the budget will be fully utilised in future.
7. A communication plan will be put in place to launch the new policy and ensure that promotion of the service maximises take up of the service.
8. Figures for the last 3 years are set out below however are not truly representative of the Christchurch numbers owing to data discrepancies.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
No of applications received	170	158	141
No of completed works	175	154	130

9. The policy sets out the intention of the Council to promote the Council's wholly owned company Seascope South Limited to complete any works as part of a comprehensive in-house service to applicants.

10. Seascope South Limited has a proven track record delivering major adaptations across Bournemouth and Christchurch and minor adaptations (not covered by this policy) across all of the BCP area.
11. External contractors will continue to provide specialist services as needed and tender for works where the applicant chooses not to use Seascope South Limited.

Consultation

12. The policy and action plan has been developed through good practice documentation such as the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) Adaptations without Delay, Adult Social Care project work and examples of other Local Authorities policy
13. Key stakeholders that have been consulted with are the Principal Occupational Therapist for Adult Social Care, Team Manager for SEND, OT and Grants Officers, Financial Services and Legal Services.
14. The policy is currently out for consultation with housing associations, several service user groups and some local charities who advise and represent applicants. Consultation is due to end on 30th July 2021.

Options Appraisal

15. The recommended option is to implement the new policy as set out in Appendix 1. This policy meets the legislative requirements for the grant and provides discretionary powers to Council officers to facilitate grant funding for applicants that require works over and above the mandatory limit of £30,000, in circumstances of hardship are unable to meet their contribution and in complex cases where the Council deem the requirements over and above the legislation should be met to ensure the health and wellbeing of the applicant and prevent more costly service delivery to the Council.
16. The recommended option incurs additional cost to the grant in staffing, resources and funding however will mitigate costs to the Council in terms of delivery of care services including residential and potentially carer services as well.
17. There is scope to use Better Care Funding allocation with some degree of flexibility within BCP Council to ensure efficient service provision however to date this has not been possible without a finalised policy in place.
18. Discretionary funding assistance affords the Council flexibility to meet new national guidance and good practice around adaptations and grant delivery within the lifetime of the policy.
19. An alternative option would be to implement a new policy which meets the legislative requirements for the grant but does not include any discretionary funding assistance. This would be in line with the legacy Council arrangements where in some historical cases Adult and Children's Social Care topped up or applicants applied for charitable grants with limited success, but the majority of applications would have been cancelled and adaptations would not have been completed.
20. The alternative option would mean a proportion of applications would not proceed owing to requiring works over and above £30,000, not being able to make contributions and certain complex cases such as some of our more complex

children's cases needing innovative and long term options to sustain them into adulthood. This in turn would lead to more costly and intrusive services as well as poor health outcomes.

21. A further option would be to do nothing. We currently have in place legacy policy arrangements which differ across the separate teams leading to confusion and leaving the Council open to challenge.
22. Where the Council may identify a need for innovative and more costly adaptations to meet an applicant's needs over and above £30,000 we will not be able to proceed without the necessary policy in place setting out our discretionary powers.

Summary of financial implications

23. The current DFG budget and spend is set out in the table below. This includes costs of adaptations and staffing.

Year	Allocation (£)	Spend (£)
19/20	3,100,781	1,599,000
20/21	3,518,312	1,034,000
21/22	3,518,312	212,000 Qtr1

24. BCP Council have had an underspend for the last 2 financial years with 20/21 significantly affected by the pandemic. Grant applications reduced in line with OT assessments. Only critical cases were progressed in the first lock down and straightforward adaptations that could be assessed and specified through online assessments in subsequent lockdowns.
25. Applications are now increasing along with works progressing that have been on hold and more complex works that have been delayed and require Planning and technical services.
26. Owing to the corporate restructure recruitment of staff has been on hold and in the meantime the Bmth Grants Team have taken on the additional work for the Christchurch area. There will be recruitment costs within this financial year once the team are brought together under this new scheme and policy.
27. The £30,000 limit on disabled facilities grants has been in place since 2008 and owing to increasing costs of works the amount of applications where the costs amount to over £30,000 is becoming more frequent. In the last 3 years we have progressed 30 applications that have come in over the £30,000 limit with the difference funded by families, personal loans, applicant savings and charitable grants. The total cost to the Council for these grant applications was £870,000.00 however the total cost for these adaptations amounts to £1,306,828.00.

28. These amounts whilst not representative of all the discretionary assistance set out in the policy and not all these applicants would have been eligible for discretionary funding it gives an indication of the financial risk to the Council.
29. All funding awards will be approved and made in compliance with the Council's financial regulations and after Financial Services confirmation of funding available. Financial Services colleagues will be members of the Discretionary Funding Panel and advise on the current budget position.
30. Discretionary grant assistance may be withdrawn by the Council at any time depending on the availability of DFG funding.
31. Where the budget becomes oversubscribed meeting the mandatory grant funding obligations within the financial year the Grants Team will work with Adult and Children's Social Care/SEND to prioritise cases and take a planned approach to completion of works within the statutory 12 month time frame.

Summary of legal implications

32. The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996; as amended by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England & Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) requires all Local Authorities to have a published document in place setting out Council policy on the aims and application of the local grant scheme.
33. The policy sets out the mandatory legal framework for DFGs, and how the Council intends to use its powers under the RRO to provide interventions to promote independent living and wellbeing.
34. Without a policy in place BCP Council can only award mandatory grants at this time.
35. The implementation of discretionary funding assistance will require additional processes to be followed around placing land registry charges on properties. This is a legal procedure and will require resource from Legal Services.

Summary of human resources implications

Housing have two grants teams operating over Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole areas currently. In line with the Smarter Structures timetable these teams will become one team within Facilities in the coming months and in time for the launch of the new policy.

There will be additional resource implications because of the new policy in terms of management of a larger wholesale programme across BCP and to facilitate the additional discretionary funding process. This will be addressed partly through the recruitment of three additional posts funded through the grant and Legal Services support as mentioned above.

Summary of sustainability impact

36. The policy contributes to the Council's sustainable development goals:

Good Health and Well Being

- Facilitates residents remaining in their own homes, enabling access to and use of all areas and contributing to their health and wellbeing by maintaining their independence.

- Enables residents to access their gardens and leave their homes to enjoy local green spaces.

Clean Water and Sanitation

- Enables residents to continue to access and use bathroom and kitchen facilities

Reduced Inequalities

- Facilitates residents remaining in their own homes, maintaining their independence.

Sustainable Cities and Communities.

- Enabling people to remain in their own homes accessing and contributing to their community.

There will be an environmental impact from the delivery of our disabled facilities grant scheme under this policy and we are committed to encouraging applicants to choose local and sustainable organisations to carry out works. Seascope South Limited and any other contractors promoted by the Council will adopt sustainable business practices where possible including waste reduction and sustainable transport.

Summary of public health implications

37. Public Health Dorset works closely with the Planning Authority to shape environments and make sure that the places in which we live, work and play are 'healthy places'.

The new DFG Policy will ensure applicants who are most in need will receive adaptations to maintain their independence within their homes and access the community. Adaptations contribute to positive health outcomes, promote people's independence and reduces the need for more intrusive services.

Summary of equality implications

38. A full Equality Impact Assessment Screening document has been completed.

39. The new grant scheme set out in the DFG policy will improve the condition and access of applicant's homes.

The benefits of the new policy include:

- Improving access for disabled people in their home improves their ability to live and remain active within their local communities.
- Ensures the households that are most in need receive funding to cover the costs for their adaptations.
- An increase in applicants who will now be able to proceed with a grant.
- The Council will provide support to applicants

There is no known negative impact, as a result, of this policy however there are some identified areas which may lead to an inequity of access which will be mitigated by the following:

- a communications plan for the launch of the new grant scheme which will ensure information is accessible both online and in hard copy and targeted in key universal places such as GP practices.
- support with applications available for applicants

40. In addition, as the Discretionary Funding Panel is developed a further EIA will be carried out to ensure equalities forms part of the consideration process.

Summary of risk assessment

41. This report identifies limited risks in implementing the recommended new DFG Policy for BCP Council. There are specific risks in not implementing a new policy which need to be considered when looking at the Options Appraisal.
42. The financial risk to the Council is the most significant in terms of the additional commitment to discretionary funding however the policy outlines the decision - making process to mitigate this.
43. There is a risk of applicant dissatisfaction at this time whilst OT's and Grants Officers catch up with assessments and applications which have been delayed owing to the pandemic. Additional recruitment and fast tracking of cases will assist in alleviating this.
44. BCP Council Officers are committed to the continual improvement of the grant programme and set out in the Action Plan at Appendix 3 are the key planned pieces of work which mitigate the risks and will support and add value during the term of this policy.

Background papers

None

Appendices

1. Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Policy
2. Equality Impact Assessment Screening document
3. Action Plan