

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director (Adults and Communities)

to  
Cabinet

on  
15<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Agenda  
Item No.

9

Report prepared by: Carol Smith – Adaptation Team Manager

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## Disabled Facilities Grant Policy

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: People  
Cabinet Member: Councillor Gilbert  
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

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### 1. Purpose of Report

This report seeks Cabinet approval of the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy for Southend on Sea Borough Council.

### 2. Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

- a. Approve removal of means test for grants under £6,000 (£6,500 for a curved stairlift) to speed up prevention process for applicants.
- b. Approve the circumstances where a discretionary disabled facilities grant can be considered, including relocation grants, special assistance grants and top-up grants.
- c. Approve and agree to adopt the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy document with immediate effect.

### 3. Background

3.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) were introduced in 1990, but the principle legal provisions are now contained in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (HGCRA) and associated regulations.

3.2 In 2002 the government brought in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002 which provide freedom and opportunities for the Local Authority to address housing issues. This Order had important implications for local housing authorities because it repeals much of the existing prescriptive legislation governing the provision of renewal grants to applicants and replaces it with a new wide-ranging power to provide assistance for housing renewal.

In 2008-9 the government extended the scope of the RRO to include use of the DFG money. This enables the authorities to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes.

- 3.3 DFG's are mandatory grants available to disabled people when works to adapt their home are judged necessary and appropriate to meet their needs and when it is reasonable and practicable to carry them out having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling or building. Occupational Therapists working with Southend on Sea Borough Council assess whether any works are necessary and appropriate and decide the best available adaptation options for the disabled person, in conjunction with the Adaptations Team at Southend on Sea Borough Council.
- 3.4 DFG's are generally subject to a 'means test' which means that the applicant's income and savings have to be assessed to determine whether any contributions are required to be made by them towards the cost of the required work.
- 3.5 The maximum amount of a mandatory DFG is currently set by statute at £30,000. In addition the Council is able to provide discretionary assistance using the DFG funding which is outlined in our DFG policy.

#### **4. Other Options**

- a. Not introduce a discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant policy, continuing to only provide the mandatory elements of the DFG.
- b. Continue to means test for all grants as per the mandatory requirements.

#### **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

##### **5.1 Means Test**

- 5.1.1 In addition to the general changes, policy suggestions are described in the following section for Cabinet to consider for approval. These relate specifically to the Means Test Process and Discretionary Assistance.
- 5.1.2 The existing means test is based on the eligibility test for Housing Benefit and was designed to target funding on 'needy' households. It has long been criticised for being complicated, unfair and, in recent years, out of date. The delivery process is often slow and cumbersome, with numerous handovers.
- 5.1.3 Too many people drop out of the process, often because they must contribute to the cost. Nearly 9 out of every 10 applications relate to physical disabilities and 90% of adaptations provided are either level access showers, stair lifts or ramps. The average nationwide cost is around £9,000 but most work in Southend is under £5,000.
- 5.1.4 Subject to all other eligibility criteria being met, we recommend that the means test is removed for adaptations under £6,000 and stair lifts (average cost of which is £6,500).

## 5.2 Discretionary Assistance

5.2.1 It is advised to Cabinet that a DFG policy is recommended for discretionary assistance to be provided in the form of a 'top-up' grant, for when works may exceed £30,000 and all other reasonable options for external financing (charities, etc.) have been exhausted. The revised policy expands the circumstances that discretionary assistance can be provided, to include a 'relocation grant' and a 'special assistance' grant.

5.2.2 It is suggested to Cabinet that a **Top-up grant** to enable discretionary assistance to be provided to disabled persons, where the cost of works exceeds that allowed by the mandatory DFG. This has proved necessary in recent times, due mainly to the rise in general building costs since the £30,000 financial limit was originally set in the mid 1990's

5.2.3 The purpose of the **Relocation grant** is where a mandatory DFG is determined not to be a feasible or reasonable option and the applicant is considering relocating to another more suitable property, which they intend to purchase. Subject to an application to the Council and support from an Occupational Therapist, a discretionary grant may be made available towards specific relocation expenses including estate agent fees, legal costs and removal costs.

5.2.4 The **Special Assistance grant** is intended to help applicants to pay for the cost of adapting their home to meet the needs of the disabled person where this may not be covered by a mandatory DFG. Each case would still need to be supported by a recommendation of an Occupational Therapist. Examples of adaptations that would not generally be covered by a mandatory DFG, but could be considered under a special assistance grant would include, but would not be restricted to:

- The provision of a safe play space for a disabled child
- To provide an area for specialist care or treatment (i.e. a dialysis room.)
- The provision of facilities for a child in foster care (where the length of stay is likely to be years rather than months)
- Adaptations to a second property, where a disabled child is living under a dual residency arrangement, where residency has been split between two parents (or other designated guardian)
- Provision of a storage facility for a mobility scooter, with a fixed charging point

## 6. Corporate Implications

### 6.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map

Theme		Outcome
Safe & Well	2	Southend residents are remaining well enough to enjoy fulfilling lives, throughout their lives.
Safe & Well	3	We are well on our way to ensuring that everyone has a home that meets their needs.
Safe & Well	4	We are all effective at protecting and improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable in our community.

## 6.2 Financial Implications

6.2.1 Central Government provides annual capital grant funding towards the adaptations to clients homes and it is administered via the Better Care Fund. The grant is awarded annually. This has been confirmed as £1.721m for 2021/22, which will be added to the sum of £1.556m, which is already included in the Capital Investment Programme over a range of years.

6.2.2 All Councils are required to submit to Central Government an annual declaration that grant conditions have been complied with as well as a return detailing amounts spent on DFGs and other supporting information, such as age of the grant applicant. In practice it has been Council policy for many years that the total grant received from central Government is fully allocated to mandatory DFG spend.

6.2.3 Reallocation of the available capital budget to discretionary grants will reduce the amount available for other mandatory grants by the same amount, as it is taken from the same overall funded budget. As such, it will be important to ensure that any discretionary award is only considered having regard to the value of resources the Council has available at that time and that both the mandatory grants and discretionary grants awarded are contained within the overall allocation for the DFG capital budget.

## 6.3 Legal Implications

6.3.1 The policy requires formal adoption in order to satisfy the requirements of individual Acts of Parliament/ Statutory Instruments and this includes revision or review of such policies.

## 6.4 People Implications

6.4.1 Removing the means test for adaptations under £6,000 and stair lifts (average cost of which is £6,500) will mean we are able to complete our adaptations quicker and positively change peoples lives for the better.

6.4.2 Increasing the number of potential circumstances that discretionary assistance could be provided by the Council through the DFG funding will directly help to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable residents in the Southend Borough and provide additional support for those persons who care for, or provide them with assistance, on a day to day basis - thus changing their lives for the better.

## 6.5 Property Implications

N/A

## 6.6 Consultation

N/A

## 6.7 Equalities and Diversities Implications

6.7.1 There is a potential for a positive impact on both Adults and Children with Disabilities.

## 6.8 Risk Assessment

N/A

## 6.9 Value for Money

6.9.1 Investment in Aids and Adaptations supports the principle of Home First and often results in a significant reduction in long term care costs.

## 6.10 Community Safety Implications

N/A

## 6.11 Environmental Impact

N/A

## 7 **Background Papers**

## 8 **Appendices**

Disabled Facilities Grants Policy May 2021