

Cabinet

27 September 2017



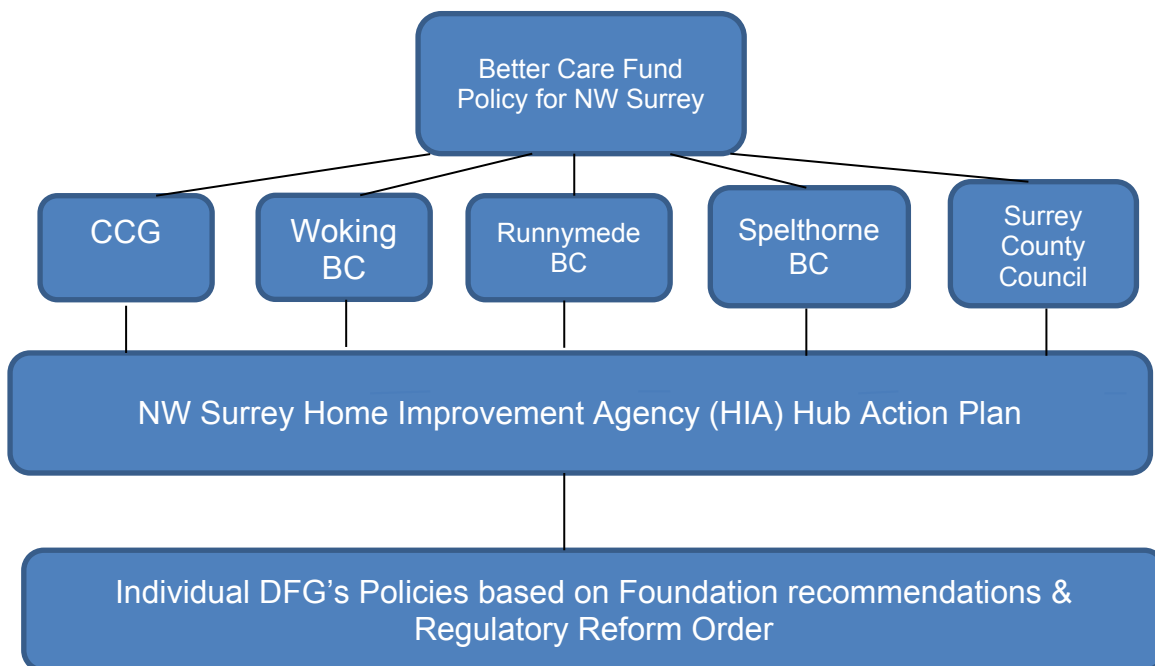
Title	Disabled Facilities Grant Policy		
Purpose of the report	To make a decision		
Report Author	Janice Lowin		
Cabinet Member	Councillor Mark Francis	Confidential	No
Corporate Priority	Housing		
Recommendations	To agree the new Disabled Facilities Grant Policy.		
Reason for Recommendation	Funding for disabled facilities grants is now part of the Better Care Fund (BCF). In order to fully utilise all the allocated budget, Local Authorities are required to have a documented policy stating how the allocation will be spent		

1. Key issues

- 1.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) administration is a statutory function for local authorities to provide adaptations to disabled people's homes to help them live as independently and safely as possible. Funding is from the Government through the Better Care Fund (BCF) and the allocation for Spelthorne Borough Council for 2017-18 is £707,366.
- 1.2 Part of the Better Care Fund brings together the budgets from Clinical Commissioning Groups, Disabled Facilities Grants and Adult Social Care within Social Services. There must also be a Better Care Fund plan which must be signed off by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Surrey County Council, and in the case of DFG's, District and Borough Councils.
- 1.3 The Legislation for DFG's is within the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The Regulatory Reform Order 2002 gives Local Authorities power to introduce policies around aids and adaptations. In 2008, the government made changes to allow greater flexibility around how the money could be used in order to keep people in their own homes. DFG funding allocations were significantly increased from 2016/17 and further increased in 2017/18. In 2017/18, the overall budget for DFG grants was £431m. In 2016/17 it was £394m and in 2015/16 it was £220m. As a result, this allowed Local Authorities to look at additional ways the money can be spent to help people live independently. Authorities are required to set out plans on how the DFG funding will be used. Allocations for Spelthorne are:

2017-18	£707,366
2016-17	£644,335
2015-16	£347,921

- 1.4 In June 2017 Foundations published a report in the DFG process across Surrey. The report was jointly commissioned by Surrey County Council and the 11 District and Boroughs in Surrey. One of the report's recommendations is for Districts and Boroughs to work together in clusters, in line with the Clinical Commissioning Groups, in order to standardise policies. The report has a number of recommendations, some of which are agreed by Spelthorne some of which are not. However to take things forward Spelthorne are working with Woking and Runnymede Borough Councils within the North West Surrey Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and have jointly developed an action plan in order to address this.



- 1.5 The action plan formulated by Runnymede, Spelthorne and Woking Borough Councils, following the recommendations from the Foundations report highlights the following points:
- Local Land Charges – All grants currently have a charge placed against the property to a maximum of a £10k charge (where works cost £15k and above) whereby the amount is re-paid on a sliding scale if the property is sold. From a customer point of view this can cause a great deal of worry for those requiring adaptations and can be a deterrent in applying for a grant, especially where the adaptation may devalue the property. In reality they are rarely claimed against and only for amounts between £5,000 - £10,000 can be reclaimed.
 - Financial Means Testing – All DFG's are currently means tested. In the case of smaller adaptations such as stair lifts, ramps, hoists and shower rooms, means testing can slow the down the process for works which could otherwise be turned around relatively quickly.
 - Discretionary Top-up Grant - The maximum grant is currently £30k in England. Any amount above this has to be referred to Surrey County

Council for top-up. This can cause a lengthy delay to the customer. Surrey County Council have recommended to have no ceiling to District & Borough funding per DFG which would mean there would no longer be any top-up funding available through them.

- Community Equipment Service (e.g. hoists and modular ramps) – District and Borough Councils currently have no involvement with community equipment. It is currently arranged by and paid for by Surrey County Council. They are arguably, however, types of adaptations, and could be included in the DFG process, as Surrey County Council have over spent in this area.
- Standardise Home Improvement Agency (HIA) fee structure – HIA fees vary across District and Boroughs and should be standardised.
- Discretionary Budget - There is a discretionary DFG budget of £29,600 for 2017/18. A policy is required in order to spend within this budget.

2. Options analysis and proposal

- 2.1 Adopt the attached policy to ensure the quickest turnaround time for DFG's in order to provide the best possible customer service and the best use of money. The policy will start to align Runnymede, Spelthorne and Woking Borough Council's Policies. It will be subject to review depending on budget implications. Actual budget implications are difficult to predict, however, the budget has increased from £460k in 2015/16 to £707k in 17/18.

The Policy includes:

- Local Land Charges – remove the need to register a Local Land charge against the property for certain adaptations including level access showers and stair lifts, for works up to the value of £15k. Stair lifts and level access showers generally do not increase the value of a property. Land charges only to be placed on major structural adaptations i.e. extensions and large conversions, at the discretion of SBC. The decision to reclaim land charges placed will be made on a case by case basis, reviewed by the Group Heads of Community Well-being.
- Financial Means Testing – Although Woking and Runnymede Borough Councils are working towards removing means testing for lower level grants, at this stage Spelthorne Borough Council will retain it. This can be reviewed if required.
- Discretionary Top-up Grant - Allow up to an additional £15k on top of the standard £30k.
Any application expected to be between £30k & £45k, or any exceptional situations, will be referred to an internal panel (Spelthorne Borough Council). The panel will comprise of a minimum of 3 people, made up of any combination of Councillors, Deputy Chief Executive, Group Head, Deputy Group Head and Independent Living Manager. Each case will be considered individually, based on client needs, circumstances, other possible options and budget, with a maximum of an additional £15k awarded.
Any application expected to be greater than £45k will be referred to Surrey

County Council to consider top-up.

SBC will pay a shortfall in top-up if the shortfall is less than £1k, where the works are already in progress, in order to prevent delay. Any shortfall greater than £1k would require referral back to the relevant panel for agreement.

Below are examples of how this will work:

Example 1: DFG expected to cost £40k with no client contribution

Mandatory Grant SBC	Discretionary Grant SBC	Surrey County Council top-up
£30K	Referred to SBC panel for agreement of remaining £10k	N/A

Example 2: DFG expected to cost £70k no client contribution

Mandatory Grant SBC	Discretionary Grant SBC	Surrey County Council top-up
£30k	N/A	Referred to Surrey County Council panel for consideration of remaining £40k

- Community Equipment Service – The payment of invoices for equipment will be paid for by District and Borough Councils, up the amount of £50k for this year only (2017-18). Surrey County Council will continue to arrange for equipment to be installed. Once a total of £50k has been spent on equipment, a review will be required to determine how payment is made for further equipment. Further discussions will be required past this financial year
- Standardise Home Improvement Agency (HIA) fee structure – Spelthorne's HIA currently charge 15% which is the proposed amount for Runnymede and Woking HIA's.
- Discretionary Budget – It is proposed that this is used for items that do not usually fall within the mandatory budget, such as warranties or flexibility in providing adaptations to assist customers varying needs.

3. Financial implications

3.1 The DFG allocation from Central government and spend for Spelthorne are:

Year	Allocation	Spend
2017/18	707,366 (+ £174k carry forward)	
2016/17	644,335	467,131
2015/16	347,921 (budget £522,921*)	475,843

*Spelthorne BC also contributed to the budget.

3.2 There was a carry forward of £174k from 2016/17 to 2017/18 due to a delay in District and Boroughs being provided with the allocations. It is expected that this year's budget (and carry forward) will be spent in full.

3.3 It is difficult to predict the additional costs associated with the changes, however, it is expected that the increase in allocation will allow for these costs. The budget will be closely monitored.

3.4 The discretionary budget (funded by Spelthorne Borough Council) is £29,600

4. Other considerations

4.1 The policy is subject to Group Head discretion and minor amendments may be made by Group Head in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder.

4.2 The policy is due for review in 2019

5. Timetable for implementation

5.1 The policy would be implemented with immediate effect.

Background papers:

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

Regulatory Reform Order 2002

Surrey Councils Aids & Adaptations Review

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Spelthorne Borough Council Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Policy