

Corporate Policy and Resources Committee

11 July 2022

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Title | <i>Disabled Facility Grants and Better Care Funding for disabled resident aids and adaptations</i> |
| Purpose of the report | To make a decision |
| Report Author | <i>Jai Camburn, Disabled Facility Grant & Assisted Living Officer Karen Sinclair Group Head Community Wellbeing</i> |
| Ward(s) Affected | All Wards |
| Exempt | No |
| Exemption Reason | |
| Corporate Priority | Community Affordable housing Service delivery |
| Recommendations | Committee is asked to: Approve the Disabled facility Grant (DFG) and Better Care Funding Policy for disabled residents |
| Reason for Recommendation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council's current policy relating to the policy for aids and adaptations for disabled residents has been in place since 2017 and requires updating 2. The proposed policy more closely aligns Spelthorne Borough Council with the policies of other Surrey local authorities 3. The policy introduces recommendations that have arisen from Government guidance issued in 2022 4. The main elements of the policy remain the same and are primarily governed by statute. The new policy seeks to provide greater parity and transparency for residents |

1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 This report seeks to gain approval for a new policy for the implementation of disabled facility grants (DFG) and expenditure of the Better Care Fund on aids and adaptations for disabled residents.
- 1.2 The Council is responsible for the administration of disabled facility grants. This includes adapted bathrooms, level access showers, stairlifts, improvements to access (ramps, half steps, handrails), The underlying principle of DFG's is that works enable people to remain living at home rather than care or nursing homes.

Disabled Facility grants are now funded from 'The Better Care Fund'. This is a fund which is meant to reflect the local need of disabled clients and have regard to Adult Social Care and health needs of the local area. The Better Care Fund plan should be agreed between partners. The Regulatory Reform Order 2002 gave local authorities power to introduce policies around aids and adaptations which resulted in greater flexibility on how money could be used to keep residents living safely and independently in their own home. This change preceded a significant increase in the national budget for DFGs which for 2020/21 was £550m and for 2021/22 is £573m.

- 1.3 There is a mandatory limit of £30k for DFG's. However, the reality is that some work will exceed the mandatory limit. In these cases, a top up process has been available since 2017 where an applicant can apply to a Council lead panel for an additional amount of up to £15,000 to help fund the work. This is only agreed in exceptional circumstances, as the Council needs to ensure overall value for money and that the funding available can assist as many residents as possible.
- 1.4 The DFG process includes an assessment by an Occupational Therapist (O.T.), a means test of household income and an assessment by a Grants Officer / Technical Officer. Consideration is given as to whether the works meet the criteria (are necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs, are reasonable and practical). The Council also considers factors such as the effect on other residents, limited access, conservation considerations, and the structural characteristics of the property.
- 1.5 Means testing is often an emotive subject both for the disabled resident and for their family. Currently the Council means tests all DFG applications. Exceptions are disabled children (up to and including aged 19 if they are in full time education), and those with certain benefits such as guaranteed pension credit. Following the means test, in some instances clients must pay a contribution. However, this can act as a deterrent and many clients then do not proceed with works. Woking and Runnymede councils do not means test clients for level access showers and for stairlifts. It is proposed that given these works do not add to the value of a property and can detract from value, Spelthorne Council adopts the same policy.
- 1.6 For many clients, such as those leaving hospital, smaller works e.g., property safety and security, general DIY, key safes and handrails, the Council refers

to the handyperson service, funded from the Better Care are provision. This is currently administered on our behalf by Woking Borough Council.

- 1.7 Currently A2D tenants who require smaller works valued under £2000 have these arranged and paid for by A2D. Using the flexibility of the Better Care Fund. it is proposed that the Council now offer the same service to owner occupiers and private sector tenants. An example might be a lower value ramp to a property which the handyperson service is not able to create. It is recognised that smaller works such as this can make a huge difference to the day to day living of a disabled client but that waiting for an O.T. assessment and means testing may delay the process.
- 1.8 Surrey County Council refer some residents to the Community Equipment Store for minor aids and adaptations. For example, referrals are made for some clients leaving hospital. The Council use its discretion and contribute an annual sum of £40,000 towards this. There are no proposed changes to this process, but it is mentioned to ensure a holistic picture of Better Care Funding is given.
- 1.9 Where clients want a higher standard of works than those that meet their basic needs (e.g., patterned bathroom tiles rather than standard white or the work would exceed the £30k mandatory DFG limit and it is not appropriate to go to the Council Panel), they can pay the difference.
- 1.10 In accordance with specific Government guidance, along with good practice, it is proposed that DFG's are means tested except in the case of an applicant with Motor Neurone Disease (MND), palliative or end of life diagnosis. In these instances, the Council propose to offer a fast-tracked process with no means testing for works up to £5K. Where works are over the value of £5K the Council will disregard the earnings of the disabled person where larger scale works are assessed as being necessary and appropriate. In this instance the means test only takes into consideration the income of other members of the household.

2. Key issues

- 2.1 Appendix 1 shows the proposed policy along with a table of existing considerations, with a table illustrating the proposals.

3. Options analysis and proposal

- 3.1 Option 1-Do nothing. This is not recommended as the current policy is out of date and does not consider the latest Government guidance and good practice.
- 3.2 Option 2- Adopt the proposed changes-recommended.
- 3.3 Option 3-Adopt some of the proposals.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The annual Better Care Fund capital allocation to the Council is currently £943,241 The proposed policy changes will be fully funded from within this provision.

5. Risk considerations

- 5.1 There is a risk that the demand for assistance outstrips the monetary provision, given the increasingly elderly population and the number of

residents that require adaptations to remain living at home. Careful monitoring will need to be given to ensure that we stay within the allocated funds.

6. Legal considerations

6.1 The proposed policy complies with current legislation and Government guidance.

7. Other considerations

7.1 The proposals more closely align the Council with those of neighbouring authorities such as Runnymede and Woking.

8. Equality and Diversity

8.1 This policy is aimed to assist all disabled residents of the borough. Many of the clients are either children with disabilities or elderly residents. A full equality impact assessment is to follow

9. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

9.1 All building works take into consideration factors such as appropriate insulation for new external walls and roofs.

10. Timetable for implementation

10.1 Once the policy is agreed by the Corporate Policy and Resources committee the policy will be introduced with immediate effect.

11. Contact

11.1 Contact details name and email address for queries relating to this paper.

Karen Sinclair , k.sinclair@spelthorne.gov.uk , 01784 446 206

Jamie Camburn , j.camburn@spelthorne.gov.uk , 01784 446 202

Background papers: *There are none*

Appendices: Appendix A, Policy for DFG and Better Care Fund, including table of current and proposed items