

 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 25 th August 2009		Agenda Item No.
Title:	Position Statement on Private Sector Housing, Disabled Facilities Grants	
For further information about this report please contact	Satnam Kaur – Interim Head of Housing Strategy	
Service Area	Housing Strategy	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	N/A	
Background Papers	None	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
With regard to officer approval all reports <i>must</i> be approved by the report authors relevant director, Finance, Legal Services and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Relevant Director	12.8.09	Bill Hunt
Chief Executive	12.8.09	Chris Elliot
CMT	12.8.09	Chris Elliot, Bill Hunt, Andy Jones
Section 151 Officer	12.8.09	Mike Snow
Legal	11.8.09	Peter Oliver
Finance	12.8.09	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	11.8.09	Cllr Grainger
Consultation Undertaken		
Please insert details of any consultation undertaken with regard to this report. N/A		
Final Decision?	Yes/No	
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report is intended to advise Members of the current position with regard to the Private Sector Housing Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG).

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 Members are recommended to note the report, and the pro active work that is ongoing to ensure the effective delivery of DFGs.

3. **REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 The past 12 months, has seen an increase in the number of complaints received regarding DFGs. This can be attributed to the Service being under pressure due to long term sickness of the member of staff responsible for the administration of DFGs resulting in a backlog of cases, combined with a lack of effective management. These have lead to unacceptable delays in the processing of DFGs

- 3.2 In response to the above a number of actions have been put place to deal with the back log, including more effective management and robust monitoring to ensure that the situation does not occur again.

- 3.3 Other measures include:

- Outsourcing some of the work to Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC)
- Expanding the number of cases given to Age Concern (AC)
- Introduction of tighter procedures for dealing with grants, including timescales for each part of the process
- Electronic recording of every case and monthly progress reports.
- Tackling staffing issues contributing to poor performance.
- Training up a second another Officer within the Private Sector Housing Team to administer grants on an honorarium arrangement
- A contract framework approach to undertaking the adaptations required. In June 2009 the Council's Executive approved proposals for the introduction of a contract framework arrangement whereby DFG works can be allocated directly to a Council approved contractor. Once in place, this will positively impact the length of time taken to complete a DFG by giving applicants the choice of going with one of the approved contractors or sourcing their own. If an applicant chooses to go with an approved contractor they will no longer have to obtain estimates themselves for the agreed works. Once the schedule of works has been agreed it will go directly to the approved contractor with the applicant's consent, thus removing one of the lengthy parts of the current process of an applicant having to obtain estimates.

4. **ALTERNATIVE OPTION CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 This report provides information on the current position of the Private Sector DFGs and therefore no alternatives need to be considered.

5. **BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

5.1 The funding for DFGs consists of a contribution of a capital grant from Central Government, and capital funding from Warwick District Council (WDC).

5.2 The current budget of £400,000 consists of the following:

- 60% Government Grant of £240,000
- 40% from WDC capital receipts of £160,000

5.3 The budget has increased from a total of £312,200 in 2008/09 to the current 400,000 in 2009/10 to meet growing need in the District.

5.4 The honorarium is being paid as a capital salary from the above budget.

6. **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

6.1 DFGs are Mandatory, and are awarded in compliance with the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, and the Council's own Housing Financial Assistance Policy approved in 2004.

7. **BACKGROUND**

7.1 Members should, firstly, be aware of the DFG process. It is one which begins, for WDC with a referral from an Occupational Therapist (OT) in the Adult Health and Community Services of Warwickshire County Council (WCC), or by a referral from the Children's Paediatric Service based at Warwick Hospital.

7.2 Such a referral will, typically, either recommend that an applicant needs their home adapting in a certain manner (ranging from the provision of a stairlift, to the creation of a level-access shower facility, to the construction of a ground floor bedroom and bathroom) to enable them to access washing and toileting facilities, or will suggest a site meeting to enable the best solution to a particular circumstance to be agreed before formal referral.

7.3 The assessment of need is undertaken by an OT before any referral is made to WDC in accordance with the Fair Access to Care Services eligibility framework issued by the Department of Health. This framework is divided into four bands:

- Critical
- Substantial
- Moderate
- Low

7.4 It is important to note that WCC only undertake assessments for those applicants with a high or substantial need. It is only these cases that are referred to WDC to take forward. Those cases assessed as moderate or low need are signposted to other agencies such as Age Concern and Phyliss.

7.5 Once WDC receive the referral the first stage is to carry out a statutory means test to ascertain whether the applicant qualifies for a Mandatory DFG. The means test can have one of three outcomes:

- Applicant qualifies for a DFG up to the maximum value of £30,000

- Applicant qualifies for a DFG but has to make a contribution to the cost of adaptation
- Applicant does not qualify for a DFG due to level of income

- 7.6 If the client is assessed as qualifying for a DFG a schedule of works is agreed by WDC and the OT. If the requirement is for major works such as an extension, plans will be drawn-up by either by a stairlift consultant, a builder or architect or by an agent such as Age Concern. The final scheme is agreed by WDC, the applicant and the OT, and it is then the applicant's responsibility to obtain two estimates for the work.
- 7.7 These estimates, together with a fully completed grant application form, copies of any Planning Permissions, Building Regulations Approvals, plans etc, plus proof of title to the property and a "Certificate of Future Occupation" are submitted to WDC for consideration. It should be noted that the majority of applicants are elderly and often need help in completing the forms in their own homes.
- 7.8 Members should note that it is only on completion of the grant form accompanied by the relevant documentation that a formal grant application is received. Any discussions prior to this stage constitute an enquiry as opposed to a formal application.
- 7.9 The application includes detailed financial information about the applicant which is checked again against the statutory means test. The estimates are then examined for reasonableness and completeness, the additional forms (proof of title and Certificate of Future Occupation) are examined and, when all is found to be in order, the grant application can be approved – subject to a £30,000 maximum grant.
- 7.10 Once the grant is approved, the applicant has 12 months in which to carry out the work and claim the grant. Works in progress are monitored and stage payments may be made to the contractor.
- 7.11 Once works are completed satisfactorily, a Certificate of Completion is signed and any final monies are paid – usually to the contractor.
- 7.12 It should be noted that the works are not commissioned by WDC, but by the applicant. Our role is to ensure that the works are carried out and give reasonable value for money. We do not act as a Clerk of Works, although we do try and ensure that all works are done well and in a timely manner.
- 7.13 The position with regards to the number of referrals WDC have received since 2007/8 and the number of outstanding DFGs are illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below.
- 7.14 Figure 1 shows that referrals have been steadily increasing since 2007/08. Of the 270 referrals received since 2007/08, only 106 of these are still live and of these 73 are waiting approval.

Figure 1

Year	Number of DFG referrals received	Number of applications received awaiting approval	Number of approved cases	Total Number of Live Cases
07/08'	109	14	10	24
08/09'	117	29	19	48
09/10'	44	30	4	34
Total	270	73	33	106

7.15 Figure 2 breaks down the 106 cases in further detail identifying which agency is dealing with these cases. This was the position as at 31st July 2009.

Figure 2

Org	07/08'		08/09'		09/10'		Grand Total Live Cases	Of which are Approved Cases
	Live Cases	Of which Approved	Live Cases	Of which Approved	Live Cases	Of which Approved		
WDC	20	8	27	7	34	4	81	19
AC	4	2	19	10	0	0	23	12
SDC	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	2
Totals	24	10	48	19	34	4	106	33

7.16 At the beginning of this calendar year 12 cases were outsourced to SDC. Of these 12, 6 were cancelled or closed as a result of the applicant not wanting to proceed, 4 have been completed and 2 are at the approval stage.

7.17 At the same time WDCs partnership agreement with Age Concern was extended to increase their involvement in the DFG process. Between January and April 2009, 37 cases were outsourced to Age Concern. Of the 37, 12 have been cancelled or closed as a result of the applicant not wanting to proceed, 2 have been completed, 23 are live of which 12 are at the approval stage.

7.18 WDC is running at a total of 81 live cases, of which 19 are at approval stage, leaving 62 to be approved. Of these 62, 49 have progressed beyond the preliminary means tests stage.

7.19 As can be seen considerable inroads have been made into the backlog through outsourcing and allocating the time of an additional officer within WDC to assist with administering DFGs.

7.20 DFGs have been made a priority within WDC and the additional officer time directed towards DFGs has helped greatly in dealing with the backlog. However, this has

been at the expense of the delivery of non-statutory duties within the Private Sector Housing Team such as bringing empty properties back into use.