

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	19 January 2016
<b>Subject:</b>	Disabled Facilities Grants Review Update
<b>Report of:</b>	Val Garside, Environmental and Housing Group Manager
<b>Corporate Lead:</b>	Rachel North, Deputy Chief Executive
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor J R Mason, Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	1

## **Executive Summary:**

This report contains an update on progress of the Disabled Facilities Grants Review.

## **Recommendations:**

**Members are asked to CONSIDER the progress of the Disabled Facilities Grants Review.**

## **Reasons for Recommendation:**

At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 July 2015, it was agreed to establish a working group to review the Council's approach to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). Terms of Reference for the Working Group were also approved at that meeting.

## **Resource Implications:**

Officer time has been met from existing allocated resources. It is likely that the Working Group will meet for less than the maximum five sessions originally suggested.

## **Legal Implications:**

None as a direct result of this report. One Legal will be able to provide advice to the Working Group or Officers as required regarding the Council's duties and powers to provide DFGs.

## **Risk Management Implications:**

If the Council does not have in place effective arrangements for administering DFGs then there is a reputational risk of failing to comply with statutory requirements, leading to potential interventions from the Ombudsman or judicial review. The Council also contributes capital funds, therefore, there are financial risks to not administering grants effectively. There could also be customer dissatisfaction leading to increased complaints.

## **Performance Management Follow-up:**

The number and value of DFGs administered is monitored by means of a performance indicator

and this is reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis.

**Environmental Implications:**

None.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

**1.1** At a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 July 2015, it was agreed to establish a working group to review the Council's approach to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). That meeting's report also gave a brief overview of what DFGs are and why the Council administers them. The Terms of Reference are shown at Appendix 1 to this report. At the first meeting, Councillor T A Spencer was elected to chair the Working Group. Other Members are Councillors Mrs G F Blackwell, K J Cromwell and Mrs P E Stokes plus the Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment.

## **2.0 PROGRESS OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES REVIEW WORKING GROUP**

**2.1** A verbal update on progress was given at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 October 2015 by the Chairman of the Working Group. The Group has met twice, the first time on 24 September and then on 30 November 2015. Invites were sent to other organisations and agencies which may be able to contribute. Although few were able to attend the meetings, all those invited have contributed positively to the review in the intervening period. Meetings have been attended by Officers from Environmental Health, Housing, Finance and Corporate Services.

**2.2** The Working Group's meeting in September was an opportunity to give an overview of the existing process and financial arrangements, how we compare to other local authorities locally and what work was currently being undertaken to meet the Terms of Reference of the Working Group in improving the service, including discussions on improvements delivered jointly with other agencies. This included discussion of the work with Gloucestershire County Council which now helped to fund grants, rather than central government, through the relatively new Better Care Fund.

**2.3** The second meeting continued the discussion on the improvements being carried out and then moved on to areas that may be considered as part of any action plan. Specifically the following subjects were discussed:

- a. Better and earlier information being given to those with a disability regarding their options, including assistance to move to a more suitable property or one that could be more easily adapted.
- b. Streamlining the application process and the correspondence sent once the grant has been approved.
- c. Potential improvements in the procurement of contractors and equipment, including benefits of using schedules of rates and alternatives to fixed equipment currently being provided.

**2.4** It is proposed that the final meeting of the Working Group be held on Thursday 28 January and it is planned that this will include discussion of other external initiatives, including the work of the countywide Better Care Fund project group, with other complementary projects that help assist adults with a disability. The Working Group's report and action plan is

planned to be presented at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 February 2016. This is later than the December date noted in the Terms of Reference.

### **3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

3.1 None

### **4.0 CONSULTATION**

4.1 Gloucestershire County Council and Severn Vale Housing Society are both contributing to the work of the group and have expressed a wish to positively contribute to the improvement of the DFG process.

### **5.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

5.1 Council Plan 2012-16 – Priority 4 (Improve the quality of the housing stock): 'Work with Public Health to develop new approaches to enablement and adaptations for disabled people'.

### **6.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

6.1 Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996; Part 1, Chapter 1: 'Disabled Facilities Grants'.

### **7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)**

7.1 Officer time to help facilitate the review.

### **8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)**

8.1 Effective outcomes will have a positive impact on the most vulnerable people living in the Borough.

### **9.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)**

9.1 Effective outcomes will also have a positive impact on the cost of providing adaptations and will help ensure a safe and healthy environment for applicants.

### **10.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS**

10.1 None.

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**Background Papers:** None

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**Appendices:** Appendix 1 – Disabled Facilities Grants Review Working Group Terms of Reference