

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	23 February 2016
Subject:	Disabled Facilities Grants Review Report
Report of:	Val Garside, Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager
Corporate Lead:	Rachel North, Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Councillor J R Mason, Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment
Number of Appendices:	Two

Executive Summary:

A review of the way in which Tewkesbury Borough Council administers Disabled Facilities Grants has been undertaken by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The review considered the Council's (and its partners) current approach in administering the grant, and what alternative processes could be used instead of, and in addition to, those currently employed.

The report sets out the findings from the review and makes recommendations in respect of how the grant could be administered in the future.

Recommendations:

To ADOPT the Disabled Facilities Grants Review Report and to refer it for consideration by the Executive Committee.

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. A Terms of Reference for the Working Group was also approved at that meeting.

Resource Implications:

Officer time to carry out the review has been met from existing allocated resources. The recommendations contained in the report will be implemented using existing resources.

Legal Implications:

As contained in the report.

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 recommendations of all Overview and Scrutiny Reviews are monitored every six months.

The number and value of Disabled Facilities Grants 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 Tewkesbury Borough Council administers them. The Group's Terms of Reference are shown at Appendix 1 to this report. At the first meeting, Councillor T A Spencer was elected to chair the 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 THE REVIEW FINDINGS

2.1 The review was carried out as there were some issues that Members wished to identify and consider, essentially to ensure that the scheme is 'fit for purpose' and cost-effective. The Working Group was asked:

1. To gain a clear understanding of:
 - a. The statutory and discretionary processes involved in allocating grants and how they are applied locally.
 - b. How grants are funded (including comparisons with other local authorities).
 - c. What agencies are involved in the processes and what role they fulfil (including the involvement of registered providers).
 - d. The potential use of previously adapted properties.
2. To consider the Council's current approach in administering grants, in particular how current practices impact on those who could or do benefit from applying.
3. To look at good practice elsewhere, especially those that provide cost effectiveness and good customer satisfaction.
4. To determine possible ways in which processes can be improved.

2.2 The Working Group met three times, on 24 September and 30 November 2015, and finally on 28 January 2016. Meetings have been attended by Officers from Environmental Health, Finance and the Performance teams. Updates on the progress of the review were given after each Working Group meeting to meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2.3 The Working Group concentrated on examining the following areas of potential improvement:

1. Better and earlier information being given to those with a disability regarding their

options, including assistance to move to a more suitable property when that is their wish, or one that could be more easily adapted.

2. Streamlining the application process and the correspondence sent once the grant has been approved.
3. Potential improvements in the procurement of contractors and equipment, including benefits of using schedules of rates and alternatives to fixed equipment currently being provided.

Other agencies and partners were kept informed of the review and there were positive contributions by other agencies at an Officer level. Some of the recommendations will involve partner agencies to assist with implementation to achieve ideal outcomes.

2.4 At the final meeting of the Working Group, Members heard from Mary Morgan, Joint Commissioner (Older People and Better Care Fund), NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group/Gloucestershire County Council. Members were given an overview of the Better Care Fund (which provides finance for Tewkesbury Borough Council to deliver DFGs), local priorities and the national context, including projects being delivered by the fund. Members also debated a draft report and action plan.

2.5 The DFG Working Group report and action plan is attached in Appendix 2. It includes an outline of the review findings, provides an update on the current performance of the service and details the progress of the service improvements being undertaken.

2.6 After considering current methods of delivery, the performance of Tewkesbury Borough Council compared to partners, and good practice that could be implemented, Members concluded that the recommendations contained in the action plan to the report will help improve the effectiveness (including cost effectiveness) of the service and should provide a service that can react better to future predicted demands.

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

3.1 The Working Group considered a number of options as part of the review.

4.0 CONSULTATION

4.1 Gloucestershire County Council and Severn Vale Housing Society both contributed 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 Implementing the review recommendations can be met from existing resources.

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.

Background Papers: None

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Appendices: Appendix 1 - DFG Working Group Terms of Reference
Appendix 2 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grants Report