

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	29 November 2016
Subject:	Disabled Facilities Grants Review Monitoring Report
Report of:	Richard Kirk, Interim Head of Community Services
Corporate Lead:	Mike Dawson, Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Councillor J R Mason, Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment
Number of Appendices:	1

Executive Summary:

The report provides an update on progress against actions contained in the Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grants Report, arising from a review by the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group approved by the Executive Committee on 6 April 2016.

Recommendations:

To CONSIDER progress against the recommendations arising from the Disabled Facilities Grants Review.

Reasons for Recommendation:

To improve the way that Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are delivered in Tewkesbury Borough.

Resource Implications:

The recommendations from the review report have been, and will be, implemented using existing resources.

Legal Implications:

None as a direct result of the actions carried out so far in the report. One Legal will be able to provide advice as required regarding the Council's duties and powers to provide Disabled facilities grants.

The Council's contract rules will need to be followed when appointing contractors.

Where there are joint projects, the Council should enter into agreements which set out each party's obligations and responsibilities in relation to these projects.

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:

A further update on progress will be provided at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 May 2017.

Environmental Implications:

None.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1.1 A review of the way in which Tewkesbury Borough Council delivers Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) was undertaken by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2015/16. The review considered the Council's approach in administering grants; in particular how current practices impacted on those who could, or did, benefit from applying, and looked at good practice elsewhere, especially local authorities that provided cost effectiveness and good customer satisfaction. The resulting report set out the findings from the review and made recommendations in respect of possible ways in which processes could be improved. The review report was considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 February 2016 and adopted at the meeting of the Executive Committee on 6 April 2016.

2.0 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS REPORT ACTIONS CARRIED OUT

- 2.1** The table at Appendix 1 shows the progress against actions contained within the review report. Only two of the actions have been identified as fully complete. There are a number of reasons why this is the case.
- 2.2** There has been positive progress on Action 1 which is worthy of specific mention. In one case, a landlord thought it inappropriate that the property be adapted to remove a bath and install a walk-in shower. The client was given very close support and information in order to make an informed decision as to what they would like to do and where they would like to live. They moved to a bungalow within the Borough which was already adapted and feedback is that, although they had not considered this as an option originally and were apprehensive, they are very pleased with their new home. This additional work at the start of the process means that the applicant is in a home more suited to their current and future needs and a shower has not needed to be installed resulting in an estimated saving of £6,000. There may also be future savings as there will not be a need to install a stairlift if the Occupational Therapists were to judge the applicant as needing assistance to access upstairs rooms; an estimate for an average stairlift is in the region of £1,500. The original property was also made available to a household from our housing waiting list who were in desperate need of suitable accommodation.
- 2.3** It is hoped that Action 1 will bring about further significant savings in the future. Anecdotally, other cases exist where a referral has not been made for a DFG as the client has been helped to move house. It is difficult to attribute such cases specifically to the work as a result of the new processes implemented, however these may have had some

impact.

- 2.4** There has been a lot of work to date around Action 2 in the report. Initial discussions with Severn Vale Housing Society (SVHS) shortly after the publication of the report focussed on how it may be able to help with procurement of contractors, schedules of rates etc. and generally to explore better ways of joint working. The retirement of an Officer with specific duties to deliver DFGs in August focussed these discussions on if this assistance could be more than just sharing information. Further discussions have taken place with SVHS and representatives of Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), which is responsible for funding of DFGs through the Better Care Fund, around the extent that SVHS could deliver DFGs in the Borough, to assist Tewkesbury Borough Council in discharging this statutory duty. These discussions are still at an early stage but SVHS has expressed an interest for any changes (if agreed) to be in place in time for the 2017/18 new financial year. Currently, the vacant internal post has been filled on a six month contract and Officers have received formal training and support to ensure that the service continues to be delivered to a high standard.

3.0 IMPACT ON FINANCES

- 3.1** Annual expenditure on DFG's has traditionally required a commitment of circa £200,000 from the Council's own resources to support the grant available from central government. Following changes to the way the government allocate DFG funding, the current year allocation, and future years, is wrapped up in the Better Care Funding received by the County Council and passported onto the District Council. The Better Care Funding allocation for the current year, and future projections of this allocation, has been increased substantially and it is therefore not expected that the Council's own resources will be required to 'top-up' the government allocation going forward. This is, therefore, a significant reduction in the ongoing capital programme.
- 3.2** The contract to deliver the Gloucestershire "Safe at Home" Home Improvement Agency service is due for renewal next year. Tewkesbury Borough Council is a partner in procuring the service (alongside the other Districts, and led by the County Council) and contributes £45,000 per year. Part of the contract includes providing agency services to help draw up plans, engage contractors etc. The partnership is currently considering the contract and how it may be delivered in future years.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1** The action referenced in Paragraph 2.4 above may result in the work continuing to be delivered directly in-house, or assistance could be provided by SVHS to support Officers in delivering the process.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1** Environmental Health and Housing Services are working closely with SVHS, the County Council and the CCG in order to implement the review action plan.

6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

- 6.1** The report was delivered during the life of the Council Plan 2012-16. The relevant priority in this case was – Priority 4 (Improve the quality of the housing stock): 'Work with Public Health to develop new approaches to enablement and adaptations for disabled people'.

7.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

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

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

8.1 To date, implementing the review recommendations has been met from existing resources. Members will be consulted / updated should any of the emerging initiatives change this situation.

9.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

9.1 Effective outcomes will have a positive impact on the health, welfare and finances of the most vulnerable people living in the Borough.

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

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

11.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

11.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report and Minutes, 23 February 2016.
Executive Committee Report and Minutes, 6 April 2016.

Background Papers: None

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Disabled Facilities Grants Review Action Plan