

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	18 June 2019
Subject:	Disabled Facilities Grants Review Monitoring Report
Report of:	Head of Community Services
Corporate Lead:	Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	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 Disabled Facilities Grants Report, arising from a review by the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group approved by the Executive Committee on 6 April 2016. All actions within the action plan have been completed.

Recommendation:

To CONSIDER progress against the recommendations arising from the Disabled Facilities Grants Review and to APPROVE closure of the review.

Reasons for Recommendation:

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

Resource Implications:

The recommendations will continue to be implemented using existing resources.

Legal Implications:

DFGs are mandatory grants up to a maximum of £30,000 per applicant. It is a statutory function delegated to local housing authorities in England. This function is delivered at this Council by the Environmental Health Team.

Risk Management Implications:

If the Council does not have a robust and timely DFG process fit for 21st century living, those who require adaptations will have to wait for lengthy periods of time to either return to or continue living at home.

If the Council does not have effective arrangements for administering DFGs then a reputational risk of failing to comply with statutory requirements exists, leading to potential of Ombudsman or judicial review.

The Council has routinely contributed from capital funds so there are financial risks to ineffective administration.

There could also be customer dissatisfaction leading to increased complaints.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Progress updates are provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a six-monthly basis.

Environmental Implications:

None

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) help towards the cost of essential adaptations to homes to enable applicants to live more independently. The grant is mandatory for those who need better freedom of movement into and around their home, up to a maximum of £30,000 per applicant. It is subject to a financial means test. Examples of grants given include:

- providing ramps to allow a person to get in and out of their house;
- stair lifts;
- level access showers for people who cannot use a conventional shower or bath; and
- installation of wet room and adaptation of homes for downstairs living.

1.2 DFGs are administered by the Council's Environmental Health Team. To apply for a grant, applicants must first be assessed by an Occupational Therapist from Gloucestershire County Council who will find out if an adaptation best meets the customer's needs.

1.3 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. This was essentially to ensure that the scheme was 'fit for purpose' and cost-effective. The resulting report set out the findings from the review and made recommendations in respect of possible ways in which processes could be improved.

1.4 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. Progress reports have been brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a six-monthly basis since that time.

2.0 CURRENT POSITION AND PROGRESS

- 2.1** The table at Appendix 1 shows the updated progress against actions contained within the original review report. All outstanding actions are intrinsically connected to the funding and delivery of DFGs which is under review by both central government and the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group.
- 2.2** The County Council and all six District Councils will continue to work collaboratively in determining the future delivery of DFGs within Gloucestershire.
- 2.3** The contract to deliver the Gloucestershire “Safe at Home” Home Improvement Agency service ceased at the end of July 2017. Since that time, members of the public have been applying for DFGs independently or appointing their own agents.
- 2.4** The county-wide project continues to meet on a regular basis to share good practice and explore a coordinated delivery model option for DFGs. Gloucestershire County Council is the lead and is coordinating this work stream.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 3.1** The Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group is responsible for the funding of DFGs through the Better Care Fund. The Better Care Fund is a programme spanning both the NHS and local government which seeks to join-up health and care services so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible.
- 3.2** The Better Care Fund was created to improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our society, placing them at the centre of their care and support, and providing them integrated health and social care services, resulting in an improved experience and better quality of life.
- 3.3** The Department of Health/Department for Communities and Local Government Integration and Better Care Fund policy framework details the arrangements in two tier areas:
“In two-tier areas decisions around the use of the DFG funding will need to be made with the direct involvement of both tiers working jointly to support integration ambitions. DFG funding allocated by central government should be passed down by the county to the districts (in full, unless jointly agreed to do otherwise) to enable them to continue to meet their statutory duty to provide adaptations and in line with these plans; as set out in the DFG Grant Determination Letter due to be issued by DCLG in April 2017.”
- 3.4** The downward trend of Occupational Therapist referrals and applications for DFG funding continued in 2018/19 with a total of 85 referrals compared with 89 the previous year. Of those 85, 57 have currently been approved, 27 are being processed and one has been withdrawn.
- 3.5** In 2018/19, £485,616 was spent on approved grants which compared with £503,794 for 2017/18. The Council's allocation for the 2017/18 period was £1.134m.
- 3.6** In January 2019 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government allocated additional funds to local authorities which committed to spend it prior to 1 April 2019. Tewkesbury Borough Council's allocation was £141,363.

3.7 The extra funding was available to be used for DFG adaptations and more broadly on “other social care capital projects”. In this regard, Tewkesbury Borough Council was able to allocate and spend these funds tackling fuel poverty in park homes through the Council’s Warm and Well partner Severn Wye Energy. This ensured that this money was spent locally for Tewkesbury residents as opposed to going into a central county-wide fund.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 None

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 Environmental Health will continue to work collaboratively with all partners involved in the DFG process, in particular Gloucestershire County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group as the key partners.

6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

6.1 Provision of DFGs directly links to two of the four priorities of the Tewkesbury Borough Council Housing Strategy 2017 – 2021:

- Priority 3: Meet the housing needs of specific groups
- Priority 4: Improving the health and well-being of local people

7.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

7.1 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/605164/Integration_and_BCF_policy_framework_2017-19.pdf (DFGs page 17)

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

8.1 Within existing

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

9.1 Effective outcomes positively impact the health and welfare of the most vulnerable people living within our borough.

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

10.1 Effective outcomes positively impact on the cost of providing adaptations in ensuring a safe and healthy home environment for applicants.

11.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

11.1 Executive Committee Report and Minutes - 6 April 2016

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report and Minutes -2 May 2017.

Background Papers: None

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Appendices: Appendix 1 - Disabled Facilities Grants Review Revised Action Plan