

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 7

meeting date: THURSDAY, 1 OCTOBER 2020
 title: PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO DISCRETIONARY GRANT POLICY
 submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
 principal author: RACHAEL STOTT – HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To revise the private sector housing policy and the disabled facilities grant offer to households.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives }
- Corporate Priorities } To address the housing needs of older and disabled occupants across the borough.
- Other Considerations }

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The current discretionary disabled facilities grant policy was adopted in January 2018. A copy can be viewed using the following link.

https://www.ribblevalley.gov.uk/downloads/file/11417/discretionary_disabled_facilities_grant_policy

This introduced 3 key policy changes as to how disabled facilities grants (DFG) were being delivered, namely:

- To optimise the use of the Council's DFG allocation and introduce a non-means tested grant- Ribble Valley Adaptation Grant (RVA). Each year a significant number of cases fail the means test and the individuals in need of adaptations were not organising the necessary adaptations. Therefore, the new policy introduced the provision of a non-means tested discretionary grant. A £5,000 maximum grant for one item as prioritised by the Occupational Therapist (OT).
- Introduction of top up grants above the mandatory grant maximum of £30,000. Until January 2018 the maximum grant was £30,000. The new grant policy allowed a £10,000 top up grant. In the past two years the use of top up grant has been approved in 3 cases.
- Introduced a 10% admin fee for all DFG's and RVA's.

2.2 This grant policy has operated for two years. Members approval is sought to introduce changes to the Policy which will be subject to a six week consultation period. The changes to the existing Policy proposed are as follows:

- To increase the Ribble Valley Adaptation Grant to a maximum of £7,000 per application and to amend the policy to one item and associated works as recommended by the OT. This is on the basis that the average cost of individual items have increased and quite regularly the current level of RVA is not meeting

the full cost of the 1 item. This has led to households not going ahead with adaptations and has resulted in delays.

- To increase the top up grant to from £10,000 to a maximum £25,000. This will only relate to adaptations where the value of the total cost of the works is over the mandatory grant. Of the 3 top up grants approved last year, all of them went above the grant maximum and the cost of works exceeded the discretionary top up. This is due to the costs of works required to make ground floor bedroom and bathroom facilities and the specialist equipment required. This resulted in the individual applicants seeking funding from other sources. In all of these cases the total value of the works was between £50,000 and £60,000. The applicants were assisted in making an application for hardship funds from LCC and/or charitable funding. This can cause significant delay in the works starting and can result in works having to stop part way through construction which can have an impact incurring further costs. If additional funds are not identified the project may be closed. Ultimately, the responsibility for ensuring appropriate housing is available would then fall on the Council as local housing authority.
- That a 10% admin fee continues to be charged where technical support is used. 5% admin fee for equipment only and no admin charge when there is no technical input.

2.3 The attached grant policy at appendix 1 sets out the proposed policy which will be consulted on with all relevant partners. Any feedback will be reported to Chair of Health and Housing and the Director of Economic Development and Planning for consideration.

3 ISSUES

3.1 There are currently 4 grants in progress that have works that will exceed the grant maximum. This can be identified within the grant report in Part 2. Three out of four of these grants are paediatric recommendations and in all cases the grant is for creating ground floor bedroom and bathroom facilities for the disabled child/occupant.

3.2 The costs of creating a ground floor extension large enough to provide turning space for wheelchairs in both bedroom and bathroom and all equipment with specialist equipment means the value of the contract work is often exceeding £40,000.

3.3 Therefore, it is recommended that the top up is increased to a £25,000 discretionary top up to enable these types of scheme to be delivered. This means the maximum grant that can be awarded will be £55,000 which is considered sufficient to address the shortfalls being experienced in a small number of the more complex projects.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – The DFG budget has been significantly increased and continues to be underspent annually. Commitment is reliant on OT recommendations being received and the works that are recommended. Delivery can also be delayed where time and resource is expended to resolve funding issues. The DFG budget is monitored on a monthly basis and at any point the offer of discretionary grants can cease should the budget not support continuation.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Regulatory Reform Order allows LA's to develop their own private sector grant policy and decide on a DFG grant award

that best suits the needs of the borough. The proposed revision is based upon the experience the council has had since the introduction of the policy.

- Political – Important we make best use of the Better Care Fund and deliver the best service to vulnerable and elderly households in the borough.
- Reputation – Important the Council makes best use of the funding available and the opportunity to enable households to remain independent and at home.
- Equality & Diversity – Important the housing needs of all residents in the borough are addressed.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Agree the proposed changes to the DFG policy and that they be subject to a period of consultation, following which subject to there being no issues of significance raised, and in consultation with the Chair of Health and Housing Committee the policy be adopted and operational from 1 December or as soon as practicable thereafter.

RACHAEL STOTT
HOUSING STRATEGY OFFICER

NICOLA HOPKINS
DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND PLANNING

For further information please ask for Rachael Stott, extension 3235.



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Proposed amended Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Policy

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

Reviewed September 2020

1.Introduction

Housing is a key determinant of health and poor housing is directly linked to poor health. This disabled facilities grant policy details the financial assistance that the Council aims to provide to support improvements to enable disabled occupants to remain in their own home through the use of the Better Care Fund allocation.

The Council is required to adopt a Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Policy which sets out how it intends to use its discretion to develop schemes having regard to the needs of the Borough, the availability of funding, and the Council's priorities.

This Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant Policy forms part of the Council's over-arching Housing Strategy. This policy was first adopted January 2018 and has proved to be successful in supporting the householder to maintain independent living.

2.Aims and priorities

Improving the housing conditions across the Borough will support improvements in health and well-being as well as having a positive impact on the quality of local neighbourhoods, particularly for those residents who are vulnerable and cannot access their homes and gardens due to their disability.

This policy sets out in greater detail our offer to disabled occupants and their families. It also details to local Councillors, local residents and our stakeholders how we will work to maintain and improve the provision of adapted property across the borough.

Appendix 1 details the assistance schemes that the Council intends to offer during the life of this policy and sets out specific eligibility criteria relating to each scheme.

The health and well-being of disabled and vulnerable residents is often compromised due to their homes not meeting their specific needs, and this can impact on their ability to live with dignity within their homes.

3.Disabled Facilities Grants

The Council has a statutory obligation to administer mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to provide aids and adaptations to enable disabled residents to live independently within their own homes.

The eligibility requirements, scope of works, and the general requirements governing mandatory DFGs are prescribed and the Council is unable to deviate from these requirements.

The Council is required to administer Disabled Facilities Grants to all eligible applicants irrespective of their tenure, and the Council aims to work collaboratively with housing associations to fund aids and adaptations within social housing wherever possible to ensure everyone has the same opportunity to have their home adapted.

In some cases the use of Disabled Facilities Grants is able to assist with reducing the length of stay in hospital and facilitating a quick return to home. This also reduces the demand for residential care placements.

4.Discretionary Top-up Grant

The Council have agreed to use discretionary powers to provide in eligible cases a top-up award in addition to the £30,000 mandatory grant. In more complex cases the work required often goes over the mandatory grant award maximum. This top-up of a maximum of £25,000 will assist to provide all the required work identified by the Occupational Therapist. In addition

to this, the 10% administration fee will also be eligible for the discretionary grant. The additional £25,000 can only be accessed where the full £30,000 of mandatory grant has been utilised. The discretionary element will be registered as a land charge if the works include alterations to the property on owner occupied properties and, in the event the property is sold within a 10 year period, the Council require repayment. * Please see exception policy. In exceptional circumstances where more than one DFG is approved, more than £25,000 may be registered.

The availability of the top-up grant is at the discretion of the Council and subject to availability of funding.

5. Ribble Valley Adaptation Grant

For some households the means testing requirement makes them not eligible for assistance. This often means the works are not carried out or don't fully meet the person needs. The Ribble Valley adaptation allows a grant to provide 1 item and the associated works to address the needs of the applicant as recommended by the Occupational Therapist up to a maximum of £7,000. This will fund the cost of the 1 item prioritised by the Occupational Therapist. Where the RVA is providing the calculated contribution the applicant will still be eligible for further items to be provided as a DFG. The applicant can then choose as to whether they fund the remaining works themselves. The full grant will be registered as a land charge if the works include alterations to the property on owner occupied properties and, in the event the property is sold within a 10 year period, the Council require repayment. * Please see exception policy.

The availability of the Ribble Valley Adaptation Grant is at the discretion of the Council and is subject to the availability of funding.

6. Review of the policy

The ability to provide Discretionary Top up and Ribble Valley Adaptation grants will be reviewed quarterly with regard to financial capacity to award the discretionary element. Mandatory grants will take priority.

The provision of Discretionary Top up and Ribble Valley Adaptation DFGs will be reported to each Health and Housing Committee.

The policy will be reviewed annually by the Health and Housing Committee.

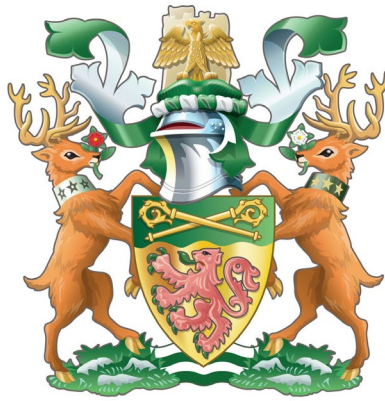
Priority 1 – Assist disabled and vulnerable residents to remain in their homes through the provision of aids and adaptations

| Scheme | Assistance Available | Purpose | Scope of Assistance | Eligibility | Scheme Conditions |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| <p>Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant</p> | <p><u>Maximum assistance per application:</u></p> <p>Statutory maximum: £30,000 from Better Care Fund allocation</p> | <p><u>Assistance to:</u></p> <p>Meet the Council's statutory obligation to assist disabled residents to live independently in their homes</p> | <p><u>Aids and adaptations to:</u></p> <p>a) be recommended by an Occupational Therapist;</p> <p>b) meet the regulations governing eligibility for works, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ adaptations to aid access into and around the property; ▪ works to ensure the safety of the applicant; ▪ provision of suitable bathroom or sleeping facilities, heating, and access to lighting and power; ▪ provision of suitable kitchen facilities or adaptation of existing kitchen, and; ▪ works to enable a disabled resident to care for dependent residents. | <p><u>Applications considered from:</u></p> <p>a) disabled home owners;</p> <p>b) disabled tenants (both in the private and social housing sectors);</p> <p>c) disabled persons living at home with their family, and;</p> <p>d) parents or guardians of a disabled child;</p> | <p><u>Applications to include:</u></p> <p>a) completed application form, and;</p> <p>b) two estimates for the works in the required format</p> <p><u>Applications subject to:</u></p> <p>a) means test through standard test of resources, except where;</p> <p>b) the grant is approved in respect of a disabled child under the age of 19</p> <p><u>Works to be:</u></p> <p>a) completed within 12 months of grant approval;</p> <p>b) completed to the satisfaction of the Council</p> |

| Scheme | Assistance Available | Purpose | Scope of Assistance | Eligibility | Scheme Conditions |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| | | | | | <u>Grants in excess of £5,000 to be:</u> a) registered as a local land charge against the property if the works include alterations to the property on owner occupied properties (ie, not equipment) b) 10% admin fee is charged where technical support is used. 5% admin fee for equipment only and no admin charge when there is no technical input c) a maximum of £10,000 be repaid if the property is sold, transferred, or assigned within 10 years. |
| Ribble Valley Adaptation Grant | Maximum individual grant £7,000 + admin fee | As per Mandatory DFG towards the one item | Ribble Valley adaptation DFG only applicable for 1 item and associated works to address the needs of the applicant; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provision of stair lift • conversion bathroom to | As per mandatory DFG Only 1 Ribble Valley adaptation grant within a 5 year period | All scheme conditions are the same as Mandatory DFG above except: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no means test |

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| | To be funded from Better Care Fund | | wet room <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ceiling track hoist wash only bidet provision of ramps, half steps and galvanised rails access inside or outside the property Any other adaptation as recommended by the OT | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the full grant will be registered as a charge against the property for 10 years, if the works include alterations to the property owner occupied (ie, not equipment). |
| Disabled Facilities Discretionary Top up Grant | <u>Maximum assistance per application:</u> £25,000 from Better Care Fund allocation + admin fee | <u>Assistance to:</u> a) provide top-up funding to meet the reasonable cost of aids and adaptations to assist the applicant to live independently in their home, where a Disabled Facilities Grant is approved at the statutory maximum and the eligible expense less contribution also exceeds the | <u>Aids and adaptations to be:</u> (As set out above for Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants) | <u>Applications considered from:</u> a) applicants for a Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant, where the eligible costs of the work exceed the mandatory grant | <u>Applications to include:</u> a) No separate application - assistance linked to Mandatory DFG application <u>Applications subject to:</u> a) means test through standard test of resources, except where b) the grant is approved in respect of a disabled child under the age of 19 <u>Works to be:</u> |

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| | | statutory maximum (currently £30,000). | | | <p>a) completed within 12 months of application approval</p> <p>b) completed to the satisfaction of the Council</p> <p><u>All the discretionary top up grant amount to be:</u></p> <p>a) registered as a local land charge against the property if the works include alterations to the property on owner occupied properties (ie, not equipment)</p> <p>b) 10% admin fee is charged where technical support is used. 5% admin fee where there is no technical input</p> <p>c) the full grant to be repaid if the property is sold, transferred, or assigned within 10 years.</p> |



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| | Fund | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wash only bidet • provision of ramps, half steps and galvanised rails • access inside or outside the property • Any other adaptation as recommended by the OT | | 10 years, if the works include alterations to the property owner occupied (ie, not equipment). |
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