



CABINET

Tuesday, 03 January 2023

Subject	Disabled Facilities Grants – Amendment to Policy
Report by	Councillor Richard Kerry – Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing
Supporting Officer	Teresa Howarth Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing) Teresa.howarth@eastsoffolk.gov.uk 01394 444206

Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is NOT in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable Click or tap here to enter text.
Wards Affected:	All Wards [Add additional wards or delete as required]

Purpose and high-level overview

Purpose of Report:

To review the current delivery of disabled facilities grants by the Independent Living east Suffolk agency established in May 2020.

To consider the implementation of policy changes to support more efficient delivery of grant aid.

Options:

- Continue with existing policy and face the prospect of not fully utilising the grant funding allocated to East Suffolk to the detriment of residents and delay adaptations due to the length of the complexity of the current application process.
- Modify the policy, accept applications from professionals other than occupational therapy staff, simplify the application process reducing 3 application types currently available to 1, reducing circumstances when means testing is used to determine eligibility to maximise expenditure to better meet need.

Recommendation/s:

That the new grants policy detailed in this report be adopted as Council policy under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) and the policy is published on the East Suffolk website.

Corporate Impact Assessment

Governance:

The Council is the Strategic Housing Authority for East Suffolk. With an ageing population and increasing levels of disability we have a statutory duty to deliver a mandatory disabled facilities grant service. In Suffolk the majority of the Councils also provide an agency service (Independent Living) to streamline the process for applicants and increase the throughput of work. The service is managed within the Private Sector Housing team with oversight by the Head of Housing apart from the Occupational Therapists element which is delivered by Suffolk County Council.

ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:

[Private Sector Housing Strategy](#)

[Discretionary Grant policy](#) adopted by Council in October 2020

Environmental:

No significant environmental impacts resulting from this proposal

Equalities and Diversity:

An Equality Impact Assessment has highlighted that these changes are likely to have a positive impact on age and disability due to a high likelihood of an improved service to those having these characteristics. All other areas considered had no negative impact. Overall, it is believed the change will lead to a better service.

Financial:

The Better Care Fund DFG allocation for East Suffolk is shown in the table below giving levels of allocation and funding utilised over the last 3 years including the year to date:

FY	DFG Allocation	Spend and commitment for all grants	Number of cases	Underspend
2020/21	£2,398,432	£2,135,341	322	£263,091
2021/22	£2,398,432	£2,004,623	375	£393,809
2022/23 (Q1 to end of Nov ONLY)	£2,721,389	£1,644,445	324	£1,076,944

As can be seen there is an underspend each of the years shown and the cumulative underspend from before that, amounting to a significant carried forward budget into 22/23 of £5,181,105.58. For 22/23 the DFG received was £2,721,389.00 so the budget is a grand total of £7,902,494.58. Therefore there are no concerns about meeting the increased demand for grant funding which this policy is likely to deliver.

The salaries of Independent Living caseworkers and technical officers are met from the DFG allocations. Management and admin costs are met from the existing revenue budget.

The Capital available to support **Renovation Grants** is a separate budget and is approximately £850,000. This has been budgeted across 3 years, giving an annual budget of £250,000 until 2023/24 when it will be sustained with funds from any repaid grants only.

Human Resources:

The policy does not involve any changes to current staffing or terms and conditions at this stage.

ICT:

No implications

Legal:

The main legislation covering this area of work is contained in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The eligible works are to facilitate access to the property and the main living areas and amenities. Grants are client focussed and there is a consultation process involving Occupational Therapists who recommend what works are necessary and appropriate to meet the client's needs. A means test is applied, except in children's cases.

The ability to set a policy outside of the legal framework is contained in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002.

Risk:

If we do not spend the allocation from the Better Care Fund it could be reduced over time which would be detrimental to future years as we know there is a growing level of need in the population for adaptations.

Delays in processing grants can lead to residents remaining at risk from falls or reliant on care for longer than is ideal. Adaptations significantly improve independence and quality of life.

Over subscription of the service could lead to the funds running out. If this were to happen the policy could be revised again to match allocations.

External Consultees:	All District and Borough Councils
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Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the Strategic Plan which are supported by this proposal: (Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
T01	Growing our Economy		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T02	Enabling our Communities		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T03	Maintaining Financial Sustainability		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
T04	Delivering Digital Transformation		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T05	Caring for our Environment		

P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
XXX	Governance		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How does this proposal support the priorities selected? Increasing access and simplifying processes to deliver disabled facilities grants funding for more residents, increases independence and wellbeing for people living with disabilities, brings our policy more in line with other Suffolk Councils and delivers more of what is important.			

Background and Justification for Recommendation

1 Background facts																														
1.1	In October 2020 Cabinet adopted a revised grant policy under the RRO which introduced discretionary grants for disabled adaptations to fast track priority situations and circumstances, removing the need for means testing in these cases.																													
1.2	<p>The demand for DFG’s is increasing. East Suffolk receives the largest level of referrals but also has the largest DFG allocation. See table below</p> <table><tr><th>FY</th><th>Allocation</th><th>Spend for grants</th><th>Number of cases</th><th>Commitment for grants</th><th>Number of cases</th></tr><tr><td>2020/21</td><td>£2,398,432</td><td>£1,100,811.11</td><td>146</td><td>£1,034,530.86</td><td>176</td></tr><tr><td>2021/22</td><td>£2,398,432</td><td>£1,042,276.17</td><td>177</td><td>£962,347.81</td><td>198</td></tr><tr><td>2022/23 (Q1 to end of Nov ONLY)</td><td>£2,721,389</td><td>£603,292.61</td><td>124</td><td>£1,041,153.92</td><td>200</td></tr></table> <p>The team have significantly increased output but are restrained by the process, in delivering more. Consideration has been given as to how the service offered by IL-ES can be scaled up to be able to meet the increased need and spend the resources that it has available to it.</p>						FY	Allocation	Spend for grants	Number of cases	Commitment for grants	Number of cases	2020/21	£2,398,432	£1,100,811.11	146	£1,034,530.86	176	2021/22	£2,398,432	£1,042,276.17	177	£962,347.81	198	2022/23 (Q1 to end of Nov ONLY)	£2,721,389	£603,292.61	124	£1,041,153.92	200
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1.3	Customer satisfaction surveys sent to all clients where works have been completed show a high level of satisfaction with the service offered. See appendix A																													

2 Current position	
2.1	The agency currently has a list of 58 clients awaiting the help of the agency. Unlike some of the other Suffolk authorities, ESC undertakes no advertising of the availability of the grants. Should we do so, the numbers of clients wishing to proceed with adaptation works to their homes would be even higher.

2.2	<p>ESC currently only accepts a client for a DFG (all types) where there is a recommendation from an Occupational Therapist, other Suffolk authorities will accept recommendations from other health care professionals, such as doctors, health visitors etc. The greater flexibility to accept alternative recommendations eases the pressure on the Occupational Therapy service and reduces waiting times for the client</p> <p>With the current system clients are currently having to wait up to 9 months to be assessed by an Occupational Therapist. It is recognised there is a shortfall in staffing for this service.</p>															
2.3	<p>Under our current policy East Suffolk Council offer the following grants:</p> <p>Mandatory DFG: Up to £30,000 requiring a full means test. Collecting evidence of income and capital can delay cases significantly.</p> <p>Fast Track grant: this provides funding of up to £10,000 to clients receiving a means tested benefit. A shortened application form makes the grant faster to process.</p> <p>Supplementary Grant: this provides up to £5,000 to every applicant irrespective of the outcome of the mandatory means test.</p> <p>Prior to the introduction of this grant, there were many applicants, who, having found themselves with a large contribution to pay towards the mandatory DFG would not proceed with the works, putting themselves at significant risk of a fall.</p> <p>Priority Grant: this grant started life as the ‘Covid’ grant providing a way of funding adaptations very quickly to allow clients to come home from hospital during the pandemic and remains for palliative and other urgent cases.</p> <p>The table below shows the respective approval and completion of work times for the various grants.</p> <table><tr><td></td><td>Average time (days) from Application to Approval (22/23)</td><td>Average time (days) from Approval to Completion (22/23)</td></tr><tr><td>Type of grant</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Disabled Facility Grant</td><td>58</td><td>80</td></tr><tr><td>Priority Grant</td><td>10</td><td>36</td></tr><tr><td>Supplementary Grant</td><td>62</td><td>67</td></tr></table>		Average time (days) from Application to Approval (22/23)	Average time (days) from Approval to Completion (22/23)	Type of grant			Disabled Facility Grant	58	80	Priority Grant	10	36	Supplementary Grant	62	67
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Type of grant																
Disabled Facility Grant	58	80														
Priority Grant	10	36														
Supplementary Grant	62	67														
2.4	<p>Each of the Suffolk District and Borough Councils has approved its own grant policy under the RRO. There is a considerable variation in what is available in each District, leading to a “post code” lottery of funding. There is however a willingness across the County to try and bring the grants offered more in line, subject to each Districts own financial circumstances.</p>															

2.5	In reviewing the agency's performance another area of concern has arisen, which is currently not fundable under the policy namely, repairs to both the property and to existing adaptations. Common examples include deterioration of waterproof, slip resistant floors used in level access showers; replacement parts for through floor lifts or stairlifts; rotten windows in shower rooms; damp proofing works or an electrical systems in an unsafe condition. A policy that allows these items to be included in an DFG would streamline the system for staff and residents.
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3 How to address current situation

3.1	A revised discretionary DFG policy will improve efficiency, achieve a higher output and spend, better align the grants available with those across the rest of Suffolk and deal with repairs issues. Below are the main changes proposed.
3.2	<p>Replacement of the Fast Track, Supplementary and Priority Grants with a single Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (DDFG) of up to £15,000.00.</p> <p>This grant will be 'non means tested' delivering savings in Officer time in undertaking the means test.</p> <p>The simplicity of a single discretionary grant will be easier for the client and other professionals we work with to understand.</p> <p>Of 198 grants approved in 2021/22, only 3 were more than £15,000.00 indicating that under the new policy, that most of our applications can be directed to this route and only the larger applications will involve a mandatory means tested grant. If the cost of works in these cases exceeds £30,000 this grant would also be available.</p> <p>Of the 200 grants approved to date in 2022/23, 48 means test were carried out. Of these only 8 applicants were assessed as having a contribution to make. These averaged £2531.97. (The remaining grants were either Supplementary or Priority (not means tested)).</p> <p>In addition to its use for standard adaptation works, the grant will also be available for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • works for the terminally ill • works to allow a client to return home from hospital • financial assistance for a client needing to move because their home cannot be adapted to meet their needs • funding to repair hazards in the home to reduce risks leading to fewer falls and accidents in the home. • works to assist a client with a diagnosis of dementia to remain in their home • assistance technology to assist a client to remain in their home. Examples of works would be a smart thermostat to control the heating, a video doorbell etc. <p>This grant will be repayable if the property is sold within 10 years (excluding the first £5000). If the grant is in conjunction with a mandatory DFG only one allowance of £5000 will be excluded from the repayment sum.</p>

3.3	<p>Repairs Grant for Adaptations (RGA)</p> <p>This grant will have a minimum grant amount of £500.00 and a maximum grant amount of £5000.00. This grant will be 'non means tested' and available for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • essential repairs to existing adaptations, such as level access showers, stairlifts, through floor lifts etc. • essential repairs to allow new adaptations to proceed, such as damp proofing works, electrical improvements and rotted floors. • essential repairs to a room where adaptations are being carried out, for example, the renewal of a rotted window in a bathroom where a level access shower is to be fitted • improvements to heating systems where the current heating arrangements are inadequate to a property where adaptations are being carried out. <p>The grant will be repayable should the property change hands within 10 years of the completion of the works (owner occupiers only).</p>
3.4	<p>Mandatory DFG</p> <p>This will remain as it is now.</p>
3.5	<p>Adaptation Costs below £1000 would not be eligible for assistance as the responsibility for these minor works rests with Social Care.</p>
3.6	<p>Accept referrals from other health professionals in addition to the Occupational Therapists. This will allow increased numbers of recommendations to be received and assist greater numbers of clients.</p>
4 Reason/s for recommendation	
4.1	<p>To free up Officer time speeding up the process of approval and reducing delays leading to an increase in overall number of grants approved.</p>
4.2	<p>The simplified DDFG will assist both clients and other professionals we work with in understanding what is available.</p>
4.3	<p>The new limit on the DDFG will align ESC with the most generous of the other Suffolk authorities. It is anticipated that the remaining authorities will look to match this as their own policies are reviewed subject to budgetary restraints.</p>
4.4	<p>The RGA will help clients where no help is currently available, removing the risk of harm from disrepair. The grant will also allow both Mandatory and Discretionary DFG's to be progressed more quickly where repair works are necessary, again assisting the client and enabling more grants to be approved.</p>

Appendices

Appendices:

Appendix A	Warwick Edinburgh results of customer satisfaction surveys
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Background reference papers: None.

Appendix A

Customer Satisfaction Survey


In addition to carrying out a Customer Satisfaction Survey following completion of adaptation works the Independent Living - East Suffolk is also establishing our client's wellbeing using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.






This is a system used to measure mental wellbeing in the general population following interventions such as adaptation works. It uses 14 questions which have five ranking categories; these produce a score from which the wellbeing level is considered as low, medium, or high. In the future we will be looking into the client's wellbeing scores, before and after the adaptations to determine the added benefits of the works.

Just under 60% of those who have recently returned the Customer Satisfaction Survey had a good mental wellbeing score after the adaptations were completed.

The below shows the Customer Satisfaction Survey which we send out to our clients.


Disabled Facility Grant Customer Satisfaction Survey (Independent Living – East Suffolk Case Ref:)

Using the  scale for each question please ✓ the box reflecting your satisfaction. If you wish to provide us with some additional information, please use the space provided (.....) after the relevant question.

					
1. Do you think your health has benefited from having the works done? Would you like to tell us how your health has benefited?					
2. Has your adaptation made you feel safer? How do you feel safer?					
3. Has your adaptation made you feel more independent? What can you do now on your own that you could not do before?					






4. Your Wellbeing

Please see the below statements about feelings and thoughts and ✓ the box which best describes your experience over the last 2 weeks.

Statements	None of the time: 	Rarely: 	Some of the time: 	Often: 	All of the time: 
I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
I've been feeling useful					
I've been feeling relaxed					
I've been feeling interested in other people					
I've had energy to spare					
I've been dealing with problems well					
I've been thinking clearly					
I've been feeling good about myself					
I've been feeling close to other people					
I've been feeling confident					
I've been able to make up my own mind about things					
I've been feeling loved					
I've been interested in new things					
I've been feeling cheerful					

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) © University of Warwick 2006, all rights reserved.

5. Has your adaptation reduced your care package costs? (e.g. Hours of care) Hours per week before? Hours per week now?	Yes	No
6. Before the adaptations had you, considered alternative options other than remaining in your own home, or receiving additional care, to help? If so, what were the alternative options?	Yes	No
7. Do you think the works helped you to stay out of care and/ or hospital?	Yes	No
8. Would you have had the work completed without the help from the Independent Living – East Suffolk?	Yes	No

Please ✓ the box reflecting your satisfaction					
9. Can you rate your satisfaction with the overall service provided by the Independent Living Service? Please add any additional comments below:					
.....					
.....					
.....					
.....					

Please return to using the pre-paid envelope enclosed.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Client Feedback

The following table provides recent examples of client's feedback we have received from our returned Customer Satisfaction Surveys.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Client Feedback
"I am extremely happy with the works carried out. The builders were amazing and the whole process was completed very satisfactory. I now feel safe and independent in my own home."
"Helped my wife a great deal when pushing my wheelchair & helped ambulance drivers when pushing the trolley"
"Easier to get in and out of property without negotiating step. Walk into shower independently, space to use walker."
"Get up & down stairs without stick"
"I would like to thank everybody who helped me get the stairlift. It also helped my husband, as he didn't have to follow me upstairs anymore"
"Very satisfied and excellent workmanship"
"100% amazing, kept us informed all the way through while having works done"
"I feel so safe now that I have a wet room and not a bath. As before I had a bath and could not get out as kept slipping. I can have a lovely shower, before when I had a bath I was scared to get in so had to have a strip wash"
"Very good grateful for all the alterations, steps, ramp outside and especially the lovely bathroom"
"It has made a great difference, thank you"