

North Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board 2nd December 2021

Report Title	Disabled Facilities Grant – 2021/2022 mid-year update	
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List of Appendices

Appendix A – DFG Data 2021/2022 mid-year.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To update the Board on the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) allocation and spend across North Northamptonshire for 2021 – 2022 mid-year.

2. Executive Summary

DFGs are an allocation provided by central government in order to enable people with a disability to remain in, or return to, and live independently in their own homes, thereby avoiding them having to be looked after in a care home or in hospital. This report provides an overview of the DFG 2021/2022 allocation for NNC, expenditure to date, legacy arrangements and the current issues that are being addressed.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Board are asked to note the DFG spend to date for 2021/2022.
- 3.2 It is a statutory requirement of Health and Wellbeing Boards to oversee local DFG arrangements.

4. Report Background

DFGs are provided in order to enable people with a disability to remain in, or return to, and live independently in their own homes, thereby avoiding them having to be looked after in a care home or in hospital. The adaptations funded by DFGs range from level-access showers, stairlifts and ramping to major property extensions and are granted in consultation with the County Council's Occupational Therapist (OT) Service. Costs vary from around £3,000 for the former to £30,000+ for the latter. Mandatory DFG funding is limited to £30,000 per application but with the new Private Sector Housing Policy in place for NNC, allows for an additional discretionary £10,000 to be awarded on top of the £30,000, for larger more complex schemes that cost over the threshold.

The timescale to process a DFG application can vary hugely and is dependent on the requirement and availability of various professional partners; requirements for an OT assessment and/or architects' drawings, permissions granted from landlords and planning departments and building control approval. Inevitably, this means that some of the grant funding committed as of 31st March in any given year will not be paid until the following financial year, and the committed but unspent amounts can vary significantly from one year to the next.

The statutory duty to provide DFGs falls under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and since the 1st of April 2021, one allocation has been awarded to NNC.

5. Issues

The total national funding for DFG in 2020/21 remained the same amount as the previous year (£505 million) therefore the allocation and breakdown for Northamptonshire stayed unchanged.

During 2020/2021 the DFG service had been heavily impacted by COVID-19 but managed to mitigate the effects and continue to deliver DFGs, however it did add to the delays that are still being faced.

The allocation that was awarded for the current financial year 2021/2022 for NNC was £2.5 million, plus the legacy under spends from each sovereign Council in the North, that is still being worked through and spent.

The current main issues faced are:

- There has been a shortage of OTs in the Occupational Therapy department therefore a backlog of 286 assessments are waiting, however this has reduced significantly over the last few months and waiting times now are 3 months for an assessment. Recruitment of OTs has been incredibly difficult and the Council's OPUS agency provider has been unable to source any but more recently another provider does have some OT locums available which we intend to recruit from in the coming months, to fill the remaining 3 vacant posts.
- There is a lengthy waiting list for both Kettering and East Northants cases that are waiting for surveys and then follow up works, as follows:
 - East Northants = c.£225,000 of work (45 cases)

- Kettering c.£514,000 of work (78 cases)
- There remains one vacant post for a Senior Surveyor and difficulties with recruiting additional Technical Officers via consultants, to undertake the increased number of technical drawings for the grant applications that will be needed, after the OT assessments have been made.
- There are some delays with payments to contractors due to internal finance systems which needs to be modified. The risk here is that we could lose contractors if they are not paid on time.
- The work needed for the set-up of the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for managing DFG contractors is still ongoing and likely to take 6 – 9 months. The DPS is being hosted by West Northamptonshire and requires significant input from Legal and Procurement colleagues to ensure we are procuring contractors to do works correctly and compliantly.
- There are significant delays with all building contractors and supplies both locally, regionally, and nationally, therefore this is causing an additional wait for residents once they have received their DFG grant approval.

High demand for the service continues and different ways of delivering DFGs in 2021/2022 are being explored due to an increase in waiting times. The new Private Sector Housing Policy for North Northamptonshire gives a range of additional discretionary grant options alongside the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant. The aim of the discretionary element is to assist those meeting certain criteria and whose application would cost in excess of the maximum mandatory award of £30,000 and who otherwise would have to make a financial contribution themselves; in addition to some other matters such as redecoration which would not normally be included under the mandatory grant.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

6.1.1 There remains a concern with staffing resources that are needed to assist with the delivery of DFGs.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 There are no legal implications arising from the report.

6.3 Risk

Applications for significant grants, particularly where substantial alterations to someone's home are required, can take several months to process and the DFG grant may not be fully spent in the year to which it relates, therefore it remains important that underspend is ring fenced and carried forward.

The current allocation will not be committed or spent in the current financial year and some of this will be needed to fund additional staffing resources, short term, to assist in clearing the back log of residents on the waiting lists, not only with the OTs but within some of the sovereign Councils too.

Contractor availability, supplies and lead times remain ongoing risks.

6.4 Consultation

6.4.1 Not applicable.

6.5 Consideration by Scrutiny

6.5.1 Not applicable

6.6 Climate Impact

6.6.1 Not applicable

6.7 Community Impact

6.7.1 Not applicable

7. Background Papers

7.1 Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.