

North Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board 5th July 2022

Report Title	Disabled Facilities Grant – 2021/2022 full year review	
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Contributors/Checkers/Approvers		
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List of Appendices

Appendix A – DFG Data 2021/2022 full year.

1. Purpose of Report

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

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 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 how the DFG 2021/2022 allocation for NNC was spent and the current issues that are being addressed.
- 2.2 The total spend on DFGs and associated supports costs for 2021/22 was £1,609,237.95

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Board are asked to note the total DFG spend to date for 2021/2022 as illustrated in Appendix A.
- 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 stairlifts, level access showers and ramps to major property extensions or garage conversions. They 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. It is therefore important that all DFG spending activity is captured by spreadsheet to illustrate the different stages and costs that take place across financial years.

The statutory duty to provide DFGs falls under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

5. Issues and actions

The total national funding for DFGs in 2021/22 has increased from 2020/21 from £505 million to £573 million. North Northamptonshire Council was allocated £2,561,759 for 2021/22, plus had legacy under spends from each sovereign Council in the North, which is still being worked through and spent.

The current main issues faced are:

- There are still two vacancies for full-time surveyors which after three recruitment cycles over 18 months, still remain unfilled. Due to the unsuccessful attempts previously for permanent postholders, recruitment through an agency on a fixed term basis is the next option, in hope that this will lead to something permanent. These vacancies heavily impact on existing staffing resources within the team and additional external surveyors are required short term, to deliver on the backlog of technical surveys required for these grants.
- There is currently a backlog of Occupational Therapy (OT) assessments that require additional locum support to work through them due to the two vacancies. The current waiting times for an assessment is about 14 weeks which has improved significantly since April 2021. A 25% increase in OT referrals was noted last month, compared to the previous month, suggesting demand is increasing again. The OT service currently utilise three locums at present and have 578 people waiting for an OT assessment.
- Another delay to the DFG procedure is often not being able to get more than one quote for larger adaptations under the tendering process. There are not

enough contractors on our register who have the capacity to take on such work, yet Officers continue to explore this and evaluate the market.

- There are currently 90 cases on the Private Sector Housing team's waiting list, as of June 2022, that need surveying and then follow-up works. A further 17 cases have been placed on hold. The total estimated cost for all this is £671,000. There are a further 63 cases on the waiting list that need equipment and can be fast tracked without the need for a survey, with an estimated cost of £347,000 to complete these. These have now been prioritised and will be completed over the next few months. Appendix A illustrates the breakdown of all DFG cases for 2021/22 in terms of what we have spent on works and support charges, i.e., £1,609,237.95 and the cost of all the cases in progress. So far nearing Q1 end of this year 2022/23, we have spent £285,669.
- 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 still some 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.
- It was suggested at the last HWBB meeting that we advertise the service more which has been actioned, by reminding all RSLs of the availability of grant funding (as they have their own OTs which can be utilised). It has also been advertised on a stall at the Corn Market in Kettering.
- It is intended that the Private Sector Housing Policy will be formally reviewed and updated in early 2023, so that it provides further assistance to more eligible residents, to positively impact on the winter fuel crisis and work more effectively in conjunction with the Council's Prevent Strategies and Integrated Care System.

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, therefore due to unsuccessful recruitment, a procurement exercise is being implemented for a surveying contract, to the value of £450,000 over a 3-year period. This will provide 12 -14 additional surveys to be carried out per month.

6.1.2 A dedicated Financial Business Partner would be helpful to assist in monitoring the budget each month and to assist with the annual audits.

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 may 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.

Appendix A

North Northants DFG works 2021-22, Q1 - Q4

Total budget allocation 21/22 = £2,561,759

Legacy carry-forward = £1,550,310

	<u>Corby</u>	<u>Wellingborough</u>	<u>Kettering</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Total spend 21/22 (not including salaries)	£255,515.75	£318,054.36	£245,683.04	380,675.80	£1,199,928.95
Approved & committed (not yet paid)	£188,518.24	£304,567.00	£68,347.93	£170,575.81	£732,008.98
Applications in progress (not yet approved/paid)	221,852.55	£584,984.74	344,730	£695,500	£1,847,067.29
Salaries & support charges/service costs (full year)	£83,623	£59,778	£196,619	£69,289.00	£409,309
Cases on waiting list	9	53	69	42	173
Carry forward from 2020-21	£283,580	£662,147.00	£455,000	£149,583	£1,550,310