

INFORMATION BULLETIN – DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

Background

- 1.0 Currently Orbit Home Improvement Agency administer Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) across Suffolk. The 5-year Contract, which is with Suffolk County Council and Babergh and Mid Suffolk are Partners, is due to end in 2 years.
- 1.1 DFG's fund adaptations to the homes of disabled residents living within the private sector to enable them to remain at home and live independently.
- 1.2 Funding for DFG's comes from the Better Care Fund via Central Government which is paid to Suffolk County Council who in turn allocate funds to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council.
- 1.3 In 18/19 Babergh received an allocation of £444,252.00 and Mid Suffolk received £407,855.00.
- 1.4 Additional funding was received following the 2018 Budget. Babergh received £72, 983.00 and Mid Suffolk received £66,736.00. This additional money must be committed by 31 March 2019.
- 1.5 At the end of December 2018, Babergh had committed £165,000 of the total budget and Mid Suffolk £184,000.
- 1.6 This significant underspend has been due to several factors but primarily the under performance of Orbit HIA and the complexity and length of the DFG process. Babergh and Mid Suffolk also have a disproportionate number of applicants who 'fail' the means test and therefore do not continue with the application.
- 1.7 Orbit HIA are operating the Contract with financial losses and therefore there is no prospect of their performance improving. Therefore, if we take no action the underspend will continue. Vulnerable residents within Babergh and Mid Suffolk are not receiving the assistance they need.

Legislation

- 2.0 The Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 is the primary legislation that governs how DFG's are administered.
- 2.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 gives powers to local authorities to decide how it provides grants or loans for the purpose of repairing, improving, extending, converting or adapting homes.
- 2.2 Before Babergh and Mid Suffolk can make any changes to the DFG process using the powers in 2.1, Cabinet approval is required.

Proposed Changes to DFG's

- 3.0 Applicants needing adaptations costing £4,999 or less will not be means tested. This will enable more applicants to be eligible to receive assistance and speed up the process. The figure of £4,999 is to avoid the requirement of registering the grant as a local land charge and repayment of the grant if the property is sold within 10 years. Setting an upper limit also restricts the risk that public funds are misappropriated but still remains proportionate to the benefits.
- 3.1 Providing adequate heating where the medical need of the applicant is likely to be exacerbated by living in a cold home.
- 3.2 Removing the need for an Occupational Therapist (OT) Referral for the straightforward cases. The long wait for an OT visit has long been a bottle neck within the DFG process.
- 3.4 Purchasing of equipment which can be installed quickly where and when it is needed and re-used when no longer needed. Examples include modular ramps, adjustable chair risers, posture aids, wash/dry toilets, key safes, sensor lights, coloured light sockets and lever taps.
- 3.5 Using DFG funding to rent a Council owned property within each district to provide temporary accommodation to enable someone to be discharged from hospital when adaptations are required to their home. Two Sheltered properties have already been identified in each district for this purpose.
- 3.6 Extending the scope of eligible work to include adaptations to assist those with dementia or mental health issues.
- 3.7 A Suffolk wide workshop is taking place at the end of February to discuss a future model for DFG delivery. The workshop will involve a variety of stakeholders from Suffolk County Council, Health Professionals and LA's.

With an ageing population the demand for DFG's is only going to rise. The current model for delivering DFG's is woefully inadequate and changes are needed.

The proposals set out above are only a start to the seismic shift that is needed to ensure DFG's are fit for purpose and meet the needs of our residents in a timely and efficient manner.