

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and/or MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee	REPORT NUMBER: JOS/19/4
FROM: Cllr Jan Osborne (Babergh) Cllr Julie Flatman (Mid Suffolk)	DATE OF MEETING: 18/07/2019
OFFICER: Heather Worton – CM Property Services	KEY DECISION REF NO. N/A

Disabled Facilities Grants.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the current situation regarding disabled facilities grants (DFG's) and outline proposals and future options to address the underspend.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Councils have a statutory duty to provide disabled facilities grants for the adaptation of properties to enabled disabled people to remain living as independently as possible in their own homes.

- 2.2 Orbit Home Improvement Agency (HIA) was jointly commissioned by Suffolk County Council and the five Local Authority partners. The partnership was formed to ensure an effective, integrated and standardised approach to the delivery of housing advice and adaptation support across Suffolk.

- 2.3 The contract with Orbit (HIA) was for five years and is due to end December 2020.

- 2.4 The current county wide service provision includes:

- Advice and support to access alternative housing options (buying/selling/rental)
- Occupational Therapists to identify customers' needs
- Advice and guidance about equity release to fund adaptations or alternative financial options
- Handyperson service
- Signposting to assistive technology services
- Administering Disabled Facilities Grants

- 2.5 Within Babergh and Mid Suffolk, Orbit HIA administer adaptation grants for the private sector only. Adaptations for council stock are administered in-house by the Property Services Team and funded from the Housing Revenue Account. This is not true of all the partners. Where stock transfer has taken place, in the West and part of the East, Orbit HIA administer these grants and adaptations are funded from the DFG budget.

- 2.6 In 2018/19 the DFG budget was underspent by 77% at Babergh and by 58% at Mid Suffolk.
- 2.7 With an ageing population the demand for adaptations is rising. This has been recognised by the Government who have been increasing the DFG budget nationally.

<p>3. RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>3.1 The contents of the report and the appendices be noted and that Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress on any remodelling of the DFG process within the next six months</p>
<p>REASON FOR DECISION</p> <p>Work will begin in September 2019 between Suffolk County Council and the Suffolk Partners on the future DFG service provision.</p>

4. KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE SERVICE

- 4.1 The substantial year on year underspend at Babergh and Mid Suffolk.
- 4.2 Lack of identified unmet demand for adaptations throughout both districts.
- 4.3 Babergh and Mid Suffolk have the second highest number of people enquiring about adaptations in the county yet have the lowest number of DFG approvals. One of the significant reasons for this is applicants 'fail' the statutory means test. Where potential applicants are in receipt of income related benefits they are 'passported' and are entitled to 100% grant funding for eligible work. In 18/19 only 20% of applicants were passported in Babergh and Mid Suffolk compared to 80% across the rest of Suffolk.
- 4.4 The complexity and length of the DFG application process can be daunting and difficult to navigate for applicants.
- 4.5 The legislation surrounding the statutory DFG is outdated and is not appropriate for many vulnerable people as it focuses on physical disabilities rather than mental or behavioural conditions. Neither does it meet the needs of people with life limiting conditions.
- 4.6 Statutory DFG's only focus on the needs of the disabled person rather than a more holistic approach and including the needs of their families or carers.
- 4.7 Lack of knowledge, even across the health sector, that financial and housing option assistance is available through the DFG process.
- 4.8 Delays in carrying out adaptations increase the health and safety risks for disabled people and therefore increase the risk of hospital admissions or GP appointments placing further burden on the health care system.
- 4.9 Major adaptations, particularly those required for children or where an extension is needed, often exceed the current £30,000 grant maximum. Therefore, the disabled person or their family will need to meet the additional costs. If they are unable to do so the adaptation cannot proceed.

4.10 Inconsistent procedures between the process of applying for an adult DFG and those carried out by the Children's and Young Persons Team. Adaptations for children are not included in the current Orbit HIA contract.

5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 In March 2019 Babergh and Mid Suffolk approved a Regulatory Reform Order for Minor Adaptation Grants. This introduced:

- Removal of the requirement for a means test where the adaptation costs less than £5,000
- Simplified on-line/telephone application form.
- Removal of the requirement for an Occupational Therapist referral.
- Funding is now available for equipment or digital technology to assist vulnerable people and their families with mental or behavioural conditions.
- Funding is now available for people with terminal conditions where temporary solutions are required to enable them to remain at home and their health, safety and wellbeing is not compromised.

5.2 Using DFG budget, Babergh and Mid Suffolk have purchased equipment which will enable us to react quickly in circumstances such as when a disabled person needs to be discharged from hospital, but their home is not suitable, or preventing a disabled person having to move to temporary accommodation in a crisis. Examples of the type of equipment include modular ramps, grab rails, wash/dry toilets and a variety of dementia products. This equipment is stored at Wenham Depot and can be delivered and installed in a day using staff from Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Services. In many cases this equipment will enable a disabled person to remain at home whilst more permanent solutions are sought if necessary.

5.3 Staff from Property Services are heavily promoting the new Minor Adaptation Grants via our website, local charities, health providers and organisations whose client base would benefit. These include Sue Ryder Care, Health Watch Suffolk, GP surgeries, pharmacies and libraries. This has stimulated a flurry of activity and enquiries. Where an applicant does not qualify for a Minor Adaptation, they may well qualify for a statutory DFG.

5.4 A detailed action plan was requested from Orbit HIA setting out how they intend to address the current underspend and low conversion rates at Babergh and Mid Suffolk for 2019/20. George Purser (Orbit HIA Programme Manager) has responded and acknowledged the current underspend needs to be urgently addressed. He has stated that the number of referrals for Babergh and Mid Suffolk needs to increase and the number of applicants who do not proceed with an adaptation due to 'failing' the means test needs to decrease. He has further stated that in order to increase the referral rate, there needs to be promotion of the service and that Orbit would need further financial support from Local Authorities to enable them to do this. A meeting has been arranged with Orbit on the 15 August 2019 to explore this further. To address the dropout rate, a Regulatory Reform Order has been adopted by Babergh and Mid Suffolk and the impact of this is being monitored.

- 5.5 A Suffolk wide review of DFG's is due to take place with a workshop planned for September 2019. This will consider alternative delivery models beyond the existing Orbit HIA contract and involve a wide range of stakeholders.
- 5.6 In addition to the Suffolk wide review, partners are carrying out reviews within their own area as each council has unique local issues which need to be addressed.
- 5.7 Legislative change is required to remove the current £30,000 grant limit.
- 5.8 Further Regulatory Reform Orders (RRO) could be used to address issues at a local level. This could include increasing the maximum amount of grant an applicant could qualify for without requiring a means test. The current RRO sets a limit of £5,000. The Councils could consider providing funding to assist families to move to a new house in situations where adaptations to an existing property are not the best option.

6 LINKS TO THE JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN.

- 6.1 Any future service provision needs to be set in the context of health and social care integration. It must seek to reduce and prevent future demand on statutory services by identifying support needs early in order to intervene effectively and prevent needs becoming more extensive.
- 6.2 Providing adaptations to vulnerable residents is vital to enable people to be independent in their homes and assisting people to leave hospital. This contributes to maximising the quality, suitability and availability of our existing housing stock.

7 DFG AND ORBIT HIA FUNDING INFORMATION.

	Total Allocation 2019/20	Held back for SCC Minor Adaptations	Budget Available
Babergh	670,029	28.5%	479,374
Mid Suffolk	615,135	28.5%	440,100

- 7.1 Funding for Disabled Facilities Grants comes from the Better Care Fund via a Central Government Grant which is paid to Suffolk County Council who then allocate funds to district and borough councils.
- 7.2 The Local Authorities have agreed to contribute 28.5% of their DFG allocation in 2019/20 to Suffolk County Councils Minor Equipment Budget. This budget funds the supply and installation of portable equipment to disabled residents across Suffolk. This budget is significantly overspent year on year.
- 7.3 Orbit HIA are funded through Suffolk County Council and the partners. Babergh pay an annual contribution of £15,979 and Mid Suffolk pay £13,316.
- 7.4 Suffolk County Council are by far the biggest contributor at £800,000 as the contract includes a number of County services including the Occupational Therapist provision and the supply and fitting of grab rails and other equipment.
- 7.5 Orbit HIA also charge a fee on each grant they complete. This is currently based on 15% of the cost of the essential works. The fee is eligible for grant funding therefore

is met from the DFG budget unless the total cost exceeds the grant maximum of £30,000. In these cases, the disabled applicant must pay anything above £30,000.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 is the primary legislation that governs how DFG's are administered and delivered.
- 8.2 Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 gives powers to local authorities to provide assistance via grants, loans, advice etc for the purpose of repairing, improving, extending, converting or adapting housing accommodation.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Underspend of the 19/20 DFG budget	3- probable	2-noticeable	Action Plan from Orbit HIA being prepared and monthly budget and performance monitoring of the HIA contract. Continued promotion of the Minor Adaptations Grant

10 CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 None for this report, but there will be extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders during the review period.

11 EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 11.1 Disabled Facilities Grants and any future service provision will directly impact on people with a disability but in a positive way which improves their independence and quality of life.

12 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 This Report does not have environmental implications.

13 APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Orbit HIA Report June 2019	 HIA KPI Report June 2019 FINAL.xlsx  HIA Progress Report June 2019 FINAL.pdf
(b) Minor Adaptation Grant Leaflet	 Grants for home adaptations - leaflet.pdf
(c) Case Studies – Sue Ryder	
(d)	