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**REVIEW OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Bill Dixon,  
Community and Public Protection Portfolio**

**Responsible Director(s) - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To consider the need to increase the level of financial assistance available for adaptations to dwellings where the work required exceeds the current grant limit of £25,000.

**Information and Analysis**

2. DFG's give a mandatory right to any disabled person for grant support up to a current limit of £25,000 for the purpose of altering their dwelling so that they are able to gain access to and use all the normal facilities of their home and to care for others where this is relevant. DFG's are currently administered by Three Rivers Housing Association on behalf of the Council through a Service Level Agreement.
3. Unfortunately, the funding available for DFG's does not reflect the true level of need. For example, in 2005/06 we anticipate spending £516k, of which only £286k it from a ring fenced DFG budget. The remainder will be financed from a combination of Housing Capital Budget and the General Fund.
4. From April 2006 funding for private sector housing investment changes and all allocations, including DFG funding will be subject to a bidding process. The amount of funding we receive next year is therefore uncertain at this stage. There is further potential pressure from the ending of means testing for adaptations for children from December 2005. This has been estimated to represent a 6.7% increase on total DFG expenditure nationally, which would equate to an additional funding requirement for Darlington of £35k per annum. Whilst there are indications that the overall Government grant provided to local authorities for DFG's will increase for 2006/07 to reflect this change, it is unlikely to cover the full costs.

5. There are currently five families for whom an Occupational Therapist recommendation has been made for adaptations in excess of the £25k mandatory limit. Given the already high demands on the DFG budget and additional demands from December 2006 when means testing for children ends, it is not considered appropriate to increase the level of grant. It is therefore proposed that as an alternative top-up loans of up to £10,000 are provided by the Council, in instances where the maximum DFG is insufficient for the level of work required. Where an applicant qualifies for financial assistance under the current means testing arrangements it is proposed that the loan would be recovered by attaching a perpetual land charge to the property. For other applicants the loan would be repayable over a maximum period of five years, dependent on the amount borrowed and the applicant's ability to pay. Standard Bank of England base rate would also apply in both instances. The financial implications of this approach would be manageable within current budgets.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

6. Proposals for changes to the DFG programme were considered at a recent Inclusive Forum attended by service providers, service users and landlords. Other key stakeholders such as the Care and Repair Team managed by Three Rivers Housing Association have also been consulted and overall feedback has been very positive in respect of the provision of top-up loans.

### **Legal Implications**

7. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

8. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

### **Council Policy Framework**

9. The issues contained within this report do represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

### **Decision Deadline**

10. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

## **Key Decision**

11. This is a key decision as it is significant in terms of the effects of the communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards within the area of the local authority.

## **Recommendation**

12. It is recommended that Cabinet agree in accordance with the terms detailed in Paragraph 5 to the provision of top-up loans of up to £10,000 where the costs of adaptations to dwellings exceed the DFG maximum limit.

## **Reason**

13. To enable adaptation work to proceed where the cost exceeds the DFG maximum limit.

**Cliff Brown**  
**Director of Community Services**

## **Background Papers**

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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