

## **Detail of suggested amends to the Disabled Facilities Grant Policy & Regulatory Reform Order Policy**

### **1. Waive the means test for certain items and raise the recovery threshold**

- (a) To waive the means test and the need for the DFG approval panel for the following adaptations (and any combination):
  - (i) Stairlifts (Straight and Curved)
  - (ii) Ramps (semi-permanent)
  - (iii) Level Access Showers
  - (iv) Through Floor Lifts
  - (v) Wash Dry Toilets
- (b) Any complex adaptations above will still have oversight via the DFG approval panel.
- (c) The means test will remain for ground floor extensions and garage conversions; however, the revised policy recommends that the land charge limit be amended so that we only consider recovery of any adaptations over £10,000 rather than the £5,000 which is the current policy. The council will also retain the ability to waive the means test or the client contribution in cases where it is financially beneficial for the council to do so.

### **Rationale**

- (d) Many of the above adaptation used to come in under the £5,000 threshold, but recent substantial rises in costs for items and works mean that the majority of these are now over the £5,000 threshold.
- (e) By removing the means test it will speed up the process by about 2 months, for these crucial items that promote independence. It will create efficiencies in the process along with the benefits for the individual in terms of prolonging independence and delaying or preventing care needs. The changes also have a positive impact on dignity and respect if individuals can shower and toilet without assistance and get to bed whenever they want without assistance. Two months is a big impact on the family and a family carer's ability to maintain their employment if they are having to take time off work to support a loved one while awaiting a decision.
- (f) The above changes are necessary as it causes disparity for service users. For example an individual needing a straight track stair lift would currently get it free of charge as it would currently come under the £5,000 threshold, however an individual with a curved of more complex staircase would be over the £5,000 threshold and require a means test, delaying the installation of the stairlift or having to go without as they cannot afford the contribution, leaving them at risk and ultimately the council with an increase care bill in the future.

## **2. Additional costs to be charged to the DFG fund**

- (a) The recharge of the cost for the Occupational Therapy Services (OT) for the time spent on completing Disabled Facilities Grant is proposed to be increased in line with the increase in demand for DFGs. The policy proposes to remove a stated amount of money that is charged to the DFG. The discretion for future changes to this charge would lie with Commissioning as manager of the DFG fund.
- (b) To allocate costs for the handyman service to the DFG, this is already included in the policy under minor works and while external costs are charged to the DFG our internal costs for minor works are not currently charged to the DFG fund. The discretion for future changes to this charge would lie with Commissioning as manager of the DFG fund.

### **Rationale**

- (c) By removing a stated amount of contribution, it allows flexibility to increase resource as appropriate to deal with demand without a change to the policy and Cabinet approval on each occasion, ensuring that we can respond to the demand more quickly and efficiently. There has been a substantial increase in the volume and the complexity of applications since 2020 and it is anticipated that due to some of the policy changes it could again increase the amount of DFG applications the team have to process, on top of the continued rising demand since the last amendment to the policy in 2020.

## **3. Amendments to the Kinship Care contribution**

- (a) Remove the pre-stipulated £30,000 annual cap on funding for children's social care for housing assistance for Kinship Care.

### **Rationale**

- (b) A notional annual budget of £30k was included in policy, however this budget is not for an individual child it is to cover support to all Kinship cases. The number of children in Kinship Care arrangements continues to grow significantly and therefore, subject to in year presenting need and risks additional funding over the annual notional allocation may be required.
- (c) By limiting the budget, we run the risk of not maximising proactive early intervention opportunities, resulting in an escalation of circumstance, a breakdown in care arrangements, carer and associated high placement costs for a looked after child, which would be hugely more expensive than any DFG costs.
- (d) For any additional funding request over the annual allocation an assessment of the cost avoidance benefit, placement stability risk and positive outcomes for the child will be undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

- (e) To date the Kinship Care housing assistance allocation has effectively supported the creation of additional living space for children with social and emotional needs and behaviours that challenge. This has been undertaken in a range of different ways from existing property adaptations and modifications to facilitating moves to alternative accommodation which can more appropriately meet the child/children's needs
- (f) The discretion for future changes to the amount used for Kinship care would lie with Commissioning as manager of the DFG fund.

**4. Expand policy to widen the support that can be provided for Children and adults with autism/behaviours that challenge, including the provision of safe spaces**

- (a) Funding for safe space adaptations, including gardens, in line with DBC Occupational Therapists assessed needs of a child, young person or adult with behaviours that challenge in line with the provisions of the Foundations best practice guide.
- (b) Where home adaptations are being considered to deal with behaviours that challenge, the family and carers of the disabled person should be highly involved in the assessment discussions and decision-making process. It is also good practice to consult with specialist colleagues to fully explore the correct balance between therapeutic interventions and adaptations. Where behaviours threaten the safety of others living within the household, the grant can be used to reduce the risks to their safety.
- (c) For instance, where siblings share a bedroom and there is the threat of harm during the night, then creating a separate bedroom can meet this purpose. Grant could also be used to create a 'safe space' for a person who is likely to injure themselves. This could, for example, include items such as upholstered and washable walls, soft flooring, radiator covers or a television enclosure or a secondary window.

or

Where there is a single bathroom and the child with challenging behaviours may physically assault a member of the family to access the bathroom but cannot because other are using it, the grant may be used to fund a second bathroom to reduce the stress and occasional violent confrontations which could lead to a breakdown of the caring arrangement and urgent accommodation from the Council being required.

**Rationale**

- (d) Challenging behaviours can frequently lead to a breakdown of the caring arrangements, particularly where the family do not feel safe or feel they cannot keep their child safe. These breakdowns of care result in residential care arrangements or supported living arrangements being sought for the child with challenging

behaviours which are much more costly than safe space adaptations funded through the DFG.

## 5. Dementia Grants & Smart Home kits

- (a) Dementia grants: small grants to fund modifications that would allow someone with a diagnosis of dementia to remain living safely in their home for longer. These are typically preventative in nature and allow for adaptations to be provided for individuals with a diagnosis of dementia and before the condition escalates to the point where a DFG would normally otherwise become necessary.

The extent and cost of the works are usually relatively small (often less than £1,000) and involve a streamlined application process. The most common types of modification are:

- (i) Labels and signs on doors and cupboards
- (ii) Task focussed lighting in bathrooms and kitchens
- (iii) Items of assistive technology, e.g. to provide reminders and to monitor activity
- (iv) Safer flooring
- (v) Decoration to improve contrast between walls and floors
- (vi) Installing coloured fixtures to create a contrast for items like toilet seats and grabrails

**Smart Home Kits:** such as a smart thermostat to control heating and hot water, video doorbell, smart switches, smart lightbulbs and an Alexa or Google Home for voice or other assistive technology grants

### Rationale

- (b) These simple changes can help to keep someone living safely at home for longer, delaying the need for more costly care services or a move into residential care. They can also enable individuals to maintain their independence for as long as possible.

## 6. Home accident prevention or health and safety initiatives

- (a) The DFG will be used to fund minor adaptations and repairs, security checks, deep clean and de-cluttering of premises.

### Rationale

- (b) To improve the living conditions for the individual for health and safety reasons or as a prevention of home accidents.

## **7. Future items for use of DFG funding**

- (a) An additional paragraph has been added to the DFG/HA RRO policy to give greater flexibility to the use of the DFG as new guidance is issued in the future, without the need for issuing a revised policy that requires cabinet approval each time the guidance is updated.

### **Rationale**

- (b) This paragraph will allow the manager of the DFG fund to respond more quickly to change by being able to add charges to the fund that while they are not specifically listed in the policy, they are allowed within the fund and are recommended by Foundations.
- (c) It will speed up the council's ability to respond to change as the policy will not need to be rewritten to specify every use possible which then needs Cabinet approval.
- (d) The fund is currently managed within Children & Adults Commissioning team and is operated in conjunction with the Occupational Therapy team who undertaken the needs assessments for all cases. Close budgetary oversight is already provided by fund manager with finance oversight to ensure the fund is being spent in line with the guidance and spend remains in line with our allocation of funding going forward, focussing on presenting need and core purpose of the DFG.