

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET WEDNESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2017

DISCRETIONARY DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER FOR REVENUES & HOUSING SUPPORT

(Contact: Jon Dearing, Tel: (01993) 861221)

I. PURPOSE

To consider the inclusion of a discretionary award within the Disabled Facilities Grants scheme.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Group Manager for Revenues and Housing Support be authorised to award discretionary disabled facilities grants of up to £30,000 on the basis set out in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act (1996) places a mandatory duty on the Local Housing Authority to provide grants to be made towards the cost of works required for the provision of facilities for disabled people. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are provided to adapt a home environment to restore or enable independent living for individuals with a disability.
- 3.2. The maximum mandatory DFG grant that can be provided was increased from £25,000 to £30,000 in May 2008. This maximum figure has not increased since and as a result the DFG funding level has not kept pace with inflation and the increasing cost of building materials and works. The scope of works that fall within the mandatory £30,000 DFG limit has decreased over time with a number of adaptations costing well over this amount. Often the higher costing schemes are ground floor adaptations and extensions to allow disabled children (and in some cases adults) to live safely at home.
- 3.3. Applicants for DFG's have a test of resources before a DFG is agreed and some applicants will need to pay a contribution towards the grant if it is deemed they can afford this. A means test is not required if the applicant is on a qualifying benefit (such as Housing Benefit) or if the DFG is for a child. Where a scheme of works is in excess of the maximum grant available of £30,000 the applicant is expected to find funding for the additional amount. This can be extremely stressful and lead to delays during which the needs of the disabled person are not met.
- 3.4. If additional funding is required the applicant may be able to secure a personal loan, apply to Oxfordshire County Council Social Care for a top up grant (if eligible and funds are available) or access charitable funding.
- 3.5. In previous years the grant received from central government for DFGs has not met the demand from an increasingly ageing population and adaptations. Maximum payments therefore remained at a mandatory level in order not to overstretch the budget. In 2016/17 funding of DFGs (for West Oxfordshire) was increased to recognize the increasing demand and the allocation for 2017/18 has increased to £606,876 against an estimated spend of £554,019. This therefore gives the Council the opportunity to enable discretionary disabled facilities grant payments where the cost of the works is above that of the maximum £30,000 of the mandatory DFG grant.

- 3.6. Based on funding need within previous years it is anticipated that there will be approximately two or three cases per year that will require additional discretionary funding. Each case will be reviewed by a Panel of relevant professionals and will make a decision of the Discretionary Funding, in line with any other options that may be available.
- 3.7. If there are insufficient resources to deal with referrals for Mandatory DFG's the Council reserves the right not to approve any discretionary grant application.
- 3.8. In order to be eligible for an additional discretionary payment an applicant will have to be eligible for a mandatory DFG as set out in legislation. When assessing the need for a mandatory DFG the officer will look at all the available options to enable the disabled occupant (this includes liaising with the Housing Options team to assess the option of relocation to a more suitable property).
- 3.9. For complex cases (such as major adaptations for children) the Housing Adaptations Officer and the Occupational Therapist (and in some cases a representative of a Housing Association) will convene to review each case on its own individual merit. This ensures the correct use of public funding and that the disabled person's needs are met.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Discretionary awards would be met from the existing Disabled Facilities Grant budget and the recommendation does not therefore represent any additional expenditure for the Council.

5. REASONS

Providing additional discretionary funding to grant applicants will enable major grants to be administered expediently and provide the disabled person to access their home and facilities within their home safely and easily. Ultimately this will result in a decreased demand on the local health service.

6. RISKS

There is a risk that allowing discretionary awards will exhaust budgets. However, the budget is very closely monitored to ensure that funds are maximized without being overspent; and the Council will retain the right not to approve applications for discretionary awards.

Jon Dearing

Group Manager for Revenues & Housing Support

(Author: Jon Dearing, Tel: (01993) 861221; email: jon.dearing@westoxon.gov.uk)

Date: 23 October 2017

Background Papers:

None