

REPORT TO THE SCRUTINY PANEL for PEOPLE
Date 1st March 2012

Status: For Information
Title: Update on the Disabled Facilities Grant Programme
Originator: Elaine Bird – Community Protection Manager
Where from: Scrutiny Commission, 17th November 2012
Where to next: Not applicable

Objective: To update members on the level of demand for Disabled Facilities Grants; to advise on how the delivery of the disabled facilities grant programme compares to the Countywide Service Standards and to advise on the future of the Home Improvement Agency.

1. Outcome sought from Panel

1.1 Members to note:-

- The level of demand for Disabled Facilities Grants.
- The compliance of the Disabled Facilities Grant delivery against the County Service Standards.
- The current situation with regards to the Home Improvement Agency

2 Background

2.1 A request was made to update members of the Scrutiny Panel for People on the level of demand for the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and to compare the delivery of the DFG programme against the Countywide Service Standards. This was seen as a useful opportunity to also update members on the future of the Home Improvement Agency.

2.2 A mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is available to residents to carry out essential adaptations to a disabled person's property to enable them to live as independently as possible in their own homes. With the exception of adaptations for children, all Disabled Facilities Grants are subject to a test of financial resources of the applicant. The maximum grant available is £30,000.

2.3 In 2009-10 the Audit Commission carried out an assessment of the Disabled Facilities Grants process across Leicestershire. Following this assessment, consultants were appointed to undertake a Countywide review of the DFG process with a view to identifying ways to improve the service to customers and to look at value for money. Small task groups were developed to look at

common service standards, procurement of equipment and co-ordination of closer working between the District Councils and Leicestershire County Council Social Care and Health Team. The outcome of this work was the development of agreed service standards to reduce the length of time it takes for an applicant to receive the assistance they need. The service standards came into effect for referrals from Social Care and Health received from 1st April 2011 and covers the installation of ramps, bathing facilities and stairlifts/through floor lifts.

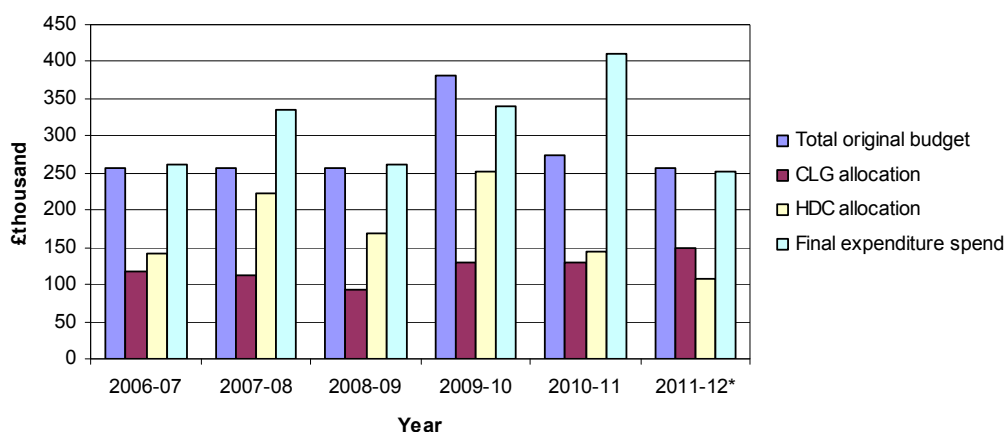
- 2.4 The Council's DFG programme is delivered through the Home Improvement Agency – Mears Home Improvement Ltd. The Business Planning process has reduced the Council's core funding to the agency however sufficient funding for 2011-12 was identified to enable the existing contract to be renewed to allow for a more sustainable delivery model to be developed. As part of the discussions between the Agency and the Council it was agreed that the service could continue without the core funding, however this would be dependant on the Agency maintaining it's funding through Supporting People. In September 2011 Supporting People announced they would consolidate all of their funding for Home Improvement Agencies into the provision of a single Countywide Agency. It is anticipated that the procurement of the new Agency will be completed by September 2012.

3 Points for discussion

3.1 **Demand for the Disabled Facilities Grant Service**

- 3.1.1 The Disabled Facilities Grants are the only mandatory grants available and there is always a very high demand for this service and generally the expenditure is greater than the original budget allocation.
- 3.1.2 Previously 60% of the budget for DFG's came from specific Communities and Local Government grants with local authorities funding the remaining 40%. From 2008-09 the 60:40 DFG funding split was removed and local authorities have been given a DFG allocation without the requirement to provide the match funding. Historically, to ensure that as many applicants as possible can access the mandatory grant funding, Harborough District Council has always funded DFG's beyond the 40% requirement.
- 3.1.3 The graph below shows a breakdown of the DFG expenditure since 2005 showing a comparison of the total budget. Including a breakdown of how the how this is made up and the final expenditure on DFG's

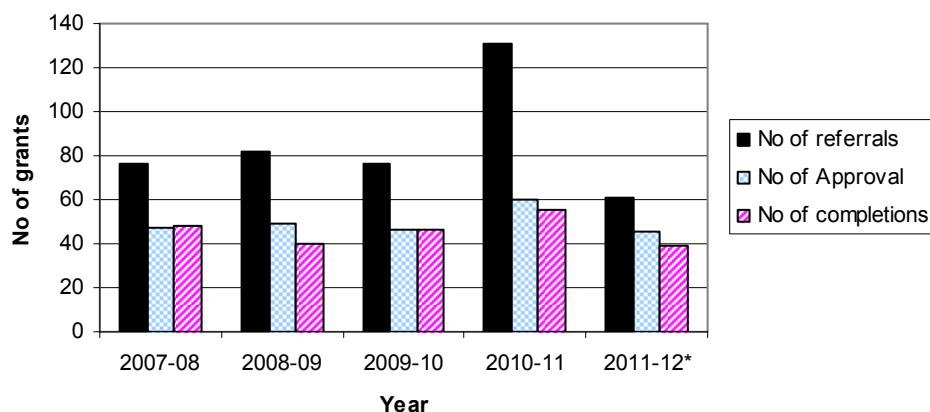
DFG Expenditure 2006 - 2012



* data complete to end of Jan 11

- 3.1.4 The current expenditure for the DFG programme for 2011-12 is in excess of £250,000 with a further potential expenditure of £70,000. In January 2012, the Department of Communities and Local Government announced additional funding for this financial year for the delivery of DFG's. Consequently the Council has received an additional £22,877 bringing the total budget for 2011-12 to almost £279,000. In previous years any overspend in the DFG budget has been met through any under-spend in the Private Sector Renewal budget.
- 3.1.5 The nature of the grant process means it can be very difficult to manage the annual budget. The grant application process can be complex and there are a number of external factors which can influence the length of time it takes to approve a grant. Once a grant has been approved the applicant has 12 months to carry out the work and delays can occur which are outside of the control of either the Council or the Home Improvement Agency.
- 3.1.6 In addition when a referral for a grant is made, each applicant, with the exception of grants for children or those on income related benefits are subject to a test of financial resources to determine if they have any contribution to make towards any assistance provided. As a result of this process a number of potential applicants fall outside of the scope of the DFG process as their contribution to any grant is too high. Consequently the number of referrals made to the Council by the Social Care and Health team does not reflect the number of grant approvals awarded in any given year. In addition the number of referrals made each year by Social Care and Health varies and whilst the Council does have an understanding of the general need for disabled adaptations through the House Condition Survey and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Harborough, the number of referrals is out of the control of the Council and consequently it is difficult to plan for the demand of the service on a year by year basis. This is reflected in the table below.

No DFG Approvals and Completions Compared to the number of referrals received



* data complete to end of Jan 12

3.1.7 The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment sets out a predicted 72% increase in residents aged 65 and over by 2025 living in Harborough district and a predicted rise of 77% in people over 65 having a limiting long term illness by 2025. In addition the population in Harborough of moderately to seriously physically disabled people aged 18-64 is set to rise by 2025. All of these factors are likely to have an impact on the need for the provision of disabled adaptations.

3.1.8 A recent House Condition Survey predicts that approximately £3,000,000 of investment will be required to meet the potential needs of the disabled population of Harborough over the next five year period.

3.2 DFG programme delivery

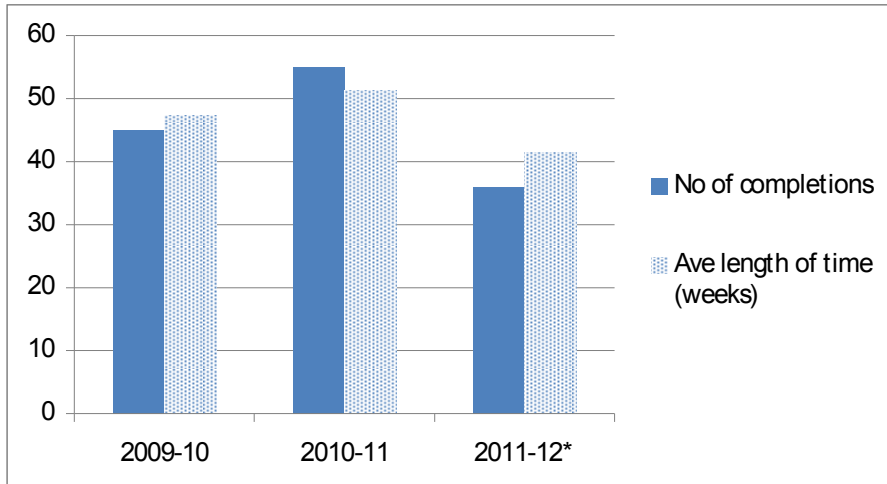
3.2.1 There are several interested parties involved throughout the grant process. The applicant is assessed by an Occupational Therapist to determine what the service user needs to enable them to remain living as independently as possible. Once the referral has been made from Social Care and Health, the Technical Officer, Occupational Therapist and the grant applicant must agree what works are feasible, practical and cost effective under the remit of the grant legislation to meet the needs of the disabled person. This process can sometimes be lengthy and delays can occur when for example the applicant goes into hospital or does not agree with the proposed scheme. The Countywide service standards reflect the complex nature of the process and a copy of the standards can be found in Appendix A.

3.2.2 Since 2008-09 the average length of time it takes to complete a grant has been monitored throughout the County. The grants are monitored against the following –

- Average length of time for all grants
- Average length of time for stairlifts
- Average length of time for bathing facilities

- Average length of time for major works (value of work in excess of £10,000)

The graph below shows the number of Disabled Facilities Grants that have been completed and the average length of time (in weeks) it takes for the work to have been completed from the receipt of the initial recommendation received from the Occupational Therapist.



*data to end of Jan 2012

The data can be broken down further to reflect the different types of work and the time taken for the works to be completed.

Works	YEAR			Direction of travel
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12*	
	Length of time – weeks	Length of time – weeks	Length of time – weeks	
Stairlifts	34.6	27.7	11.0	IMPROVING
Bathing facilities	44.6	52.5	27.1	IMPROVING
Major works (<£10K)	70.2	80.6	82.3	DETERIORATING

*data to end of Jan 2012

The Table above demonstrates that for each type of assistance the average length of time for the works to be completed has reduced in 2011-12 compared with the previous year. The major works are usually more complex cases and can be a lengthy process. The works can include the building of extensions which may require planning permission. During 2011-12, two complex cases have been completed which has resulted in a slight deterioration in the performance in this area.

- 3.2.3 For referrals received since April 2011 the introduction of the service standards has made it easier to monitor the progression of works and to enable all parties to identify any potential delay in the process at an early stage and to address any delay to reduce the impact on the customer. The service standards are seen to be challenging for all parties especially with the high demand for this service and the constraints of the budget and a target of 70% compliance was agreed.
- 3.2.4 For stairlifts there are 7 targets in the grant process under the control of either the HIA or the Council. 95% of all of the targets have been met to date and the average number of working days to complete the grant is 37 days compared to the service standard target of 55 days for non-urgent cases.

For the provision of suitable bathing facilities, 75% of the cases met each of the target areas for the process and the average number of working days to complete the grant is 112 days compared to the service standard target of 115 days for non-urgent cases.

- 3.2.5 One of the key aims of the introduction of the service standards was to reduce the overall length of time the service user has to wait for essential adaptations to be carried out to their property and to provide a framework for officers to identify any blockage in the process at an early stage. Whilst the number of completed cases being monitored against the service standards is still relatively low, the results do show a reduction in the length of time the client has to wait for work and the service standards have resulted in more joined up working with all parties involved in the delivery of the DFG programme.

3.3 Working with the Home Improvement Agency.

- 3.3.1 As discussed in paragraph 2.4 the core funding from the Council for the HIA has been removed. The HIA also receives funding from the Supporting People programme. There are currently three HIA's covering several locations across the County, however during 2011-12, Supporting People announced they would be consolidating their funding to support a single HIA working across the whole of the County. Consequently during 2012-13 the County Council will be undertaking a procurement exercise for this service. Without the funding from Supporting People, Mears Home Improvement Ltd could not provide a service just for Harborough and therefore it is necessary for Harborough District Council to undertake a joint commissioning exercise with the County Council for the continued delivery of the Council's DFG and Private Sector Renewal programme. It is anticipated that the new HIA will come into operation at the end of September 2012.

4 Equality Impact Assessment Implications/Outcomes (attach completed EIA)

- 4.1 An initial equality impact assessment was completed in April 2009 which concluded that the provision of a HIA would have a positive impact on client groups such as the elderly and disabled residents in the district. However a further impact assessment will be required as part of the procurement process for the new Home Improvement Agency contract.

5 Impact on Communities

- 5.1 The role of the Home Improvement Agency is to work with the most vulnerable households in the community to assist them in arranging for repairs and adaptations to be carried out to their properties and to enable them to live as independent lives as possible. The removal of this service will have an impact on this sector of the community as the grant process can be lengthy and complicated with different agencies involved with the process.

6 Legal Issues

- 6.1 The provision of Disabled Facilities Grants is mandatory under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

7 Resource Issues

- 7.1 The Capital Programme for 2012-13 sets out a budget of £100,000 for private sector housing loans and grants and a further £256,000 for disabled adaptations. However the figure for the DFG's is provisional and will be dependent on Government announcement on the allocation for Disabled Facilities Grants which is expected shortly.

8 Community Safety Implications

- 8.1 None identified

9 Carbon Management Implications

- 9.1 None identified

10 Risk Management Implications

- 10.1 The Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory. The additional resources a HIA can provide will ensure better business continuity and service delivery. From April 2011 county service standards for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants were introduced which provide a challenging framework but have resulted in improved timescales for the implementation of adaptation measures for referral received after the 1st April 2011. This reduces the likelihood of challenge by grant applicants on the local authority for the provision of this service.

- 10.2 There will be an annual benchmarking exercise undertaken across Leicestershire which will be reported through the County Chief Executives Group on the performance of the councils against the Disabled Facilities Grants service standards. By not having the resource of a HIA available it is anticipated that the Council's performance against the service standards will deteriorate.

11 Consultation

11.1 The Portfolio Holder has been advised on the work of the Home Improvement Agency and the outcome of the monitoring of the disabled facilities grant programme against the Countywide service standards.

12 Background Papers

12.1 Not applicable.

Previous report(s): Scrutiny Panel for People 31st March 2011 - Private Sector Housing – Disabled Adaptations and Private Sector Renewal

Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure: *N*

Appendices:

A. Disabled Facilities Service Standards