

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

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REASON FOR ITEM

At its meeting of the 16th December, Policy Overview requested officers to provide a background report relating to the availability of Disabled Facilities Grants in Hillingdon.

OPTIONS OPEN TO THE COMMITTEE

Officers are currently reviewing the issues of supply and demand in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants and are providing this report to Committee for information and comment.

INFORMATION

Amount of Grant and Reason for DFGs

1. Our 2008 Housing Needs Survey looked at the circumstances of households considered to have special needs. Special Needs are defined as including the frail elderly, disability, mental health and people with a severe sensory disability. Overall, 18,220 (17%) households in Hillingdon included one or more persons with a special need.
2. The survey also shows that over a third of owner-occupier households with no mortgage have at least one member with a special need. Over half of all special needs households include an older person or are households composed only of older people.
3. Clearly, with over 15,000 people who are either frail elderly, or who have a disability, there will be a consistent demand for assistance with both equipment and adaptations to the home.
4. Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory provided applicants meet certain statutory criteria. They are available to owner- occupiers, private and housing association tenants to allow adaptations to enable the person with a disability to live as safely and independently as possible. In practice, housing associations are expected to fund their own adaptations.
5. Adaptations to the home allow clients to live in a safe and adapted environment. They also prevent the need for expensive residential care or complex Care Packages in some cases.

6. For instance, in an exercise carried out 2 years ago, a sample of 25 complex Hillingdon cases with detailed Care Packages was selected. Some of these cases might otherwise have required residential care. Disabled Facilities Grants not only allowed people to remain at home, their preferred choice, but were also the most economic option. The DFG capital on these particular cases totaled £485k. Eight cases had no reduction in the Care Package. Of the 17 cases that did, there was a total annual Care Package saving of £625k. The break-even point for these cases was 41 weeks.

7. Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory for certain cases worth up to a limit of £30,000 and subject to a national statutory means test. Hillingdon also makes available 'top-up' grants, where essential and mandatory work takes the cost over the £30,000 limit. These are also means tested and the top-up is repayable on sale of the property.

Criteria and Process

8. Disabled Facilities Grants are governed by statutory criteria. They must be 'necessary and appropriate' for the needs of the client and 'reasonable and practical' in terms of costs and scope.

9. The client assessment side of these criteria is carried out by Occupational Therapists and the scope and costs of the work by Disabled Facilities Grants surveyors. Hillingdon Homes has its own team of surveyors doing similar work, generally to the same criteria, for Hillingdon Homes tenants in Council owned stock.

10. The client entry point is through Social Services where the initial assessment is carried out within the 28 day period. If a major adaptation is found necessary a referral is made to Housing, either as a Category 1 'urgent' case or a Category 2 'normal case'.

11. Category 1 cases are actioned wherever possible on arrival, and an appointment made with the Disabled Facilities Grant Officer and Occupational Therapist. The means test is carried out before this visit.

12. If resources allow, Category 2 cases are also actioned on arrival but, in practice, usually have to go on the waiting list as demand has exceeded the Disabled Facilities Grants budget in recent years. Again, the means test is carried out before the first visit.

Budgets and Outturn

13. Table 1 below shows DFG budgets and grants completed over the last 5 years. All the budgets were spent in full.

Table 1: DFG Budgets and Outturn

Year	Total Budget	Grants Completed
2005/2006	£1907k	122
2006/2007	£1938k	141
2007/2008	£2080k	196
2008/2009	£2350k	238
2009/2010	£2033k	208
2010/2011	(£3000k) Approved by Cabinet subject to Government contribution	

14. Of the completed DFGs for 2009/2010, 7 are Children's cases, 65 cases for Clients aged 19-59 and 136 cases for clients aged 60 or over.

Client Demand

15. Table 2 below shows referrals from Social Service for DFGs from 2006/2007.

16. The level of referrals has varied according to client demand for different types of assistance.

Table 2 : DFG Referrals From Social Services

Year	Cases Referred
2005/2006	350
2006/2007	278
2007/2008	259
2008/2009	317
2009/2010	135 to date

17. If the higher allocation of £3m is supported by the Government, the waiting list will be cleared during 2010/2011.

Waiting Times and Care Quality Commission Target of 25 weeks

18. The Care Quality Commission has a target measuring the time between referral to the Housing service for a grant or adaptation and approval of the Disabled Facilities Grant or adaptation. The target for Hillingdon is 25 weeks or under for both DFGs and adaptations carried out by Hillingdon Homes. The target was met in 2008/2009 at 21 weeks. For 2009/2010 it will be met again but at 23 weeks, reflecting the current need to keep a waiting list.

Client Feedback

19. Every completed Disabled Facilities Grant client and family receives a feedback questionnaire. This includes client satisfaction scores, which have remained at over 90% as 'satisfied or very satisfied' with their adaptation and approach of the Council.

20. A number of clients are visited at home each year to get a more detailed account of the work. In particular, approach of the contractor, arrangements made, communications, views on the grants officer etc. These are being completed at the moment.

21. During 2009/2010 client feedback meetings have also been held with DASH and Age Concern.

22. One issue raised by DASH was the affect of the statutory means test on a minority of cases. In particular, people on very low incomes, with no capital and substantial outgoings in the form of existing mortgages who find themselves excluded from grant aid, but unable to pay for the work to be done. This is similar to the position of the client who attended a recent POC and gave evidence on behalf of her husband, who needs stair lift.

23. Officers have since visited the client at home. We are reviewing all our grant polices at the moment and are looking at an equitable solution to this issue

Comparative Costs, Savings and Efficiencies

Hillingdon Costs

24. Table 3 below shows the average cost of Mandatory DFGs between 2002/2003 and 2008/2009. Costs have come down in cash terms by £1000 over the period. In real terms the reduction is very much higher given increases in building costs and general price inflation over the period. This has been

achieved by reducing specifications, use of tendered schedules of rates and bulk order contracts.

Table 3: Average Mandatory DFG Costs 2002/2003 to 2008/2009

Year	Average Grant
2002-2003	£ 10,657
2003-2004	£ 11,972
2004-2005	£ 10,059
2005-2006	£ 10,885
2006-2007	£ 10,926
2007-2008	£ 10,980
2008-2009	£ 9,695

25. The range of costs for work involved is shown by Table 4 below. Most grants are under £10,000, with only 10% over £20,000.

Table 4: Percentage of Grants within Certain Cost Ranges.

April 2007 to June 2009	Disabled Facilities Grant
Amount of grant paid	Jobs within this band of costs
Less than £5000	28%
£5000 to £10,000	41%
£10,000 to £20,000	22%
Over £20,000	10%
Total	100%

Comparative Disabled Facilities Grant Costs

26. It is not helpful to compare 'average' adaptation costs between boroughs as the stock profile and work carried out is very different. For instance, Bexley, which has an initial lower cost, includes all of its local authority stock within the DFG programme, and 70% of its work is walk- in showers only. Some other council's do not include, or charge, fees.

27. What is helpful to compare is like for like building costs and the scope of work included within DFGs. To this end a West London comparison exercise was carried out recently and the officer conducting the research also visited L.B. Wandsworth, which appeared an example of good practice. The summarised results of this exercise are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: West London Cost and Practice Exercise September 2009

Authority	West London Cost and Practice Exercise September 2009 Summary
Brent	Operate a system where everything is tendered, they do not have schedule of rates or bulk orders. The officers have a series of indicative costings to ensure the costs are reasonable. They use 3 contractors on the tender list. They don't do crossovers but they do hard standings. They were not able to provide costings for the indicative amounts used as they said every job in Brent is different.
Ealing	Do not operate a schedule of rates but wish to develop one equivalent to Hillingdon's. Their average DFG is currently £14K inclusive. They do crossovers and hardstandings. All DFGs are through their in-house agency. In an attempt to control costs a cabinet paper is being prepared with jobs over £30k being subject to a whole household means tested for any discretionary element.
Kensington And Chelsea	Use Shepherds Bush 'Staying Put' as the delivery vehicle for DFGs. Staying Put charge between 12.5% to 15%, depending on the size of the job.. They do not operate a schedule of rates but tender everything. The nature of the housing stock and planning controls means that most DFG work is walk-in showers. These have been coming in at between £6k-£6.5k. Recently prices have dropped by 10% to reflect market conditions.
Hammersmith and Fulham	They operate a system of schedule of rates and there are 8 contractors used in an in-house agency arrangement. The agency has to share the work with Staying Put Care and Repair. They do crossovers. The typical price for a walk in shower is £7-9K. All contractors work off a schedule of rates. LBH&F will not be approving any discretionary DFGs over £30,000 from 2010
Harrow	Have no schedule of rates but use a maximum combined discretionary/ mandatory DFG of £80k. There is little limit on the size of their DFG's at the moment. Most jobs are channelled through their in-house agency. The costs for walk in showers are coming in at £5-6k. They operate a list of 10 contractors and they carry out the full range of works similar to Hillingdon.

Wandsworth	A visit was carried out to Wandsworth. Their operation mirrors Hillingdon in many ways. They have a schedule of rates and all jobs are carried out through an in-house agency. However, one team carries out all the adaptations in the borough, for both the private and the local authority stock. They charge 20% fees through their agency. They add an extra means tested sum of £10k, as their maximum discretionary element above the £30k mandatory DFG. Their walk in showers cost between £6-7k.
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28. Part of this work involved cost comparisons. The results for stairlifts and through floor lifts are shown in Tables 6 and 7 below. Hillingdon had the second cheapest stairlift costs for DFGs, only £15 per stairlift less than the cheapest borough, and 23% cheaper than the average cost of a stairlift.

Table 6: West London Stairlift Costs 2007/2008 to 2008/2009

Average stairlift costs 07-09		
Ranking	Borough	Average cost
1	Brent	£ 3,125.00
2	Hillingdon	£ 3,139.53
3	H&F	£ 4,597.85
4	Harrow	£ 4,666.67
5	Hounslow	£ 4,923.69
6	Ealing	£ 5,500.00
Overall average (for all stairlifts in the boroughs in 07-09)		£ 4,078.58

29. A comparison on 'through floor lifts' shows that we were second equal in pricing for these. There is scope for keener pricing given Brent's notably lower cost, but this would have little overall impact due to the low numbers involved ((2 to 3 per year).

30. It was decided not to try to do a direct comparison of walk- in showers as each boroughs specification was very different. For instance, one borough includes full tiling, Hillingdon only part tiling etc. Also, Hillingdon does a much higher proportion of shower cubicles than those surveyed, which are considerably cheaper. Our cost for a basic shower cubicle is £3000 and £5,500 for a walk-in shower (from bulk order tender and schedule of rates costs)

31. Work is being carried out between West London boroughs to introduce consistency and bring down costs through economies of scale. In particular, on

a standard specification for stair lifts, with the intention of having one contract for the whole of West London. Partnering is also being considered.

32. A similar exercise will follow for walk-in showers, where only Hillingdon, Hammersmith and Kensington and Chelsea (Staying Put) use priced schedules of rates.

Table 7: West London Through Floor Lift Costs 2007/2008 to 2008/2009

Average through floor lift costs 2007-09			
Ranking	Borough	No Installed	Average cost
1	Brent	15	£ 8,333.33
2=	Hillingdon	4	£ 10,000.00
2=	Ealing	12	£ 10,000.00
4	Harrow	3	£ 10,666.67
5	Hounslow	3	£ 11,428.67
Overall average		37	£ 9,494.22

33. From both exercises and continuing West London work, the main conclusions that have emerged are:

- Hillingdon's costs give as good value for money, or better, than other boroughs. This is largely as a result of either schedules of rates or bulk order tenders for walk-in showers, shower cubicles, over bath showers, stairlifts and central heating, the main elements of DFG work.
- Our speed of processing has been greatly improved through the use of schedules of rates and bulk order contracts (as opposed to individual tendering)
- Further savings appear possible through West London tendering for stairlifts and walk-in showers. Partnering arrangements will form part of this exercise.
- Reducing non-essential elements in specifications where possible will further reduce costs
- Overall, Hillingdon parallels reasonably well with and the other West London Boroughs.

Potential Savings and Efficiencies

34. Real term reductions in costs have been achieved through the use of schedules of rates, bulk order tenders and improved specification. The

comparison exercises carried out show that Hillingdon's costs are as good value compared to other boroughs (and Tables 5 and 6).

Some other efficiencies being considered.

a) Reducing materials and equipment costs.

35. Specialist bathroom fittings for people with a disability, such as rails, wash basins and toilets, are already price controlled through a shared joint specification with Hillingdon Homes, and schedule of rates it was tendered upon.

36. However, there is scope to further reduce non- essential or very expensive specialist fittings. One company has just offered a 30% reduction in costs if we use their bathroom fittings and equipment, and they are already good value.

b) Reduce Grant Spent on Registered Social Landlords.

37. Last year we paid £260,000 in DFGs to RSLs. Current Communities and Local Government (CLG) guidance expects us to pay DFGs to RSLs, but this has been under review. A CLG announcement is imminent. It is anticipated that councils will be expected to pay for 60% of adaptation costs through DFGs and RSLs to pay for the remaining 40%.

38. This would bring a considerable saving in the Disabled Facilities Grants budget. Depending on the decision this could be in the region of £100,000, equivalent to 30 stairlifts.

BACKING DOCUMENTS

Hillingdon Housing Needs Survey 2008

SUGGESTED SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

Question the officers on the contents of this report.