

# **BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Report of Paul Claussen, Executive Member for Planning and Environment**

**To: Cabinet - 14 February 2012**

(Author: Gordon Partridge Principal EHO)

**Subject: Funding for Disabled Adaptations**

**Purpose:** To introduce a new form of funding to partially replace Disabled Facilities Grants

**Recommendation(s):** To approve a new form of grant aid called Reable, to replace Disabled Facilities Grants in some circumstances

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Adaptations to enable a disabled person to live as independently as possible in their own home are funded by a means-tested Disabled Facilities Grant, (DFG).

The Government has provided support funding through a bid based Specified Capital Grant, ring fenced to be spent only on DFGs, providing roughly 60% of projected spend with the other 40% made up from an Authority's own capital resources.

DFGs have a very prescribed, bureaucratic, process that has to be followed in order for a grant to be awarded and this means that the end to end process can take many months.

The Government has recently changed the rules so that, although nominally still bid based funding, the support funding is currently being allocated on an historical spend basis as part of an over all Housing Capital Grant and, therefore, not ring fenced for DFG spend.

Furthermore, the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 gives power to Local Housing Authorities to be able to devise their own, local, forms of assistance.

### **1.2 Issues**

The DFG process was conceived on the basis that all applicants would be means tested. However, the concept of passport benefits and non- means testing of parents of disabled children means that most applicants no longer go through that process. In 2010/2011 of 152 approvals only 11 applicants made any form of contribution.

Equally, over the years it is clear that many adaptations needed are small scale, mostly level access showers, stair-climbers and ramps. In 2010/2011 of the 152 approvals 139 were for less than £7000.

The DFG process is, therefore, unnecessarily bureaucratic and subsequently too temporally burdensome for the vast majority of cases dealt with. Applicants wait far too long for relatively simple works which can be completed in a few days. As the DFG process is a defined legal process it is not possible to eliminate any part of it nor to circumvent the necessity of consultation with the welfare authorities.

Experience with the locally derived Enhance and Restore grants has shown that it is possible to reduce considerably the amount of bureaucracy whilst still maintaining necessary financial probity.

### 1.3 Options

- 1) To use the powers in the Regulatory Reform order and the unhypothecated funding for adaptations provided through the Housing Capital Grant to create a new form of assistance, Reable, to deliver adaptation grants where the value of the work is less than £7000 and where the applicant is in receipt of a passport benefit or is a non-means tested applicant.
- 2) In cases where the cost of the work is expected to exceed £7000 or the applicant is required to go through means testing to continue to use DFGs as the preferred process.
- 3) Alternatively to continue to use DFGs for all adaptation grants.

### 1.4 Reasons for recommendations

The introduction of Reable will allow grants for adaptations to be processed far quicker and more flexibly than by using DFGs. This will significantly improve the efficiency of the adaption process thereby lowering unit costs per application from the Authority's aspect decreasing the cost of service provision. It is expected that contractor costs for carrying out the work will also decrease due to the improved efficiency eventually leading to lower costs of work.

## 2. IMPLICATIONS

### 2.1 Risk

I have completed a risk assessment in accordance with the Council's Risk Management methodology and the following risks and mitigating factors have been identified.

By not using the DFG process the recovery of monies implicit in the case of an applicant defaulting on the conditions will not be available. However, this power is rarely invoked and the limitation of 'Reable' to a maximum of £7000 in any one case significantly reduces risk.

The risk assessment indicates that if the recommendations are not implemented the following risks may occur.

Continuing to use DFGs for low value, non-means tested applications will not realise potential efficiencies to decrease service costs.

### 2.2 Financial

Breckland currently match funds 40%, (c. £269,000), of the total DFG budget. This should continue to be the case with Reable grants to ensure adequate funding to meet anticipated demand.

### 2.3 Legal

There are no legal implications

### 2.4 Equality and Diversity

Grants for adaptations ensure that vulnerable disabled persons are able to live and be cared for at home rather than being institutionalised. They and their families' quality of life are improved and their risk of further illness or injury is reduced.

### 2.5 Other

No other implications.

### **3. Alignment to Council Priorities**

- Work in partnership to combat crime, anti-social behaviour and Support vulnerable people
- Improve health, wellbeing and standards of living
- Improve productivity and deliver Value for Money

### **4. Wards/Communities Affected**

4.1 All

Background papers:- **None**

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#### **Key Decision**

**Yes**

**Appendices attached to this report: None**