

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

15 May 2006

Joint Report of the Director of Health and Housing and Cabinet Member for Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Council Decision

1 HOUSING ASSISTANCE/DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS REVIEW 2005/06 AND BUDGET ALLOCATIONS FOR 2006/07

Summary

This report provides members with an outline of the disabled facilities grants and housing assistance activity for 2005/06. Information is provided on expenditure, number of completions and approvals and general customer satisfaction with the service.

The report also details the budget allocation for both housing assistance and disabled facilities grants for 2006/07.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The following grants/assistance were available from the Council in 2005/06:

- Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs); and
- Discretionary Housing Assistance

1.2 Grant Expenditure 2005/06

1.2.1 A total of £597,000 was spent on mandatory DFGs during 2005/06. This is a 59 per cent increase on spend in 2004/05 at £376,000. This is primarily due to the increase in the number of completions of DFGs in the year at 129 compared to 83 completions last year. The Council received a subsidy from the Government of £307,000. This is not the full 60 per cent subsidy that normally applies to the mandatory grants and requests for further funding during 2005/06 have been unsuccessful.

1.2.2 A total of £51,000 was spent on all forms of discretionary housing assistance in 2005/06. This is a 50 per cent decrease in spend compared to the £101,000 spent in 2004/05 on discretionary grants. This low take up of discretionary assistance is a concern and will be addressed in the review of the housing assistance policy

when both eligibility of applicants and properties will be reconsidered in the light of the house condition survey results.

1.3 Number of completions and approvals

- 1.3.1 The following table shows the number of grant/housing assistance completions and approvals for the period 2005/06 and the previous year to allow comparisons to be made. In addition there were some discretionary renovation grants completed that were given under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (legislation prior to the Regulatory Reform Order 2002).

Type of Grant	Number Completed 2005/06	Number Completed 2004/05	Number Approved 2005/06	Number Approved 2004/05
Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants	129	83	100	123
Discretionary Housing Assistance	24	17	20	22
Outstanding Discretionary Renovation Grants	2	4	0	0

- 1.3.2 The increased number of completed DFGs reflects the increasing numbers of referrals from the Occupational Therapy Bureau (OTB). Although the number of approvals is slightly down on last year the OTB have informed us that the number of referrals is increasing. It is therefore expected that numbers of DFG approvals and completions will remain high for the foreseeable future.

1.4 Local Performance Indicator

- 1.4.1 The Council has a local performance indicator relating to housing assistance which is "the percentage of applications for housing assistance processed within 28 working days". In 2005/06 85 per cent of housing assistance applications were processed within 28 days (17 out of 20 cases). The maximum length of time it took to process an application was 33 working days.
- 1.4.2 Although not covered by a local performance indicator, for Members information, 95 per cent of applications for DFGs were processed within 28 working days (95 out of 100 cases).
- 1.4.3 The team will continue to strive to meet the 28 day target for processing all forms of grants/housing assistance and regular monitoring will continue.

1.5 Customer Satisfaction

- 1.5.1 At the completion of each DFG and housing assistance application, householders are surveyed to find out what they thought of the service they had received. The feedback is used to improve the service wherever possible. In 2005/06 we received 75 completed surveys for disabled facilities grants and 18 completed surveys for housing assistance, which is a 58 per cent and 75 per cent response rate respectively.
- 1.5.2 The applicants who had received a DFG from the Council were extremely satisfied with the service they received. Out of 71 respondents who answered the question "Has the adaptation(s) reduced the problem(s) you were experiencing?" 70 said yes. The one who replied 'no' considered his work had not been finished adequately but this was subsequently addressed by the Housing Association concerned. When asked overall how satisfied they were with the service they received from the Council in respect of their DFG on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) the average score, was 4.8.
- 1.5.3 In relation to housing assistance grants, the average score was 4.0.
- 1.5.4 While satisfaction levels are very encouraging, your officers will be working throughout the year to improve performance.

1.6 DFG budget 2006/07

- 1.6.1 Members will be aware that the Council's 2006/07 allocation for DFGs is £276,000. Regrettably this has not increased despite the Government announcement of an increase in overall budget to £121 million in England. We have written to the Government Office for the South East requesting additional resources following this announcement, as reported at the February 2006 Board.
- 1.6.2 We anticipate that spend on DFGs in 2006/07 will remain at a similar level to 2005/06 and we therefore require a subsidy in the region of £360,000, some £84,000 more than our current allocation. We are currently liaising with the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) and pressing for further subsidy during 2006/07. A further update for members will be provided at the meeting.

1.7 Housing Assistance budget 2006/07

- 1.7.1 The budget for discretionary housing assistance for 2006/07 is £160,000. In addition, the Council has recently been notified of a capital allocation for 2006/07 of £262,227 from the South East Regional Housing Pot. This is extremely good news and is awarded to support our private sector housing strategy. The Council has been allocated this money as a result of the last House Condition Survey

undertaken in 2000 when we reported that 7 per cent of the housing stock was unfit.

- 1.7.2 The 2006/07 capital allocation represents expenditure of £102,227 higher than that included in the Council's capital plan for 2006/07 approved by Council on 20 February 2006. This additional expenditure needs to be built into the capital plan.
- 1.7.3 It is intended to utilise this additional funding to support our housing assistance policy which is due to be reviewed in May/June 2006, once the final results of the house condition survey are known. Clearly we have an opportunity to broaden who can be assisted under the policy and the types of work with which we can assist.
- 1.7.4 A further report on the review of the housing assistance policy will be presented to members at the July 2006 meeting. However members should be aware that if an amended policy is not agreed until July 2006 and subsequently promoted in the following months, the allocation may be committed but not actually spent in 2006/07. It may be necessary therefore to roll over the provision into 2007/08 subject to GOSE also allowing the funding to be rolled forward to the following year. We take the view it is better to spend this funding wisely rather than early.

1.8 Legal Implications

- 1.8.1 The Council is under a statutory duty to provide DFGs under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.9.1 The Council has received a capital allocation of £262,227 for 2006/07 to support the private sector housing strategy. It is recommended that this be used to further private sector renewal activities and that the capital plan be amended accordingly.
- 1.9.2 There is presently the risk that the subsidy received from Government for mandatory DFGs will not equate to 60 percent of the spend that the Council will incur for 2006/07. This would result in either the Council funding more than 40 percent of expenditure on DFGs from its own capital resources or the Council delaying approval of DFGs in order to manage spend within the allocated budget. Clearly the second option would result in the delay of much needed adaptations being provided to those residents most in need.

1.10 Risk Assessment

- 1.10.1 The Council will be failing in its statutory duty if DFGs are not provided.

1.11 Recommendations

- 1.11.1 That Cabinet **RECOMMENDS** to Council that the capital allocation of £262,227 for 2006/07 is used to support the Council's private sector renewal activities and that the capital plan provision is amended from £160,000 to £262,227.

Background papers:

contact: Linda Hibbs

Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing

Councillor Nicolas Heslop
Cabinet Member for Housing