

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

8 October 2007

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 UPDATE ON DISABLED FACILITIES CONSULTATION PAPER

Summary

This report updates Members of the responses to the consultation paper published by Communities and Local Government (CLG) on the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Programme. The Council's response to the consultation appears consistent with the majority of other respondents. Government have acknowledged these points and concluded that further work on the proposals has to be undertaken in order to improve the delivery of the DFG programme.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Members will recall the reports to the February and May meetings of this Board, which highlighted key features of the consultation paper "Disabled Facilities Grant Programme: The Government's proposals to improve programme delivery" and the Council's response to this paper.
- 1.1.2 Members will recall that the proposals were wide ranging and if adopted in their entirety would have a major impact on the way DFG's are provided and resourced in the future.
- 1.1.3 During August 2007 the Government issued a "summary of responses" paper providing feedback on the proposals and an interim response ahead of the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2007. A total of 253 responses were received by the Government on the consultation paper.

1.2 Summary of responses

- 1.2.1 The consultation proposed increasing the maximum grant limit of £25,000 to £30,000, then to £50,000 in stages if evidence shows that local authorities are realising sufficient offsetting savings through using proposed powers to reclaim DFG. The Council welcomed the proposed increase in the grant limit to assist in more extensive schemes, however concerns were expressed that adequate funding would be needed to cover this and this was unlikely to be achieved through reclaiming DFG. The responses received by Government reflected the

Council's concerns and they have agreed that the increase to £30,000 will be considered subject to securing adequate funding to resource the proposal over the long term. A further increase to £50,000 will be subject to more work on the potential for charges to support this increase including how such changes may be phased in.

- 1.2.2 The Council indicated in its response that it was unclear why children's DFG work should be exempt from any proposed repayment charges as these tend to be for larger works which can add considerable value to a property. In the majority of responses there was significant opposition to adaptations for children being excluded from charging, for the same reasons given by this Council.
- 1.2.3 The consultation paper invited views on changes to the means test in order to help target assistance to those most in need. The majority of respondents supported these. Passporting through applicants in receipt of certain means tested benefits received overwhelming support, and reflects this Council's position. The Council also welcomed the proposal to include recognition of actual housing costs and again this was widely supported by respondents.
- 1.2.4 The proposal to issue new guidance to Regional Assemblies (RA's) to ensure regional housing strategies have a more explicit policy on adaptations as well as a more strategic and coherent approach to accessible housing was generally supported. However feedback received by Government reflected this Council's concerns that RA's were far too removed to be able to take full account of needs at a district level, particularly if they are to exercise greater influence over the allocation of available funding.
- 1.2.5 In relation to housing associations (HAs), the consultation paper proposed simplification of funding with the current funding under the Housing Corporation for adaptations being incorporated into the DFG programme. The paper also proposed that HAs should seek to reach local agreements with local authorities in relation to major housing adaptations with a view to sharing the cost. The Council commented that a stronger stance with housing associations on the sharing of costs for adaptations was needed and suggested a 50/50 split along with a fallback position if local agreement could not be reached. Our concerns were reflected in the overall consultation feedback which expressed concern that there was no mandatory requirement for HAs to contribute towards the cost of adaptations.

1.3 Way forward

- 1.3.1 The Government have committed to carrying out further work on taking the proposals forward. They acknowledge that some proposed changes have cost implications and decisions about these cannot be made until the Comprehensive Spending Review is completed. The consultation process also recognised that existing demand for DFG's has generated pressures on the programme, and

raised concerns that any changes the Government introduces must be sufficiently funded, and not cause additional strain on the current system.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 Disabled Facilities Grants are a mandatory grant and under the consultation paper it is proposed to continue this duty on the local authority.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 As detailed in this report, a number of the proposals do have financial implications and could place a greater demand on the Council's financial resources.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 None arising from this report.

Background papers:

contact: Linda Hibbs

Nil

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing