

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

20 July 2009

Report of the Director of Health and Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

Summary

This report updates Members on the current spend against the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) budget, the ongoing discussions with Russet Homes and provides more information on the children's cases currently in the DFG process.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Members will recall the reports to previous meetings of this Board which have highlighted the severe pressure on the DFG budget. Discussions have been underway with Russet Homes to reduce the demand from their tenants on the Council's budget. A notional allocation of £350,000 of the 2009/10 DFG budget has been endorsed by this Board and Cabinet for expenditure on Russet Homes properties. This is seen as an interim measure pending further dialogue on a longer term solution.
- 1.1.2 Members will also recall at the last meeting of this Board concerns were expressed about the long waiting times for Occupational Therapy assessments for children within Tonbridge & Malling.
- 1.1.3 The original DFG budget for 2009/10 was £561,000. This is made up of £360,000 Government allocation and £201,000 Council funding. However there was an overspend against the DFG budget in 2008/09 of £67,000 which was covered by pulling forward from the 2009/10 DFG budget so the revised budget for 2009/10 is £494,000.

1.2 DFG spend in 2009/10

- 1.2.1 As of 25 June 2009 the spend against the DFG budget is £135,000. A further £365,000 has been committed i.e. approved but not yet paid, the vast bulk of which is expected to be spent in this financial year.
- 1.2.2 The combined total of spend and outstanding commitment on Russet Homes tenants' applications is nearing their £350,000 notional allocation limit. I have

therefore requested that Russet Homes do not submit any further DFG applications in respect of their tenants. Once the Council accepts a valid DFG application we are legally required to either approve or refuse it within six months irrespective of any allocation agreement. This position will be closely monitored as the year progresses and further applications invited towards the year end.

- 1.2.3 I have asked Russet Homes for confirmation that as their cases reach application stage from now on they will continue to ensure works are progressed utilising their own budget. This will prevent a build up of cases awaiting approval under the DFG route as was the case from 2008/09 leading into this current year.
- 1.2.4 I will carefully monitor the ongoing spend and commitment of the DFG budget in respect of all other cases (owner occupiers/private rented and other housing associations) in order to control final expenditure and further reports to this Board will update Members on the position.
- 1.2.5 Further discussions are ongoing with Russet Homes to reach a long term solution to the continuing high demand on the DFG budget from their tenants. A Kent wide group has also been set up, led by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, to discuss the funding of adaptations for Registered Social Landlords. We are attending the group, which should inform our future discussions with Russet Homes.
- 1.2.6 Members will be aware that there have been increased delays in approvals of DFGs due to the suspension of approvals in October 2008 to control the DFG spend and a period of catch up. I am pleased however to report that the average time taken to approve DFGs since April 2009 is 23 working days which is well within our target of 28 working days.

1.3 Children's cases

- 1.3.1 Members will recall that at the last meeting concerns were raised about the current waiting time for children/young persons for an Occupational Therapy assessment. The assessment can form the first part of the DFG process in that if the Occupational Therapist (OT) determines a DFG is the way forward a referral is made to the Council for the DFG. Clearly if the family has already been waiting for some significant time for the assessment they can already be feeling unhappy about the whole situation and further delays in the process can quickly lead to complaints. In the case of children, delays can occur due to changing needs, complications in schemes (tend to be large schemes such as extensions) and obtaining the necessary funding (tend to be the more expensive schemes requiring additional top up funding beyond the £30,000 DFG limit).
- 1.3.2 There are currently 23 children/young persons DFG cases being progressed by the Council. A breakdown is provided below:
- thirteen cases still have schemes to be agreed and/or costed;

- one case is the subject of an application to be determined by the Council (£30,000 DFG limit);
- six cases have applications approved and works are in progress; and
- three cases are being concluded in terms of snagging works and payments.

1.3.3 The vast majority of the cases in the system date from 2006 onwards with a couple of older cases where schemes are being brought to a close. At least seven of these cases have been or will be the maximum grant limit. In these cases parents are advised early on that the scheme may exceed the maximum grant limit and therefore additional funding may be required. This funding may come from a number of sources, for example, savings, loan, Kent County Council Home Support Fund or charities. The Home Improvement Agency can offer assistance in securing additional funding.

1.3.4 As requested by Members at the last meeting of this Board, I have written to the Managing Director of Children, Families and Education at Kent County Council to ask for confirmation on the current position of the waiting list for OT assessments for children in Tonbridge & Malling. I have asked for an assurance that measures have or are being put in place to address delays. I will update Members further on the response received at the meeting.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 DFGs are a mandatory grant. The Council is legally required to either approve or refuse a DFG application within six months of receiving a valid application.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 The revised DFG budget for 2009/10 is £494,000.

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Where the Council has to delay approvals as a method of controlling expenditure, applicants' adaptation works cannot go ahead which could be leaving residents at risk of injury or unable to live independently and jeopardising their quality of life.

Background papers:

contact: Linda Hibbs

Documents held on the subject file in Housing Services

John Batty
Director of Health and Housing