

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

10 November 2020

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 UPDATE ON DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT BUDGET AND SPEND

Summary

This report gives an update on spend against the 2020/21 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) budget and advises how changes on distribution of this money are being built into the Estimates process.

The proposed changes to the distribution of funding, which are being reflected in the forthcoming Estimates process, provide a degree of certainty regarding funding for the approved social care capital projects in the current financial year, as well as an option to fund hospital discharge/handypersons costs in 2021/22.

The proposals within this report aim to deliver a saving of £125,000 against the original 2020/21 budget for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's).

Members should note that the proposed changes to the budget will be incorporated in the budget setting process covering revised Estimates for 2020/21 and the Estimates for 2021/22.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 DFGs are a mandatory grant awarded by the local housing authority to provide adaptations in the home (such as stair lifts, level access showers and ramping) to enable people to remain independent in their own home. They are available for both children and adults and across all tenure types, such as owner occupied, housing association or private rented homes.
- 1.1.2 The mandatory element is a means tested grant with a maximum award of £30,000.
- 1.1.3 The funding for DFGs is awarded through the Better Care Fund, which requires the NHS and local government to create a local single pooled budget to incentivise closer working around people, placing their wellbeing as the focus of

health and care services and shifting resources into social care and community services for the benefit of the people, communities and health and care systems.

- 1.1.4 The Better Care Fund grant goes to Kent County Council (KCC) who in turn are required to pass onto districts the DFG funding element. This money must only be used by the Council for the specific purpose of providing adaptations for disabled people who qualify under the DFG scheme or to fund the approved social care capital projects, such as the hospital discharge scheme, handyperson scheme and the One You Your Home scheme.
- 1.1.5 For 2020/21, TMBC's Better Care Fund allocation was £1,025,691 after KCC top-sliced £159,020 for funding of equipment and minor adaptations, which is done county wide to benefit from economies of scale.
- 1.1.6 The Council originally set a total DFG budget of £1,298,000 for 2020/21, which includes funds carried forward (£137,000) from 2019/20's budget and a further £125,000 funded by the Council.
- 1.1.7 The Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it unprecedented challenges for the various agencies and contractors involved with delivering adaptations to people in need of these.
- 1.1.8 The various measures taken and restrictions imposed, such as the shielding of vulnerable persons and restrictions on non-essential travel and human interaction, coupled with additional health and safety precautions designed to reduce the risk of infection and spreading of coronavirus, have inevitably reduced the number of new DFG applications being received in the first half of this year compared to what was anticipated. Staff from the Home Improvement Agency have been furloughed during the pandemic as a response to the drop off in business. In addition Occupational Therapy staff will have been responding to the pandemic in a different way as part of the KCC response.
- 1.1.9 The Council received 45 new valid applications for DFGs between 1 April 2019 and 30 September 2019, compared to just 16 for the same period this financial year.
- 1.1.10 As at 31 August 2020, the Council had spent £142,000 funding adaptations, with a further commitment of £417,000. The sum of these figures is £559,000, equating to 43% of the total budget allocation for the year.
- 1.1.11 In consultation with our finance colleagues, it is recommended that the capital plan for 2020/21 is amended on mandatory DFGs to £900,000. This will be incorporated into the Estimate papers that will be considered initially by the Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board in January 2021.
- 1.1.12 It is suggested that the remaining £398,000 should be distributed as follows.

- 1.1.13 It is proposed that £89,000 is used to fund the hospital discharge/ handypersons costs in for the current financial year. The funding for this scheme was originally planned to come from the Housing Assistance reserve however it seems appropriate to now fund from the BCF allocation.
- 1.1.14 It should be noted by Members that the cost apportioned to each of the three local authorities regarding the hospital discharge scheme are reviewed on an annual basis based on actual usage by residents, therefore the costs of these schemes will fluctuate from year to year.
- 1.1.15 It is proposed that £16,600 is used to fund the One You Your Home scheme for the current financial year. A commitment to this scheme was given for the first six months and this has now ended. Again the funding for this scheme was originally planned to come from the Housing Assistance reserve however it seems appropriate to now fund from the BCF allocation.
- 1.1.16 It is proposed that we use £90,000 of underspend this year to enable the funding of the hospital discharge and handypersons schemes in 2021/22. At a time when there is significant need to ensure early liaison between hospitals and housing over discharges to prevent the need for temporary accommodation wherever possible along with the ongoing need to work with health on ensuring timely and safe hospital discharges Officers consider that there are significant prevention benefits involved in this scheme continuing. Discussions regarding a contribution from health towards the scheme (as recommended in the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Committee) did commence however the pandemic clearly diverted attention. Officers will be picking up these discussions again and will report back to Members with any progress.
- 1.1.17 It is further proposed that we allocate £77,400 from this year's underspend into 2021/22 mandatory DFG budget to provide a buffer for currently unknown negative impacts regarding the level of funding allocation from central Government, potentially coupled with increased numbers of new DFG applications.
- 1.1.18 It is recommended that the £125,000 which is the Council's contribution towards DFGs is offered up for this year (2020/21) as part of the in-year savings requirement.
- 1.1.19 A summary of the above is provided at **Annex 1**.
- 1.1.20 It is difficult to predict what our funding allocation from central Government will be for 2021/22. Furthermore, we will receive an increased level of new DFG applications in 2021/22 as services return to normal. Currently the capital plan estimates are being prepared having regard to the wider financial picture, and these will be considered by Management Team before being presented to the Finance, Innovation & Property Advisory Board.

1.2 Legal Implications

- 1.2.1 DFGs are a mandatory grant scheme which local authorities are required to administer.

1.3 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.3.1 The proposals within this report switch the funding of the social care capital projects in the current financial year from the Housing Assistance reserve to the Better Care Fund allocation, as well as providing an option to fund hospital discharge/ handypersons costs in 2021/22. These proposals are being incorporated into the estimates which will be presented to Members in the New Year.
- 1.3.2 Members should note that proposals within this report will deliver a saving of £125,000 against the original 2020/21 budget for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's).

1.4 Risk Assessment

- 1.4.1 The level of funding each year through the BCF is uncertain. Any shortfall on BCF allocation is likely to represent budget growth, impacting the corporate funding gap and the savings and transformation target.
- 1.4.2 Prior to the pandemic the Council was experiencing increasing demand on the mandatory DFG budget. It is expected that the current low level of demand on this budget will only last for the short term.
- 1.4.3 Reducing or withdrawing funding for the approved social care capital projects will likely have an impact on other statutory services provided by the Council and their associated budgets. For example, The West Kent Hospital Discharge scheme and handyperson services enable better planning and management of patient's leaving hospital. This joined up approach increases patient safety and wellbeing as well as preventing future demand for more extensive works funded from the mandatory DFG budget. Planning and managing hospital discharge this way prevents patients needing to be provided with temporary accommodation by the Council, which as Members are aware is a growing pressure on the Council's budget.

1.5 Recommendations

- 1.5.1 Members are **RECOMMENDED** to **NOTE** the following revisions that are being incorporated into the 2020/21 Revised Estimates and 2021/22 Estimates which are due to be presented during the forthcoming budget cycle:
- 1) Amend the 2020/21 capital plan provision for mandatory DFGs to £900,000;

- 2) Use £89,000 to fund the hospital discharge/ handypersons costs for the current financial year 2020/21;
- 3) Use £16,600 to fund the One You Your Home scheme for the current financial year 2020/21;
- 4) Use £90,000 of underspend this year to enable the funding of hospital discharge/ handypersons costs in 2021/22; and
- 5) Allocate £77,400 from this year into 2021/22 mandatory DFG budget to provide a buffer for an unknown allocation from central Government moving forwards.

1.5.2 Members should further **NOTE** that £125,000 of Council's own funding for DFGs in 2020/21 will be removed during the update of the Capital Plan, and this can be viewed as in in-year saving.

The Director of Planning Housing and Environmental Health confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

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Nil

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