



**SEAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT COVER SHEET**

<b>Title of Report:</b>	Disabled Facilities Grants – 6 monthly Update	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
<b>Meeting of:</b>	Corporate Management Team [DATE]	
	Pre Cabinet [DATE]	
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group [DATE]	
	Cabinet [DATE] / Council [DATE]	
	Scrutiny Value for Money Council Committee- 17 January 2024	



<b>Is this an Executive Decision:</b>	NO	<b>Is this a Key Decision:</b>	NO
<b>Is this in the Forward Plan:</b>	[YES/NO]	<b>Is the Report Confidential:</b>  <b>If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:</b>	NO  [ ]

**Essential Signatories:**

**ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE**

Monitoring Officer: **John Teasdale**

Date ..... Signature .....

Interim Chief Finance Officer: **Stephen Fitzgerald**

Date ..... Signature .....

**EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Report to Scrutiny Value for Money Council Committee**

**Date: 20 December 2023**

**REPORT TITLE: Disabled Facilities Grants – 6 monthly Update**

**PORTFOLIO:**

**CHIEF OFFICER: John Teasdale**

**CONTACT OFFICER: Rachel Liddle Ext. No. x1838**

**WARD(S) AFFECTED: All**

**1. Purpose of the Report**

1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide a progress update on the Disabled Facilities Grant Service.

**2. Executive Summary**

2.1. The current in-house Disabled Facilities Grant Service began on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 which aimed to provide significant benefits for service users by reducing the time taken to undertake adaptations and the costs currently associated with administering Disabled Facilities Grants through the use of an approved contractor and reduced administrative costs.

2.2. The DFG service administers the full DFG process through the provision of support, information and advice; completion of application forms and the collation of supporting evidence; technical advice, preparation of schedules of works and drawings; application of planning permission and building regulations approval; advice on funding the adaptation if not fully met by the grant; obtaining contractor quotes; arrangement and agreement of work commencement dates; supervision of the relevant works and payment of contractors. A Disabled Facilities Grants and Assistance Policy was adopted providing discretionary assistance through top up grants and grants to assist clients to move to an adapted home.

- 2.3. Whilst the full DFG process is complex the in-house DFG service has been designed to be as simple as possible, and constantly reviewed to reduce delays. This has resulted in a significant reduction in DFG process timescales from 362 days for cases handled by the previous provider in 2017/18 to 240 days for cases handled by the in-house DFG team in 2022/23.
- 2.4. The number of approvals and completions have increased annually along with expenditure which is currently exceeding the amount of DFG grant received from government.
- 2.5. A customer satisfaction questionnaire has been incorporated into the service which reviews the level of service that is provided by the different services that are involved in the process and considers the impact of the DFG on the service user. To date the majority of responses rate the service as good or very good and over 90% of respondents feel safer in their home as a result of the DFG.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1. East Staffordshire Borough Council has a statutory duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to provide financial assistance to disabled people for a range of essential adaptations to their home through a Disabled Facilities Grant.
- 3.2. A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is available to owner occupiers, private sector tenants and registered social landlord tenants to enable adaptations to be carried out in their own home to meet disability needs. This service is available for adults and children. The purposes for which mandatory disabled facilities grants may be given are set out in section 23(1) of the 1996 Act. The primary purpose is to facilitate access and provision, this includes work to remove or help overcome any obstacles which prevent the disabled person from moving freely into and around the dwelling and enjoying the use of the dwelling and the facilities or amenities within it.
- 3.3. A DFG is a mandatory grant and in accordance with its statutory obligations the Council must either approve or, for defined reasons, refuse applications within six months of receipt and in any event without unreasonable delay.
- 3.4. In 2013, East Staffordshire Borough Council procured a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) Service in partnership with Staffordshire County Council which was delivered across the County and within the Borough. Following a 1 year extension the contract ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.
- 3.5. An options appraisal was undertaken in 2018 which recommended the provision of an in-house Disabled Facilities Grant service to provide significant benefits for service users and the Council by adopting a more personalised approach to service delivery, seeking to reduce delivery times and costs through 'smarter' service provision and reduced administration.
- 3.5. The in-house DFG service began in April 2018. The team consists of one Support Officer, three Adaptations Officers and a Housing Technical Officer.

One Adaptations Officer is a temporary post that was added in 2021 in response to the increased demand. An Occupational Therapist consultancy is used to identify the adaptation that is required for each client and two approved contractors undertake the required adaptations.

- 3.6. A Disabled Facilities Grants and Assistance Policy was adopted which encompasses:
- Full delivery of an adaptation from initial enquiry through assessment to delivery.
  - Delivery by an integrated team including Adaptations Officers, Technical Officer, an approved list of Occupational Therapists, and an approved Contractor.
  - Provision of support and advice that the current HIA service provides
  - Provision of discretionary assistance to provide top-up grants, fund unforeseen works or issues of disrepair or to assist relocation.

#### **4. Contribution to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1. Creating a prosperous East Staffordshire- The provision of a disabled facilities grant is a key component in delivering the Government's objective of providing increased levels of care and support to disabled and vulnerable people to help them live independently and safely in their own homes.
- 4.2. Standing up for our communities- The DFG service aims to secure improvements in the speed of delivery of disabled facilities grants and secure cost efficiencies through reduced service costs.

#### **5. Disabled Facilities Grant Report**

- 5.1. The DFG service aims to provide an effective and efficient service that makes best use of DFG funding using a personalised approach to service delivery, seeking to reduce delivery times and costs through smarter service provision and reduced administration.
- 5.2. Since bringing the DFG service in-house in 2018, the number of approvals and completions have continued to increase, along with expenditure which is currently exceeding the amount of annual DFG funding received.

*Table 1- DFG Approvals, Completions & Spend*

	Number of DFGs Approved	Number of DFGs Completed	Total DFG Spend
22/23	74	75	£1,162K
21/22	67	65	£973K
20/21	59	49	£741K
19/20	44	35	£581K
18/19	16	32	£253K
17/18	88	77	£782K

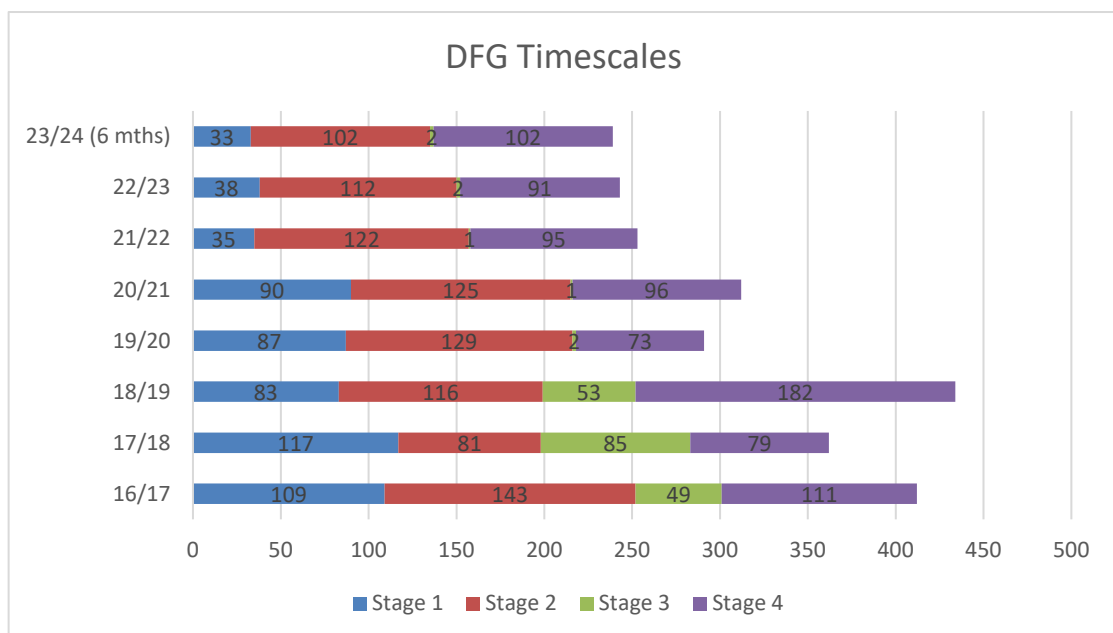
- 5.3. Throughout the process of delivery the dates of the following key stages are used to measure performance as detailed in Table 2:

Stage	Description
Stage 0- Initial Enquiry	Initial notification requesting a DFG. If 1 care need then client directed to the ESBC contracted OT. If a child's case or a Trent and Dove resident then the client is directed to Staffordshire County Council or Trent and Dove.
Stage 1- Referral	Referral received detailing the full adaptation that is required to meet the client's needs.
Stage 2- Application	The Adaptations Officers will process an application on behalf of the client. This involves obtaining ownership details of the property, tenant and/or owner permission certificates, financial checks or proof of benefits, drawing up plans and schedules of works, obtaining planning permission and/or building control approval if required, and contractor quotes.
Stage 3- Approval	A full and valid application is considered by the Head of Service for approval. Once approved the works can commence.
Stage 4- Completion	The adaptation has been completed and the works meet the requirements set by the OT. Certificates are obtained from the client, OT, building control (if required) along with any required certificates for electrical work etc and the contractor is paid.

Table 2- DFG Stages

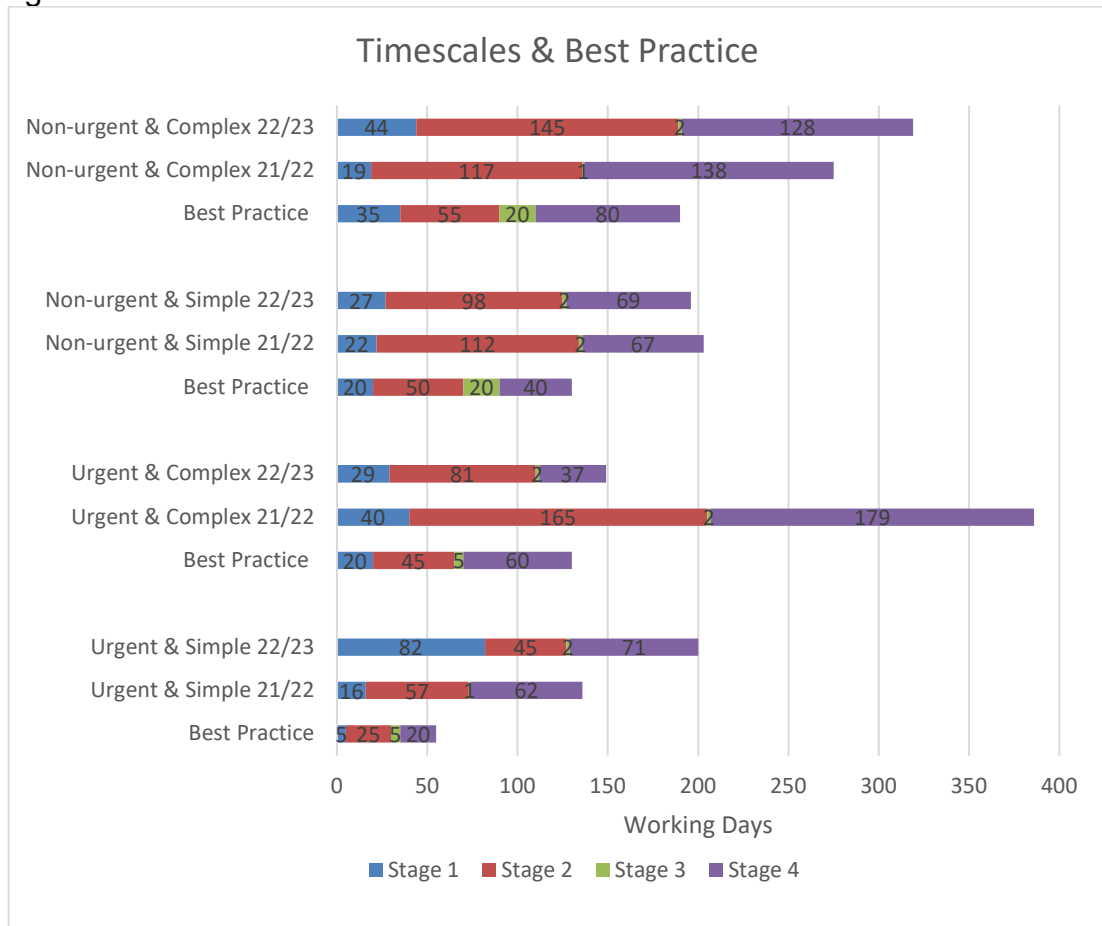
### Timescales

- 5.4. The graph in figure 1 shows the timescales associated with the different stages of the entire DFG process for the previous 7 years. Compared to 21/22 the timescales for 22/23 have reduced from 250 to 240, a reduction of 4%.



- 5.5. The graph also demonstrates an ongoing reduction in timescales since bringing the DFG service in house, despite a slight increase in 2020/21 due to Covid and significant delays associated Trent and Dove and Children's OT cases.

- 5.6. A corporate target has been introduced to improve DFG delivery timescales by 10% on 2022/23 figures; this will be reported in 24/25.
- 5.7. One of the key aims of the service is to reduce the timescales associated with the delivery of a DFG. The DFG is therefore monitored against a range of prescribed statutory and best practice performance indicators as detailed in figure 2 below:



- 5.8. Whilst the overall timescales have reduced key stages within the overall DG process remain in excess of the best practice guidance.
- 5.9. Previous reviews have highlighted a number of challenges causing delays within the DFG process, and whilst these have been addressed, the data for 22/23 contains some older cases that will have these historic delays within the timescale. The impact of Covid 19 on these cases is one of the biggest delays along with client delays.

**Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires**

- 5.10. Customer satisfaction questionnaires were introduced in July 2023 and to date we have received 12 responses from 17 completed DFG cases. This is a return rate of 71%.

- 5.11. Improved Health & Wellbeing- 92% of clients said that the DFG had improved their health and wellbeing, enabling them to live independently and 83% said they felt less likely to have an accident at home as a result. 92% said that it was unlikely or very unlikely that they would have had the work carried out without the grant.
- 5.12. Quality of Service- 92% of clients said that the service provided by the occupational therapist was good or very good; 92% stated that the performance of the case worker was good or very good and 75% stated that they found the contractors work good or very good.
- 5.13. Further breakdown of the questionnaires is provided in Appendix 1.

### **Staffing Proposals**

- 5.14. In 2022 Cabinet approved an amendment to the staffing profile of the service. This resulted in a team of one support officer, two adaptations officers and a housing technical officer which are all permanent positions and one temporary adaptations officer that was extended to 31 March 2025.
- 5.15. The current staffing levels have resulted in a reduction in stage 2 of the DFG process, and this is continuing to reduce. Additional resources are therefore not currently recommended, however the temporary post may be considered for extension following a further review of the service.
- 5.16. The expenditure of the DFG service exceeded the amount of DFG grant received from government in 2022/23, and whilst there is a significant budget due to previous years carry forward it is important that expenditure is carefully monitored to prevent overspend.
- 5.17. This will ensure that the cost of delivering the service is efficient but effective and will ensure that expenditure is not at a level that causes a financial risk to the council.

## **6. Financial Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: James Hopwood*

- 6.1. The main financial issues arising from this report are as follows:
- 6.2. The DFG funds the capital programme scheme, which delivers the required works. The grant is also provided on the basis that it is ring-fenced to fund the equipment and adjustments that are required in residents' homes. When the Capital Programme scheme is not fully spend in year, both funding and the related scheme is carried forward into the next year in accordance with the ring-fencing.



- 6.3. One of the reason that the Capital Programme scheme is not fully spent in year, is that there is a time delay between the Council making the grant award to the householder and the capital works then being completed.
- 6.4. The table below summarises the Capital Programme scheme for DFG works and the carry forwards at the end of each year.

	From Monitoring	From Monitoring	From Monitoring	Ledger	
Year	Brought Forward Grant	Grant	Budget	Expenditure	Carry Forward
	£	£	£	£	£
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
					(d less e)
2018/19	194,378	947,755	1,142,133	253,450	888,683
2019/20	888,683	1,022,684	1,911,367	581,896	1,329,471
2020/21	1,330,328	1,160,392	2,490,720	740,582	1,750,138
2021/22	1,750,138	1,160,392	2,910,530	973,981	1,936,549
2022/23	1,936,549	1,160,392	3,096,941	1,161,853	1,935,088
2023/24	1,935,088	1,160,000	3,095,087	-	-

## 7. Risk Assessment and Management

- 7.1. The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:
- 7.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):
- 7.2.1. Reduced administrative costs through the provision of a cost effective in-house disabled facilities grant service.
- 7.2.2. Reduced timescales involved in the delivery of adaptations providing a reduction in delays.
- 7.2.3. Increased number of adaptations delivered to clients resulting in reduced social care and health costs, a reduction of accidents in the home and increasing the number of people that are able to remain in their own home.
- 7.2.4. Ability to provide a service that is responsive to local needs of the borough residents.

7.2.5. The provision and use of a Council approved contractor procured through a tender process providing consistent approach to adaptations.

7.2.6. Cost recovery of services permissible under the Housing Grants (Services and Charges) Order 1996.

7.3. **Negative** (Threats):

7.3.1. Covid 19 restrictions can delay or prevent visits and adaptations to properties- this has had a significant impact on delivery for 2020/21 and is a risk for future delivery. The use of remote assessments and case work is being used to negate this risk, along with improved reporting of restrictions for specific clients.

7.3.2. Reduced or insufficient funding received from MHCLG and passporting of money from Staffordshire County Council reducing the ability to provide grants, resulting in additional delays to the current service.

7.3.3. The council is unable to recover VAT on Disabled Facility Grant work and is reliant on the contractor ensuring the maximum number of invoices are zero rated as possible. This used to be the agency responsibility to arrange but will now be directly chargeable against the capital grant where incurred.

7.3.4. Increasing the amount available as discretionary grant (top up monies) reduces the overall amount available for mandatory grants.

7.3.5. Additional demands on the service due to the effects of long Covid on clients that may need to access the service (unknown impact)

7.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

8. **Legal Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:  
John Teasdale*

8.1. The main legal issues arising from this Report are as follows.

8.2. The principal legal provisions are contained in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and associated regulations. This Act explicitly covers mandatory DFGs offering assistance once the recommendation has fulfilled the criteria of an adaptation being 'necessary and appropriate' and 'reasonable and practical'. Applicants also have to satisfy a Test of Resources looking at their income and savings which determines whether they will have to contribute towards a grant.

- 8.3. The maximum amount of DFG is currently set by The Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes) (England) Order 2008 at £30,000 and has been at this level since 2008.
- 8.4. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 provides freedom and opportunities for the Local Authority to address housing issues. This Order had important implications for local housing authorities because it repeals much of the existing prescriptive legislation governing the provision of renewal grants to homeowners and replaces it with a new wide-ranging power to provide assistance for housing renewal.
- 8.5. The provision of discretionary assistance is detailed within the Disabled Facilities Grants and Adaptations Policy which is available for inspection, free of charge, at the Town Hall, Burton Upon Trent at all reasonable times and copies of a document containing a summary of the policy may be obtained by post.
- 8.6. The provision of disabled facilities grants and discretionary assistance is subject to grant conditions which are detailed within the Disabled Facilities Grants and Adaptations Policy 2018.

## **9. Equalities and Health**

- 9.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.
- 9.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

## **10. Data Protection Implications – Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)**

- 10.1. A DPIA must be completed where there are plans to:

- use systematic and extensive profiling with significant effects;
- process special category or criminal offence data on a large scale; or
- systematically monitor publicly accessible places on a large scale
- use new technologies;
- use profiling or special category data to decide on access to services;
- profile individuals on a large scale;
- process biometric data;
- process genetic data;
- match data or combine datasets from different sources;
- collect personal data from a source other than the individual without providing them with a privacy notice ('invisible processing');
- track individuals' location or behaviour;
- profile children or target marketing or online services at them; or
- process data that might endanger the individual's physical health or safety in the event of a security breach

10.2 Following consideration of the above, there are no Data Protection implications arising from this report which would require a DPIA

**11. Human Rights**

11.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

**12. Sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)**

12.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) N/A

**13. Recommendation(s)**

13.1. To note the contents of the report

**14. Appendices**

14.1. Appendix 1: DFG Satisfaction Questionnaire Results