



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**



Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11 October 2023

Report of Councillor Phil Dilks
Cabinet Member for Housing and
Planning

Overview of Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) Case End to End Times

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To provide an overview of the current end to end time for the delivery of disabled facility grants (DFG) to residents of the district, in comparison to the previous year. In addition to provide the current arrangements and future proposed changes to continually improve the delivery of DFGs and decrease end to end times of the process.

Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes the current end to end times for delivery of the disabled facility grants.**
- 2. Notes the current and proposed improvements to continue to enable the quicker delivery of disabled facility grants.**

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication? No

What are the relevant corporate priorities? Housing that meets the needs of all residents

Which wards are impacted? All wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The Council received £975k in 2022/23 and £1.060m in 2023/24 to fund disabled facilities grants. The unspent grant in 2022/23 of £308k was transferred to the Housing Delivery Reserve and can be used to fund future demand if costs were to exceed the in-year grant allocation.

Reviewed by: Alison Hall-Wright, Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 There are no significant legal or governance implications associated with this report, which is to note delivery of the scheme in comparison to previous years.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 The report sets out a review of disabled facility grants end to end times and service provision for 2022/23 and from April to end of August this financial

year. It compares the end to end times for key stages of a disabled facility grants application through to completion along with the current changes and proposed changes to reduce end to end times and improve delivery for customers.

- 2.2 There are two broad types of DFGs, mandatory and discretionary. Mandatory grants are up to £30,000 and are a statutory function set by legislation. However an additional piece of legislation allows Local Authorities to provide discretionary grants on the condition that it has a policy for the types of assistance it will offer under this category and that the policy is published. At South Kesteven District Council both mandatory and discretionary grants are offered.

Financial Year 2022/2023

- 2.3 At the start of the financial year 2022/23 the team consisted of the following roles:

Table 1

Role	Number of roles	Full/part time
Housing Grants Officer	2	Full time
Disabled facility grants Surveyor*	1	Part time

(* surveyor role was based within the Council Adaptations Team and assisted the DFG team)

- 2.4 At the beginning of the financial year 22/23 the team had an open caseload of 239, this is made up of ongoing cases at varying stages of the DFG process.
- 2.5 During the financial year 22/23 217 referrals were received by the team. It should also be noted that 74 of those referrals were closed without progressing to a grant being undertaken. Reasons for this could include:
- after an initial test of financial means they would not qualify for a grant (as the contribution required would exceed the amount of the adaptation needed);
 - the applicant sadly passes away;
 - the applicant does not wish to proceed.
- 2.6 Table 2 below provides, for the financial year of 22/23, the stages involved (from end to end) in the DFG process and includes a breakdown of average days between each stage:

Table 2

Stage	Stage Description	Days between (Average)
1	Enquiry received to application being sent to client	117
2	Application sent to application returned by client	23
3	Application received to grant approval	33

4	Grant approval to completion of works	59
6	Enquiry to completion (all of above)	211

2.7 In the financial year of 22/23, 101 grants were completed, which consisted of 62 mandatory grants and 39 discretionary grants.

2.8 In the financial year of 22/23, the total spend (actual and committed) for DFG's per quarter are shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Quarter	Total spend
Q1	£185,284
Q2	£175,472
Q3	£175,867
Q4*	£130,176
Total	£666,799

(* Q4 is usually a higher value as the year end is completed during this period)

2.9 At the beginning of the 22/23 financial year the average waiting time for surveys to be completed from date of referral was 4 months, however at the end of the financial year this increased to 8 months. This was partly due to the increase in referrals received from Lincolnshire County Council from November onwards as they worked to reduce their Occupational Therapist assessment waiting lists. This placed an increased pressure on the service, and on average for the 22/23 year 3 surveys a month were being completed.

2.10 From November 2022 onwards additional staffing had been secured with the DFG surveyor joining from the Council Adaptations Team on a permanent basis. Thereby ensuring that the team had a designated surveyor provision is in place. In addition the Private Sector Housing Team Leader role was recruited to at this time, which provided support, consistency, stability and a designated service oversight to the team.

2.11 In January 2023 a Business Administration Apprentice joined the team on an 18 month fixed term basis. The Apprentice provides administrative support to the team, allowing grants officers more time to process applications and means tests, once new members of the team had been trained.

2.12 By the end of the financial year the team consisted of the following roles:

Table 4

Role	Number of roles	Full/part time
Housing Grants Officer	2	Full time
Disabled facility grants Surveyor*	1	Part time
Business Administration Apprentice**	1	Full time (18 month fixed term)

Private Sector Housing Team Leader	1	Full time***
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(* joined the team permanently from November 2022, **joined January 2023, ***this role oversees additional areas of Private Sector Housing)

Financial Year 2023/2024

- 2.13 At the beginning of the 23/24 financial year the team had an open caseload of 262.
- 2.14 The number of referrals received from the 1 April 2023 to the 31 August 2023 during this year to the end of August is 74 referrals, however 16 of these have been closed without progressing to a grant being undertaken.
- 2.15 Table 5 below provides, for this financial year so far, the stages involved (from end to end) in the DFG process and includes a breakdown of average days between each stage:

Table 5

Stage	Stage Description	Days between (Average)
1	Enquiry received to application being sent to client	44
2	Application sent to application returned by client	11
3	Application received to grant approval	35
4	Grant approval to completion of works	No Data Yet
5	Enquiry to completion (all of above)	No Data Yet

- 2.16 Number of grants completed so far this year is 32 consisting of 19 mandatory grants and 13 discretionary grants.
- 2.17 The total spend (actual and committed) for DFG's for quarter 1 and up to 29 September in quarter 2 of this year are shown in Table 6 below:

Table 6

Quarter	Total spend
Q1	£312,130
Q2	£278,463
Total	£590,593

- 2.18 At the beginning of this financial year the average waiting time for surveys to be completed from date of referral was 8 to 9 months and this upward trend continued to June/July 2023 where this peaked at 10/11 months average waiting time. As the waiting list for surveys increased this put pressure on the process.
- 2.19 As a result of the pressures within the end to end process, an additional surveyor has been recruited on a temporary basis from June to present. As

a result of this the average number of surveys now being undertaken a month is 9.

2.20 The team as to the end of August now consists of the following roles:

Table 7

Role	Number of roles	Full/part time
Housing Grants Officer	2	Full time
Disabled facility grants Surveyor	2	1xPart time 1xFulltime temporary contractor
Business Administration Apprentice	1	Full time (18 month fixed term)
Private Sector Housing Team Leader	1	Full Time

2.21 Summary of the steps already taken to reduce end to end times and increased spend on DFGs is additional staffing, some of which are temporary and some permanent, and a redistribution of activities which allowed smarter and more efficient ways of working.

2.22 The temporary roles have been used as pilots to see if there is a need for these types of roles on a permanent basis, and if the anticipated benefits would be realised. It is now clear that there is a benefit to these roles, and it is hoped that they will become permanent.

2.23 The performance can be compared in the following areas:

2.24 Staffing

The team has increased by 3 officers with a redistribution of tasks within roles.

2.25 End to End times

Whilst at this time it is too early in the year to obtain like for like comparisons. With the current changes, in stage 1 and 2-there has been a 63% and 52% reduction respectively in the number of days these stages take. At present the time take in stage 3 remains around the same within the 30-35 days rage.

2.26 Survey waiting times

As of the end of August 2023 the survey waiting times are reducing to 4 or 5 months, compared to 10 or 11 months in June/ July 2023. The number of completed surveys a month on average has increased from 3 to 9.

2.27 DFG spend

As this financial year has not been completed it is too early to say what this year's final spend will be, however it is hoped that it will exceed last year's spend. For the first 6 months of this financial year (23/24) the spend is £590,593 compared to £360,756 at the same time last year.

2.28 In conclusion it is noted that current improvements have seen an initial positive impact that is improving key areas in the process for the delivery of DFGs. The team will continue to review these changes and deliver further improvements.

2.29 It is proposed that the current temporary roles are changed to permanent with recruitment undertaken to fill the roles.

3. Key Considerations

3.1 The current changes have improved the delivery of the service against comparable benchmarks and are a positive step towards continued improved delivery.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1 None – as this is for information only

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

5.1 To demonstrate the improvements made to the service and the result of the improvements on the end to end times of the delivery of DFGs