

# Nottingham City Council Delegated Decision



**Nottingham**  
**City Council**

<b>Reference Number:</b>	4451
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<b>Department:</b>	Growth and City Development
<b>Contact:</b>	Sandra Francis-Farrell (Job Title: Project Support Officer, Email: sandra.francis-farrell@nottinghamcity.gov.uk, Phone: 8763185)
<b>Subject:</b>	Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants - Policy Changes
<b>Total Value:</b>	£255,000 (Relocation Grants £90,000; Means test change £45,000; Increase threshold £120,000) (Type: Capital)
<b>Decision Being Taken:</b>	<p>To amend the discretionary Relocation Grant Policy from a maximum of 1 per year to 4 per year, this to be a permanent change to policy (impact increase by 3 at £30k p.a. = £90,000 p.a. use of DFG).</p> <p>To remove means testing for stair lifts, modular ramps, hoists and level access showers for a period of 18 months (to be reviewed at end of financial year 2022/23). Impact increase of £45,000 p.a.</p> <p>To temporarily increase the threshold for repayment of grant from £5,000 to £10,000 for a period of 18 months. Impact increase of £120,000 p.a.</p>

**Reasons for the Decision(s)**

The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funds capital budget for adaptations to private sector homes. The Pandemic of 2020/2021 caused a backlog of adaptations due to only extremely urgent and specialist equipment requests being processed. The waiting list has increased from 5 to 12 months and there is an increase in the number of cases being made urgent due to the delays. The DFG grant received by the Council in 2020/21 was underspent and has been carried forward to the financial year 2021/2022. The underspend amounted to £1.261m, and because restriction were not lifted until almost the end of July 2021 and the onset of summer holidays directly following the lifting of restriction, the grant will underspend again this financial year.

The recommended decisions are to enable the Adaptations Agency to reduce bureaucracy, fast track applications and speed up the adaptations process, whilst helping the council spend existing grant that is underspent from 2020/2021. This will not require any addition to the Council's approved Capital Programme as this is fully funded by grant from central government.

The Disabled Facilities Grant's (DFG) maximum award is £30,000. The Agency receives on average, 17 request per year to carry out adaptations to a property where costs exceed the grant limit by £10,000 or more. In more than half of these cases, the citizen would be better off moving rather than spending large sums of money on properties that are no longer suitable. Currently, the discretionary Relocation Grant is on a first come first served basis. The outcome is that citizens continue with the DFG waiting up to 2 years for the works to be carried out due to the need to apply to charities for funding to cover the excess above the grant limit. Therefore it is recommended to approve 3 additional relocation grants per annum at £30,000 each = £90,000 on a permanent basis.

Level access showers, stair lifts, hoists and ramps are the most widely recommended minor adaptations and have a significant impact upon the daily lives of citizens. They increase independence, reduce the demands on family members and social care budget. Removing the means test for these types of minor adaptations will reduce the delays in completing works as citizens attempt to fund contributions. An average of 60 disabled citizens per annum will benefit from the change who would otherwise have cancelled the request due to financial pressures. The cost of implemented this change from loss of contributions is estimated to be £45,000 per annum. This change should be reviewed at the end of financial year 2022/23.

The Housing Grants Construction & Regeneration Act, and Regulatory Reform Order 2002 allows local authorities the discretion to impose grant conditions requiring the partial repayment of grant if the adapted property is sold or transferred within 10 years. The repayment amount is capped at a maximum of £10,000, and applies to Owner Occupiers Only.

NCC policy requires the repayment of grants over £5,000. This policy has been in place since 2012 and on average £50,000 pa reclaimed. Moving the threshold from £5,000 to grant awards over £10,000 won't significantly impact the amount of payments received, but will allow the adaptations agency to use its discretion to undertake works outside of the OT recommendations. To tackle issues such as fitting low threshold doors, security lighting and improve heating systems in the homes of vulnerable and disabled people, without affecting the amount of grant that they will have to repay. A cap will be set on the amount of discretionary assistance, in line with the current discretionary limit of £5,000. The value of additional works that can be carried out with the threshold increased will be between £90 - £120,000 an estimated 30 - 35 households benefiting from this.

This change should be reviewed at the end of financial year 2022/23.

All decision are temporary except Relocation Grant, Because the Agency as a significant underspend of grant for financial year 2020/21 carried forward to 2021/22, due to restrictions being lifted at the end of July 2021, we are likely to underspend again. These decisions will help speed up the DFG processes and increase output to reduce the backlog of adaptations. With changes to working practices and policy changes, we aim to be back on target for achieving full spend of allocated budgets for financial year 2023/24. Temporary recruitment of 2 Project Officers to help deal with the adaptations backlog. \*\*This is not part of this decision, a separate process for the appointment to these posts has been followed \*\*

**Briefing notes documents:** Recommendations for temporary policy changes final draft.docx

**Other Options Considered:**

Relocation Grant - A do nothing has been considered and rejected. This option would not allow citizen to move to suitable accommodation that require minimal adaptations and be a better use of public funds.

Removal of means testing - A do nothing has been considered and rejected. This option would not addresses the backlog of works and the considerable underspend/carry forward in grant accumulated during the pandemic.

This option would disadvantage up to 60 disabled citizens per year unable to afford essential adaptations. This option would also disadvantage a further 50 households per years who struggle to find the money, often delaying the installation of adaptations by several months.

Increase repayment threshold - A do nothing has been considered and rejected. This option would not reduce the amount of delays associated with re-working schemes to keep below the re-payment threshold. This option would not allow the Agency to offer the discretion to tackle issue regarding suitable heating, reduce tripping hazards and safety adaptations as part of the grant process and help the Council towards his target for better housing for all.

This option would continue to disadvantage vulnerable Citizens who have been unable to benefit from adaptations to support independence. This option would result in the continued reliance upon care and support packages which is financially unsustainable and fails to support better outcomes for Citizens

**Background Papers:** None

**Published Works:** None

**Affected Wards:** Citywide

**Colleague / Councillor Interests:** None

**Consultations:** NCC has the discretion to adjust policy to deal with local market forces

**Crime and Disorder Implications:** None

**Equality:** EIA not required. Reasons: Minor change to policy which will not negatively impact or exclude citizens who currently use this service.

**Decision Type:** Portfolio Holder

**Subject to Call In:** Yes

**Call In Expiry date:** 03/12/2021

**Advice Sought:** Legal, Finance

**Legal Advice:** This proposal raises no significant legal concerns, as long as the funding is used in accordance with and within the scope of the relevant legislation, the Reform Order and any funding or contractual terms we are bound by. Decision making should be recorded formally and any written policy should be formally updated with these changes. Advice provided by Raina Mason (Senior Solicitor) on 12/10/2021. Advice provided by Raina Mason (Solicitor) on 12/10/2021.

**Finance Advice:** Due to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, there was an underspend of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) of £1.261m in 2020/21. The decision proposes some changes to the policy for awarding DFG to increase the volume and therefore value of grants awarded in 2021/22 and 2022/23 and so enable this grant to be spent, rather than returned to central government.

The policy changes will increase the number of relocation grants (£0.090m permanent change), remove means testing for certain adaptations (£0.45m temporary change) and alter the threshold for repayment of the grant (£0.120m temporary change). In addition to support the delivery of the additional caseload, the Adaptations Agency are seeking approval to appoint 2 temporary project officers for 17 months (this is part of a separate staffing approval).

The approved Adaptations capital budget in 2021/22 is £3.544m, which consists of a base budget in 2021/22 (£1.955m), additional grant awarded (£0.328m) after budget was approved and the brought forward budget from 2020/21 (£1.261m). The Adaptations budget is already included within the approved Capital Programme and is fully funded by the DFG grant. Therefore, this decision doesn't require endorsing by the Capital Board and commitment to expenditure is exempt from the amended scheme of delegation.

Therefore the decision will not impact on the Council's MTFP, as it will only utilise grant and not the Council's capital resources. An indirect result of the decision is the employment of two temporary project officers for 17 months, which will increase staffing costs for the Adaptations Agency. The additional work done by the officers will generate income from fees that should cover the cost of employing them. Finance comments regarding this were provided as part of the separate staffing approval.

Advice provided by Julie Dorrington (Senior Accountant (Housing Revenue Account)) on 28/10/2021.

**Signatures**

Adele Williams (Portfolio Holder for Adults and Health)
SIGNED and Dated: 24/11/2021
Sajeeda Rose (Corporate Director of Growth & City Development)
SIGNED and Dated: 16/11/2021