

NCC Adaptations & Renewals Agency Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG): Policy and Capacity Proposals

1. Background

Since the Covid 19 Pandemic of March 2020, there has been an increase in waiting times for disabled adaptations. Citizens eligible for adaptations are those most likely to be adversely affected by Covid 19 therefore works only proceeded where the risk of contact could be managed effectively. The result of the Covid 19 restrictions and constraints was an underspend of £1m DFG grant for the period 2020-21. It has been confirmed that this funding has been carried forward 2021-22. Although there is capacity within the service to manage works at pre Covid levels, there is further backlog in works arising from the spring 2021-22 restrictions which will result in a further anticipated underspend. The current back log will also place pressure on Social Care Services.

Recommendations

In order to address the current backlog of works the following recommendations are proposed

- 1.1 Temporary Removal of Means Testing for stair lifts, modular ramps and level access showers
- 1.2 Increase the number of Discretionary Relocation Grants from 1 to 4 for the period 2021/22 – 2022/23
- 1.3 Increase the repayment threshold from £5,000 to £10,000 for the period 2021/22 – 2022/23
- 1.4 Appoint 2 temporary (18 months) Project Officer (FTE) Grade G
- 1.5 Undertake a mini tender with selected contractors to secure capacity
- 1.6 Work with NCH to develop capacity to undertake private home owner adaptations
- 1.7 Reinstate the top-up panel to provide additional discretionary grant of up to £15K for extension, this would be a repayable grant on the sale or transfer of the property for an indefinite period.

2. Proposals

The Agency proposes to seek portfolio holder's approval to temporary change its policy on how DFG's are offered and a permanent change to its discretionary Relocation Grant policy. The DFG Legislation allows local authorities to use discretionary powers as defined in the Housing Grants, Construction & Regenerations Act 1996 and Regulatory Reform Order 2002, to adapt to local needs.

The proposal is for a temporary changes to grant conditions and to use discretionary powers to offer fast tracked grants for specialist equipment, that require no technical input (such as stair lifts & modular ramps) and to fast track referrals for level access shower both of which will not be means tested. Around 70% of referrals received are for level access showers, 25% are for specialist equipment on their own or as well as level access showers.

Not means testing these types of adaptations will reduce delays encountered by citizens having to find the money in order to proceed. In 2018 we received 356 referrals for adaptations. 129 of these referrals were later cancelled 49 were cancelled because they failed the means test.

In 2019 we received 329 referrals – 119 cancelled and of these, 43 failed the means test. Many of the people that fail the means test, go on to struggling without the adaptations relying more on family and social care.

The Agency can only offer 1 Relocation Grant p.a to the maximum value of £30,000.00. The proposal is to increase it to 4 to allow OT's to have meaningful conversations with homeowners about moving

to more suitable properties. The Relocation Grant have indefinite repayment periods, this proposal would not see this change.

The final proposal is to raise the current repayment threshold from £5,000.00 to £10,000 if the property is sold within 10 years, as this will reduce delays and stagnation of the schemes. Full details of the repayment conditions are available within the current policy.

The temporary policy change would end 31st March 2023

3.1 Removal of Means Testing: Stair lifts, Modular Ramps and Level Access Showers

The Agency and Renewals Agency proposes to seek approval to temporarily change its DFG policy. DFG Legislation allows local authorities to use discretionary powers as defined in the Housing Grants, Construction & Regenerations Act 1996 and Regulatory Reform Order 2002, to adapt to local needs

The proposals include temporary changes to grant conditions and to use discretionary powers to offer fast tracked grants for specialist equipment, that require no technical input (such as stair lifts & modular ramps) and to fast track referrals for level access shower both of which will not be means tested. Around 70% of referrals received are for level access showers, 25% are for specialist equipment on their own or as well as level access showers.

The temporary removal of means testing for these types of adaptations, will reduce the delays often encountered by citizens having to find the money in order to proceed. The number of referrals received, cancelled due to mean testing is set out below for the period 2018 - 2019. It should be noted that many of the Citizens that fail to meet the means testing criteria either rely on family or the social care system.

Year	Referrals	Cancelled	Cancelled due to Means Testing
2018	356	129	49
2019	329	119	43

3.2 Discretionary Relocation Grant

The Council has available the option of granting a discretionary Relocation Grant. Currently the policy is to grant one discretionary payment to a maximum value of £30,000.00 per annum. It is proposed that this is increased to four to provide Occupational Therapist with the opportunity to realistically explore relocation options with homeowners about moving to more suitable properties. The Relocation Grant includes the requirement for an indefinite repayment periods which this proposal does not seek to change.

3.3 Repayment Conditions

It is proposed that the grant repayment conditions are revised to reduce the number of schemes that are delayed or fail to proceed due to Citizens concerns of repayment risks. This having potential impacts upon the wellbeing of Citizens and call on social care services. It is proposed that the repayment conditions are revised for works over £10,000 from the current threshold of £5,000.

The temporary policy change would be reviewed at the in 2022-23

3.4 Top-up fund

Outcome

By adopting the above measures it is anticipated that the number of adaptations will be increased by 30% over the next 2 years, with waiting list restored to pre-Covid levels by 2023-24

Offer energy efficiency measures (currently not offered) when providing adaptations such as:-

- replacing single glazed windows in bathrooms,
- thermostatic radiator valves,
- better heating controls,

Improve quality of lives of disabled people with safety & security measures such as :-

- replace doors with low threshold doors,
- smoke detectors and solar lights,

Tackle poor quality housing issues for disabled people by:-

- using Housing Health and Safety Rating system to assess category 1 or 2 Hazards and address them when dealing with adaptations
- update inefficient heating systems including replacing boilers,
- updating wiring

3.4 Technical Project Officer Capacity

In order to manage the backlog and works arising from the additional funding it will be necessary to increase project capacity (technical Project Officer Grade G) within the Adaptations Service on a temporary basis. It is proposed that there should be 2 temporary appointments funded from fees for an 18 month period.

It is proposed that these posts could be sought from an Agency using a framework and through a potential secondment from NCH.

The Agency is a fee earning service, fees earned through additional workload should offset cost of employing Agency Staff, using architects and paying overtime. An additional 2 project officers producing 80 level access showers over 8 months would earn approx. £62,000 in fees to offset the majority of salary costs. Extending use of Architect for an additional 60 adaptations (including research project) will produce income of approx. £27,000 as research project will be paying some of the fees.

3.5 Contractor Capacity

In order to scale up the number of adaptations the Council needs to ensure that there is appropriate contractor capacity. It is proposed that a mini tender using Agency select contractors to carry out blocks of adaptations, this provides contractors with the assurance of work and enables investment to scale up the workforce for a specific period (making sure to encourage the use of local workforce and young people).

Encourage Nottingham City Homes to tender for private adaptations, which will bring much needed income back into Nottingham City Council.

3. Equality Impact Assessment

Any measure employed by Nottingham City Council to reduce the amount of time disabled people have to wait for adaptations, will have a positive impact on the lives of some of the most vulnerable

members of our society. None of the measures requiring implementation, will have a negative effect on the Citizens of Nottingham or its workforce.

Additional information

Reduction in referrals received by 20% during 20-21 anticipate increase in number of referrals from 26 to 32 per month over the next 12 months = 76 additional referrals on top of the expected 312.

Waiting list currently 128, if we do nothing

Anticipated additional referrals Aug – March 2021 = 256

Anticipated cases assigned using existing workforce 192

Predicted waiting list at April 2022 – 192 increase of 2 months waiting time.

Predicted spend £1,800,000

Underspend £1,200,000.

Completing an additional 80 Adaptations will increase spend by £664,000

Completing additional 50 referrals cancelled due to means test for specialist equipment £245,000

Completing 25 level access showers cancelled due to failing means test £172,500

Adopting new temporary change in policy and staffing could increase spend to an additional £1,081,500