

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 9 February 2006
AUTHOR: Housing and Environmental Services Director

NEW DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT POLICY FOR CHILD ADAPTATIONS

Purpose

1. To seek approval of policy to incorporate new grant legislation, which abolishes means testing on mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) for child cases.

Effect on Corporate Objectives

2.	Quality, Accessible Services	Adaptation works improve the quality of life of child clients and their parents.
	Village Life	Grant-aided adaptations make it affordable for families to remain in the property, in the village of their choice.
	Sustainability	
	Partnership	

Background

3. The mandatory DFG budget this year is £605,000, which includes ODPM funding of £230,000. The Home Improvement Agency currently has 98 open DFG cases. Of these, 15 are child cases.
4. Currently, the Council's DFG's are means-tested. They have a £25,000 mandatory limit. Discretionary costs over £25,000 can either be met by the client or be placed as a charge against the property, repayable upon disposal. In recent months, the Cambridgeshire Home improvement Agencies have secured 'top-up' funding from Social Services to assist some clients with their contributions towards such grants.
5. On 31 December 2005, the government issued Statutory Instrument 3323 which amends The Housing Grants, Construction & Regeneration Act 1996, abolishing the requirement to means test the mandatory element of the DFG for child cases, with immediate effect.

Considerations

6. In this financial year, Social Services have financially assisted several of our clients with their contributions. They are currently extending their policy and budget on assisting in the provision of DFG's across the County; in particular, they are creating a specific means test to be used for this purpose.
7. The child DFG caseload is expected to increase owing to the legislation changes, which is likely to put pressure on the budget. The Paediatric Occupational Therapy Service has advised us that 13 new cases will be referred to the Council in the next 2 years, however only 2 cases with costs likely to exceed the mandatory limit are likely in each of the financial years 06-07 and 07-08.

Options

8. There are three options for members to consider in implementing the new legislation into Council policy. All options include the abolition of mean testing of the mandatory element of child DFG:

- (a) To retain the means testing of discretionary Disabled Facilities grants on child cases, with no upper limit on the amount of discretionary funding. This would allow the client to have a £25,000 mandatory grant. Funding above this would be made up of the financially assessed client contribution, topped up by unlimited discretionary funding from SCDC, charitable sources and/or Social Services. Under this option, the funding breakdown for a case costing £55,000 where the parents have a financially assessed contribution of £3,000 would be as follows:

DFG mandatory £25,000; Parental contribution £3,000; DFG discretionary, charitable sources and/or Social Services funding £27,000

- (b) To retain the means testing of discretionary Disabled Facilities grants on child cases and limit them to £15,000. This will allow the client to have a £25,000 mandatory grant. Discretionary funding above this would be made up of the financially assessed client contribution, topped up to a £15,000, thereby allowing a £40,000 maximum grant. Environmental Health Portfolio Holder delegated to approve additional discretionary funding in exceptional circumstances. Under this option, the funding breakdown for a case costing £55,000 where the parents have a financially assessed contribution of £3,000 would be as follows:

DFG mandatory £25,000; DFG discretionary £12,000; Parental contribution £3,000; Assistance with balance of £15,000 to be sought from charitable sources/Social Services.

- (c) To cease the means testing of discretionary Disabled Facilities grants on child cases and limit them to £15,000. This will allow the client to have a £25,000 mandatory grant plus discretionary funding up to a maximum of £15,000, thereby allowing a £40,000 maximum grant. Environmental Health Portfolio Holder delegated to approve additional discretionary funding in exceptional circumstances. Under this option, the funding breakdown for a case costing £55,000 would be as follows:

DFG mandatory £25,000; DFG discretionary £15,000; Assistance with balance of £15,000 to be sought from charitable sources/Social Services.

Financial Implications

9. It is difficult to quantify the financial impact of the options, as there are many variables, e.g. variations in referral numbers from adult cases, adult cases not progressing due to changes in circumstance, some adult or child cases may falter if additional funding cannot cover all costs or suffer delays due to planning/ inclement weather to name a few. These are the nature of grant applications.
10. Charitable funding will still be sought to aid clients who have contributions towards discretionary Disabled Facilities grants – if this option is chosen.

11. Given the above, it is anticipated that the DFG mandatory budget for the financial year 2006-07 will be adequate. Option (b) offers the greatest control of spending. Options (b) and (c) both limit the extent of the discretionary funding, with Option (a) imposing no upper limit.

Legal Implications

12. Applications will be made under the Housing Grant, Construction & Regeneration Act 1996, as amended.

Staffing Implications

13. With referrals likely to increase, the additional workload may be beyond the capacity of the Home Improvement Agency team and therefore the use of external surveyors or Agency temps may be necessary to prevent delays.

Risk Management Implications

14. Failure to provide some grant assistance may detrimentally affect the health and safety of the client and negatively affect the Council's reputation as a caring public body.

Consultations

15. Discussions have taken place with Social Services managers to inform them of a change and likely increase in 'top-up' funding requests on child cases – across the county.

Recommendations

16. Cabinet is recommended to retain the means testing of discretionary Disabled Facilities grants on child cases and limit them to £15,000. This will allow the client to have a £25,000 mandatory grant. Discretionary funding above this would be made up of the financially assessed client contribution, topped up to £15,000, thereby giving a £40,000 maximum grant. Environmental Health Portfolio Holder delegated to approve additional discretionary funding in exceptional circumstances (option b above).

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: OT referral; Case file.

Contact Officer: Maureen Nudds Home Improvement Agency Team Leader
Telephone: (01954) 713330