

HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

30 March 2007

**DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS - RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT
CONSULTATION**

Report by the Director

RECOMMENDATION

That Members consider their response to the consultation on Disabled Facilities Grants.

SUMMARY

Members considered this issue at their last meeting as a result of representations from East Hampshire District Council. Disabled Facilities Grants - to be retitled “accessible homes grants” - form an important part of the care-in-the-community package but create an unrecognised pressure on local government expenditure. This paper summarises the latest Government consultation and reports on the response from this Association’s Housing Advisory Group.

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFGs)

1. DFGs are mandatory capital grants to fund adaptations to homes of disabled people to allow them to continue to stay there. 60% of the grant is funded as a specific Government grant through the Housing Investment Plan (HIP) process. Typically the local authority occupational therapist specifies the works needed and the housing department arranges the grant. (In a two-tier area the County Council specifies and the District Council funds). If the HIP predictions are accurate then the Government meets 60% of the cost, and 40% is met by the local authority. If the predictions are too low, the local authority can be caught having to pay 100% of the cost.

THE GOVERNMENT’S PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

2. Proposals for change were published just before the Association’s January meeting when Paul Coen (LGA Chief Executive) listened to the debate. The deadline for comments is 13 April 2007.
3. The main changes proposed are:
 - relax or abolish the ring-fencing of DFGs
 - abolish the 60/40 split and replace with a specific grant
 - increase maximum grant from £25,000 to £30,000 and subsequently £50,000
 - allow greater flexibility to local authorities e.g. help disabled person move to more suitable accommodation rather than adapt their own home
 - allow local authorities to reclaim part of the grant if the disabled person moves within a short timescale (not to apply in the case of children)

RESPONSE FROM H/IOW HOUSING ADVISORY GROUP

4. The Association's Housing Advisory Group has met to consider a response at housing officer level. The Group - which represents County, Unitary and District authorities with social landlord and voluntary sector input - broadly supports the Government's proposals but has provided a great many specific comments on the consultation. It highlights the following:
 - Housing authorities need more resource to fund DFGs at present and the additional grant has not been costed into grants/budgets for 2007/8.
 - Registered Social Landlords should be required to fund adaptations to their own properties (the consultation proposes that social housing grant funding for adaptations should be pooled within the central DFG fund).
 - Administrative procedures need to be improved including a simpler application form and production of a "best practice" guide.
 - Where the disabled child's family can afford it, the Group considers the family should be required to repay part of the grant if the family moves soon after spending it.
 - The consultation asks about the means test and the Group recommends using the "Fairer Charging for Care" assessment method which would provide for consistency.
5. The Housing Advisory Group strongly opposes the abolition of the ring-fence because (as the consultation document says) there is a "risk that resources could leak away into other priorities outside housing". The Group suggests that pilots should be fully evaluated first and Members may agree with this. However the LGA's position generally is to oppose ring-fencing and support Government moves to devolve decision-making to local authorities.

LGA RESPONSE

6. There are both strategic and detailed issues in this consultation for local government as a whole. I have been invited to a Local Government Association meeting on 28 March in Westminster to discuss the implications and will report further to Members.

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Director

Date: 9 March 2007

Annex: 0

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