



Individual Executive Decision Notice

Report title	Request for Discretionary top-up to Disabled Facilities Grant (IEDN 06/2020)	
Decision designation	GREEN	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Linda Leach, Cabinet Member for Adults Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman, Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing.	
Wards affected	Spring Vale;	
Accountable Director	Emma Bennett, Director for Children's and Adult Service, Ross Cook, Director of City Environment	
Originating service	City Housing	
Accountable employee	Lynda Eyton	Client Relationship Manager - Housing Management Agents Tel: 01902 555706 Email: lynda.eyton@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Cabinet Member Briefing - City Assets and Housing Cabinet Member Briefing - Adults	

Summary

To consider a request for top up funding to a Disabled Facilities Grant.

Recommendations for decision:

That the Cabinet Member for Adults and Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director of Children's and Adult Services and the Director of City Environment:

1. Agree to the provision of discretionary top-up for the case detailed in the report below at a total cost of £18,573.44 subject to any additional unforeseen costs which may increase the amount of discretionary grant required.
2. Determine that the full amount of any discretionary grant becomes repayable if the ownership of the property is transferred by any means within 10 years of the completion of the grant aided works. A local land charge would be registered to reflect this condition.

Signature

Date:

Signature

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1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 which prescribes the award of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) previously gave local authorities the power to award discretionary grant, in addition to the mandatory grant, for the purpose of making a dwelling suitable for the accommodation, welfare or employment of a disabled person. Subsequently, the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order in 2002 removed this power and replaced it with the discretion for local authorities to introduce their own policies for the award of discretionary grants, with regard to local circumstances.
- 1.2 The City of Wolverhampton Council Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy approved at Cabinet on 12 September 2018 outlines the council's current discretionary policies under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002. There is an agreed discretionary policy for the award of Small Adaptations Grants and other Housing Assistance. The Council has a legal requirement however to consider any request for assistance outside of existing policy to provide additional discretionary funding. This report deals with one such request. There is some ongoing work to introduce amendments to the policy which would deal with requests such as the one outlined below however; this amendment has not yet been brought before Cabinet for a decision.
- 1.3 The maximum DFG award is set by the legislation at £30,000. A recent (2018) review by the Department of Communities, Housing and Local Government have concluded that the grant maximum should be increased as the current maximum amount was set over 10 years ago, and has not taken account of increased prices in the building industry over the subsequent period. However, the legislation required to allow any change has not yet been brought before parliament.

2.0 Request for Assistance

- 2.1 Mrs H is an 83-year-old lady who lives with her 80 year old husband in a 3 bedroom property. An upstairs level access shower was provided by means of a DFG a number of years ago. Mrs H has several co-morbidities including lower body parkinsonism (for which there is no cure or treatment) bipolar and diabetes. These affect her ability to walk and manoeuvre herself around the house safely. Her mobility has significantly deteriorated over the past 4 years. She suffers with incontinence and has regular falls. Her husband must assist and supervise her when using the stairs.
- 2.2 Mrs H was initially assessed by an Occupational Therapist (OT) in 2018. At that time, it was determined that Mrs S could not safely use a stairlift and that the property was not suitable for the provision of a through floor lift due to the space and layout. Recommendations were therefore made for ground floor facilities.

- 2.3 The scheme of work to provide the ground floor extension has now been fully scheduled and received all the statutory approvals, prices have been obtained from 4 builders and a full value for money assessment of the costs has been carried out by officers. The reasonable cost of the work has been assessed by officers as £49,733.94 (including all fees and applicable VAT) and the cheapest contractors cost is £48,573.44 (again including all fees and applicable VAT). This is in excess of the current mandatory grant limit of £30,000. The reasons for the high costs are: -
- The need to ensure that direct access from kitchen to rear of property is provided. This had to be by means of a passageway, necessitating a larger footprint
 - The need to ensure the footprint of the extension avoids the line of a public sewer
 - The need to include a small utility space for the relocation of white goods from the existing utility area to be demolished
- 2.4 In accordance with the legislation, the application for a DFG made by Mrs H has been means-tested and Mrs H has a small contribution of £640.90 to the cost of the work. Mrs H has already paid the architects' fee of £700 and has therefore fulfilled her contribution to the costs. A grant approval of £29,359.10 has been issued to Mrs H, however, she is required to fund the additional costs in excess of the mandatory grant limit.
- 2.5 The family of Mrs H have contacted the Adaptations Team on behalf of Mrs H and requested that in the circumstances she wishes to be considered for discretionary grant funding to top-up the grant above the mandatory limit.
- 2.6 The property is owned by Mr and Mrs H. There is no outstanding mortgage. Mr and Mrs H are both in receipt of state pensions and have limited savings. Mrs H currently receives a small support package of 1 carer, 1 call a day, 7 days a week. All additional care is provided either by Mr H for his wife or with the assistance of family members. Mr and Mrs H do not wish to take out loans or equity release as they have inability to repay these. They have explored the option of family gifts/loans however the family are not able to contribute any significant amount towards the costs of the work.
- 2.7 The family have advised that Mrs H continues to deteriorate and in particular her mobility has significantly worsened, this in turn impacts on issues that arise from incontinence as she cannot quickly reach the toilet. She currently has a commode by her bed for use at night.
- 2.8 The impact of being able to have the adaptation work carried out is described by the family as follows: - "the advantages and benefits of having a down stairs bedroom and shower room will be that there will be a reduced risk of falls and injuries for Mrs H, she will be able to get around more easily and use a wheelchair in the house to gain access to bedroom and bathroom, it will be much easier for her to keep clean, and will hopefully reduce accidents due to incontinence. The carers will be able to do their tasks more quickly and easily with the proper facilities and increased access. In addition, we hope

that Mr H will suffer less from stress and anxiety due to his caring role and therefore he will be able to reduce the amount of medication he currently takes.”

- 2.9 The provision of these adaptations mean that Mr & Mrs H have the facilities to be able to remain in their own home for as long as possible, and that they will have a better quality of life. The work will increase the well-being of Mr & Mrs H generally and it will reduce the likelihood of a residential admission. If falls and injuries are reduced this will mean less need to call emergency services and prevention of hospital admission. If Mrs H mobility deteriorates further, then there is sufficient space for additional moving and handling equipment to be introduced with ease.

3.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 3.1 In the above case, the alternative options are as follows: -

- A. Request that grant applicant obtains finance through a loan option available on the financial markets. The personal and financial circumstances of the applicant mean that this is not an option that they wish to pursue.
- B. Advise the applicant to source additional funding from charity, family or friends. Currently the adaptations service does not have the resource or structure to provide additional support to applicants in sourcing external funding. If an applicant has to seek their own sources of personal funding this inevitably leads to lengthy delays and in many cases, work never progresses. In this case funding is only being requested for mandatory work for which grant aid would be available if the maximum grant had not already been awarded. Mrs H and her family have indicated that the family are not in a position at this time to provide significant financial assistance of this nature. Many charities will not fund the costs of mandatory work and generally only provide small amounts.

4.0 Reason for recommendation

- 4.1 For the case outlined above it is requested that agreement is given to approve a discretionary grant to assist with the additional costs of the mandatory work above the grant limit of £30,000. This will be a total of £18,573.44 and subject to any further unforeseen costs that may arise on site which may increase the discretionary grant requirement.
- 4.2 Officers have considered this case and consider that approval of funding should be given for the following reasons:
- The facilities to be provided are to fulfil the mandatory requirements of access to and from the property, including the garden, access to a room for sleeping and access to bathing and toilet facilities. (Housing Grants Construction & Regeneration Act 1996, Section 23 (1) (a) (d) (e) (f) (g) (h). i.e. there is nothing over and above the mandatory requirements that would normally be provided.

- The applicant is unable to fund the excess costs due to their financial circumstances.
- The cost of the work is considered reasonable as assessed by officers.

4.3 There is sufficient budgetary provision within the 2020-2021 financial year to enable this discretionary grant to be financed (see 5.1 below).

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 The current Housing Capital Programme approved by Cabinet on 19 February 2020 includes a budget of £3.465 million for Disabled Facilities Grants and discretionary grants in 2020-2021. The current known demand on the 2020-2021 budget is in the region of £1.8 million which includes the mandatory element in the above case. There is therefore sufficient budget to fund the expenditure of approximately £18,573.44 recommended in this report. This investment may also mitigate a risk of a revenue cost for additional care. [JM/26102020/G]

6.0 Legal implications

6.1 Mrs H is eligible to apply for a DFG and has been awarded a mandatory grant given under the provisions of the Housing Grants Construction & Regeneration Act 1996 which the Council has a duty to provide. Councillors do have the power to refuse the discretionary grant, however, for the reasons outlined in Section 4 above, it is recommended that the grants be approved.

DC/02112020/B

7.0 Equalities implications

7.1 An equalities analysis is not required as this report is for a one-off decision affecting one applicant and is not intended to set a precedent. In future, the proposed full policy report will require an appropriate analysis

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental implications

8.1 There are no climate change or environmental implications in this report.

9.0 Human resources implications

9.1 There are no human resource implications in this report.

10.0 Corporate Landlord implications

10.1 There are no corporate landlord implications in this report.

11.0 Health and Wellbeing implications

11.1 This report has significant health and well-being implications for Mr and Mrs S in that the provision of these facilities will ensure that the caring responsibilities of Mr S are eased,

there will be a significantly reduced risk of falls for both Mr and Mrs S due to not having to use/supervise use of the stairs, and Mrs S will have increased dignity in her activities of daily living.

12.0 Covid-19 implications

12.1 Any work to be undertaken to the property will be in accordance with Government guidelines for Working Safely during Coronavirus.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

13.1 Private Sector Housing Assistance policy – Cabinet 12 September 2018.