

Written response to: People Scrutiny Panel

Resolution: That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources provide a written response regarding the reasons for the underspend in the Disabled Facilities Grant budget along with feedback on the impact of the changes made to the flexibility of the Policy and an overview of the budget profile including commitments, future spends and challenges.

Written response from: Corporate Director of Finance and Resources/Principal Health and Housing Officer

Response: The Council has benefited from the uplifts over the last 6 years from DLUHC under the Better Care Fund (BCF) policy, but especially the last 2 years which has seen the annual allocation rise to £2,155,574. This has seen the carry forward budget increase due a wide range of factors, including the market post pandemic and our ability to staff and resource physically spending the funding by approving grant applications and getting works completed, the customer base and demand is in the system to spend our allocation.

Our housing assistance policy is certainly now fit for purpose and a very generous offer to support our most vulnerable residents.

The last two years have also seen our spend increase despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic and in 2021/22 the shortages in materials and contracted labour to carry out the works needed. We are now seeing a steady recovery, especially over the last 9 months, but there will be an impact on the spend as we had such huge backlogs in the system from the pandemic and then by the material/labour shortages. Staffing turnover and availability of contractors is the biggest delivery challenge. We are currently a FT member of staff down in the team and admin support is an issue to get the large number of payments through the system.

DFGs are administered by 2 teams (Homelife and Housing and Pollution), and as at the end of November we have spent £1,461,342 which includes the two members of staff that are funded from the DFG budget – a caseworker and trusted assessor. The next 4 months of the year is our busiest time for Homelife and hospital discharge work.

Our spend also follows patterns around staffing, managing resources such as annual leave and contractor availability, it also is busier in the winter months. From October 21 to June 22 we had one contractor for Level Access Showers, this had a huge impact on delivery that is reflected in our spend. The extra contractors and the adaptation works that started to move forward again in June 2022 are now just coming through the system as actual payments, it is a 16 week process normally but had increased to double that in 2021/22.

However, the commitment on grant approvals for the live grants that are not completed is £1,177,125.15 from the mid December; this covers 102 grant approvals for the Housing and

Pollution team, there are also another 128 live cases in the system not approved and at different stages.

Homelife are in a similar position although the work they do has a shorter turn around and is typically lower amounts of funding but higher throughput of case numbers. Approved amount but not spent is just over £200.000.

Based on the projections to date our approvals take us to nearly another £1.4 million allocated to spend but this does not account of jobs not approved or applications yet to be received in the next few months.

Statistical information indicates that the grant completions are dropping from 2018/19 onwards,

- 2018/19: 486 completions;
- 2019/20: 497 completions;
- 2020/21: 392 completions;
- 2021/22: 301 completions.

However, this is mainly due to the manner in which Homelife completions are now recorded - they are now counted per customer or as a single applicant, regardless of number of grants or works a customer may receive. This is to ensure they are reported consistently between the teams for DLUHC. The number of mandatory DFG are actually going up as is our spend per job due to the market prices.

Date: 17th January 2023