



Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel

Meeting Date: 14 October 2021
Portfolio: Communities, Health and Wellbeing
Key Decision: No
Policy and Budget Framework: Yes
Public / Private: Public

Title: Housing Assistance Grants - DFGs, repair assistance and empty property grants

Report of: Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services
Report Number: GD 53 / 21

Purpose / Summary:

A report providing an update on the housing assistance grants delivered in 2020 / 21 by Regulatory Services' Housing and Pollution and Homelife Teams.

Recommendations:

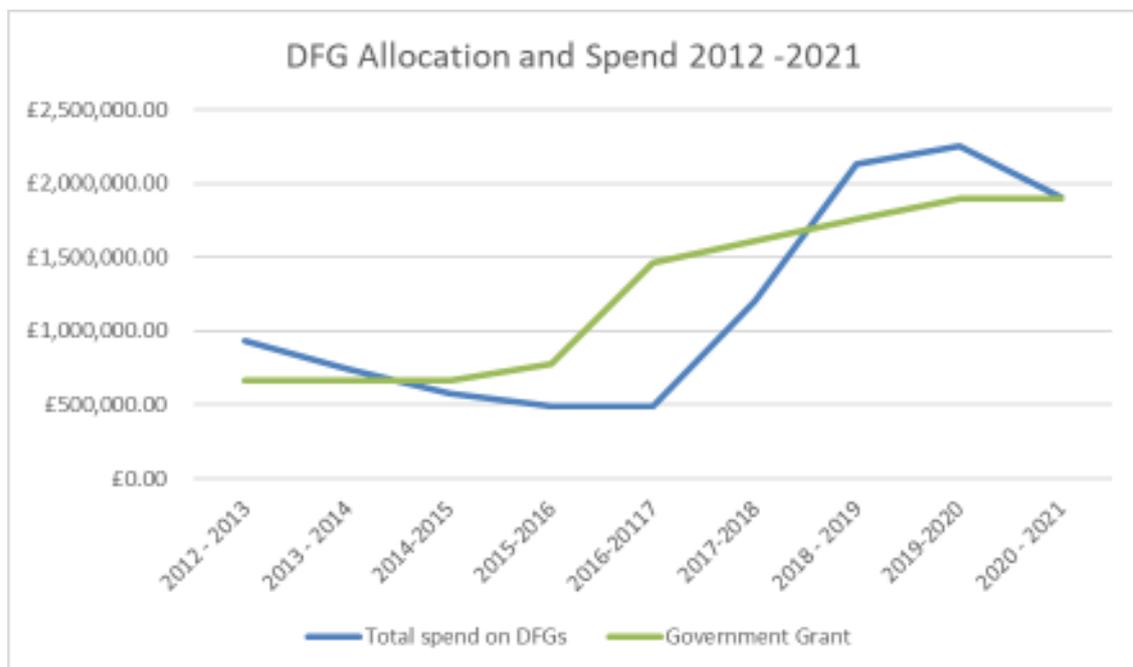
That the report is noted

Tracking

Executive:	NA
Scrutiny:	14 October 2021
Council:	NA

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The main source of funding for Carlisle's housing grants is the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) determined annually by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The 2021/22 allocation is £2,155, 574, which is £255,810 above the £1,899,764 allocation in 2020/21. Graph 1 below details the allocation and actual DFG spend by Carlisle City Council over the last 9 years. In recent years Carlisle has spent above its allocation due to carry forwards made in in 2016, when underspends were caused following a large increase in the allocation coinciding with the Housing and Pollution Team being very busy with flood grants work. The slight reduction in spend in 2020 / 21 occurred due to a slowdown in grant delivery in the first quarter because of the start of the coronavirus pandemic.



Graph.1.

- 1.2 The criteria, eligibility and grant levels for Mandatory DFGs are detailed within national legislation and guidance. The City Council DFG allocation will always prioritise its obligations to the Mandatory DFG applicants. DFGs can also be used

for discretionary purposes provided these are adopted by the Council and detailed within a Housing Grants Policy. The City Council's Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2018 details the options for discretionary housing assistance available within the district. A revision to the Policy is scheduled in 2021/22.

- 1.3** The Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2018 made the commitment that the Council would use its discretionary housing grants to assist the elderly, disabled or other vulnerable groups to live independently and to improve their living conditions and well-being. Carlisle regularly scores around or above the national average for excess winter deaths on Public Health England's District Health Profiles. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Report - "*Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes*" states a wide range of people are vulnerable to the cold. This is either because of: a medical condition, such as heart disease; a disability that, for instance, stops people moving around to keep warm, or makes them more likely to develop chest infections. Cold properties can cause death and illnesses that lead to hospital admissions. Carlisle's discretionary housing grants are targeted at making the homes of the elderly, disabled and other vulnerable groups with qualifying health conditions warm and safe thereby reducing the illnesses that may lead to admission into hospitals.
- 1.4** Delayed transfer of care, people staying unnecessarily long in hospitals, has been a problem for Carlisle and the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy created the post of Homelife Liaison Officer to liaise with the NHS and Adult and Social Care and assist in identifying where the DFG process, and other Grants, can help people move back safely into their homes. Appendix 1 list examples of some of the recent cases dealt with by the Homelife Liaison Officer.

2. CARLISLE'S HOUSING ASSISTANCE 2021/22

- 2.1** Mandatory DFGs tend to be for the larger internal construction works or extensions and provide the main expenditure from the Disabled Facilities Fund. The Council's activities on mandatory DFGs have been increasing significantly since 2016 both in terms of volume of referrals coming into the department and the actual spend. However, during the last 18 months there have been some external factors outside

of the Council's control, such as the coronavirus pandemic and the changes in the world markets which continue to have an impact on DFG delivery.

- 2.2** In the first quarter of 2020 / 21 Mandatory Grants payments slowed down because works in properties couldn't proceed due to problems with supplies and labour, many companies rushed to furlough staff at the start of the pandemic and the restrictions placed on building contractors in the first lockdown restricted the works that could be undertaken. After May 2020 when the construction industry was started up again under Covid secure measures, delivery was again slowed as some individuals didn't want the works to proceed as many were still shielding and had to balance the need for the adaptation with the risk from the virus.
- 2.3** Housing and Pollution usually see a steady stream of referrals through the year from Adult Social Care and other professionals, however at the start of the pandemic health professionals, including the Occupational Therapist, were redeployed to other tasks and organisations had to develop new ways of remote working, this resulted in very few assessments being undertaken under the Care Act that could be referred for major adaptations. The number of referrals dropped significantly for Mandatory adaptations at the start of the pandemic, between March 2020 and August 2020 there were only 35 referrals within the 6-month period. The first 6 months of 2021 / 22 has had 97 referrals.
- 2.4** The number of referrals to Homelife only saw a slight decrease during the pandemic. The smaller discretionary Housing Grants were less affected by the lockdown as they tended to use contractors still operating in providing essential electrical or boiler repairs and insulation and heating works. The Discretionary Housing Grants offered by the City Council include: Safe and Warm Grants, Dementia Friendly Grants and Energy Efficiency Grants. Assistance with hospital discharge cases became a priority for the discretionary grants in 2020/21.
- 2.5** Homelife also offer Non-Disabled Facilities funded Grants including the Energy Company Obligations (ECO), Foundations Gas Safety Charity Grants and the National Grid's Warm Homes Fund. As Homelife is a Home Improvement Agency it is ideally placed for applying into many short-term funds made available for specific

purposes many of which are linked to the objectives of the discretionary DFGs. The number of referrals for these types of work also dropped initially at the start of the pandemic as contractors carrying out the works experienced supply and access issues.

- 2.6** Referral numbers started to increase in both services over the last 6 months of the year 2020 /21, this was in part due to the natural recovery out of the first lockdown and the Council successfully appointing a Trusted Assessor to work within the Housing and Pollution Team in late April 2020. The Disabled Adaptation Trusted Assessor and the Homelife Liaison Officer have been able to work closely together to raise awareness of the service offer and have been able to take on some of the assessment work that would have been previously been carried out by Adult Social Care, reducing waiting times and increasing the throughput of referrals for both services.
- 2.7** In 2020/21 the Housing and Pollution Team completed 141 Mandatory DFGs, the main works being stairlifts, level access showers and building works allowing access around the house. Within the same period Homelife completed 287 discretionary DFGs, mainly covering heating and electrical improvements. Many house clearances were also completed under the discretionary DFGs to facilitate re occupation of the home.
- 2.8** In the next 12 months material costs and availability of materials will be one of the biggest challenges, the cost of timber, plastic materials, plaster board, steel products and bricks are causing significant delays to building works commencing on site. Although the Council rely on framework contracts under its procurement framework for the Disabled Adaptations, with prices fixed for the period of the contract, contractors are having to pass insurmountable costs on to the Council or the adaptation would simply not go ahead. The contractors we work alongside have also reported that finding skilled trades persons is also a problem with not enough contractors to go around now there is drive for new build housing again, and a demand for local domestic building and restoration projects.

2.9 In October 2020 capital funds of £23,200 were made available for bring long term (greater than two years) empty homes back into use. The funding allowed 7 previously empty homes to be re-occupied with the main works being kitchen installations, heating, glazing, access improvement, re-wiring, bathrooms, joinery, damp, floor coverings to kitchen and bathroom. The Average time that the properties were empty before the works were completed was 6 years 6 months.

In 2021/22 a further £109,433 was made available for the empty homes grant and from these 17 properties have had grants approved. The maximum empty property grants are now £5,000. There are a further 6 properties about to submit applications and it is hoped that a minimum of 23 properties will be re occupied during this initial phase. Progress visits undertaken thus far has shown positive activity and one property has already been completed.

3. CONSULTATION

3.1 This report is for Information

4. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 This report is for Information

5. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES

5.1 Address current and future housing needs to protect and improve residents' quality of life.

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Appendices	Appendix 1
attached to report:	Examples Of 2021 Cases Dealt with by the Homelife Liaison Officer

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- **None**

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL – Grants must be awarded in accordance with national legislation and should be awarded in line with Council policy. This report provides an update for Members to note, and no decision is required.

PROPERTY SERVICES – No comments

FINANCE – The Council has received substantial increases in DFG funding through the Better Care Fund over the past couple of years. The current budget allocation in 2021/22 stands at £3,387,200 (including amounts carried forward from previous years and the 2021/22 allocation of £2,155,574). The current budget allocation in 2021/22 for bringing empty properties back into use is £112,400.

EQUALITY – Carlisle City Council has a leading DFG service.

INFORMATION GOVERNANCE – There are information governance implications with this report

Appendix 1

Examples Of 2021 Cases Dealt with by the Homelife Liaison Officer

Case study 1 – Hospital discharge – Furniture Move

“A” was referred to us by their daughter who was unsure who to ask for assistance to help get A home from hospital. A had been in hospital for 6 weeks and was unable to go home until a stair lift had been fitted. The Homelife Liaison Officer was able to advise about the services that could be offered through Homelife and Housing and Pollution to get A home. The ward occupational therapist was contacted to ask them to make a referral. The Homelife Liaison Officer was able to get A home quickly by moving a bed downstairs and also ordering a stair lift. It took two weeks to order and install the stair lift which is very quick, but if the bed had not been moved downstairs to enable interim downstairs living, A would have spent a further two weeks in hospital. Being at home enabled the care package to start and help A with rehabilitation. When a date for the stair lift to be fitted was confirmed, Homelife arranged to move the bed back upstairs on the morning of installation. A is now recovering well at home.

Case Study 2 – Hospital discharge – Deep Clean

The Homelife Liaison Officer arranged for a deep clean on behalf of B who was admitted to hospital. The clients support worker made the referral. B needed a deep clean of their home to enable a safe discharge. Without support B would have been transferred to an interim care setting until works could have taken place.

The Homelife Liaison Officer was able to have a deep clean carried out within the same week the referral was made meaning B could return home quickly without the need to be moved to another care setting. Both B and their family were very impressed by the clean and it has made a huge difference to B’s health and wellbeing. The deep clean meant B could be safely discharged from hospital in a timely manner.

Case Study 3 – Hospice Discharge – Boiler, key safe, Front door

The Homelife Liaison Officer received a referral regarding urgent works required to help get a palliative care patient home. C’s boiler had broken, and they had no heating and hot water. The front door was also difficult to open and close and its high threshold was a tripping hazard. The Homelife Liaison Officer arranged to replace the boiler within a week

and arranged a key safe the next day to help carers gain access in the property. The front door was changed within a couple of weeks to help make the property safe and secure and reduce the risks of falls within the home. C's family were very happy with the works as it enabled palliative care to be continued at home rather than in a medical setting.

Case Study 4 – Hospital Discharge – Lock change, key safe & deep clean

D was admitted to hospital by ambulance after becoming unwell. It was noticed that the property had become quite unkempt, and these concerns were passed onto the hospital when transferring care. Homelife were notified and grant assistance was organised to get D home as they had no family locally to help. As D was taken into the ambulance quite quickly the door keys were left inside the house. The Homelife Liaison Officer met with contractors at the property and safely gained access just changing one lock. A key safe was installed to keep the keys safe and to allow cleaning contractors access to deep clean the property. Homelife were able to carry out all works very quickly meaning D could return home and reduce the time required to be spent in hospital.