

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 6th September 2021

Report Title: Amendment to Financial Assistance Policy 2019 -2023

Report By: Andrew Palmer – Assistant Director of Housing and Built Environment

Purpose of Report

To request Cabinet, agree an amendment to the current Financial Assistance Policy (2019-2023), to increase the discretionary disabled facilities grant assistance for internal stair lift only applications from £5000 to £10,000

Recommendation(s)

That subject to the agreement of the leadership, the discretionary disabled facilities grant assistance for internal stair lift only applications is raised to £10,000

Background

1. The Housing Renewal Team administer the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding available for eligible adaptions defined under The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The Act defines not only what types of adaption can be made to a property but also specifies who is eligible for a mandatory DFG. This includes a means tested element to determine whether the applicant is required to make a contribution to the cost of the adaption
2. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 broadened the scope for which DFG funding could be used. It provided a discretionary element (within certain criteria), as to how DFG funding could be used to further support people who required adaptions and support
3. It states under Regulation 4 that a local authority may not use additional provisions of discretionary assistance unless they have adopted a policy for that assistance and the public have notice of it. Our current financial assistance policy is on our website at
<https://www.hastings.gov.uk/content/housing/improvement/454250/pdfs/HousingRenewalFinancialAssistancePolicy2019>
4. Our current financial assistance policy has a section which sets out our discretionary assistance criteria and the circumstances where discretionary DFG funding will be considered

5. We are currently in the process of reviewing all of the discretionary elements of the disabled facilities grant funding. The purpose of this has two aims. The first to assess the current options on offer, how much they are utilised and whether they are making tangible difference to people's access to support and adaptations. The second aim is to consider other types of discretionary options that could be offered (within the remit of the legislation and guidance) and if so to incorporate them into an updated financial assistance policy
6. Work on this has begun with a Councillor workshop on 20th July 2021 where we began to discuss possible options. We are also looking at developing a communications plan so we can improve the information on our website and undertake some targeted promotion to relevant audiences about the funding and how people can access it. This process will take approximately 6 months to put in place. This is because once the options have been identified, work will need to be done to ensure the processes and procedures that underpin the application and auditing of eligibility are set up correctly and in line with legislative requirements

Means Testing of DFG Applications

7. It is a legislative requirement under the mandatory DFG grant process that applicants who are not on a passporting benefit are means tested, to establish whether they are required to contribute towards the cost of the grant
8. Undertaking the means test element is a step in the overall DFG process which takes time to administer and is dependent on obtaining accurate and up to date financial information from the applicant and others in the household (if applicable). Until the client provides the information the grant cannot be progressed further. If it is determined a contribution is required from the applicant, then the DFG cannot proceed unless either the applicant or third party commit to providing the contribution required
9. Our current discretionary policy has an option for internal stairlift only applications to be non-means tested provided the total cost of the internal stairlift and installation is under £5000. The rationale for this was to reduce the waiting time for this type of adaption when people are waiting to be discharged from hospital and/or would be struggling in their current home due to not being able to safely access bedroom and bathroom facilities
10. Stair lifts are relatively straightforward and expedient to fit in comparison to other types of adaption and enable people to remain living in their current home. The reason for removing the means test for this type of adaption is that when compared with the cost of someone having to move as a result of not being able to make a contribution to the DFG, this is a more cost effective option, particularly when there is a shortage of suitable level access accommodation
11. We have not considered removing means testing for other types of adaption at this time. However, as part of the wider discretionary review, one of the options being considered is providing hardship assistance for those who are means tested and are required to contribute. This idea is being developed further to

ensure an equitable balance between those who would be unable to pay as a result of financial hardship and those able to pay but chose not to. A financial impact assessment will also need to be completed to look at the impact on the grant budget of such a change, in conjunction with our current discretionary options and other ideas we may wish to introduce

Reason for wanting to increase current discretionary limit on stairlifts

12. In the interim one of the amendments we do wish to make is to increase the limit for non means tested, internal stair lift only applications from £5000 to £10,000
13. We have noticed due to the increased costs involved for curved stair lifts; some stair lift only applications are no longer meeting the discretionary £5000 funding limit. This means applicants must submit information on their financial circumstances and wait for a means test to be carried out. If it is found they need to contribute to the grant and are unable to do so, then they are left in a position where they cannot access the grant funding, or the adaptions needed. The lack of availability of level access accommodation means they are unlikely to find a property suitable for their needs in a timely manner. The result is they will continue to be at risk of falls in their current property, and should they do so, create further demand and financial burden on the NHS
14. We have looked at the costs of curved stair lifts and have found that over the course of three years the average cost of a curved stairlift has risen by 20.48% and the maximum cost has risen by 20.68%. This would mean that by 2024 the average cost of a stairlift will be approximately £6,926.00 and the maximum cost would be approximately £8,447.60

Financial Implications

15. We would like to propose the current £5000 limit is raised to £10,000 to cover situations where internal curved stair lifts are required or more than one internal straight stairlift is required
16. The financial implications are; this would widen the eligibility for non means tested discretionary applications for stair lifts. This will result in a higher proportion of cases using funds for this purpose, meaning they are not available for other discretionary options. However, given the large budget allocation which was £ 2,056,655 in 21/22 (staffing and in-house OT costs to be deducted), and the fact we have been underspend over the last few years, this is not perceived to be an issue at this time
17. In 19/20 13 curved stairlifts were installed with the minimum cost being £4450 and the maximum cost being £6885. Therefore, the average cost of the 13 stairlifts for the year was £5332.31. The total spent was £69,580
18. In 20/21 9 curved stairlifts were installed with the minimum cost being £4125 and the maximum cost being £7000. Therefore, the average cost of the 9 stairlifts for that year was £5771.67. The total spent was £52,270. There was 1 case where a client mandatory DFG was refused due to means testing and due to the cost of

the stair lift exceeding the current policy limit of £5000, they were not eligible for a discretionary grant

19. Based on the above figures, if we estimate an average of 11 curved stairlifts eligible for a non means tested discretionary grant in a year with an average cost of £5771.67 (based on latest 20/21 figure. Would need to be adjusted for inflation), the amount spent on this discretionary option would be £63,488.37. However, it is important to note we cannot predict exactly the type of adaptions that will be requested.

Timetable of Next Steps

1. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Amend Policy to reflect proposed change		When agreed in line with delegated authority	Sandra Thornton

Wards Affected

All

Implications

Relevant project tools applied? Yes/No

Have you checked this report for plain English and readability? Yes/No

Climate change implications considered. Yes/No

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness - No

Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17) - No

Risk Management - No

Environmental Issues - No

Economic/Financial Implications – Yes

Human Rights Act - No

Organisational Consequences - No

Local People's Views - No

Anti-Poverty - No

Additional Information

Officer to Contact

Officer Name Sandra Thornton
Officer Email Address s thornton@hastings.gov.uk
Officer Telephone Number 01424 451332
