

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING

DATE 29th JUNE 2006

Disabled Facilities Grants

OPEN	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	Improved Health and Wellbeing
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Enabling Community Wellbeing
KEY PRIORITY:	Housing and Independent living
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Anne Hingley
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Head of Planning, Health and Environment
CONTACT OFFICER:	Richard Osborne – Ext. 2564 Richard.Osborne@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES:	none

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider future arrangements for the administration of Disabled Facilities Grant in the district.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to **DECIDE** to:

- 2.1 **Delegate to the Head of Planning, Health & Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, Health & Environment, authority to put in place the necessary arrangements to transfer the administration of Disabled Facilities Grants related functions currently carried out by Wyre Forest Community Housing to the North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency, subject to satisfactory arrangements on staffing, finances and office accommodation.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGS) are mandatory grants provided to persons to assist them in accessing and moving around their home and also to provide for facilities such as level access showers, ramps and stairlifts. The provision of these grants is covered by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

- 3.2 The administration, processing and supervision of these grants was carried out solely by the Council until 2000 when Wyre Forest Community Housing (WFCH) took over the Council housing stock. Since 2000, the provision of DFGs in WFCH properties has been carried out by staff of WFCH with Council Officers maintaining a supervisory role and part administrative function including provision of means testing. WFCH have been paid an Agency Fee (currently 10% of the work cost), top sliced from the grant, to provide for their role.
- 3.3 Recognising a backlog of DFGs needing to be resolved, the Council has committed significant funding to this service, currently £800,000 per year. This budget is contained within the 'Single Housing Capital Pot' and is part funded with a Government grant of 60% up to a limit of approximately £320,000.
- 3.4 In October 2004 the Council formally agreed with Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council to set up the North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency. One of the roles of the Agency is to administer, process and supervise DFGs in private properties. The Agency is provided with a 10% Agency Fee, top sliced, as with WFCH, and is also provided with additional support through the provision of a Caseworker and office accommodation (currently Wyre Forest District Council offices in New Street, Stourport on Severn). The Agency has completed a successful first year exceeding all of its targets and the Council sees its role continuing to develop to help meet its strategic housing objectives.
- 3.5 A North Worcestershire Code of Practice for Adaptations is nearing a final draft. This sets out standards and consistency for all involved in DFGs, including Occupational Therapists and seeks to bring consistency of approach in each of the Districts and Borough areas. This would include for a needs based response not dependent upon whether the property is private or public sector. Primary Care Trusts in Worcestershire are being restructured and there is an Occupational Therapy service review in the north of Worcestershire. These factors may delay or alter the outcomes and Code of Practice. It is anticipated that this matter will be reported to Cabinet in due course, hopefully by late summer.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 DFGs are currently administered through two agencies in the District. There are differences in how DFGs are dealt with by the Agencies and different backlogs. The use of two Agencies is not considered to be the most effective and consistent way to deliver DFGs.
- 4.2 For 2005/06, for the first time, the budget target of £800,000 was achieved, however, there is still a significant backlog of cases, in particular in WFCH properties. This backlog needs to be addressed in the most effective way and the Council needs to ensure the budget spend continues to be met in the future.
- 4.3 The North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency has been driving forward changes in service provision of DFGs and other work. Some of these advances need to be incorporated into the DFG work in WFCH stock.

- 4.4 For practical reasons which would generate operational efficiencies, consisting of service delivery and for a more effective across the District as a whole, it is proposed to administer DFGs only through the North Worcestershire Care & Repair Agency. This has been accepted in principle by WFCH.
- 4.5 Discussions are currently ongoing to carry out this change and to ensure WFCH are satisfied with the arrangements relating to work to their stock. It is anticipated that it will take a few months to put in place the necessary operational changes required to effect the administrative transfer. The Council needs to be satisfied that any operational changes improve administrative efficiency and that the arrangements are fully compatible with the overall operation of the North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council currently supports the functioning of the Agencies with fees on the works carried out and direct, in kind, support to the North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency through a seconded case worker and office accommodation.
- 5.2 It is anticipated that there will be no additional financial implications arising from the alignment of the administration systems but should this not be the case, a further report will be made to Cabinet

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council is required to fund mandatory DFGs and this work is covered by the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Failure to ensure an effective DFG service in the district could result in disabled persons not being provided with the adaptations they need and the Council is duty bound to provide.
- 7.2 Operating two administration systems for DFG's is not considered to be efficient, economic nor effective.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 It is untenable to continue to operate two parallel administrative systems for DFGs in the District. It is proposed that the administration current carried out by WFCH on their stock is transferred to the North Worcestershire Care & Repair Agency.

9. CONSULTEES

Head Financial Services
Head Legal & Democratic Services
Wyre Forest Community Housing
North Worcestershire Care & Repair Agency

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Wyre Forest District Council Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
website link:

<http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/lychee/media/spu/wfdcpshousingassistpolicy.pdf>

9.6.06