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| Subject: | Report on the Findings of the Disabled Facilities Grants Task and Finish Group Report | Status: | For Publication |
| Report to: | Overview and Scrutiny Management | Date: | 6 th June 2011 |
| Report of: | Head of Health, Housing and Regeneration | Portfolio Holder: | Regeneration |
| Key Decision: | <input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No | General Exception <input type="checkbox"/> | Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community Impact Assessment: | Required: No | Attached: | No |
| Biodiversity Impact Assessment | Required: No | Attached: | No |
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| 1. | RECOMMENDATION(S) |
| 1.1 | That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee notes the response from Cabinet to the recommendations of the Disabled Facilities Task and Finish Group |

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To report considers the recommendations of the Disabled Facilities Grants Task and Finish Group.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:
- **A clean and green Rossendale** – creating a better environment for all.
 - **A healthy and successful Rossendale** – supporting vibrant communities and a strong economy.
 - **Responsive and value for money local services** – responding to and meeting the different needs of customers and improving the cost effectiveness of services.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 5.1 Whilst developing its work programme for 2010/11, it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group be established to look at the process for Disabled Facilities Grants.
- 5.2 The Task and Finish Group met in July to agree the Terms of Reference of the Group and agreed a site visit to St Vincent's Homecare and Repair. A representative from Lancashire County Council and Burnley Borough Council as well as an Occupational Therapist attended a meeting to provide information to the Task and Finish Group. The final report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in December 2010. In February 2011 the Cabinet considered the recommendations and the response to those recommendations is as follows.

5.3 **Recommendation 1** – It would be beneficial if the OT provided the Council with an update on those adaptations under £500, to enable the Council to keep an audit of all applications

Response - All minor adaptations under £500.00 are dealt with by Lancashire County Council Social Services. Figures are available on a quarterly basis and recent years demand for minor adaptations has been as follows: 2008/09 712 cases had been completed, 2009/10 778 cases and 2010/11 978 cases.

5.3 **Recommendation 2** – That the Council considers placing a local land charge on properties which receive grants over £10,000, from April 2011, similar to the system in place that Lancashire County Council use for top-up funding.

Response – Cabinet supports this recommendation which is in line with The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996: Disabled Facilities Grant (Conditions relating to approval or payment of Grant) General Consent 2008. This allows a local land charge to be registered against the property requiring repayment by the recipient of such part of the grant that exceeds £5000 (but may not demand an amount in excess of £10,000).

It is noted that the recommendation from the Task & Finish Group requires that local land charges will not be applied unless the total grant exceeds £10,000 and this is supported by Cabinet.

5.4 **Recommendation 3** – The Group recommend that the Council request a joint leaflet be produced to include information on the process of DFGs from a Council and OT perspective, which should include sources of financial help and advice to assist people struggling to fund their own contribution to the building work, including credit unions.

Response – Cabinet agrees that this would be helpful to applicants and will request officers to develop an information leaflet together with the OT Service and consider options regarding how this might be funded and maintained in the longer term.

5.5 **Recommendation 4** – Members felt that there would be more merit in having a Home Improvement Agency based on a local footprint, rather than a County footprint.

Response – The Cabinet is aware that the future model for Home Improvement Agencies is being debated as part of the efficiency reviews at a County Level. The Cabinet does support provision on a local footprint but recognises that this needs to be fully considered to ensure the most efficient use of limited public resources.

5.6 **Recommendation 5** – It is important that there is a defined policy to allow for a specific amount of money to be spent on urgent cases eg 25% of the available funding specifically for non-urgent cases to help reduce this element of the waiting list.

Response - Cabinet support this recommendation and will introduce this policy from June 2011.

5.7 **Recommendation 6** – Lancashire County Council needs to provide a clear statement about what they are going to do about the following:

- a) Provision of top-up funding for Registered Social Landlord properties
- b) Transition process for carer/family and the impact on them

- c) Clear intention about what they intend to do about re-cycling equipment, such as track hoist/stairlifts, in circumstances such as death or redundant equipment (no longer needed) so families, owners and carers are aware of the policy.

Response – The County Council have responded to these issues as follows.

- a) This has been raised by a number of District Councils in recent years Lancashire County Council legal advice is that they are unable to provide top up funding in RSL properties as they place a charge on the property when a top up is provided and that wouldn't be possible on rented property.
- b) A response from the Director of the Children and Young Peoples Service is awaited on this item. The Leader of the Council will write directly to the County Council requesting an urgent response to this issue.
- c) The County Council already have in place processes and procedures for managing the recycling of hoists and stair-lifts. It would be beneficial to ensure that service users and carers/ families as well as other professionals were fully aware of these and suggest that this is addressed in the leaflet as in 3 above.

5.8 **Recommendation 7** – The Council need to ensure that local MPs are kept informed of waiting times for Disabled Facilities Grants, the total costs of those aids and adaptations on the waiting lists and the procedure for applying for these grants, to enable them to inform their constituents.

Response – The Chief Executive has scheduled meetings with the MP and will include this issue on the agenda for future meetings.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

6. SECTION 151 OFFICER

6.1 “In making any recommendation Members should ensure that they can be accommodated within existing budget resources”

7. MONITORING OFFICER

7.1 No comments.

8. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

8.1 No HR Implications.

9. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

9.1 None

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Figures are available regarding the number of minor adaptations under £500.00 which are delivered by Lancashire County Council Social Services. These will be reported on a quarterly basis through the Covalent Performance Management System.
- 10.2 The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 allows local authorities to place a local land charge, registered against the property, requiring repayment by the recipient of such part of the grant that exceeds £5000 in the event of the property being sold on the open market. This allows receipts from the repayments to be recycled into the Disabled Facilities Grants budget making provision for additional grants to be awarded. The Cabinet believes that this represents the best use of its resources and from 1st July 2011 the Council will now place a local land charge on properties which receive grants over £10,000.
- 10.3 The Cabinet recognise the value of good quality information to ensure that customers are aware of the full level of services provided by both the local and County Council. Officers will be asked to develop an information leaflet with the Occupational Therapy service to include full information on the process of DFGs and signposts to other sources of financial help and advice to assist people struggling to fund their own contribution to the building work.
- 10.4 The commissioning of Home Improvement Agency services has been the subject of a county wide review in which the Council took part. The recommendations from the review are that each locality will shape how HIA service are provided locally subject to an agreed county wide performance framework. The Cabinet does support provision on a local footprint but recognises that this needs to be fully considered to ensure the most efficient use of limited public resources.
- 10.5 The Cabinet fully support the priority weighting awarded to cases deemed as urgent by the Occupation Therapist. However, in recent years this has led to a backlog of 'non-urgent' cases awaiting assistance. The Cabinet support the recommendation from the Task & Finisjh Group and from 1st July 2011 25% of the available funding in the DFG budget will be ringfenced specifically for non-urgent cases to help reduce this element of the waiting list.
- 10.6 The County Council have responded to these issues, detailed in section 5.7. However, whilst the issue of top up funding for tenants cannot be resolved for legal reasons a response on the issue of the impacts of the transition process for carer/family has not been responded to. This is a vital issue for many families and the County Council will be asked to respond to this issue as a matter of urgency.
- 10.7 The Chief Executive has scheduled meetings with the MP and will include discussion on the issue of Disabled Facilities Grants on the agenda for future meetings. . .

No background papers