

Factsheet 2

Disabled Facilities Grant

What is a Disabled Facilities Grant?

The Council is required to provide financial assistance through Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) to owner occupiers and tenants to enable adaptations to be made to a property which is occupied by a disabled person. The grant is means tested (except where the disabled occupant is a child) and the maximum grant is £30,000.

What type of work does the grant cover?

The grant can be used for adaptations to help the disabled person to get into and around the home or to provide or enable access to facilities within it including safe access to the garden. Common types of work funded include:

- Providing a level access shower
- Providing a stairlift
- Providing a ramp
- Widening doors
- Providing accessible kitchen units
- Extending the property to provide ground floor bedroom and bathroom

How are the needs of the disabled person assessed?

The needs of the disabled person are assessed by the Social Services authority which for North Norfolk is Norfolk County Council. The assessment may be undertaken from information provided in writing or over the phone by the Care Connect Service or for more complex cases an assessment will be undertaken by the Occupational Therapy Service and is likely to require a home visit. A recommendation will be made by Norfolk County Council to the district council who is the responsible body for providing Disabled Facilities Grant.

What is the process for making an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant?

The Council has reviewed and streamlined all of its grant processes and changes will be implemented very soon. On receipt of the recommendation from the County Council the owner or tenant of the property to be adapted will be invited to make an application for a DFG by completing a simple form. This form will be considered firstly by the Housing Options team who will consider the type of property, the household composition and the extent of the recommended works to determine whether consideration should be given to assisting with securing suitable alternative accommodation. If the DFG is to go ahead and a means test is required a further more detailed form will require completion. A Technical Officer from the Council will visit the property to be adapted to assess the required work to ensure that the recommended works are 'reasonable and practicable' and to draw up a specification against which the applicant will obtain quotes. The quotes will be considered and an approval for the grant made against the lowest.

Approximately 50% of applications for DFG are from tenants of Victory Housing Trust. The Council and Trust have been developing a pilot partnership arrangement under which the Council will provide £250,000pa to the Trust as a contribution to meeting the needs of their tenants. The Trust will match fund the Council's contribution and in future will take responsibility for providing adaptations to their tenants. The pilot is due to commence on 1 June 2011.

The Council is also working in partnership with other agencies and Councils across the County to deliver improved services to disabled people who would otherwise apply for DFG.

Who undertakes the work?

The applicant will obtain quotes from companies depending upon the cost of the work (2 below £5,000 and 3 over £5,000). An approval will be issued against the lowest quote and the applicant then instructs the contractor to undertake the work in line with the specification. The applicant is responsible for managing the contractor and ensuring that the work is completed satisfactorily. The Technical Officer will inspect the completed works before the grant can be paid.

Is there support available?

The process of adapting a property can be very complex and support is available from the Home Improvement Agency Caseworker. The Home Improvement Agency service is provided by South Norfolk District Council but funded by Supporting People Grant (see factsheet 11) and North Norfolk District Council. There is a charge for the service but this can be included in the grant. The Caseworker is based in the Council office in Cromer with the Housing Services Team.

Are there any grant conditions?

The grant requires that the disabled person should be able to reside in the property for a five year period or for a shorter period as his or her health or other relevant circumstances permit. The Council is able to place a charge against the property which requires that the grant is repaid if the property is disposed of (sold, assigned, transferred or otherwise) within 10 years of the works being completed. The Council can only demand repayment of grants in excess of £5,000 disregarding the first £5,000 and the maximum amount that can be demanded is £10,000. In determining whether to demand repayment of the grant the Council will need to be satisfied that it is reasonable in all the circumstances to require repayment.

Can Tenants apply for a grant?

The grant requires that the disabled person should be able to reside in the property for a five year period. Tenants of social housing currently have a 'lifetime' tenancy and the Council will therefore provide grant although in some cases the landlord may themselves arrange for the adaptations to be delivered and may not require the tenant to apply for a DFG. In future tenants in moving into affordable housing may be given a fixed term tenancy, if this tenancy is for less than five year the Council will want to be assured that the tenancy is likely to be renewed at the end of the fixed term. In the private rented sector however most tenants will be given a 6 month or 12 month tenancy and the Council will have to carefully consider whether to allow the tenant to apply for a grant. It is possible that the Council could consider an application from the landlord instead. The Council would always work with the tenant to seek an appropriate solution.

How much does the Council spend on DFGs

In 2010/11 the Council spent just under £900,000 and completed 170 applications with an average grant of £5,272. The Council received £345,000 from Government towards the cost of providing DFGs. The Government has maintained its commitment to funding DFG in the face of significant pressure to reduce the national debt and the Council will receive an increased allocation of £443,000 from Government in 2012/13.

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