

<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>FOUNDATIONS REVIEW - DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS DELIVERY</b>	
<b>Presented by</b>	Councillor Michael Wyatt Communities and Climate Change Portfolio Holder  PH Briefed: Yes	
<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Public Report:</b> Yes
		<b>Key Decision:</b> Yes
<b>Financial Implications</b>	<p>The staffing costs and grant payments will be funded from the Disabled Facilities Grant Capital Fund.</p> <p>The £114,152 additional grant received in 2024/25 will be used to initiate this work.</p> <p>Once the demand for the Adapted Property Home Improvement Grant has been assessed, the grants will be funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant Allocation. The Council's capital programme, approved by Council on 20 February 2025, includes an indicative capital budget of £3.4m for the period 2025/26 to 2029/30.</p>	
	<b>Signed off by the Section 151 Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Legal Implications</b>	Grant conditions will be developed with the oversight of the Council's legal/audit teams and this would include nomination rights.	
	<b>Signed off by the Monitoring Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Staffing and Corporate Implications</b>	Additional staff will be required for this project and the cost of these can be capitalised.	
	<b>Signed off by the Head of Paid Service:</b> Yes	
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To update Cabinet on the work with Foundations and the proposed Financial Assistance Policy and associated grant programme.	
<b>Reason for Decision</b>	To approve the Financial Assistance Policy which includes the new Adapted Property Home Improvement grant to be delivered by NWLDC.	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>THAT CABINET:</b>	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>APPROVES THE DRAFT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY</b></li> <li>2. <b>APPROVES THE PROPOSED USE OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) CAPITAL UNDERSPEND FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY ALONG WITH ANY ONGOING DFG CAPITAL</b></li> <li>3. <b>CONSIDERS THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMUNITY SCRUTINY AT ITS MEETING ON 26 JUNE 2025 AS SET OUT IN SECTION 7 OF THIS REPORT</b></li> <li>4. <b>DELEGATES AUTHORITY TO THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES) IN CONSULTATION WITH THE SECTION 151 OFFICER TO AGREE TERMS WITH AND THEREAFTER ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT OR AGREEMENTS WITH FOUNDATIONS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY.</b></li> <li>5. <b>DELEGATES AUTHORITY TO THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES) TO MAKE MINOR AMENDMENTS TO THE POLICY INCLUDING LEGISLATIVE CHANGES.</b></li> </ol>
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## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 District councils have a statutory duty to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). Funding for DFGs is provided from central government with the Council receiving £943,749 in 2024/25.
- 1.2 The Council has a significant cumulative DFG underspend from previous financial years of circa £2.3m at the end of 2024/25.
- 1.3 DFG funding is allocated as a grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and by proxy the Department of Health and Social Care. There is a historic formula to determine how much each local authority is allocated. The Council receives an allocation that takes into account the health impacts of a former mining town. DFG can only be spent on private sector housing adaptations. Non-stock holding councils can passport the grant to arm's length housing providers. Therefore, the Council currently has more grant than there is demand for the service. The grant is normally awarded in April of each financial year. Successive governments have recognised the preventative benefits of DFGs and increased the allocated grant given to local authorities.
- 1.4 The Council's DFGs are delivered by Lightbulb, a Countywide service run by Blaby District Council. The Council has been a full member of the Countywide Lightbulb Service since 2017 along with Leicestershire County Council and five other Districts in Leicestershire.
- 1.5 The Lightbulb Service brings together a range of practical housing support into a single service. The offer is a targeted, proactive approach via General Practitioners (GPs) and other health/care professionals. Early assessment and triage of housing issues is undertaken at key points of entry. The service is based on a hub and spoke model. There is an integrated locality Lightbulb team in each authority area offering:

- Minor adaptations and equipment
- DFGs
- Wider housing support needs (warmth, energy, home security)
- Housing related health and wellbeing (Assistive Technology, falls prevention)
- Planning for the future (housing options)
- Housing related advice, information, signposting.

1.6 The table below shows DFG allocations 2022-2025. In the last two years there has been an additional in-year allocation to local authorities.

Year	Allocation
2024/25	£829,597 + £114,152 = £943,749
2023/24	£760,574 + £66,367 = £826,941
2022/23	£760,574

1.7 The Lightbulb service is meeting the statutory needs of the DFG funding. See more detail regarding the RRO at 4.1 below. Lightbulb is also using the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) framework to deliver a number of pilot projects which also utilise the capital grant funding such as a safer spaces pilot and a respiratory illness pilot. However, the Council commissioned Foundations, who are the national body for DFGs and home improvement agencies in England, to support officers in looking at options for utilising the Council's remaining grant within the framework to provide additional support to vulnerable and disabled residents.

## 2.0 FOUNDATIONS INITIAL REVIEW

2.1 A summary of Foundations' findings are:

- Lightbulb is meeting the statutory function and the adaptation work should remain within the scope of Lightbulb;
- That the Council increases the Technical Officer resource at Lightbulb to increase capacity to deliver the annual capital Better Care Fund allocation;
- That the Council could offer loans and grants for adaptations, home improvements works or similar to low-income owner occupiers;
- That the Council should consider introducing a Financial Assistance Policy for North West Leicestershire.

2.2 The recommendations in relation to the Lightbulb Service have all been fed back to Lightbulb as part of the Lightbulb Service review.

2.3 The Lightbulb Review has been paused due to on-going negotiations with Leicestershire County Council. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) may also have an impact on the future of the service. The Lightbulb Executive Board took the decision to keep the service as status quo and all partners agreed to extend the contract for a further twelve months, to allow time for a clearer picture to emerge regarding LGR.

2.4 The technical support function, at 2.1 above, has been implemented as from 1 April 2025.

## 3.0 FOUNDATIONS SECOND REVIEW

- 3.1 Lightbulb already delivers the Council's statutory DFGs, and other grants associated with that work stream. A new Financial Assistance Policy delivered directly by the Council would need to complement the work carried out by Lightbulb but also sit independently enough to be delivered separately.
- 3.2 In response to the Foundations advice, a proposed Financial Assistance Policy has been drafted. This is attached at **Appendix 1**. It looks at gaps in provision, existing structures and identifies areas that the underspend could be spent on that meet the needs of the district as well as the health and wellbeing outcomes that underpin the Better Care Fund (BCF). The BCF programme supports local systems to successfully deliver the integration of health and social care in a way that supports person-centred care, sustainability and better outcomes for people and carers. The BCF objectives are to:
- enable people to stay well, safe and independent at home for longer
  - provide the right care in the right place at the right time
  - prevent crisis intervention
  - avoid admissions to hospital
  - avoid admissions to residential and care homes
  - ensure the effectiveness of reablement
  - ensure hospital discharges are to the person's usual place of residence.
- 3.3 The new proposed Financial Assistance Policy consists of two parts. The first part being the statutory offer of DFGs and complementary grants delivered by Lightbulb.
- 3.4 The second part concerns a new financial assistance offer, to be administered and delivered directly by the Council.
- 3.5 The proposed grant under the Financial Assistance Policy is:
- Adapted Property Home Improvement Grant – to increase quality of homes and the number of available properties to privately rent for people with disabilities on North West Leicestershire's housing register
- 3.6 The Financial Assistance Policy will be delivered subject to available funding.

#### **4.0 GOVERNANCE**

- 4.1 The Regulatory Reform Order (Housing Assistance England & Wales) 2002 (RRO) gives local authorities their discretionary grants and loan offer, providing that there is an approved published policy.
- 4.2 The proposed policy is a key decision, hence requiring formal approval by Cabinet.
- 4.3 The review recommends that the underspend is ring fenced to be used to implement the Financial Assistance Policy.
- 4.4 The grant conditions state that the money can only be spent in the following ways:
- A. Approving Disabled Facilities Grants in accordance with the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
  - B. Providing other forms of assistance to fund adaptations for disabled people in accordance with a locally published Housing Assistance Policy under RRO powers.

C. Any other social care capital projects (as locally agreed with district and county councils in two-tier areas).

- 4.5 Having regard to the above requirements, the Council can proceed with the Adapted Property Home Improvement Grant without getting approval from Leicestershire County Council because it meets criteria A and B in point 4.4 above. This is because the Adapted Property Home Improvement Grant is directly providing an adaptation for a disabled person. If this grant was not directly providing an adaptation for a disabled person, point C at 4.4 above would apply and the Council would have to seek agreement with the County Council. Therefore, the proposed grant will not require the agreement of Leicestershire County Council to deliver, but this would need the agreement of the Section 151 Officer. This is Foundations' advice which has been agreed by the Section 151 Officer for audit purposes.

## **5.0 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY**

- 5.1 Subject to the draft Policy being agreed, it is recognised that there will be a period of mobilisation. Foundations can support the Council in mobilising and implementing the new Adapted Property Home Improvement Grant. Foundations will, therefore, support the Council through the mobilisation and implementation of the new grant which will include recommendations on the appropriate level of staffing resource. The Council's Head of Paid Service will consider these recommendations and determine the appropriate level of resource necessary within the financial envelope available to implement the Policy.
- 5.2 The Environmental Protection team will set up a task and finish group to implement the new grant and will include internal audit.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL**

- 6.1 The recommendation is to use the £114,152 from the additional DFG allocation for 2024/2025 to fund the Foundations' mobilisation costs and any other associated costs involved in setting up the new Adapted Property Home Improvement Grant.
- 6.2 Foundations, as part of their mobilisation and implementation work, will review and recommend the appropriate staffing levels and posts required for the new Adapted Property Home Improvement Grant. The staffing costs and associated resources for the new grant will be funded through the annual DFG allocation. Any new job role proposed will be contained within the available budget, subject to sign off by the Head of Paid Service and evaluated and recruited to in line with the Council's Human Resources policies and procedures.
- 6.3 It is recommended that the underspend is used to deliver the Financial Assistance Policy.
- 6.4 It is also recommended that any future underspend is used on an ongoing basis to continue to deliver the Financial Assistance Policy.
- 6.5 Once the demand for the Adapted Property Home Improvement Grant has been assessed, the grants will be funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant Allocation.

The Council's capital programme, approved by Council on 20 February 2025, includes an indicative capital budget of £3.4m for the period 2025/26 to 2029/30.

## 7.0 COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMENTS

### 7.1 Formal recommendations from Community Scrutiny on 26 June 2025:

- Formally recommend to Cabinet that officers work with Lightbulb to improve communication and publicity efforts.
  - This is an ongoing action that is picked up through the Lightbulb working group and is not part of this decision since this decision relates to a new grant the NWLDC officers will deliver. Therefore, there is no requirement for Cabinet to adopt this as this is already being progressed by Lightbulb.
- Formally recommend that Cabinet ensure that people moving into the privately owned adapted properties are not disadvantaged on the housing list.
  - Officer's confirmed at the Community Scrutiny meeting that people on the housing waiting list are applying for both private and social rented properties and once a property is secure, either private or social, they are removed from the waiting list. Therefore, private renters would not be disadvantaged. There is no requirement for Cabinet to adopt this as there is no disadvantage posed.
- Formally recommend to Cabinet that the Lightbulb cap on the maximum amount to claim be increased.
  - The Lightbulb working group is already reviewing this aspect of the standard DFG. This is not part of this decision since this decision relates to a new grant that Council officers will deliver. Therefore, there is no requirement for Cabinet to adopt this as this is already being progressed by Lightbulb.
- Formally recommend to Cabinet that the grant condition period for private landlords be extended to ten years.
  - Since the meeting, officers have discussed this request further with Foundations. Foundations strongly recommend the period of time is kept at five years. This is based on an Associate of Foundations experience with similar clauses within private sector leasing schemes that have been around for a number of years. They have found that five years is the most attractive timeframe for landlords. Many things can change within a ten year period for an owner/landlord of a property, therefore, extending the period to 10 years would, in their opinion, affect the uptake of the grant. Based on this advice, it is proposed that Cabinet does not adopt this recommendation.
- Formally recommend that the method of means testing be addressed which currently prevents people who need adaptations from being able to have them.
  - The Lightbulb working group is reviewing this aspect of the standard DFG. This is not part of this decision since this decision relates to a new grant the Council will deliver. Therefore, it is proposed that Cabinet does not adopt this as this is already being progressed by Lightbulb.

Policies and other considerations, as appropriate	
Council Priorities:	- Communities and housing
Policy Considerations:	The Financial Assistance Policy is a new policy.
Safeguarding:	All Officers will complete the mandatory corporate safeguarding training.

Equalities/Diversity:	EIA completed – positive impact
Customer Impact:	EIA completed – positive impact
Economic and Social Impact:	Positive impact for those who are eligible for the financial assistance.
Environment, Climate Change and Zero Carbon:	The works will need to be compliant with the latest domestic energy efficiency standards.
Consultation/Community/Tenant Engagement:	Consultation with Lightbulb, the Better Care Fund Commissioners, Social Services and Councillors.
Risks:	There is a very low risk that demand for these grants is high and the underspend is used up quickly. This would then incur a revenue cost to fund the staffing resource. To mitigate against this any ongoing underspend could be used to pay the staffing cost and continue to deliver the Financial Assistance Policy. This is a very low risk because the trend over previous years has shown there is always significant underspend of the DFG Capital fund.
Officer Contact	Paul Sanders Head of Community Services <a href="mailto:paul.sanders@nwleicestershire.gov.uk">paul.sanders@nwleicestershire.gov.uk</a>