

## CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

### NOTES OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP – WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER, 2019 AT 4.00 P.M.

Present: Councillor Ms. M. Freeman (Chairman of Wellbeing Scrutiny  
Committee)  
Councillor C.D. Smith  
Councillor Ms. V. Jones

Officers: M. Edmonds, Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles  
D. Prosser-Davies, Food, Safety and Licensing Manager  
M. Walker, Environmental Protection Manager  
T. Weston, Senior Environmental Health Officer  
J. Hunt, Senior Committee Officer

Apologies: Councillor Mrs. H.M. Sutton  
Councillor Mrs. D.M. Todd  
Councillor J. Newbury

A presentation was given by Officers which covered the following:

#### Purpose and Scope of Review

- look at the current policy and examine any problems with the existing system and processes
- identify any opportunities to develop a more efficient and effective service for the Council's residents needing disabled adaptations; and
- make suggested amendments to the policy to improve its effectiveness and enable those with disabilities to regain independence faster

#### Comments/Questions

The Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles commented that it was hoped that the Policy could be reviewed and improved and then submitted to Cabinet.

#### Legislation

- **Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996** – Governs Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and explicitly Mandatory DFGs
- **The Housing Renewal Grants (Services and Charges) Order 1996** – includes what DFGs can be used to pay for
- **Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance)(England and Wales) Order 2002** – Provides flexibility and opportunities for LAs to address housing issues provided a policy for housing assistance is in place

#### Comments/Questions

In response to a question, the Environmental Protection Manager discussed the Regulatory Reform and the flexibility for the Council. The Council's Housing Assistance Policy which previously went to Cabinet provided some discretion dependent upon what was needed.

- What is a DFG and Why is it needed

**What is a DFG?**

- Mandatory grant to help older and disabled people in owner occupied, privately rented and registered provider properties to make changes to their home environment so that they can continue to live safely and independently.

**Why is it needed?**

- Ageing population
- Poorly designed housing for disabled people (including children) and those that are getting frailer with age
- To reduce hospital admissions and providing safer and more effective discharge

Comments/Questions

The Environmental Protection Manager commented that there was a separate Policy for Council owned dwellings and this Policy was aimed at providing greater discretion for the Council.

The Senior Environmental Health Officer also touched on the allowances for being 'means tested' which had not changed for a number of years.

- Slide 1 - Current process, funding, policy and performance

**Current Process**

- Eligibility, Assessment of need and Application – Occupational Therapists make assessment
- Test of Resources
- Cost, design and specify works
- Monitor works and sign off

**Current Funding**

- 2019-20 - £926,470 –funding which potentially is not being fully used

- Slide 2 - Current Policy

- Cabinet 16 March 2017
- Review every 3 years
- Discretion to make individual decisions outside policy for
  - Unforeseen works above the mandatory grant limit
  - Discretionary top up to £45k
  - Non mandatory works referred by welfare authority
  - Relocation grants
  - Works that reduce health risks to persons with a confirmed medical condition and where there is no owner/landlord responsibility

Comments/Questions

Members discussed the equipment installed in properties and the process for removal when no longer required, the grant and maintenance costs.

The Environmental Protection Manager advised Members that the grant did not cover maintenance or service contracts, however extended warranties would be provided for equipment such as track hoists and stairlifts.

- Slide 3 – showed the current policy

#### Comments/Questions

Members discussed the relocation grant and it was confirmed that this was solely for the use of assisting and providing equipment (with no cap on the limit) and not for the purchase of property.

Officers then discussed with Members the various aspects of the assistance available.

- Slide 4 – showed information on the current performance

#### Comments/Questions

The Senior Environmental Health Officer provided information to Members around the change in days from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2. She advised that legally the Council could take up to 6 months from receipt of application to approval.

The Environmental Protection Manager explained that the process for DFGs which had previously been delivered by the Home Improvement Agency had come to an end due to ongoing problems. Whilst there was a small amount of risk with this, it also left the Council in greater control.

He also explained that whilst the backlog of applications had been cleared, demand had fallen and the Council were experiencing a drop out rate.

A Member referred to the Policy and asked if it was restricted to mobility only and if those that were visually impaired could also apply. He felt that those that were visually impaired were overlooked and that there was the perception that only those with mobility problems could apply.

In response to the question, the Senior Environmental Health Officer advised that an Occupational Therapist would make an assessment to the needs of the individual; however she commented that the needs of people were continually changing and in particular it was emerging that more people were living with dementia. Therefore it was important to keep up to date with ideas.

#### Current problems

##### Problems and Aims

- Complex and Bureaucratic – Reduce Administration
- Restrictive – Broaden scope of assistance and works undertaken
- Time consuming – Speed up the process
- Low take-up – Increase take up

- Charging regime – Formalise charging process

The Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles referred to the low take of the grant and indicated that the problems experienced with the drop out rate could be due to the applicant having to declare their financial status. If the applicant through the process was found to have disposable income, they could be liable to make a contribution towards the equipment.

The Chairman commented and explained that many constituents would refuse to apply due to the process for means testing.

Members were advised that the Council currently made a charge for administration which would come directly out of the grant. The charge was significantly less than the County Council which was estimated to be around 16%.

The Chairman then discussed with Members how the Council could promote the DFG scheme to the public.

#### Next steps

- Task and Finish Group
- To research other Council's DFG procedures and Housing Assistance Policies to identify improvements for inclusion in the revised policy.
- To look at other Council's charges for administering DFGs

The Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles explained that Members of the Group would be asked to conduct some research on other LAs that provided similar assistance to their communities and a further meeting would be arranged to look at ideas.

It was agreed that a further meeting be arranged in approximately 3 weeks in order to evaluate the ideas from Members and incorporate into the Council's current Policy.

Close 4.55 p.m.