

AUDIT & STANDARDS COMMITTEE

26 September 2018

Title: Adaptations Grant Scheme	
Report of the Director of People & Resilience	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: No
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Accountable Director: Stephan Liebrecht, Operational Director, Adults' Care & Support	
Accountable Strategic Leadership Director: Elaine Allegretti, Director of People and Resilience	
Summary	
<p>The Adaptations Grants Scheme (AGS) involves the provision of grants of money to individuals with social care needs so that they may arrange their own adaptations to their home, and maintain their independent living. It has been running for some years, with declining uptake. The current scheme is widely underutilised with a current budget underspend of £0.378m as at 31st July 2018.</p> <p>On the basis of both the control weaknesses identified by Internal Audit and the poor uptake of the scheme, this report outlines a decision undertaken by the service management to suspend the current Adaptations Grant Scheme with immediate effect. It is intended to fundamentally review and relaunch the scheme in for 2019/20.</p> <p>Whilst interim solutions to tackle the most prominent issues have been put in place a relaunched service would be able to fully look to accommodate the audit recommendations and focus on improving the take up of the service and promoting the principle of choice and control, upon which the scheme was based.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	
<p>The Audit and Standards Committee is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Note the work that has been undertaken already to strengthen controls in the operation of the scheme; and(ii) Note the proposal to now suspend the scheme, review the poor uptake and fundamentally relaunch it for 2019/20.	

Reason(s)

The AGS was set up with a goal of enabling borough residents to independently choose and complete adaptation requirements in their property. A relaunched scheme would retain and ensure that this principle is maintained, and this links closely to elements of Council priorities including:

Enabling Social Responsibility:

- support residents to take responsibility for themselves, their homes and their community
- protect the most vulnerable, keeping adults and children healthy and safe

Growing Our Borough:

- support investment in housing, leisure, the creative industries and public spaces to enhance our environment

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Adaptation Grant Scheme (AGS) offers support to both owner occupier and housing association residents with disabilities in Barking and Dagenham in relation to some lower-cost adaptations and alterations in their property. It does not include tenants/Council tenants.
- 1.2 The AGS has an annual budget of £400k which is funded corporately. The scheme is managed by the Adaptations and Equipment Team which works across all of adult social care from within the new Disability Service and is responsible for processing applications and authorising payment to successful residents. In line with the principles of personalisation, the resident is then responsible for organising and paying for the works.
- 1.3 The scheme was reviewed by Internal Audit between April and September 2017 and a final report generated in January 2018 highlighting a number of issues and the provision of a 'Nil Assurance' level.
- 1.4 In response to the report by Internal Audit, the service agreed broadly that the scheme needed reviewing. The scheme had been operating for some years, however, and it is appropriate that the processes and protocols are revisited to ensure that they are delivering the best value for money and the optimum service for residents.
- 1.5 Some immediate issues with controls around the scheme were addressed at the start of 2018, these included:
 - **Absence of Policies & Procedures**
A mapping session took place with the key stakeholders in March 2018. This enabled the current AGS process to be mapped out incorporating all relevant responsibilities and timescales. The outcome of this session was an "As Is" process map which was then distributed to the Adaptation &

Equality Team to ensure the correct process was followed. This process also helped to identify and understand associated issues.

- when the scheme is relaunched in 2019 a new process would be designed focusing on taking relevant steps to resolve issues, and thus improve efficiency and also a related AGS Policy and Procedure developed.
- **Multiple AGS Applications** (with no process of checking earlier work completed)
If individuals make multiple applications, a process for the monitoring of completed works to be determined, prior to the next application being processed.
- **Approval of Payments** (no delegation scheme and is completed by the team that raised the initial order)
Any successful applications whilst raised by the Equipment and Adaptations Manager are approved/signed off by the Head of the Disability Service or Group Manager Intensive Support, thus a delegation scheme already exists.
- **Initial Screening (Service Initiated Improvement)**
A simple screening tool for the process has been implemented at the point of contact. This is vital for a number of reasons including:
 - **Safeguarding**
The previous lack of a health check mean that a person with dementia could potentially apply for an adaption such as a stairlift which poses a significant risk to that individual
 - **Proof Medical/Disability**
By obtaining proof of an individual's medical condition/disability (if not already known to the organisation) we can now ensure that applicants meet the required criteria for the scheme
 - **Reduce Burden on Adaptations Team**
The screening tool will help reduce demand on the service by reducing the number of applications that do not meet the essential criteria not being formally submitted.

2. Proposal and Issues

- 2.1 In order to ensure that the AGS scheme is optimised, it is proposed that the scheme is suspended for the remainder of 2018/19 and relaunched with a revised service in 2019/20.
- 2.2 The new service will be designed to strike a better balance between the recommendations made in the audit report and the ambition to give service users control over the work and the way they it is completed in their properties in the spirit of Personalisation and the Care Act.

2.3 Key aspects of the re-launched service would include:

Policies/Procedures

- Detailed mapping of the current process to take place and help to understand and identify issues
- New process to be designed, taking steps to resolve issues and reduce any unnecessary wastes, thus improving efficiency
- Application form to be reviewed and ensure fit for purpose, with emphasis on being as simple as possible, online, and thus not a barrier to people applying for the scheme
- This will help to encourage people to apply whilst minimising errors made on forms and subsequent re-work for the team

Use Of AGS

- Detailed list of the potential uses of AGS to be completed, with a focus on being able to provide person centred solutions and the use of modern technology/initiatives. This will be completed in consultation with Care City.

Publicity

- Scheme to be relaunched with clear, revised documentation
- Communication strategy utilising Social Media
- Promotion of scheme to a broader range of locations i.e. libraries, GP surgeries, community groups with a view to increase take up/utilisation of available budget
- Focus on digitalisation of scheme ensuring accessibility and making use of available resources such as the Care & Support hub.

Awareness

- Other relevant teams within ACS/CS provided with correct information to ensure that consistent message is provided to residents and also scheme is promoted where possible.

Monitoring

- A three-tier monitoring process is proposed to replace the current spot-checking process as follows;
- 100% Invoices (All invoices are audited and checked)
- 30% of cases will be reviewed by Social Workers as part of their annual review. Cases chosen need to have a social care provision)
- 10% Home Visit by Occupational Therapists to review work

3. Options Appraisal

3.1 The alternate option that was considered is to do nothing and continue the scheme in its current state. However, it is felt that the issues highlighted below need to be addressed, and the proposal of a re-launch in 2019/20 allows the time to complete this.

- **Low Uptake**
Since the schemes inception in 2012 it has become increasingly underutilised, with the number of successful applications decreasing each year.

Financial Year	Successful Applications
2012/13	143
2013/14	127
2014/15	90
2015/16	41
2016/17	71
2017/18	73
2018/19	12 (To Date)

- **Low Number Of Successful Applications**
Of the 1571 AGS applications only 557 or 35% have been successful.
- **Budget Not Utilised**
Due to the low number of successful applications the scheme has underspent against the budget in the past three financial years as reflected in the table below.

Financial Years	Actual £	Budget £	Variance £
15-16	112,040	400,000	(287,960)
16-17	342,518	400,000	(57,482)
17-18	155,032	400,000	(244,968)
April - June 2018	22,322	400,000	(377,678)

- **Officer Time**
The AGS is a significant burden on Officer time within the Adaptation & Equality Team, this is largely due to the volume of applications that do not meet the criteria but still require processing, chasing of applicants for further information/incomplete forms.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 Given the very low utilisation of the AGS in its current format by local residents, consultation was limited. Councillor Worby agreed to the proposed way forward including the suspension of the AGS in its current form. The Strategic Director for People and Resilience Elaine Allegretti has also provided her agreement.
- 4.2 In designing a new scheme, there will be engagement with service users about how it can work most effectively for them.

5. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: Olufunke Adediran, Group Accountant.

- 5.1 This report seeks approval to suspend the current Adaptations grant scheme while work goes underway to re-launch a new scheme following recent audit recommendations.
- 5.2 The budget available within the capital programme for this scheme is £0.400m and the scheme has significantly underspent over the past three financial years and in this financial year 2018-19 to date, only £22k has been spent.
- 5.3 Suspending the scheme this year would release an underspend of £0.378m and the use of this monies would need to be agreed with the corporate finance section to ensure optimum use for 2018/19 only. A budget would then be required from 2019/20 onwards to fund the new Adaptations scheme which should be contained within the existing budget envelope.

6. Legal Implications

None

7. Other Implications

7.1 Health Implications

None

List of appendices:

None