



North Kesteven - Local authority in-house home improvement agency

Good practice themes

- 1. Discretionary Assistance within Regulatory Reform Order Policy that supports stay put and move on options in a rural authority area**
- 2. Access to Adult Care Information system to directly update case records and hence ensure statutory agencies are able to determine current status of intervention being provided through housing assistance**

Context

North Kesteven Council (population c 110,000) is one of seven second tier authorities in Lincolnshire and is essentially rural with two small towns and around 100 small communities. Over 80% of the population live in rural areas or market towns. The housing tenure mix is dominated by owner occupation, there is a limited social housing sector (including some council owned stock) and an increasing private rented sector, the latter considered in part to be meeting demand from inward migration to the area due to employment in the agricultural industry.

Historically, in common with many second tier authorities across England, available funding for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) has been modest so until relatively recently there has been an approach where demand for mandatory assistance has been carefully managed. Indeed whilst the Better Care Fund allocation has resulted in a significant increase to the local budget it remains relatively small, £744k in 2018/19. However this level of increase has since 2016 enabled the introduction of several forms of discretionary assistance for disabled older people in a way that better meets the ambition of the local authority to directly provide or enable improvements in health and wellbeing of residents. In this instance this is via a more rounded package of housing grants and loans to support older service users maintain their independence.

1. Discretionary Assistance within the adopted Regulatory Reform Order

The local rehousing and lettings policy precludes applicants who have had significant adaptations carried out in their current home in the last 5 years from being considered for properties unless there has been an evidenced change of circumstances meaning that the adaptation is no longer sufficient to enable them to remain there. This places a strong emphasis on the in-house agency to consider very broadly what options are most appropriate to assist disabled householders to retain their independence.

In an attempt to provide services in a tenure neutral way all DFG applications are means tested but there is help for those in financial hardship to reduce the risk of schemes not being progressed. All forms of assistance involving loans are assessed by the Council's Money Advice service.

Recently a county wide adaptations good practice group was established as there is an appetite to both share practice and provide more consistency amongst its members. This should in the longer term help the OT's at county level to give advice to service users about the adaptations help they can expect.

In summary, in addition to mandatory DFG assistance the adopted policy contains the following forms of discretionary assistance. Full detail of eligibility and conditions can be found via www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/residents/homes-and-property/i-am-a-private-landlord-or-tenant-in-north-kesteven/financial-assistance.

- **Relocation Grant** – up to £5k to help cover removal costs and fees. The service user can then apply for a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant in the new home.
- **Top Up Funding** – up to £10k for cases where the stay put option involves a scheme cost greater than the £30k limit
- **Allowance to cover means tested contribution** – up to £1,800 for any application where a means tested contribution is relevant
- **Fast track adaptations** – non means tested grant up to £1,500 for small scale adaptations for example when receiving requests from hospital OT's or Macmillan nurses and where an OT assessment is not required. It was introduced for items like ramps or straight track stair lifts
- **Discretionary Work Assistance** – interest free loan up to £10k available for a range of work types outside of mandatory criteria including, for example, support for disabled people to assist them to work from home
- **Hospital Discharge Grants** – for works are that non-prescriptive but can include deep cleaning, decluttering, moving furniture and repairs including boilers. If self-referrals are received the council's Wellbeing Service undertake an assessment to determine eligibility and most appropriate form of assistance. There is not a prescribed maximum level of financial assistance.
- **Dementia Friendly Grants** – for non-prescriptive minor works that assist those with a diagnosis of dementia. There is not a specified maximum level of assistance

- **Learning Disability Grants** – similar arrangements to dementia friendly grants

Added Value Assistance

Support via interest free loans are available for older and disabled people including:

- **Small Scale Assistance** – up to £1k for older people in receipt of qualifying income related benefit for security measures or repairs that either remove a serious hazard or prevent a defect leading to a more significant problem. The qualification for this type of assistance can be determined by an NKDC officer and not reliant on hospital, wellbeing or other medical professional making a referral.
- **Energy Efficiency Assistance** – up to £5k provided as a top up to the energy performance of the property for homeowners (including older and disabled people) who cannot access sufficient funding from national or other recognised schemes
- **Equity Release** – the council promotes and provides guidance on safe Just Retirement Solutions schemes. If the householder intends to use the released funding for adaptations or repairs an interest free loan may be provided

2. Access to Adult Care Information System

From April 2018 there is a local agreement that relevant staff within the DFG teams in the seven district councils can have a degree of access to the Adult Care information system used by Lincolnshire County Council in order to update progress on adaptation cases. This can include case narrative and upload of plans. This enables the OT involved to be aware of the progress being made plus enables other county care services personnel not directly involved in the adaptation to be aware of the agency's involvement.

Contact

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