



Foundations

DFG Champions Roadshows 2016 Headline Report



November 2016

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This document requires the following approvals.

Signed approval forms are filed in the Management section of the project files.

Name	Signature	Title	Date of Issue	Version
P Smith		Director	03/11/16	1.0



About Foundations

Our Mission

To share the magic about what makes good home improvement and adaptation services

Our Vision

A thriving range of home improvement agencies – supporting people to live safe, independent and happy lives in the home of their choice

Our Objectives



Identify and meet the training needs of the sector



Engage with stakeholders, providers and commissioners and facilitate networking opportunities



Represent and promote the sector



Develop tools and resources for providers and commissioners



Monitor activity, quality and performance and find out what good looks like



Develop and promote quality assurance systems



Provide an information management and workflow system

For more information visit: www.foundations.uk.com

Our Values

Our shared values guide our actions and describe how we behave:

Leadership:	The courage to shape a better future
Collaboration:	Leverage collective genius
Integrity:	Be real
Accountability:	If it is to be, it's up to me
Passion:	Committed in heart and mind
Scalable:	National solutions for a local scale
Quality:	What we do, we do well

About Home Improvement Agencies

Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs), sometimes known as Care & Repair or Staying Put schemes, help vulnerable people maintain independence in their own homes. Their services include:

- visiting clients at home or providing detailed telephone advice;
- setting out housing options to help clients decide what type of housing is best suited to their changing needs;
- checking entitlement to any financial help, including grants and charitable funding;
- project management, drawing up plans, getting estimates and liaising with others involved in any building work/adaptations needed, such as council grants officers and occupational therapists;
- provision of handyperson services, to carry out small jobs around the home, help with gardening, or coming home from hospital; and
- helping to make homes more energy-efficient.

A searchable directory of accredited HIAs and handyperson services is available at:

www.findmyhia.org.uk

About FILT

Foundations Independent Living Trust (FILT) is the charitable arm of Foundations.

FILT helps older and vulnerable people live with dignity in their own homes this by operating funds which enable local HIAs to provide a range of support including repairs and improvements to people's homes.

FILT distributes Corporate Social Responsibility and charity funds through the network of HIAs. These then deliver a fast and effective service by assessing the customers' needs and carrying out the necessary work quickly and cost-effectively.

Foundations manages the delivery of these programmes, reporting to an independent board of trustees.





Background

The recent increase in central government funding for the national DFG programme, from £220m to £394m and rising to more than £500m in 2019/20 was accompanied by a change in approach from government. The intention is that the DFG should be seen strategically as part of the Better Care Fund so that decisions on how the monies are spent should be made jointly between Health, Housing and Social Care. The objective being to ensure people remain independent in their own homes avoiding costly admission to hospital and residential care.

Local Authorities are being encouraged to innovate, to utilise their powers under the Regulatory Reform Order and use the DFG fund to support strategic initiatives. We are encouraging the introduction of new grants and loans, revising the scope of works carried out and pooling funding towards shared local objectives.

Following on from our DFG Summit and our recent publications,

- [the Collaborative Home Improvement Agency](#); and
- [The Disabled Facilities Grant - Before and after the introduction of the Better Care Fund](#)

We launched the DFG Champions Roadshows – an initiative that advocates for good practice and supports change in the delivery of the DFG programme. This included a round of four events that took place throughout October 2016 – Sunderland, Derby, Liverpool and London - and were attended by over 200 delegates: a mix of HIA staff, Occupational Therapists, Grant Officers, NHS policy officers, Managers and Commercial Suppliers.

[To continue the debate join the DFG Champions Facebook Group](#). Copies of the presentations used are also available for group members.

We would like to express our thanks to all the speakers for their time and insights and to our sponsors for making these events possible.

The DFG Champions Roadshows 2016 were sponsored by:



AND





The National DFG Picture

The Regulatory Reform Order Housing Assistance (2002) (RRO) gave local authorities powers to introduce policies for assisting individuals with renewals, repairs and adaptations in their homes through grants or loans. Subsequently in 2008 the freedom was extended so that the DFG allocation from the central government could be used to support these policies. This means that the government is explicitly encouraging *authorities to use specific DFG funding for wider purposes which may be more appropriate than current DFG arrangements allow*.

A local authority only has to comply with the following conditions to take advantage of the RRO:

- there must be a formally adopted policy in place, which sets out how the authority intends to use its powers;
- there must be notice to the public that a policy is in force;
- they must ensure that a copy of the full policy is available to the public for free at the council offices; and
- there must be a summary document available on request (though a small charge to cover costs may be allowed).

The additional monies announced by government to boost the DFG funding for the current and subsequent 3 years is a great opportunity for authorities to innovate and reach out to a wider section of the population with their grant/loan schemes. Our recent Freedom of Information request has shown that already roughly 50% of authorities are using the RRO to offer a range of grants aimed at supporting vulnerable people to remain independently in their own homes. Our objective is to reach out to all authorities to encourage them to use their freedom under the RRO order and take advantage of this 4 year period to showcase how adaptations and repairs support independent living and reduce demand for hospital and residential care.



The role of the occupational therapist in housing and DFG

College of Occupational Therapists (COT) Specialist Section - Housing

COT Specialist Section - Housing is a forum for occupational therapists that have an interest in housing, inclusive design and accessible home environments

They work closely with other related organisations and professionals with similar interests

Advocate for improved standards of housing for older and disabled people

Work to influence consultations at both national and local level regarding housing and the built environment

Share knowledge and good practice examples to improve services and quality of life for our service users

Projects by COT Specialist Section Housing this year

- Co-produced the DFG Summit with COT and Foundations
- Commissioned and published guidance by Michael Mandelstam entitled: Home adaptations: The Care Act 2014 and related provision across the United Kingdom
- Co-funded and involved in the re-write of the Habinteg Wheelchair Housing Design Guide
- Completed Phase 2 of the genHOME project

Projects by COT this year

- Care Act 2014: Guidance for occupational therapists: Wellbeing, Prevention, Transitions, Custodial Settings; Employment, Training and Education and Disabled Facilities Grants.
- Support with Foundations report: The Disabled Facilities Grant - Before and after the introduction of the Better Care Fund

Future asks for DFG

- Increase the upper limit of the DFG
- Bring DFG means test in line with adult social care means test
- Encourage flexible use of DFG funds to improve people's choice, control and wellbeing
- Joint working between housing, health and social care.



Good practice

Sunderland Care & Support

- Integrated adaptations service combining HIA, community equipment and telecare
- Solutions-based service offering support across different services
- Contracts for FME and pre-fabricated ramps
- List of accredited contractors and good relationships with local builders
- Clear specifications and pre-priced tenders
- Close working relationship with the OT service

gill.lawson@sunderlandcareandsupport.co.uk

Warwickshire Heart Project

- Countywide partnership offering a holistic approach to housing issues
- Brought together the statutory agencies of housing, social care and public health
- Created a new role – Housing Assessment Officer
- Enabled OTs to deliver whole DFG and casework process
- Increased partnership working with contractors.

HAT@nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk

St Helens HIA

- Integrated within housing services along with occupational therapy service
- Strong cross-working with adult social work team in same division
- OTs, Grant Officers, TOs under the same management
- St Helens housing assistance policy amended from 2006 to enable: removal of test of resources all cases less than £2K, removal of test of resources all registered provider partners, 'lesser evidence' process, discretionary grant / loan offer works over £30K, etc.

vickywhittle@sthelens.gov.uk

Ealing Council HIA

- Dispensing with the means test for level access showers and stair lifts
- Introduction of a hospital discharge grant available to support speedy discharge
- Building related services around DFGs
- Free handyperson service for small repairs and adaptations
- In house OTs as part of the service

housinggrants@ealing.gov.uk



Improving the DFG Regulations

We asked delegates what they would like to change in the existing DFG rules and regulations. There were 2 main issues reflected at all the Roadshows and a few other suggestions.

Increasing the grant ceiling from £30,000

Delegates thought that this would bring into the mandatory scope the majority of large adaptations particularly those occurring in the areas of the country where construction costs were lower. It was discussed whether London and the South could introduce a higher amount but this was thought better to leave within the powers under the RRO 2002.

The other benefit identified was that where authorities were not using the RRO to flex DFGs then it would make it far easier to push through the larger grants. Currently in many areas where a top up system does exist, it remains a slow and discouraging process where people are subject to different processes and means test to receive a grant or loan.

Updating the means test

This was a consistent theme at all 4 events with delegates pointing out the inequities and unfairness of the current system. As a minimum people were keen to see the rates updated to current values, with real housing costs applied rather than the standard amount currently applicable in the mandatory system. Many asked that the means test be amalgamated with the one applied by Social Care which would have the advantage of the customer only undergoing a single test that takes into account outgoings.

Other suggestions

Extending the scope of the DFG to include behavioural needs

People considered that this is a crucial issue with a lack of consistency in how authorities interpret the legislation. It was felt that the regulations could be clarified to remove any ambiguity that safe rooms and other measures can be included in all mandatory applications for people with challenging behaviours.

Clarify the application of VAT

Preferably to ensure that all adaptations are zero rated

Extend the ability of authorities to use some of the Capital Fund for revenue purposes.

So that additional staff can be employed particularly those offering advice and information to support the process.

Time periods

Introduce regulatory change to ensure that Councils have to process applications within a reasonable time frame. The current system doesn't work as Councils are only obligated to process applications once they receive a complete application which means that earlier

waiting times (e.g. length of time for OT to visit) aren't accounted for. Any realistic system needs to include the time from when the original referral is made to the Council.

Clarifying the situation with Housing Associations

Their responsibility towards grant applicants. It was felt that the current situation is confused and inequitable. Solutions included ensuring that all adaptation costs were incurred by the RSL or that a fixed minimum cost was agreed that all RSLs would be eligible to pay.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding is a real issue and that it should be included within any grant determination. So that if a family lost essential space due to the adaptation then this could be considered as part of the agreed recommendation.





Using the Regulatory Reform Order

All the sessions involved a discussion of what was occurring locally with some authorities already having introduced changes under the auspices of the RRO. Others were considering introducing new policies and some were simply awarding more of the existing mandatory grants as a result of the additional funding. What we did find was that the additional monies within the BCF had stimulated a desire for change and an appetite to learn from the experience of colleagues around the country.

Many of the regulatory changes suggested in the previous section can be addressed by local authorities employing the freedoms offered under the RRO, however our recent freedom of information research request uncovered that approximately 50% of authorities were not using the RRO to offer a range of discretionary grants and loans strengthening the argument for regulatory change to the legislation.

We have listed the most common policies in place across the country using the freedoms available under the Regulatory Reform Order. Please contact us if you want more information about these policies and how to introduce them in your local area.

- Using the DFG capital funding to increase the minimum amount available to £40k-£45k
- Dispensing with the means test for works under £10k/Stair lifts/ showers
- Top slicing the DFG capital resource to fund ramps and lifts.
- Introducing a hospital discharge grant so that people can be discharged and work carried out without any processing or financial constraints.
- Funding small adaptation and prevention work through a Handyperson service
- A Housing authority funded means tested grant to enable residents to continue to live independently in their own home (Safe and Secure Grant)
- Relocation grants- supporting people with moving home in lieu of receiving a DFG in their existing property
- Redistribution of funding between districts organized on a county wide basis
- Funding Telecare initiatives
- Increasing the range of grants available to include repairs, heating and energy efficiency measures



Conclusions and Recommendations

All four sessions were sold out reflecting a real thirst for information and ideas in the Sector. The new monies from government have stimulated an appetite for developing new policies to flex how the DFG is delivered and initiated a conversation about how we serve the vast majority of older and disabled people who aren't entitled to a DFG. Advice, information and access to good contractors is vital for self-funders and to encourage people to plan ahead. Additionally the Care Act places a duty on Local Authorities to provide advice and information to all vulnerable people that include a person's housing needs within that framework.

How these new duties under the Care Act supported by the additional DFG monies will always be implemented differently across the country. Through these Roadshows and other events and publications we are opening up a discussion of how local authorities can take advantage of this additional money and widen the offer to their vulnerable citizens to support them to live independently at home. Research has shown that some authorities are retrenching and cutting back on their preventative offer and reverting to the statutory minimum. Others have grasped the nettle and commissioned truly preventative adaptation services offering the entire range of support to all vulnerable people regardless of income, from housing options and locating reputable builders through to minor adaptations, Telecare and DFGs.

The DFG Champions Roadshows are part of a programme to institute this discussion and stimulate change and we are keen to continue this conversation through our Facebook DFG Champions page and other mediums. We will be holding a further round of Roadshows in the new-year as well as other events with our partners across the whole sector. We have been delighted by the enthusiasm within the Sector and the appetite for change and will continue to play our part in harnessing this energy to improve the lives of older and disabled people.

The main recommendations for government in regards to the existing DFG regulations are

- Increase the grant ceiling from £30,000 to £45,000.
- Update and reform the means test
- Simplify the guidance and collate it in a single document.



The Old Co-op Building,
11 Railway Street,
Glossop,
Derbyshire, SK13 7AG

www.foundations.uk.com