



# **Review of the Housing Grants for Older People and People with a Disability**

**July 2013**

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## 1. Introduction

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government requested the Housing Agency to establish a Review Group of local authority officials to examine the Housing Grants Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability. Membership of the Group, which included both County and City Managers' Association (CCMA) and the Housing Practitioner Network representation, is listed in Appendix 1.

The Review Group had its first meeting on 21 May 2013. The terms of reference of the Group were to examine the current housing grants (private houses) for Older People and People with a Disability and to make recommendations as to how the grants could become more focused and targeted to those most in need. The Review Group's terms of reference are in Appendix 2.

The work of the Review Group was set in the context of the current economic constraints and reduced budgets. Increasing demand for the grants due to demographic changes and in particular an ageing population. The increasing recognition of a wider spectrum of disabilities was also noted by the Group. It was also acknowledged that the grants play a significant role in allowing people to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible.

The Review Group noted the Disability Act, 2005 definition of disability as:

*Disability, in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment.*

The Group also acknowledged throughout its deliberations the important role which these grants play in achieving the vision of the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011 – 2016, namely:

*To facilitate access, for people with a disability, to the appropriate range of housing and related support services, delivered in an integrated and sustainable manner, which promotes equality of opportunity, individual choice and independent living.*

The Group was asked to consider both demand issues (for example: criteria, income limits, scope of works, etc) and supply issues (for example: level of grant, time limits to draw down funding). The Review Group was requested to report back with draft recommendations by end June, which it did. Feedback was received on the Group's draft recommendations and this is the Group's Final report.

Given the short timescale available to the Group, it was informed by the following information sources:

- Administrative data supplied by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and by local authorities;
- An interactive meeting with stakeholder organisations representing older people and those with a disability (see participant list in Appendix 3);
- Local authority experience of operating the schemes; and
- Feedback from housing practitioners on draft proposals.

The report is divided into four sections. The next section gives a brief overview of the three schemes under review. Section 3 then outlines the Review Group's recommendations and the final section, Section 4, provides some concluding comments.

## 2. Outline of the Schemes under Review

### 2.1 Overview

This Review includes the following three grant schemes:

1. Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability
2. Mobility Aids Grants Scheme
3. Housing Aid for Older People

This suite of grants was introduced in October 2007, following a review of the schemes then in place. The Regulations for the schemes are set down in Statutory Instrument SI No 670 of 2007. The Schemes are typically funded 20 per cent by the relevant local authority and 80 per cent from central funding. The grant is payable to owner-occupied housing, houses being purchased from a local authority under the tenant purchase scheme, private rented accommodation, accommodation provided under the voluntary housing Capital Assistance and Rental Subsidy schemes and accommodation occupied by persons living in communal residence.

### 2.2 Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme for People with a Disability

The Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability Scheme is administered by local authorities and provides grant aid to applicants to assist in the carrying out of works that are reasonably necessary for the purposes of rendering a house more suitable for the accommodation needs of a person with a disability.

The effective maximum grant under the scheme is €30,000, which may cover up to 95% of the approved cost of works. The maximum grant payable reduces on a sliding scale as household income increases, as detailed below. Households with an income in excess of €65,000 are not eligible for the grant.

| <b>Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability</b> |                   |                         |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Gross Maximum Household Income p.a.                          | % Costs Available | Maximum Grant Available |
| €  | %                 | €                       |
| Up to €30,000  | 95%               | 30,000                  |
| €30,001 - €34,000  | 90%               | 27,000                  |
| €34,001 - €38,000  | 80%               | 24,000                  |
| €38,001 - €42,000  | 70%               | 21,000                  |
| €42,001 - €46,000  | 60%               | 18,000                  |
| €46,001 - €50,000  | 50%               | 15,000                  |
| €50,001 - €54,000  | 40%               | 12,000                  |
| €54,001 - €65,000  | 30%               | 9,000                   |
| In excess of €65,000   | No Grant Payable  |                         |

Note: A reduced grant is payable for new houses (less than 12 months old)

The types of works allowable under the scheme can be varied and may include the provision of access ramps; stair-lifts; downstairs toilet facilities; accessible showers; adaptations to facilitate wheelchair access; extensions; and any other works which are reasonably necessary for the purposes of rendering a house more suitable for the accommodation of a person with a disability.

### 2.3 Mobility Aids Grants Scheme

The Mobility Aids Grant Scheme provides grant aid to cover a basic suite of works to address mobility problems, primarily, but not exclusively, associated with ageing. The types of works allowable under the scheme can be varied and may include the provision of grab-rails, access ramps, level access showers and stair-lifts. It was designed as a fast track grant scheme to assist with the carrying out of basic works to improve the mobility needs of a member of the household.

The effective maximum grant under the Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme is €6,000, which may cover 100% of the cost of works. It is available to applicants with gross household incomes of up to €30,000 per annum. There is no sliding scale grant reduction in place for this grant, as income increases.

### 2.4 Housing Aid for Older People

The Scheme of Housing Aid for Older People is available to assist older people (generally those over 60 years of age) to have necessary repairs or improvements carried out to their homes to make it habitable for the lifetime of the occupant. Applicants must be living in poor housing conditions.

The effective maximum grant under the scheme is €10,500 which may cover up to 100% of the cost of works. The maximum grant payable reduces on a sliding scale as household income increases, as detailed below. Households with an income in excess of €65,000 are not eligible for the grant.

| <b>Housing Aid for Older People</b> |                   |                         |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Gross Maximum Household Income pa   | % Costs Available | Maximum Grant Available |
| €                                   | %                 | €                       |
| Up to €30,000                       | 100%              | 10,500                  |
| €30,001 - €34,000                   | 90%               | 9,450                   |
| €34,001 - €38,000                   | 80%               | 8,400                   |
| €38,001 - €42,000                   | 70%               | 7,350                   |
| €42,001 - €46,000                   | 60%               | 6,300                   |
| €46,001 - €50,000                   | 50%               | 5,250                   |
| €50,001 - €54,000                   | 40%               | 4,200                   |
| €54,001 - €65,000                   | 30%               | 3,150                   |
| In excess of €65,000                | No Grant Payable  |                         |

The types of works allowable under the scheme can be varied and may include structural repairs or improvements; re-wiring; drylining; repairs to / replacement of windows and doors;

provision of central heating, water and sanitary services; contract-cleaning; painting and radon remediation works.

## 2.5 Recent Trends

The table below shows grant activity since the introduction of the new grants in 2007. Since then, over sixty-six thousand grants have been awarded at a cost of almost €500 million.

| <b>Grants Activity 2007 – 2012</b> |                      |                               |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Year</b>                        | <b>No. of Grants</b> | <b>Expenditure (€million)</b> |
| <b>2007</b>                        | 7,770                | 71.3                          |
| <b>2008</b>                        | 12,094               | 94.9                          |
| <b>2009</b>                        | 11,434               | 79.6                          |
| <b>2010</b>                        | 13,910               | 99.2                          |
| <b>2011</b>                        | 11,787               | 76.7                          |
| <b>2012</b>                        | 9,190                | 67.5                          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                       | <b>66,185</b>        | <b>489.2</b>                  |

Turning now to activity this year, by early June 2013, authorities had paid just over 2,300 grants at a cost of almost €15 million, and commitments had been made for a further 2,600 grants at an additional cost of €18.6 million. Another 6,700 grant applications had been received awaiting approval, which if approved were estimated to cost a further €54.5 million. The data indicates that authorities are approving much fewer grants this year compared to earlier years, but that demand remains high and also, that there is a significant level of commitments on hand. This was borne out by Dublin City Council – it indicated that for every fifty grant applications it receives only 3 are likely to get funding, despite the practice of screening applicants prior to sending out the application form.

In considering the options available to it, the Review Group gathered some information from local authorities in relation to recent grant activities. What was clear from the returns received from twenty-six authorities (accounting for approximately three-quarter of grants issued in 2012) was that a very small proportion of grants are paid at the maximum amount. In 2012, for example, only 6% of Housing Adaptation for People with a Disability grants, 16% of Mobility Aid grants and 11% of Housing Aid for Older People grants were paid at the maximum amount.

## 2.6 Impact of the Schemes

The timetable under which the Review Group operated did not afford it sufficient time to fully investigate the impact of the scheme. However, reference to previous research undertaken both by the National Disability Authority and the Centre for Housing Research and a meeting organised with stakeholders (see Appendix 3) highlighted the very positive impact the grant schemes have on grant recipients. Review Group members, particularly those from rural areas, also reported that the schemes have a positive impact on the local construction industry and on the improvement and sustainability of the national housing stock.

### 3. Recommendations for change

The Review Group's recommendations are outlined below and are divided into two categories. The first category relates to immediate recommendations to target reduced resources to those most in need. The second category includes recommendations which were considered by the Group, but which may take longer to implement or which should be considered further if the immediate recommendations do not prove to be as impactful as is required.

#### 3.1 Immediate changes recommended

| Recommendation  | Comments  |
|---|---|
| <b>Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability</b>  |   |
| 1. Maintain maximum grant at €30,000 and reduce number of income bands and percentage of cost of work available for those over €30,000 threshold, as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Up to 30,000            95%</li> <li>2. 30,001-35,000        85%</li> <li>3. 35,001-40,000        75%</li> <li>4. 40,001-50,000        50%</li> <li>5. 50,001-60,000        30%</li> <li>6. Over 60,000 no grant payable</li> </ol> | It is recommended that the maximum grant be retained. Very few grants are paid at the maximum level so there is little saving here in reducing the maximum grant level. Also it was felt that a reduction might exclude some families with children in severe need. The number of income bands has been reduced and the % of available costs has also been scaled back. The maximum gross income threshold has been reduced by €5,000 to €60,000. |
| 2. All household members' income to be included in assessment, but consider how this affects different types of household.  | Spouse's income is already included in the assessment, but this should be extended to include other adults living in the house (those over 18 or over 23 in full-time education). There should be a disregard for Carers' Allowance.  |
| 3. No extension works approved unless all less costly alternatives have been considered and eliminated.   | Extensions are costly and take time to complete. They should only be considered when less costly and time consuming approaches have been considered, such as use of technology, reassignment of existing rooms, etc. An Occupational Therapist should confirm that the works recommended are the most economic means of meeting the adaptations requirements.   |
| 4. Local Authorities should develop (if not already available) a schedule of rates for works to be carried out to help budget control and to achieve consistency across regions. Each Local Authority should send its schedule of rates to the DECLG for information.   | Some local authorities are already doing this and the feedback to the group was positive as a cost control and value for money measure and to help achieve consistency.   |

|    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 5. | Local Authorities should liaise with OTs where possible.   | Occupational Therapists were considered as a key group with whom local authorities should co-ordinate to ensure that the scarce resources available are best targeted to those most in need.   |
| 6. | In the current economic context DECLG guidelines to clarify that only Priority 1 applicants are likely to receive grant aid, e.g. including those undergoing end-of-life care or have high level care needs and where works would facilitate discharge from hospital or alleviate the need for hospitalisation in the <i>immediate</i> future. | In the case of those undergoing end-of-life care, the focus of the grant should be on what is required to keep someone comfortable. See also recommendation 3. above.  |
| 7. | Introduce a clawback where significant works are grant-aided to put a charge on the property if sold within 5 years of grant awarded.  | This was considered to be an administratively burdensome route, but a clawback option should be introduced for authorities, whereby those receiving a grant of over €15,000 should be required to pay back the grant (or a proportion on a sliding scale over 5 years) if the property is sold within a period of 5 years from the grant being paid. |
| 8. | Ensure Property Tax Compliance   | All applicants should be required to include with their grant application proof that they are compliant with the property tax.   |

### **Mobility Aids Grants Scheme**

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Maintain maximum grant at €6,000, but agree standard rates for works. Maintain income threshold of €30,000. | Agreeing standard rates for works would help to control costs and to achieve consistency.  |
| 2. | All household members' income to be included in assessment.   | Spouse's income is already included in the assessment, but this should be extended to include other adults living in the house (those over 18 or over 23 in full-time education). There should be a disregard for Carers' Allowance. |
| 3. | Ensure Property Tax Compliance  | All applicants should be required to include with their grant application proof that they are compliant with the property tax.   |

### **Housing Aid for Older People**

|    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Reduce maximum grant to €8,000 and reduce number of income bands and percentage of cost of work available for those over €30,000 threshold, as follows: | The maximum grant has been reduced by €2,500 to €8,000. The number of income bands has been reduced and the % of available costs has also been |
|----|---|--|



|    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
|    | <p>1. Up to 30,000 95%</p> <p>2. 30,001-35,000 85%</p> <p>3. 35,001-40,000 75%</p> <p>4. 40,001-50,000 50%</p> <p>5. 50,001-60,000 30%</p> <p>6. Over 60,000 no grant payable</p> | <p>scaled back. The maximum gross income threshold has been reduced by €5,000 to €60,000.</p>   |
| 2. | <p>All household members' income to be included in assessment.</p>  | <p>Spouse's income is already included in the assessment, but this should be extended to include other adults living in the house (those over 18 or over 23 in full-time education).<br/>There should be a disregard for Carers' Allowance.</p> |
| 3. | <p>Increase age limit for eligibility to 66 years.</p>  | <p>This would align the eligibility with retirement age. Authorities should continue to exercise some discretion in exceptional and hardship cases.</p>   |
| 4. | <p>Only include necessary repairs to make property habitable for applicant.</p>   | <p>Only essential repairs to be undertaken. For example the replacement of windows or doors would be considered on a case by case basis and only those considered essential would be replaced under the scheme.</p>                             |
| 5. | <p>Ensure Property Tax Compliance</p>   | <p>All applicants should be required to include with their grant application proof that they are compliant with the property tax.</p>   |

### 3.2 Options for further consideration

The Review also considered the following options for reform of the suite of grants. These options were considered to potentially take longer to implement.

|    | Option  | Comment   |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | <p>Savings should be included in the assessment</p> | <p>Income from interest on savings is included in the assessment, but there was considerable discussion about the treatment of applicants with substantial savings. Some of the Review Members felt that such applicants should be asked to contribute to the cost of works undertaken even if their gross income was low. However, it was also felt that this would be difficult to administer fairly and could lead to people keeping cash in their own homes, with related security risks. For these reasons, this option was not recommended at this time, but should be kept under review.</p> |

|    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 2. | Allow Fair Deal subvention to be spent on home improvements   | For those in the early stages of institutional care, if the subvention was converted to cover home adaptations this might prove a more cost effective response. This should be considered between the relevant Departments (Health and Environment) |
| 3. | Consider the calculation basis for the allocations.   | The DECLG should consider alternative options for allocating funds e.g. based on a demographic profile of the authorities.  |
| 4. | Monitoring information needs to give better information on applicants and beneficiaries of the schemes. | The current data being collected by DECLG regarding the grants scheme is insufficient to undertake proper impact assessment. More detailed information is required regarding the number of applications, profile of those who receive grants, etc.  |
| 5. | Funding options for stair lifts   | Further consideration should be given to alternative funding options for stair lifts including procurement of an all-in services (installation, removal and re-use)   |
| 6. | Review Group to reconvene   | The Review Group should be asked to reconvene periodically to review progress with the schemes.   |

#### 4. Concluding Comments

In undertaking its work, the Review Group was very aware of the positive impact which these grants have had on older people, those with a disability and the wider community. While the recommendations above were developed to try to better target the available resources to those most in need, the Group also considered that the lack of local authority funding will also impact on grant availability. Traditionally local authorities used internal capital receipts (e.g. income from tenant purchase) to fund their contribution to the grants. This matched funding is greatly reduced in recent years.

It should also be noted that these grants finance work to privately owned houses. The lack of finance for similar work to be undertaken on the social housing stock, while beyond the terms of reference of the Review Group, nonetheless, was also raised as a serious concern.

Finally, the Review Group would like to emphasise the importance of ensuring an equitable distribution of available grant funding across the country and the need to further foster a consistency of approach in administering the grants.

## 5. Appendix 1 – Membership of the Review Group

### County and City Managers' Association (CCMA) Nominees

|             |                             |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Billy Coman | South Dublin County Council |
| Mary Quinn  | Leitrim County Council      |
| Mary Ryan   | Cork County Council         |

### Housing Practitioner Network Nominees

|                  |                                |
|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Alan Farrell     | Galway County Council          |
| Aidan Fennessey  | South Tipperary County Council |
| Nora Kaye        | Clare County Council           |
| Cormac O'Donnell | Dublin City Council            |
| Michael Rainey   | Laois County Council           |

### Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government Nominees

|                |       |
|----------------|-------|
| Paul Geraghty  | DECLG |
| Belinda Treacy | DECLG |

### Housing Agency Nominee

|             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| David Silke | Housing Agency |
|-------------|----------------|

## 6. Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference

- The Older People and People with a Disability Grant Schemes Review Group was convened by the Housing Agency at the request of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.
- The work of the Review Group is set in the context of the current economic constraints, reduced budgets and increasing need.
- The main task of the Review Group is to examine the current Older Persons and Disability Grant Schemes for Private Houses and to make recommendations as to how the Grants can become more focused and targeted to those most in need.
- The Review should consider both demand issues (for example: criteria, income limits, scope of works, etc) and supply issues (for example: level of grant, time limits to draw down funding).
- The Review Group will review available material and seek inputs from relevant stakeholders (especially local authorities, HSE and relevant voluntary bodies).
- The Review Group should report back to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government with a draft report by end June 2013.

21 May 2013

## **7. Appendix 3 – Stakeholders' Meeting, 11 June 2013: Participant List**

Dolores Murphy, Irish Wheelchair Association

Sean Moynihan and Emma Kennedy, ALONE

Mary O'Kelly, Occupational Therapist, HSE

Barbara Flynn, Ataxia Ireland

Pat Matthews and Tara Matthews, Irish Society for Autism

Shane Hogan, National Disability Authority