



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

17TH DECEMBER 2019

RHONDDA CYNON TAF TO ADMINSTRATE THE MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL'S DISABLED FACILITY GRANT

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PROSPERITY AND DEVELOPMENT, IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER CLLR R BEVAN

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Appendices: RCTCBC DFG Process Appendix A
 MTCBC DFG Process Appendix B
 New proposed DFG Process Appendix C

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out proposals for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) to act as the Lead Body for the administration and monitoring of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

2.1 Approve the proposal for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) to act as the Lead Body for the administration and monitoring of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) as set out in section 5 of this report.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Local Authorities have a mandatory duty to consider all applications for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's). On the 3rd July, MTCBC's Chief Executive formally wrote to RCT's Chief Executive to explore if there is any potential capacity and appetite to enter a collaborative arrangement for RCT to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) across Cwm Taf. This request was made as a result of all MTCBC's DFG staff being given

an in principle agreement for Voluntary Early Retirement this financial year.

- 3.2 The proposals will ensure that MTCBC meet its mandatory duty to consider DFG's, therefore enabling disabled residents to have the opportunity to receive a grant in order to make adaptations to their homes allowing them to live independently.
- 3.3 The recommendations will help address findings set out in the Welsh Audit Office Housing Adaptations review. Specifically the recommendation for Councils to work together and with partner agencies to maximise both take up and the benefits of adaptations in supporting independence by pooling of resources and creating integrated delivery teams.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Local Authorities have a mandatory duty to consider all applications for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's). The grant is administered under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended) and specific details of the grant are contained within the Act of Parliament and associated guidance.
- 4.2 Disabled Facilities Grants are awarded for essential adaptations to give a disabled person better freedom of movement around their home and support them to live independently. This work could include widening doors, installing ramps, installing a stair lift, installing a downstairs bathroom, improving or installing a new heating system, adapting heating or lighting controls so that they are easier to use by a disabled person. The maximum grant assistance available is £36,000 per home.
- 4.3 The Council has a total budget of **£4.2M** to deliver DFG's across the borough. To manage this, a robust process is in place, which is set out in detail in **Appendix A**. In summary, expressions of interests for the grant are made to RCT's Social Services team, an Occupational Therapist (OT) from the team will undertake an assessment of need to determine the adaptations required at the home. Following the assessment, the OT will complete a referral form for the resident to receive the Disabled Facilities Grant, and send this to the Housing Grants team. The Housing Grants team will then process the referral. In 2018/19, **550 DFG referrals** were made to the RCT's Housing Grants team.

Request for support

- 4.4 On the 3rd July, MTCBC's Chief Executive formally wrote to RCT's Chief Executive requesting the opportunity to explore options for RCT

to deliver the DFG function on behalf of MTCBC. This request was made due to MTCBC disestablishing their DFG team (administration staff and surveyors), which currently consists of 2.4 FTE members of staff, who have been given an in principle agreement for Voluntary Early Retirement this financial year.

- 4.5 In response to the letter, a meeting was held with MTCBC and RCT colleagues, to further discuss the opportunity to enter a collaborative arrangement to deliver DFG's across Cwm Taf.

5.0 PROPOSAL

- 5.1 The following proposals are based on MTCBC's annual capital budget allocation being transferred to RCTCBC without any existing staff or TUPE liability. Furthermore, the proposals relate to the administration of the grant only and not to the current Occupational Therapist arrangements which will remain unchanged across both authorities.
- 5.2 Following a review, it was found that MTCBC's current DFG processes, **Appendix B**, are very similar to RCT's. Expressions of interests for the grant are made to MTCBC's Social Services team, an Occupational Therapist (OT) from the team will undertake an assessment of need to determine the adaptations required at the home. Following the assessment, the OT will complete a referral form for the resident to receive the DFG, and send this to the Housing Grants team to process.
- 5.3 The only difference between the two processes is the agency fee charge. MTCBC's agency fee is currently 12% where as RCT's is priced at 15%. As part of this arrangement, it will be essential that MTCBC's agency fee be brought in line with RCT for consistency purposes. This is something that has already been agreed with MTCBC.
- 5.4 A review whether there is sufficient capacity within the existing RCT staffing structure to administer MTCBC's grant has also been undertaken. The administrative responsibilities would include approving, managing, distributing and monitoring the grant on behalf of MTCBC. However, the reporting of annual DFG performance indicators and any statutory financial returns to Welsh Government, will remain the responsibility of MTCBC.
- 5.5 Based on the average number of referrals received per annum, which is **59** and the level of budget allocated, **£850,000**, inclusive of fees, the impact on the current administration team who oversee the processing of the grant is very low. As such, it is felt that the administration function could be easily absorbed within RCT's existing staffing structure.

- 5.6 However, due to existing surveyor capacity within the service, it is proposed that this aspect of the service is outsourced to Care and Repair. Care and Repair is a service for older, disabled and vulnerable people, guiding them through the often complex or daunting process of carrying out repairs and adaptations in their own home. The organisation will appoint a reputable contractor on behalf of the applicant to carry out the work and will oversee the work from start to finish. It is therefore proposed to extend Care and Repairs existing DFG arrangements with RCT to cover MTCBC's DFG's.
- 5.7 Care and Repair act as agents for the applicants applying for DFG's and will offer a hand holding service by assisting to complete the application form, collate financial information, appoint the contractor on behalf of the client and oversee the works to completion on site. Discussions have taken place between the Council and Care and Repair, who have confirmed that they have the capacity within the organisation to support this arrangement. The proposed new process is set out in **Appendix C**.
- 5.8 Based on this arrangement, if MTCBC received 59 referrals (based on 2018/2019 data), RCT would anticipate a fee income which will offset any additional costs the Council may incur in administering and monitoring MTCBC's scheme.
- 5.9 If this proposal is approved by Cabinet, a Service Level Agreement (SLA) will be created to formally establish the Council's role as the lead body for this project. It is anticipated that this collaborative arrangement is operational from January 2020.

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening test has been completed and this has indicated that a full Equality Impact assessment was not required

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 A consultation exercise is not required.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 MTCBC's DFG Capital Programme is set annually, therefore the scheme would need to be implemented from January 2020 and reviewed annually in line with budget setting.

8.2 The arrangements for the transfer of the budget from MTCBC to RCT will be included in the SLA and will ensure that sufficient funds are transferred from MTCBC to RCT periodically, in advance of RCT paying Care and Repair. The treatment of any budget variances will also be included in the SLA.

8.3 The potential additional fee income will offset any additional costs the Council may incur in administering and monitoring MTCBC's scheme. The actual income levels will be monitored and included in the Council's Medium Term Financial Planning updates when appropriate.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1 Discussions have taken place with Legal Services and Finance to consider the legal implications and legislation and it is considered that the arrangements and terms and conditions of this funding can be administered under the Council's lawful powers. In addition, a Service Level Agreement (SLA) will be put in place between RCT and MTCBC. This will essentially pass on the accountability, risk and responsibility for the local delivery of this project to RCT and will also govern the grant monitoring and claim process.

9.2 There are no TUPE implications as a result of this proposal.

10.0 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

10.1 The Scheme will assist RCT to contribute to the delivery all three of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities of economy, people and place. The Scheme will also assist RCT and MTCBC to contribute to three of the seven wellbeing goals that 'The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' puts in place as follows:

1. A healthier Wales
2. A prosperous Wales
3. A Wales of cohesive communities

11.0 CONCLUSION

11.1 This report sets out proposals for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) to act as the Lead Body for the administration and monitoring of the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC).

- 11.2 The proposals ensure that MTCBC meet their mandatory duty, whilst having very little impact on RCT current programme, with any potential fee income offsetting any additional costs the Council may incur in administering and monitoring MTCBC's scheme.
- 11.3 Furthermore, the proposals will help address findings set out in the Welsh Audit Office Housing Adaptations review. Specifically the recommendation for Councils to work together and with partner agencies to maximise both take up and the benefits of adaptations in supporting independence by pooling of resources and creating integrated delivery teams.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer

Derek James (01443 281114)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENTERPRISE,
DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING, COUNCILLOR BEVAN**

Item:

Background Papers

None.

Officer to contact: Derek James (01443 281114)

APPENDIX A: RCT Disabled Facility Grant Process

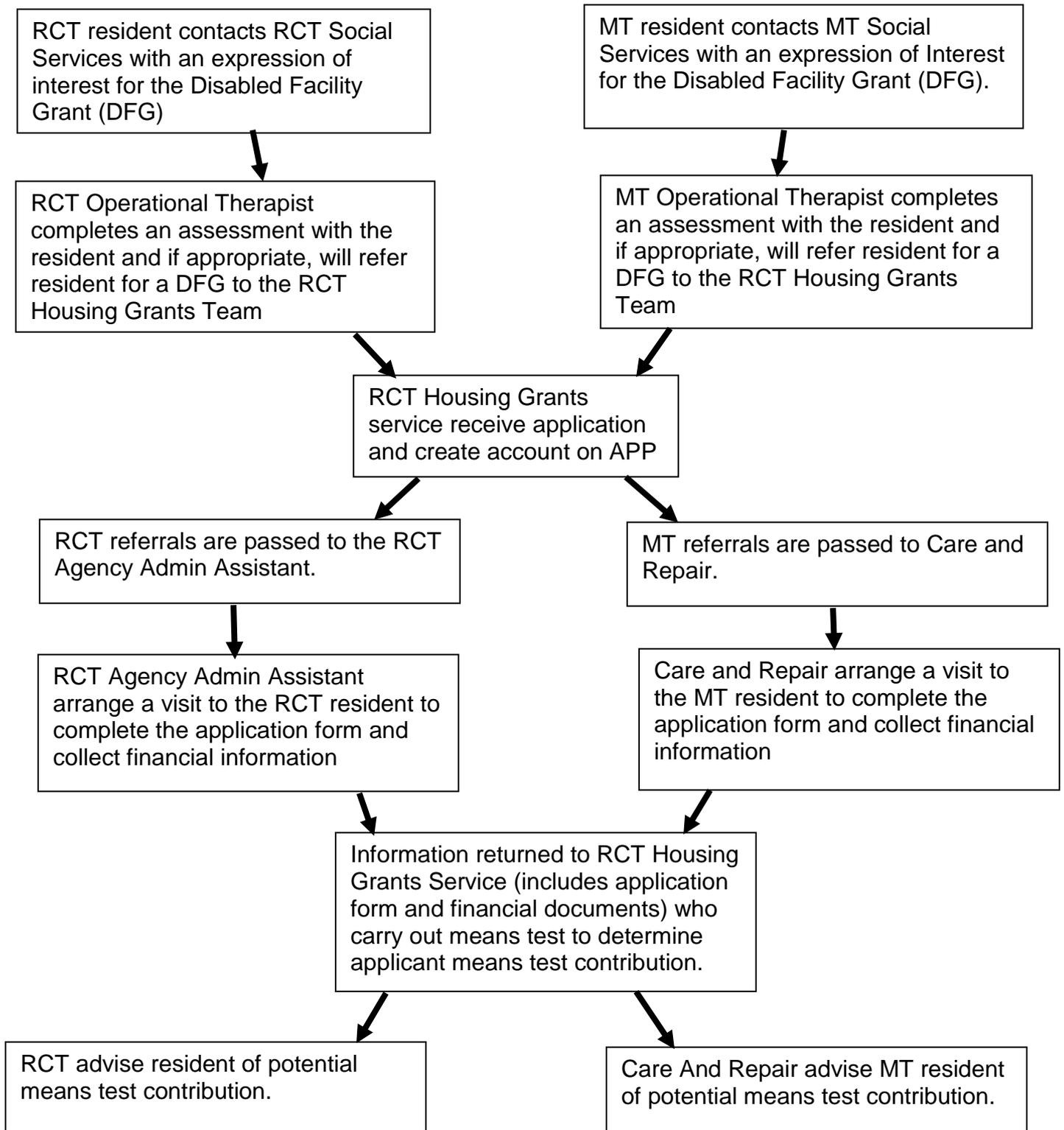
1. Electronic copy of the referral received from social services
2. Grant Application created on APP
3. Admin visit arranged to complete application forms and collect financial information
4. Means test carried out and client advised
5. Any calculated means test contribution is collected from applicant
6. Survey arranged for surveyor to carry out feasibility survey and quantify work
7. Schedule of work drawn up and scheme costed
8. Request certificate of title
9. Approve application
10. Allocate work to agency contractor, agree start date and programme of work
11. Work starts on site and over seen by surveyor
12. Surveyor to agree any unforeseen work, revise grant approval and valuate and process any interim payments
13. Work completes and is certified by surveyor
14. All final documentation collated
15. Final payment processed
16. Local land charge placed if cost of Grant is over £5k

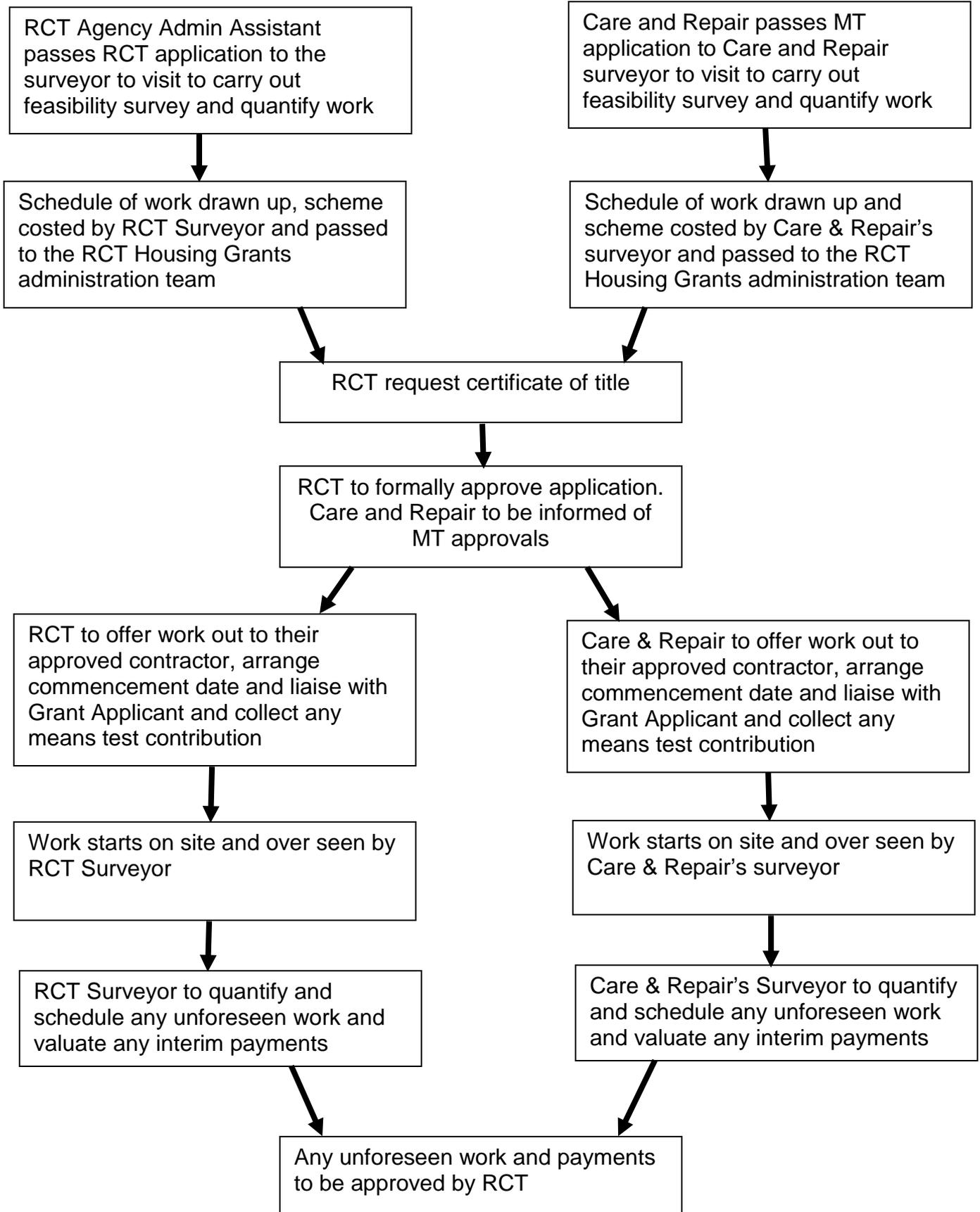
APPENDIX B: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Process

1. Electronic copy of referral received from Social Services
2. Grant Application created on Tascomi
3. Survey arranged for surveyor to carry out feasibility of referral
4. Request certificate of title
5. Admin visit arranged to complete application forms and collect financial information
6. Means test carried out and client advised
7. Survey arranged for surveyor to carry out feasibility survey and quantify work
8. Schedule of work drawn up and scheme costed
9. Approve application
10. Arrange to meet client to go through grant approval, who the contractor is and agree a start date
11. Local land charge placed if cost of work is over £5k
12. Work starts on site and over seen by surveyor
13. Surveyor to agree any unforeseen work, revise grant approval and value and process any interim payments
14. Work completes and is certified by surveyor
15. All final documentation collated
16. Final payment processed

APPENDIX C: Proposed new process

New proposed DFG Process





Work completes and is certified by RCT Surveyor

MT resident contacts MT Social Services with an expression of Interest for the Disabled Facility Grant (DFG).

All final documentation collated by RCT Surveyor and RCT Housing Grants Administration team to process final I payment

All final documentation collated by Care & Repair and sent to RCT Housing Administration team to process final payment

Local land charge placed if cost of Grant is over £5k

Resident feedback collected

Grant closed