

DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL UPDATE ON COMMENCEMENT OF THE ENHANCED GRANT SCHEME ON DEFECTIVE CONCRETE BLOCKS

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage announced the commencement of the Enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant scheme on the 3rd July 2023.

ROLES UNDER THE ENHANCED SCHEME

Both Donegal County Council and the Housing Agency will have roles in the implementation of the New Scheme.

- The Council's role is changed significantly and will involve the validation of applications, administration of the scheme and the issuing of payments.
- The role of Engineering, Technical assessment and Compliance is now the remit of the Housing Agency and/or the homeowners' Competent Building Professional.

Both organisations will work in co-operation to implement the new Scheme.

NEW APPLICATIONS UNDER THE ENHANCED SCHEME

The Council has undertaken significant work in preparation for the enactment of the new scheme.

New online system to accept applications under the Enhanced Grant Scheme was opened on Monday 10th July. 7 applications received to date.

Significant learning period for all concerned (i.e. Council staff administering the scheme, Homeowners, etc.)

- Guidelines and '*Your Questions Answered*' prepared by Department.
- Ongoing engagement with Department in this regard.

NEW APPLICATIONS UNDER THE ENHANCED SCHEME

Under the new Enhanced Scheme, the homeowner engages a Competent Building Professional to complete a Building Condition Assessment (BCA) on the dwelling, incorporating a non-invasive visual survey to determine if the damage is consistent with the use of defective concrete blocks and meets the damage threshold as set out in the regulations. There is no requirement in the enhanced scheme for the homeowner to do sampling, testing, laboratory report and chartered engineers report.

On completion of the survey, the Competent Building Professional will determine if the dwelling has met the damage threshold. The next step is the completion of an application form, accompanied by associated proofs and submission to the Local Authority.

Once a new application is submitted and the Council is satisfied that it meets the validation requirements of the Enhanced Grant scheme, it will be referred to the Housing Agency for engineering/technical assessment.

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

1296 applications were submitted under the previous scheme which have, and are moving across to the Enhanced Scheme under Transitional Arrangements.

These can be split into two broad categories:

- Applications which have received Confirmation of Eligibility (Stage 1 Approval)
- Applications which have not received Confirmation of Eligibility (Stage 1 Approval)

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PRIORITISATION

849 applications made under the previous scheme have received Confirmation of Eligibility.

These applicants will need to be provided with confirmation of Grant amount under Enhanced Scheme.

Given the numbers involved, this will take a period of time and the Council recognises the need to prioritise such applications.

The following lists the priority order for the recalculation of Grant Amount, with Category 1 being dealt with first.

- **CATEGORY 1 - Applications that have received Stage 2 Approval, and where remediation works have either been completed or have commenced.**
- **CATEGORY 2 - Applications that have received Stage 2 Approval but have not yet commenced remediation works.**
- **CATEGORY 3 - Applications that have received Stage 1 Confirmation of Eligibility Approval, and have submitted their Stage 2 documents, but have not yet received a Stage 2 Grant Approval under the previous scheme.**
- **CATEGORY 4 - Applications that have received Stage 1 Confirmation of Eligibility approval but have not submitted their Stage 2 documents.**
- **CATEGORY 5 – Remaining applications.**

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PRIORITISATION

Applications which have not received Confirmation of Eligibility (Stage 1 Approval) under the previous 90/10 scheme now fall within the remit of the Housing Agency for Engineering/Technical Assessment under the terms of the Enhanced Scheme.

- 323 of these applications have already been referred to the Housing Agency for technical and engineering assessment.
- All remaining applications which did not receive Confirmation of Eligibility (Stage 1 Approval) under the terms of the previous 90/10 Scheme will be transferred to the Housing Agency for technical and engineering assessment, subject to completion of validation requirements, and applicants will be advised accordingly.

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PRIORITISATION:

CATEGORY 1 - APPLICATIONS THAT HAVE RECEIVED STAGE 2 APPROVAL, AND WHERE REMEDIATION WORKS HAVE EITHER BEEN COMPLETED OR HAVE COMMENCED.

- These applications will be prioritised as homeowners have already incurred significant costs and have either completed the remediation of their homes or have commenced works.
- We have been engaging with the Department to clarify matters pertaining to the method of calculation of the Grant. The Department has confirmed that the method of calculation will be as follows:
 - 'the expenditure incurred to fully complete the remedial option in compliance with the Remedial Works Plan (subject to the Cap limits), making use of the updated rates provided in the Enhanced Regulations'.
- In order for this recalculation to be completed, the homeowners Competent Building Professional will be required to provide a declaration outlining the following:
 - details of the internal floor area (of original dwelling)
 - details of the internal floor area (of proposed dwelling), or
 - details of defective blockwork replaced / to be replaced
- For completed works, the homeowner should submit all invoices detailing the expenditure incurred to fully complete the remedial option (if not already submitted).
- *NOTE: THE ACTUAL GRANT AMOUNT PAYABLE WILL BE THE LESSER OF THE FOLLOWING:*
 - *the expenditure incurred to fully complete the remedial option in compliance with the Remedial Works Plan or*
 - *the maximum grant available as calculated under the terms of the enhanced scheme.*

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PRIORITISATION:

CATEGORY 2 - APPLICATIONS THAT HAVE RECEIVED STAGE 2 APPROVAL UNDER THE PREVIOUS SCHEME BUT HAVE NOT YET COMMENCED REMEDIATION WORKS.

- This category will be addressed once Category 1 has been dealt with.
- In order for this recalculation to be completed, the homeowners Competent Building Professional will be required to provide a declaration outlining the following:
 - details of the internal floor area (of original dwelling)
 - details of the internal floor area (of proposed dwelling), or
 - details of defective blockwork replaced / to be replaced
- *NOTE: THE ACTUAL GRANT AMOUNT PAYABLE WILL BE THE LESSER OF THE FOLLOWING:*
 - *the expenditure incurred to fully complete the remedial option in compliance with the Remedial Works Plan or*
 - *the maximum grant available as calculated under the terms of the enhanced scheme.*

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PRIORITISATION:

CATEGORY 3 - APPLICATIONS THAT HAVE RECEIVED STAGE 1 CONFIRMATION OF ELIGIBILITY APPROVAL, AND HAVE SUBMITTED THEIR STAGE 2 DOCUMENTS, BUT HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED A STAGE 2 GRANT APPROVAL.

- This category will be addressed once categories 1 and 2 have been dealt with.
- In order for this recalculation to be completed, the homeowners Competent Building Professional will be required to provide a declaration outlining the following:
 - details of the internal floor area (of original dwelling)
 - details of the internal floor area (of proposed dwelling), or
 - details of defective blockwork replaced / to be replaced
- *NOTE: THE ACTUAL GRANT AMOUNT PAYABLE WILL BE THE LESSER OF THE FOLLOWING:*
 - *the expenditure incurred to fully complete the remedial option in compliance with the Remedial Works Plan or*
 - *the maximum grant available as calculated under the terms of the enhanced scheme.*

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND PRIORITISATION:

CATEGORY 4 - APPLICATIONS THAT HAVE RECEIVED STAGE 1 CONFIRMATION OF ELIGIBILITY APPROVAL BUT HAVE NOT SUBMITTED THEIR STAGE 2 DOCUMENTS.

- This category will be addressed once Categories 1, 2 & 3 have been dealt with.
- In order to process / calculate the grant amount, the homeowners Competent Building Professional will be required to provide the following:
 - details of the internal floor area (of original dwelling)
 - details of the internal floor area (of proposed dwelling), or
 - details of defective blockwork replaced / to be replaced
- It is preferable (but not essential) that the remedial works plan is also submitted at this stage.
- *NOTE: THE ACTUAL GRANT AMOUNT PAYABLE WILL BE THE LESSER OF THE FOLLOWING:*
 - *the expenditure incurred to fully complete the remedial option in compliance with the Remedial Works Plan or*
 - *the maximum grant available as calculated under the terms of the enhanced scheme.*

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW ENHANCED SCHEME

NEXT STEPS.

New applicants:

- The Online application process is already open since 10th July.
- Applications are being received.
- 7 have been received to date and are being examined.

Existing applicants:

- No requirement for applicants do to anything at present.
- Council will be in touch with applicants either later this week or next week.
- Letters will issue this week and next week to each applicant, advising them as follows:
 - How the transition process will work.
 - Which priority category they are in.
 - What they need to do next in respect of their own application.