

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO AUDIT COMMITTEE

14 NOVEMBER 2019

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) – RESPONSE TO WAO RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide members with a progress update on the recommendations made in the Wales Audit Office (WAO) report to the Audit Committee meeting of 15th November 2018.

2. Connection to corporate improvement objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:

- Helping people to be more self-reliant – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
- Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 15th November 2018 the Audit Committee received a report from the Wales Audit Office on satisfaction levels of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) applicants within Bridgend. Key messages from the report highlighted that overall satisfaction levels of applicants were high:

'Most service users we spoke to were happy...but the Council is not maximizing opportunities to improve the service and deliver value for money'

'Most service users are happy with the service and feel that the adaptations have helped them with their needs'

'Most service users found the application process easy but the Council receives regular queries which it is not best placed to answer as other outside parties become involved as the project progresses'

'The Council could do more to help service users make informed choices about which agent and builder to use and to strengthen its oversight of them, particularly ensuring that builders are safe to work in the homes of vulnerable people'

3.2 Since the report to Members, a number of actions have been undertaken to respond to specific WAO recommendations and an update on progress against these recommendations is provided in **Appendix 1**. Members also requested Case Studies be provided which are attached at **Appendix 2**:

Case 1 – An example of where potential cost avoidance has been achieved in providing an adaptation which supported the applicant to be safer at home and reduced the risk of falls as well as meeting the Council's Social Services and Well-Being duties. This has also enabled the client to be supported by family in a better environment.

Case 2 – An example of where potential cost avoidance has been achieved in providing an adaptation which supported the applicant to be safer at home and reduced the risk of falls as well as meeting the Council's Social Services and Well Being duties.

Case 3 – An example of a long standing application which has not progressed to completion. BCBC has reviewed the case to ensure that information remains current and to understand why the application has not proceeded. Information is required from the Agent to proceed. BCBC will ensure follow up on this case to meet its duties

3.3 In addition, other key actions undertaken include -

- Staffing re-structure undertaken in December as part of the wider housing team review 2018;
- Research and liaison with other local authorities to investigate delivery and operational models, including Cardiff City Council and Neath Port Talbot Council;
- Lean Thinking Review undertaken by an Independent Consultant to identify unnecessary bureaucracy and barriers;
- A number of day-to-day operational changes to clarify and simplify processes where possible and increased monitoring and review.

3.4 The findings from the Lean Thinking Review provided evidence of out of date practices. A sample assessment of random cases during this review found that out of 6 cases –

- the number of assessments across these cases ranged from 1 – 12;
- the total number of people involved in these cases ranged from 4 – 22 people;
- the number of times work is passed to other people during the DFG process ranged between 4 – 38 times

3.5 Current performance indicators highlight the challenges facing the service with complex cases taking longer to deliver which therefore effects the overall averages reported Currently it takes-

- an average on 270 days to deliver a DFG (BCBC is ranked 20th in Wales);

- 713 days to deliver a children's DFG which tend to be the more complex and larger cases often comprising bedroom and wet room extensions. These require detailed design and planning and therefore take longer to deliver than less complex cases;
- 244 days to deliver an adult DFG.

Full spend during most years is not achieved. There are many variables within the current model of delivery, both internal and external that have led to this position. These have been highlighted by the lean review and are currently being examined. This, combined with information gathered from other local authorities, highlights key areas for further consideration.

- 3.6 In addition to mandatory DFG's, discretionary expenditure takes place on minor works adaptations. These works are low level works which aim to reduce as much as possible the escalation of needs by preventing falls and support individuals to live safely in their own home. The type of works delivered by this expenditure includes work on trip hazards such as security lights, pathway repair, grab rails and security lights. Other examples are intercom systems, key safe and grab rails. These services are delivered on the Council's behalf by a 3rd party. A new Performance Indicator (PI) has been established this year 2019/20 to capture performance and Quarter 1 saw this work being delivered on average within 9 days.
- 3.7 Nationally the DFG service and wider adaptations services have been subject to a number of reviews and reports such as Housing Adaptations: Wales Audit Office (2018) and a Review of Independent Living Adaptations: Welsh Government (2015) which highlight and recognise the complexity and challenging arrangements for the delivery of such services in Wales.
- 3.8 Welsh Government (WG) has also set out the standards that should be in place for housing adaptations, of which DFG's play a significant role. WG has issued the Housing Adaptations Service Standards. These standards are-

Standard 1 – the adaptation should be necessary and appropriate as well as reasonable and practicable

Standard 2 – Equality and Diversity – applicants can expect to be treated fairly and equitably

Standard 3 – Communication – should be a two-way process between the service provider and applicant

Standard 4 – Quality of Service – outlines the level of service that should be expected

Standard 5 – Quality of Equipment – outlines health and safety, warranty and service charges should be made clear

Standard 6 – Expected Timeframes for small, medium and large adaptations

Standard 7- Eligibility Checks – outlines those required for DFG's

- 3.9 The findings from all recent and the national scrutiny of the adaptations/DFG service has provided a solid baseline from which to identify improvements and changes required.

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 Within Bridgend, the DFG service is in a period of change and actions to develop the service since the last Committee meeting has meant that significant work has been undertaken to develop options for the future model of delivery.

4.2 Mindful of both the findings and recommendations from WAO and WG service standards as referenced above, research is on-going to:

- 1) identify the most effective Model in providing a timely and quality service to applicants;
- 2) introduce a level of control over performance and safeguarding issues;
- 3) ensure resources are at an appropriate level;
- 4) ensure the effective delivery of minor works continues.

4.3 Cabinet members have requested further information on delivery models and cost benefit information on options. This work is on-going and a future report will be presented to cabinet in the near future.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There will be no effect on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken prior to any changes being implemented.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The report contributes to the following goals within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

- A Healthier Wales - prevention of deterioration of health conditions, anxiety and mental health problems caused by inappropriate living conditions and precieved need to move away from home and community, prevention of accidents in the home.
- A more equal Wales - supporting the maintenance of diverse communities where disabled people play an active part
- A resilient Wales – enabling people to stay in their communities and families contributing to support neighbours and sustain community networks
- A Wales of cohesive communities – avoid the loss of individuals to their communities and families, building understanding and relationships within communities with disabled people and older people.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language – keeping older people in their communities maintaining links to community history and retaining language and skills from previous generations to share with future generations

7.2 The 5 ways of working have been considered in the preparation of this report and are summarised below –

- **Long term** – This supports the Council’s objectives of ‘Helping people to be more Healthy and Resilient’ to strengthen the links to well-being goals a

resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

- **Prevention** - The revision of the current corporate plan to focus away from business as usual is driven by a desire for the council to take a stronger focus on prevention and as work continues on reviewing and revising the commitments for the next corporate plan, this principle will guide this work.
- **Involvement** - The engagement with service users has informed the review and the service will continue to use feedback from those seeking adaptations to their homes to guide service improvement reflect a more preventative approach seeking long term benefits for citizens from remaining in their own homes and communities.
- **Integration** –The council’s vision One Council Working Together To Improve Lives is reinforced by the principle in the corporate plan to work as one Council and discourage different parts of the organisation from developing multiple processes or unnecessarily different approaches. The business process review has looked in detail at how the different parts of the council work together to provide adaptations to homes.
- **Collaboration** – the DFG service is predicated on effective and successful collaboration and partnership arrangements with internal and external colleagues, other statutory bodies, 3rd sector and service user engagement.

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 That members note the responses made to the WAO report.

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November 2019

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Background documents:

Housing Adaptations: Wales Audit Office (2018) and a Review of Independent Living

Adaptations: Welsh Government (2015)

Appendix 1 WAO Report : Proposals for Improvement

<p>P1 The Council should consider more broadly how its housing adaptations service can contribute to meeting its strategic aim 'To ensure that Bridgend County is a place that people want to live, where there is a choice of good quality, affordable, and sustainable housing, appropriate to the needs of each household' and the medium and longer-term actions needed to do this. In doing so, it should consider how it can apply the five ways of working from the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act to help it do this and the Social Services and Well-being Act.</p>	<p>1.1 Through its review the services has recognised the long term trends for an aging population and for more single person homes and is seeking to provide both mandatory DFG's and small supportive adaptations at an earlier stage to prevent deterioration and provide support to more people to enable them to stay safely in their own homes.</p> <p>1.2 The service supports A Resilient Wales; A Healthier Wales; A more equal Wales; A Wales of cohesive communities; A Wales of Vibrant Culture as per Section 7 in the report</p>
<p>P2 The Council should strengthen its arrangements for evaluating the housing adaptations service to help the Council improve the service. This includes improving the design of the service user survey and extending it to include all service users and to increase awareness of the survey and the results across the organisation.</p>	<p>2.1 Applicants not surveyed by Care and Repair are being asked to take part in a telephone survey by BCBC.</p> <p>2.2 Internal review of waiting list cases taking place to determine progress and identify where processes have been delayed or failed. Contact is being made with individual applicants as to their current situation, whether things have changed since their first contact with the DFG service and whether further assessments are required thereby increasing awareness of the service allowing for face to face feedback</p> <p>2.3 New evaluating and survey systems will be explored for 2020/21</p>
<p>P3 The Council should help service users understand the often-complicated process that involves multiple organisations by providing a clear and simple overview of the grant process from beginning to end.</p>	<p>3.2 Joint working with Social Services taking place and a dedicated housing OT to review cases where required, who visits applicants and explains the process and provides a direct line of contact for the applicant.</p> <p>3.3 Established monthly meetings with children's OT at POW hospital to clarify grant criteria, policies and expectations</p>

	<p>which can then be discussed at their engagement with families</p> <p>3.4 Established multi-agency meetings to discuss complex cases involving applicants themselves increasing knowledge of policies and procedures</p> <p>3.5 Further guidance will be developed when the final model of service delivery agreed</p>
<p>P4 The Council should fully implement the recommendations made by the Auditor General for Wales' in his report in 2018 on housing adaptations, most notably Recommendation 6 to introduce formal systems for accrediting contractors to undertake adaptations including developing effective systems to manage and evaluate contractor performance. • The Council should ensure it has arrangements in place to monitor and manage the performance of third parties involved in the DFG process. This performance information should be shared with service users to inform their decision upon which agent and builder to engage for their housing adaptation. • Formally accrediting contractors and continually monitoring user satisfaction will satisfy the Council that adequate safeguards are in place to protect vulnerable service users when builders are entering their homes.</p>	<p>4.1 Care and Repair as an agent has provided written confirmation of the process they follow to allow builders on their approved builders framework.</p> <p>4.2 Discussions are on-going in relation to a formal framework system for builders as part of a discussion on the role of an agent and which model best fits for Bridgend CBC</p> <p>4.3 Monthly meetings are taking place with Care and Repair and problems and issues dicussed.</p> <p>4.4 Stairlift contractors part of the nationally procured framework by Welsh Government</p> <p>4.5 On-line system to monitor applications is being discussed.</p> <p>4.6 Any complaints or issues of performance are followed up on a case by case basis</p>
<p>P5 The Council needs to assure itself that it has appropriate controls in place to provide effective oversight of the adaptations process, given it is ultimately responsible for the delivery of the adaptation.</p>	<p>5.1 Lean Thinking Review undertaken to identify blockages and barriers</p> <p>5.2 Monthly meetings are taking place with Care and Repair and Princess of Wales OT service in relation to children's cases</p> <p>5.3 New IT system to support performance management is being investigated</p> <p>5.4 Internal review of waiting list cases taking place to dertermine progress and identify where processes have been delayed or failed. Contact is being made</p>

	<p>with individual applicants to assess their current situation, whether things have changed since their first contact with the DFG service and whether further assessments are required.</p> <p>5.5 Informal contact is made between builders, applicants at initial stage of works, works in progress and end of works to ensure progress</p> <p>5.6 Additional resource in the team to support recording and review and provides general advice to applicants when seeking information regarding the grant</p> <p>5.7 The development of a new Model will support this recommendation for greater control over the process.</p> <p>5.8 The commissioning of a new Minor Works Service will follow CPR rules and allow greater monitoring and control</p>

Appendix 2 – Case Studies

CASE STUDY ONE – COMPLETED CASE

An example of where potential cost avoidance has been achieved in providing an adaptation which supported the application to be safer at home and risk of falls reduced and meet the Council’s Social Services and Well Being duties. This has also enabled the client to be supported by family if required.

Background/Need for a DFG?
The client was referred to the social service department in November 2017 and an assessment completed by an Occupational Therapist in July 2018. The assessment determined that the client was being supported by a family member to access a shower cubicle with a high step on a daily basis, as a result the client has sustained several falls. The client also has regular seizures and if one should occur when using the shower there is potential for the client to sustain an injury due to the confined space in the shower cubicle.
What we did
A DFG recommendation was received in July 2018 for a level access shower. A grants officer visited within 2 weeks of the recommendation being received to complete a survey and issued a technical specification. The client appointed a local DFG agent to assist with the application and design process. A design of the proposed shower scheme was received in September 2018 and approved by the Grants Officer and Occupational Therapist. The works were completed in February 2019.
What was the outcome
The client was provided with a level access shower as a result the risk of falls has been significantly reduced. The new facility also enables the client to be supported by a family member if needed in a more suitable environment. From the recommendation being made by the Occupational Therapist to completion of the works the time taken was around 7 months.

CASE STUDY TWO – COMPLETED CASE

An example of where potential cost avoidance has been achieved in providing an adaptation which supported the application to be safer at home and risk of falls reduced and meet the Council’s Social Services and Well Being duties.

Background/Need for a DFG?
The client was referred for an occupational therapy assessment in 2018. Following this recommendations were made for a level access shower and ramped access into the rear garden.

The client resided in a property that only had a bath and when in use was at risk of falls. As a result the client managed their personal hygiene by strip washing with support from care staff.

What we did

Once the referral was received by the grants officer it was reviewed and the adaptation work was deemed as technically feasible and a technical specification was issued.

The client appointed a DFG agent to support them with the application process, design of the scheme and carrying out the works.

The grants officer and Occupational Therapist approved plans for the scheme submitted by the DFG agent.

Throughout the construction phase of the DFG, several site inspections were completed by the grants officer to review the progress and ensure work was completed to a high standard.

What was the outcome

The client was provided with a level access shower room which could be accessed more easily and safely by the client. The client still has support with personal hygiene via a care and support plan. However, the risk of falls has been reduced and care staff are able to support the client in a more suitable environment.

CASE STUDY 3 – CASE REVIEW

An example of where long standing application which has not progressed to completion. BCBC has reviewed the case to ensure that information remains current and to understand why the application has not proceeded. Information is required from the Agent to proceed. BCBC will ensure follow up on this case to meet its duties

Background/Need for a DFG?
<p>The client was originally assessed in 2018 by an Occupational Therapist working with a local charity body. The client has difficulties with accessing the bath to use the shower and climbing the stairs due a joint condition. Recommendations were made for a level access shower and stair lift. However due to communication delays and the initial application forms not being returned to BCBC the DFG did not proceed. It was deemed necessary for a review to be completed as the DFG had not proceeded and the original recommendations had expired.</p>
What we did
<p>The Housing Occupational Therapist conducted a review of the case in September 2019 to ensure the original recommendations were still necessary and appropriate.</p> <p>Following the review by the Housing Occupational Therapist, recommendations were made for a level access shower in the upstairs bathroom, a stair lift and a ground floor toilet. This was an amended recommendation including additional works.</p> <p>The client's home is owned by a local stock transfer housing association, they make provisions in their budget to carry out certain adaptation work up to the value of £3000. This includes but not limited the installation of a level access shower room.</p> <p>The remaining recommendations made by the Housing Occupational Therapist for ground floor toilet and stair lift are considered as major works and therefore require DFG funding.</p> <p>Following the Occupational Therapist' visit a grants officer visited to confirm the feasibility of adapting the property and drew up a technical specification.</p> <p>Liaising with the DFG Agent, new recommendations were provided to enable the agent to support the client with the application process and prepare the formal application, and carry out the works once approved.</p>
What was the outcome
<p>Recommendations for the shower were sent to the housing association and are with their technical team pending a survey and arranging for the works to be completed.</p> <p>Currently the DFG department is waiting for the submission of the formal application from the DFG agent.</p>