

Meeting of:	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	25 JANUARY 2024
Report Title:	DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT – PROGRESS REPORT AND POSITION STATEMENT
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE
Responsible Officer:	MARTIN MORGANS HEAD OF PARTNERSHIPS
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules
Executive Summary:	The purpose of this report is to update the Governance and Audit Committee on actions taken to progress improvements to the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) service and provide information on the position to date.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Governance and Audit Committee on actions taken to progress improvements to the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) service and provide information on the position to date.

2. Background

- 2.1 Past reports to the Governance and Audit Committee, Cabinet and Cabinet / Corporate Management Board (CCMB) have outlined the critical need to re-shape and improve the delivery of the DFG service within Bridgend. Members of the Governance and Audit Committee received a report on 22nd April 2021 outlining the new model of service.
- 2.2 A report to Governance and Audit Committee on 11th November 2021 provided an update on progress made in relation to the implementation of the new model, together with the actions taken to meet the recommendations of the Audit Wales report in 2017/18 on the Service Users Perspective. Of particular note within that report was a key recommendation regarding Council controls: *‘Council needs to be assured 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’*. The report also outlined information on the actions taken to respond to the Regional Internal Audit Service report in 2019/20 which had concluded that there was Limited Assurance in relation to the service.

2.3 A report was also taken to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2nd March 2022 which provided an update on the current position in relation to the implementation of the new model and appropriate actions.

3. Current situation

3.1 The Disabled Facilities Grant service has continued to develop, with a number of actions being progressed. The report presents an update on progress and risks:

3.2 Staff Recruitment. Staff recruitment has continued to be challenging due to a buoyant private sector with regards surveyors. To mitigate this the following has been implemented:

- Use of agency workers to support the necessary works.
- Commissioned surveying support through the South East Wales Technical and Professional Procurement Framework (SEWTAPs) which provides a contract for 12 months and an option to extend for a further 12 months. There are two active contracts in place at present.

3.3 DFG Case Worker. The administrative element of the DFG service has been strengthened by the employment of a DFG Caseworker, who commenced in post in December 2023. The caseworker is a key role which underpins the process of a DFG adaptation, from point of engagement of an Occupational Therapist through to completion and certification of adaptations to a client's home. The caseworker will encourage an innovative, outcome focused, multi-agency approach to the provision of the Disabled Facilities Grants service, ensuring initiatives are delivered effectively and efficiently.

3.4 Development and Implementation of a Contractors Framework. The development of the Framework has taken longer than expected to complete, with external legal support commissioned to facilitate the exercise. All the necessary legal work has been completed and signed off and the framework is now finalised. The Delegated Authority is in place for the Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change to undertake the procurement process. It is anticipated the process will take 6 months to conclude which will incorporate the necessary standstill period. The initiation date for the procurement is imminent.

3.5 DFG Software System. A new software system, MasterGov, was introduced in April 2023, with migration of data from the legacy systems taking place in the first quarter of 2023/24. System training was rolled out to staff prior to a go live date of 1st July 2023. The system is now fully operational, providing key data to the management team in order to allocate referrals to the surveying team. MasterGov is now providing KPI data which is accurate and valuable in determining the performance of the team.

Alongside the introduction of MasterGov, all financial elements of the Disabled Facilities Grant service have been digitised. EDRM is being used to issue purchase orders to building contractors, following the quotation or tender process. Contractors also use this channel to submit their invoices for payment allowing the Central Grants Team to accurately and promptly make payment to

contractors/suppliers, with the added ability to monitor actual and forecasted expenditure.

3.6 Monitoring and Recording. Until the framework goes live, works continue to be procured through the Sell 2 Wales system with contractors tendering for jobs. All contractors are required to be registered and verified on Constructionline (accreditation for the construction industry throughout the UK) to comply with rule 6.6 of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs). The volume of cases dealt with under this process is dictated by the process and the capacity of the team to oversee each case.

3.7 Financial Overview. In the current financial year, the availability of funding has come from three sources. Capital funding of £2.1 million from the general capital funding for the Council, Welsh Government Enable Grant £270k and the Regional Partnership Board Housing with Care Fund Top Up Grant £100k (top up of large schemes over the £36k grant level limit). The Regional Partnership Board Housing with Care Fund have made further funding available of £122k in year, which has been targeted at small and medium size works such as stairlifts and level access showers. In previous years, the capital funding available has not reached full spend, however with improved staffing levels, availability of surveyors and full implementation of an adequate software system, the management of DFG's has improved significantly, resulting in an increase in the number of adaptations being completed, projecting a full spend of the funding available across all three funding sources. A summary of spend for the current year and previous three years is outlined below, the DFG Capital includes both the general capital funding for the Council and the Regional Partnership Board Housing with Care Grant.

<u>DFG Capital Expenditure Summary</u>	£
2023-24 (to date)	1,865,857
2022-23	1,038,053
2021-22	1,680,432
2020-21	1,357,903

<u>Enable Expenditure Summary</u>	£
2023-24 (to date)	146,677
2022-23	210,677
2021-22	224,576
2020-21	181,046

3.8 Performance

The Covid 19 pandemic was the main cause for significant delays in the implementation of adaptations where referrals had already been received and placed on hold. The table below outlines the adaptations have been completed and certified (closed cases).

	Total complete/ certified	% increase
2019-20	157	
2020-21	75	-52%
2021-22	148	97%
2022-23	174	18%
2023-24*	192	10%
Total	746	

Completed and certified cases for the current year are expected to increase in the final two months. 80 cases are currently allocated to surveyors/contractors with an expected completion date prior to the year end close. On the basis that all of these cases are closed for the year 2023-24, total cases completed will be **272**, a **56%** increase from 2022-23.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The report contributes to the following goals within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A globally responsive Wales

The following is a summary to show how the 5 ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been used to formulate the recommendations within this report:-

Long term	Ensuring best use of available accommodation allowing individuals to live safely in their own homes
Preventative	Through a person centered approach preventing an individual escalating into hospital services
Involvement	Providing individuals the choice to remain in their home ensuring they are part of the process from start to finish managed through a single point of engagement

Integration	Ensure individuals can remain within their communities providing an array of benefits including stability through the maintaining of local support networks
Collaboration	Developing a Framework Agreement to support the DFG service. Working in partnership with Social Services to deliver the required adaptations necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the individual.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 The Disabled Facilities Grant service supports the agenda around climate change. The key priority is to ensure residents can live safely within their own homes and their communities. The use of the grant will be developed in line with Welsh Government planning and standards requirements, which support moves to tackle climate change.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 The Disabled Facilities Grant service plays a key role in supporting Bridgend County Borough Council's safeguarding agenda, with the service often supporting vulnerable individuals.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-
- Note progress to date to improve the DFG service and the current position.

Background documents:- None