

Audit Wales Report Housing Adaptations

Additional contextual information

The Council acknowledges and accepts that there are improvements to be made to the DFG service. The issues faced in Bridgend are not dissimilar to many other local authorities post Covid pandemic which resulted in a considerable backlog of cases to work through. The new group manager for housing who is accountable for progressing these improvements, with colleagues across the Council, was new in post at the time of the field work but was not interviewed as part of the review which would have given the opportunity to give auditors confidence in the way forward.

Whilst accepting the need for improvement, the Council does not fully agree with all findings of the report and considers that the conclusion does not represent a balanced assessment of the Council's current arrangements for securing value for money.

There have been measurable improvements in two specific areas of DFG adaptations during the last financial year those being-stairlifts and extensions. However, the report whilst acknowledging them does not appear to have considered these in detail or assessed the impact of the recent service changes that have been implemented. Despite this, the findings state that *“the Council's delivery time is worsening and is currently averaging over two years for an adaptation.”* The Council considers that this conclusion does not fully reflect a performance improvement or the benefits expected from the service reforms introduced in recent years.

Within the report it is highlighted that in 2025/2026 performance for DFG delivery was an average 838 days, however, we provided additional statistical data that showed that upon removing the outliers (Covid cases) the actual performance for 2025/2026 is indeed recorded as 595 days. This follows a similar pattern to 2024/2025 when the recorded data within the report states average DFG delivery was 799 days, however upon removing the outliers (Covid cases) it was reduced to 558 days. This information was also provided during the review meeting. Whilst we accept that the average number of days remains higher than we would expect it does show that COVID cases continued to have a significant impact upon our service delivery.

It should also be noted that auditors confirmed that it is not possible to benchmark performance in Bridgend against other local authorities – some Authorities report the mean rather than the average wait and others have different measures for different

categories of cases. A national standard for performance would aid transparency and accountability for local authorities.

The report notes that there is a 95% satisfaction rate from customers with the DFG service provided by the Council, but this is not given great prominence in the impact of the service.

The review places significant emphasis on value for money considerations; however, the evidence gathered does not appear to have included all relevant stakeholders or service improvement activity. In particular, the Contractor Framework referenced throughout the review was developed in conjunction with the Council's Procurement Team, yet Procurement Services were not consulted as part of the review process. Given the findings and commentary in relation to value for money, contractor management and procurement arrangements, engagement with Procurement would have provided important context regarding the rationale for the framework, procurement methodology, market testing undertaken, contractor pricing, performance monitoring arrangements and the measures implemented to improve value for money.

There is a recommendation that the Council should be in a position to demonstrate value for money and impact on other services – we note that this is a recommendation being made to a number of local authorities and we would ask auditors to highlight good practice where this has been achieved as, in light of the challenging demographics, all service areas supporting vulnerable people are seeing an increase in demand, not just in Bridgend but across Wales.

The review also does not fully recognise the wider programme of improvements introduced within the service. This includes the implementation of the MasterGov adaptations management system, revised contractor allocation arrangements, the appointment of a dedicated DFG Allocation Officer and the integration of Occupational Therapy expertise within the DFG Team. These improvements were introduced specifically to strengthen governance, improve performance management, reduce delays and enhance service efficiency.

The introduction of MasterGov has improved the Council's ability to manage and monitor the DFG service. The system replaced several manual administrative processes with a single end-to-end case management platform, providing improved workflow management, case tracking, validation processes, performance reporting and management oversight. The system enables officers to monitor cases more effectively, identify delays at an earlier stage and support a more efficient progression of applications through the service.

Importantly, MasterGov has strengthened the Council's ability to demonstrate and monitor value for money. The system enables officers and managers to monitor cases and make evidence-based decisions regarding service delivery. This level of oversight

and performance intelligence was not previously in place when the previous Audit Wales report was completed and should provide assurance regarding the effective use of public funds.

There is an Occupational Therapist within the DFG Team. The inclusion of specialist Occupational Therapy expertise within the operational team supports timely decision making and contributes to the effective and efficient use of grant funding.

As acknowledged, we fully accept the need for improvements to the DFG service. A new structure is being implemented in the housing division which will enhance leadership and management oversight. External experts are working with the Council undertaking an 'end to end' review of the service which is identifying a number of quick wins as well as longer term improvements. Critical to this work will be informing Council of the resource allocation required to meet need in a timely way as it should be noted that the full budget allocation has been spent over the previous three years. For example;

In 25/26 we received total funding of £2,013,000.00 made up of DFG, Housing with Care Funding (HCF) and additional top up grants and spent £2,004,268.02 certifying 205 cases

24/25 - we received total funding of £1,973,144 made up of DFG, HCF and additional top up grants and spent £2,396,765.32 certifying 238 cases

23/24 - We received total funding of £2,783,206.00 made up of DFG, HCF and additional top up grants and spent £2,882,023 certifying 225 cases

As the figures show above BCBC made full use of the DFG funding along with additional monies from the HCF top up grants within the service.

We look forward to working with Audit Wales to deliver against the actions in the management response to the management response to the report. We are already working with a number of other local authorities to learn from practice and elsewhere and particularly ask auditors to highlight authority areas where there is good practice that we can learn from in Bridgend as they review this service across Wales.

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