

Communities Cabinet Advisory Committee – 10th March 2016

Disabled Facilities Grants

1. Background

- 1.1 The purpose of a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is to help fund modifications to the home environment in order to restore or enable independent living, privacy, confidence and dignity for individuals and their families. The focus is on identifying and delivering an individualised solution to enable a person to use their home effectively in accordance with their needs.
- 1.2 Adaptations are a key preventative measure helping avoid slips, trips and falls in the home for example. They are also used to help facilitate hospital discharge and delay/reduce the need for care packages and residential care admissions.
- 1.3 Demand for adaptations is rising. This is led by demographic change and medical advances that have allowed people of all ages, with varying levels of disabilities and complex needs, to lead longer and more independent lives in the community.
- 1.4 A recent paper by the UK Home Adaptations Consortium forecasts that the number of people aged 65 or over will increase by 23% by 2019, growing to 56% of the population by 2031. The number of people aged 75 and over will see an increase of 70% by 2031, compared with an overall population growth of only 16%.

2. Disabled Facilities Grants

- 2.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide DFGs. These are provided using the powers laid down by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. The grants are means tested and available to home owners, Council and private tenants. For Council tenants we use resources from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to fund adaptations but mirror the DFG process to ensure consistency.
- 2.2 The maximum grant limit in Wales is £36,000 per application. The means test is not applied where the application is for a disabled child. Applicants at or below the income threshold for means tested benefits are entitled to full grant assistance.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) England & Wales Order 2002 requires Councils to adopt a Policy on adaptations and housing renewal assistance. The Private Sector Housing Renewal and Disabled Adaptations Policy 2012-17 details how the Council delivers assistance to help residents adapt and maintain their homes. This includes discretion to

award up to a further £10,000 to an applicant where adaptation costs cannot be fully met within the statutory DFG limit.

4. Budget

4.1 The Annual Capital budget for the Disabled Facilities Grants and repair assistance is £5.2m funded by the General Fund. The annual capital budget for adaptations for Council tenants is £2.75m funded by the HRA.

5. DFG Process

5.1 DFGs are managed by the Housing Renewal and Adaptations Service in Housing and Public Protection. Requests for DFG are received from a variety of Council departments and partner agencies. An initial screening process is undertaken to help determine the customer's needs as early as possible.

5.2 DFG law requires consultation with Occupational Therapy. The Occupational Therapist (OT) carries out a functional assessment of the person's abilities in relation to personal and domestic activities within their home and provides Housing with detailed recommendations for adaptations and equipment.

5.3 On receiving the OT recommendations, the Housing Caseworker helps customers complete application forms and source relevant supporting documentation. The Caseworker also carries out the means test to determine if the customer is required to pay anything towards the cost of the adaptation works.

5.4 In accordance with good practice, the customer is offered the opportunity for the works to be administered by the Housing Renewal and Adaptations Agency Service. The Agency Service is offered to help DFG customers complete adaptation works quickly and to as high a standard as is possible. Services provided by the Agency include:

- Providing access to Council procured local builders and contractors.
- Assisting with other housing options if adaptations are not feasible at the current home.
- Helping applicants access support services.
- Advising on entitlement to welfare benefits and access to other forms of financial assistance, for example home repair loans.
- Acting as Contract Administrator for any adaptation works recommended by the Occupational Therapist. This includes carrying out a survey, preparation of designs/plans, estimates, schedules of work, ensuring construction health and safety compliance, supervising / inspecting works and liaising with other statutory bodies and departments including Planning and Building Control.

6. Performance

6.1 A robust performance management system is in place to ensure waiting times for adaptations are monitored and kept to a minimum. Waiting times are measured from initial customer contact to completion of works. These have reduced since 2010. See Table 1.

Table 1

Year	Number of DFGs completed	Average numbers of days to complete a DFG
2011/12	474	351
2012/13	394	317
2013/14	420	267
2014/15	302	277

6.2 A systems review of the DFG process has been completed and a number of changes aimed at reducing waiting times have been implemented. This includes for example a telephone based initial enquiry and screening process. The Agency Service has also been expanded and helps ensure DFGs are offered within statutory timescales.

6.3 Waiting times have however increased during 2015/16. The waiting time target is 290 days but current performance is 346 days. This is largely due to available OT resources, set in the context of the high demand for adaptations detailed in this report. OT resource is also a contributing factor in the reduced number of adaptations completed in 2014/15 compared to previous years. To manage this and improve performance, Housing has directly employed 2.5 OT staff to work in addition to OTs based in Social Services. This is expected to improve DFG performance in 2016/17 and beyond.

7. Minor Adaptations

7.1 Minor adaptations are completed in partnership with Swansea Care and Repair. Small adaptations up to £2000 in value are delivered outside of the DFG process and without the need for an Occupational Therapist assessment in every case. The average waiting time for minor

adaptations in 2015/16 is 55 days. Typical works include installation of grab rails, external handrails, small ramps and lever taps. In 2014/15 467 minor adaptations were completed. Minor adaptations are not included in the monitoring of DFG waiting times. The larger and more complex adaptations are all delivered through the DFG process, hence longer waiting times for DFG.

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