



To:
Councillor Andrea Lewis
Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy

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Date 08 July 2019
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Summary: This is a letter from the Adult Services Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy following the meeting of the Panel on 20 June 2019. It covers the Wales Audit Report on Housing Adaptations.

Dear Cllr Lewis

The Panel met on 20 June to discuss the Wales Audit Office Report on Housing Adaptations and follow up on progress with recommendations. We would like to thank you, Mark Wade and Darren Williams for attending to present the item and answer the Panel's questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, share the views of the Panel, and, where necessary, raise any issues or recommendations for your consideration and response. The main issues discussed are summarised below:

Wales Audit Office Report on Housing Adaptations

The Panel felt this was a very negative report nationally with the same things having been recommended in three reports over the last 10 years, showing that progress has not been made. You informed us that you do not think this applies to Swansea.

We were pleased to hear that the Council's indicator for delivering Disabled Facilities Grants has improved from 340 days in 2015-16 to 235 days in 2018-19 and that the target for this year is 255 days. However, it is still above the national average waiting time and the Panel will be looking for further improvements.

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We heard that PIs are not a perfect measure of performance as Authorities look at them in different ways.

The Panel was pleased to hear that the Occupational Therapy service has been brought in house. We feel there should be a unified assessment as there is duplication with Occupational Therapists from Health and Social Services.

We were informed that it is difficult to do anything on a unified adaptations process between Housing Associations and the Council as they are funded differently. The Panel felt there is currently a problem of inconsistency. We heard that the Welsh Government needs to sort this out and undertake a national review. Panel feels anything that can be done locally would help.

We heard that the Council has fed back to Welsh Government that there is a need to ensure that the All Wales Categorisation is categorised properly. We were pleased to hear this.

You informed us that the Council made a decision in the last budget round not to cut the housing adaptations budget, in terms of leaving it at the current level, given that demand had increased but that this will need to be reviewed year-on-year. We heard that if demand exceeds budget, waiting times will go up.

You also informed us that 'Adapt' has been very successful. It has helped not to waste capital monies by leaving equipment in properties and matching new tenants to adapted homes.

The Panel expressed its concern about whether the Council is doing the right thing by adapting certain properties that are difficult or expensive to adapt and queried whether it would be more cost effective for the Council to move tenants to more easily adapted properties. We were informed that there is a process for evaluating if an adaptation is value for money.

We heard that £36,000 is the maximum that can be received for a Disabled Facilities Grant and that the Council currently tops this up if needed but may need to look at this in the future.

We asked if anyone can make an application for housing adaptations and heard that individuals can and professionals on behalf of an individual.

We heard that the Council manages a Framework of Contractors. If a contractor is employed within the framework, the Council are obliged to resolve performance issues. However, if people employ contractors themselves there are limited sanctions the Council can take if any issues arise.

We were informed that there is a performance evaluation assessment for every scheme of adaptations completed using the Council's Framework of Contractors, scored under various performance headings. The scoring mechanism includes the possibility of a warning for a contractor for performance that needs improvement, or where there is an instance of serious poor performance or continued need to improve performance on successive jobs, there is a possible sanction of removing contractors from the framework.

Finally, we noted that the waiting time for improvements for council housing is marginally longer than that for private sector housing. As the obstacles to improving a council home are significantly fewer than a similar adaptation in the private sector, we would have expected this position to be reversed. We would like to hear proposals to achieve better delivery times for council tenants.

Your Response

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised but please provide a written response by Monday 29 July 2019 to the following:

1. We would have expected the waiting time for improvements to council housing to be less than that for private sector housing. We would like to hear proposals to achieve better delivery times for council tenants.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Black', written in a cursive style.

PETER BLACK
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