



Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy

Adult Services Scrutiny Performance Panel – 20th June 2019

Progress in implementing the Recommendations of the Wales Audit Office review of Housing Adaptations in Wales

Purpose	To provide an overview of the Wales Audit Office review of Housing Adaptations in Wales and present progress made in implementing locally the recommendations listed in the report.
Content	This report includes a background to the Wales Audit Review of Housing Adaptations, recommendations on improvements and progress made both nationally and locally in implementing these recommendations.
Councillors are being asked to	Endorse the recommendations of the Wales Audit Office review of Housing Adaptations in Wales and consider the progress made both nationally and locally in implementing the recommendations listed in the report.
Lead Councillor(s)	Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Homes and Energy.
Lead Officer(s)	Mark Wade Head of Housing and Public Health.
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1. Background

- 1.1 The Wales Audit Office (WAO) undertook a review of Housing Adaptations in Wales and published a report in February 2018. The review looked at adaptations services across Wales and did not focus on individual Councils or Agencies. Despite user satisfaction with housing adaptations, the review found there is a complicated, reactive and inequitable delivery system that is not always effective for all those who may need it. The review also said public bodies are not taking opportunities to improve value for money.
- 1.2 The summary of the WAO findings found roughly 70 organisations deliver adaptations in Wales, spending around £60 million and assisting 32,000 people every year. Funding arrangements for adaptations are complex, creating an inefficient delivery system, with people of similar needs often receiving different standards of service due to where they live and which public body provides the adaptation.
- 1.3 Public bodies with responsibility for adaptations – local authorities, housing associations and Care and Repair Agencies have seen demand for adaptations increase in recent years and expect this trend to continue. Census data highlights that a higher proportion of the Welsh population consider themselves to be in poor health than is the case in England and it is forecast the number of people in Wales who will experience mobility problems will increase significantly over the next 20 years. The speed and efficiency of the provision of adaptations can make the difference between disabled or older persons staying in their own home or having to move into specialist or residential care.

The review found assessment processes are not streamlined nor efficient and often contribute to delays, with lack of co-ordination between delivery organisations, interruptions due to problems arising from the unavailability of staff or funding, and poor standards of communication with some service users.

The full WAO report is attached as a background paper.

- 1.4 The WAO recommendations tracker lists the progress made to date in implementing the recommendations set out in the report nationally and locally. In Swansea the Council's Housing Renewals and Adaptation service is responsible for the delivery of housing adaptations for owner-occupiers, private and Council tenants.

The WAO recommendations tracker is attached as a background paper.

- 1.5 Importantly Swansea is already implementing a large number of the service improvement recommendations detailed in the WAO report, many of which have been in place for a number of years. These include partnership working with local RSLs on managing a local adapted housing register and Western Bay Care and Repair on

provision of Minor Adaptations through their handyperson service. The Council also provides Caseworkers to visit applicants in their own home to help with the application process, employs its own in-house team of Occupational Therapists(OTs), offers a Home Improvement Grant Agency and a Council appointed Framework of Contractors for delivery of adaptations.

2. WAO Report Recommendations.

2.1 The report identified a series of recommendations for improvements in delivery of Housing Adaptations that include :

- Welsh Government set standards for all adaptations to ensure disabled and older people receive the same standard of service irrespective of where they live, who their landlord is and whether they own their own home.
- Local authorities work with partner agencies to strengthen their strategic focus for the provision of adaptations.
- Provide information on housing adaptations in both Welsh and English, in accessible formats, with information promoted through a range of media and through key partners, preferably produced jointly between delivery bodies.
- Delivery bodies streamline applications by creating single comprehensive applications forms covering all organisations locally.
- Delivery bodies improve how long they take to process adaptations applications and deliver works including looking to reduce delays by reviewing Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) means test, provision of home improvement agencies services to manage schemes for clients, fast tracking planning applications, using trusted assessors to undertake less complex adaptation assessments.
- Delivery bodies have formal arrangements for accrediting and managing contractors undertaking adaptations, using framework agreements, schedule of rates for tenders and evaluating contractors performance.
- Local Authorities work with partner agencies(health bodies, housing associations and Care and Repair) to develop and improve joint working.
- Delivery bodies effectively manage performance and assess impact of adaptations.

3. Progress on Recommendations Achieved Nationally.

3.1 A number of the WAO report recommendations are strategic, require joint working and need national and regional input to be delivered. The Public Accounts Committee in July 2018 recommended that the Welsh Government take the lead in ensuring the longstanding weaknesses in provision of Housing Adaptations across Wales are addressed through the introduction of the recommendations in the WAO report.

- 3.2 Welsh Government have set up a National Housing Adaptations Steering Group. Membership includes Welsh Government Housing policy division, Welsh Local Government Association, Local Authority representatives, Care and Repair Cymru, Royal College of Occupational Therapists, Community Housing Cymru, Office of the Older People's Commission, Tai Pawb, Disability Cymru, Voluntary Transfer Landlords and Royal College of Nursing.

The aim of the Steering Group is to work with Welsh Government Officials to develop policy advice for Welsh Ministers in relation to simplifying the provision of housing adaptations and implementing the WAO report recommendations. The Group will provide assurance that processes and practices are fair, transparent and equitable and there is proper guidance, monitoring, regulation and accountability arrangements in place.

- 3.3 The National Steering Group is to be supported by the setting up of working groups to look at:

- **Collaboration / Integration** – to improve strategic focus locally and regionally through Regional Programme Boards, streamline application process, use home improvement agency services, integrated delivery teams, maximising use of accessible housing registers.
- **Operational Delivery** – fast track planning, use of trusted assessors, contractor accreditation scheme, accessible information.
- **Performance Monitoring** – uniform performance indicators, revised national performance indicators.
- **Policy** – service standards, means testing review, streamline RSL Physical Adaptation Grants.
- **Procurement / Contract Management** – framework agreements, contractor performance management.

- 3.4 Welsh Government issued a Housing Adaptations Service Standards consultation document to public bodies delivering housing adaptations in September 2018 for response. This document detailed the levels of service expected on 7 standards that include Purpose, Equality and Diversity, Communication, Quality of Service, Quality of Equipment, Expected Timeframes and Eligibility Checks. The Housing Adaptations Service standards consultation document is attached as a background paper. The Council responded to the Welsh Government consultation document in December 2018 both individually as a Local Authority and collectively within the Welsh Heads of Environmental Health Private Sector Housing Expert Panel. Welsh Government is yet to confirm results of the feedback to the consultation document or publish the final Service Standards document.

4. Progress on Recommendations in Swansea.

4.1 As indicated in section 1, a number of recommendations made by WAO in the report are already in place in Swansea. Adaptations locally are administered by the Housing Renewal & Adaptations service. Although the National Housing Adaptations Steering Group has been tasked with implementing the recommendations within the WAO report, the adaptations service delivered in Swansea is already providing a number of best practice measures and services identified in the recommendations.

4.2 The Council within its Private Sector Housing Renewal and Adaptations Policy to Provide Assistance 2017-2022 offers housing adaptations through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and Council House Adaptations. Smaller adaptations are also provided through the provision of Minor Adaptations Grants (MAG). These are delivered in partnership with Western Bay Care and Repair, using their handyperson scheme that provides small adaptations such as handrails and grabrails quickly to the client.

In 2017-18 the service completed 367 DFGs, 543 Council House Adaptations and 734 Minor Adaptations Grants, investing £4.3 million on DFGs, £2.75 million on Council House Adaptations and £400,000 on Minor Adaptation grants. In addition, 899 Occupational Therapist assessments and recommendations were undertaken.

4.3 To make the best use of properties that are already adapted, the Council works in partnership with local Housing Associations to support an adapted housing register. The 'Adapt' scheme is managed by Coastal Housing Association and ensures available adapted properties are matched to households who need them.

4.4 The Housing Renewals and Adaptations service is continually looking to improve the delivery of DFGs and Council House Adaptations. Systems thinking has been employed to undertake a systems review aimed at streamlining processes. Caseworkers visit applicants in their own home to complete grant applications quickly following an enquiry for assistance and to provide welfare benefits advice to the applicant. Housing now employs its own Occupational Therapists to prevent delays in undertaking adaptation assessments and recommendations. The Council's National Performance Indicator for delivering Disabled Facilities grants (PAM/015) has improved from 340 days in 2015-16, to 240 days in 2017-18 and is now at 235 days for 2018-19.

4.5 An in-house Home Improvement Grant Agency service is offered and 95% of clients take up this service. The Grant Agency provide a high quality project managements service, managing the scheme from application stage through to completion and includes survey, preparation of drawings and schedules of work, procuring contractors, supervising works and arranging payments.

- 4.6 The Council operates and manages a Framework of Contractors that undertake adaptations works, with jobs allocated on a rotational basis. The framework evaluation and selection process utilised the Welsh Government public procurement Sell to Wales system, consisting of a robust two stage selection process where Contractors were appointed based on previous experience and proposals to deliver high quality adaptations works. References and financial standing, insurances, accreditations, health and safety, customer care and emergency call-out arrangements were all checked and verified prior to appointment of contractors to the framework. The contractors selected for the framework have their performance monitored and evaluated by officers in consultation with the client. Any poor performance can result in removal from the Framework.
- 4.7 A schedule of rates for all adaptation works is in place to ensure we maximise value for money and probity in the adaptation works provided.
- 4.8 The Grant Agency is in ongoing dialogue with the Planning Department to ensure delays in processing adaptations are minimised. We also liaise with Welsh Water to simplify processes and reduce timescales in obtaining over sewer agreements on larger extension adaptations.
- 4.9 Information to customers requiring adaptations is offered in a variety of formats and are published online, in leaflets and posters are placed in public information areas such as Civic Centre reception, libraries, GP surgeries.
- 4.10 Housing Renewal and Adaptations monitor the quality and performance of our adaptations by issuing a Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire to our clients. In 2017-18 98.5% were very satisfied or satisfied with the services provided.
- 4.11 The WAO review of Housing Adaptations and the recently commenced Commissioning review of Housing Services have identified a number of further improvements to be implemented within the adaptations service. These include improved online application provision, further improvements to the quality and formats of assistance information available, advertising our services to a wider target group and reviewing our customer satisfaction data to look more at outcome to the individual.

5. Equality and Engagement Implications

- 5.1 The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Our Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

- 5.2 An EIA Screening Form has been completed. There are no equality implications arising from the review as it reports on progress in implementing recommendations from a national examination of Housing Adaptations services in Wales.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications.

For Information

Background papers:

Wales Audit Office Housing Adaptations in Wales report Feb 2018.

Welsh Government Housing Adaptation Service Standards Consultation document September 2018.

WAO Recommendations Tracker March 2019

Appendices : None