

CELG(4) HA 07

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into Home Adaptations

Response from : Caerphilly County Borough Council



1. **General**

1.1 Caerphilly CBC regards the provision of adaptations for disabled persons as paramount and in this respect the Authority continues to ensure the availability of adaptations across all tenures is given the highest priority. In difficult financial times the Authority continues to provide resources both in terms of staff and capital allocation to ensure the accommodation needs of disabled persons living within the county borough are properly addressed.

1.2 The Authority currently deploys some £2.55m of its capital resources to provide:

- Major Works of Adaptation via Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants
- Major Works of Adaptation via Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grants
- Major Works of Adaptation to its own council tenants
- Minor Works of Adaptation cross tenure
- Relocation Grants (See link below)

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All the above can be delivered via the Authority's in – house Agency Service which is available to undertake the full range of services on clients' behalf.

1.3 The Authority also manages an Accessible Housing Register to facilitate moves to more suitable accommodation in appropriate cases and, as well as having a strong working partnership between Housing and Social Services, has a dedicated Occupational Therapist located within its Housing Team.

1.4 The Authority's performance, as reported via the National Performance Indicator, has seen waiting times for major works of adaptation reduce by 73 days over the past 3 years. We recognize, however, that although we are moving in the right direction, more needs to be done to build on progress to date and we are constantly reviewing the manner in which we deliver our services in an effort to achieve the best possible outcome for our clients.

1.5 It is, however, hoped that the Inquiry will recognise that the quality of service provided is also of major importance and should not be compromised by efforts to speed up waiting times. The service provided by the in-house Agency at Caerphilly relieves clients of the substantial organisational burdens associated with contract management and affords piece of mind to clients, many of whom would simply drop out of the system if forced to organise matters themselves.

2. **Why are there still significant variations in the time it takes to deliver aids and adaptations funded by Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's)?**

2.1 It is assumed this question is being asked as a result of the outturn figures for the National Performance Indicator.

2.2 There has for some time been conjecture that the figures are not being reported by Authorities on a like for like basis. The point at which the waiting time should start appears to be a bone of contention for many Authorities despite the PI guidance being absolutely clear. However, the 2011/12 financial year saw the PI returns being audited for the first time and so we should now at least have a degree of assurance that inter Authority comparison in respect of waiting times is accurate.

2.3 Unfortunately, the manner in which individual Local Authorities deliver major works of adaptation can vary greatly, with many choosing to utilize methods outside the mandatory grant regime, especially for the more common smaller scale works, such as the installation of stairlifts and showers. Where this is happening only the large scale and more complex adaptations are reported in respect of the PI and so the average waiting time appears longer. This means, therefore, that many Authorities who fast track the smaller scale DFG's (outside the mandatory DFG regime) fall foul of the PI, when in actual fact they are delivering an extremely effective service to most of their recipients. The PI figures must, therefore, be construed accordingly.

2.4 Another factor that will bring about disparity of provision across Wales is, inevitably, resources. Caerphilly CBC resources its adaptations service well, but we still have average waiting times that need to be reduced. Other Authorities, for whatever reasons, may not be in a position to resource the service as well, and both staff shortages and capital financing pressures will have a marked effect on performance.

2.5 It is also worth mentioning that the question relates only to DFG's, it makes no mention of any service disparity in relation to adaptations provided for Council tenants or Physical Adaptations Grants (PAG) for tenants of Housing Associations. These areas should also come in for scrutiny as part of the Inquiry.

3. **Whether sufficient progress has been made on implementing recommendations from the Equality of Opportunities Committee's 2009 report on home adaptations.**

3.1 From a purely Caerphilly perspective it is difficult to comment on this statement as virtually all the recommendations contained within the Committee's report were aimed at the Welsh Assembly Government rather than Local Authorities.

3.2 Local Authorities were, however, involved in bringing together best practice and assisting the WLGA in producing "Housing Adaptations for Disabled Persons – A Good Practice Guide." Likewise, the Wales Heads of Environmental Health Housing Technical Panel who have representation from all Welsh Local Authorities have also been active in ensuring that good practice and standards within the delivery of adaptations is available for all to share.

4. What impact reduced resources for housing are likely to have on the provision of home adaptations.

4.1 Any reduction in resources for housing will have an effect on the ability of Local Authorities to deliver home adaptations in an acceptable manner. It must be remembered that the only home adaptations that must be provided by Local Authorities are those provided via mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants. All other forms of adaptation provision, whilst no doubt important, are discretionary.

4.2 Consequently, when Local Authorities, currently under enormous financial pressures, are setting their annual budgets, discretionary services are often the first to suffer. Indeed there are some Authorities who struggle to finance even the mandatory grant regime.

4.3 It is essential, therefore, that the importance of delivering home adaptations is given the highest profile and that good practice in making the best use of limited resources is being adopted by all.

4.4 It is well documented that the timely provision of even the smallest adaptations can bring about substantial savings to the budgets of others. Perhaps it is time for those who benefit from such intervention to bring some of their own money to the table.

5. Is the Welsh Government effectively monitoring the provision of adaptation services?

5.1 Current monitoring undertaken by WG is in the form of the National Performance Indicator relating to waiting times and the annual data collection form for DFGs that record numbers of applications, approvals, and completions by tenure together with associated financial information.

5.2 Our comments in respect of the Performance Indicator are outlined in paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 above, and, despite any shortfalls there may have been in respect of the manner it has historically been collected, its introduction has focused widespread attention on Local Authorities and has had an influence in driving up performance. For all its faults, therefore, it has served a useful purpose and if further refined (and expanded for use within the public

and RSL sectors) will no doubt continue to assist in bringing about service improvements.

6. What more needs to be done to improve home adaptation services in Wales?

- 6.1 Adaptations are currently delivered differently according to tenure and extent of works required. For major works owner-occupiers and tenants in the private rented sector use the DFG process, council tenants are assisted via funding from an Authority's Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) and tenants of traditional Registered Social Landlords are assisted via Physical Adaptations Grant (PAG). Stock Transfer RSL's should fund adaptations themselves but (reportedly) some still ask their tenants to apply for DFG assistance. The systems and the relevant funding streams are, therefore, complex and the quality and speed of delivery of adaptations cross tenure varies greatly.
- 6.2 Addressing the problem is, however, not an easy task as demonstrated by the number of enquiries/reports etc that have been commissioned in respect of this issue over the past 8 years.
- 6.3 The mandatory DFG process is itself cumbersome and needs streamlining. Calls for the removal of the means test, however, must be taken with extreme caution, as not only would applicants who could clearly afford to fund their own adaptations benefit disproportionately, the financial implications for Local Authorities would be significant and in some cases unaffordable.
- 6.4 The means test should, therefore, remain but the means testing process simplified. Likewise, there is scope to simplify other aspects of the DFG process, particularly the tender/estimates requirements, which will also help to speed up the process.
- 6.5 If PAG's are to remain, DFG's should only be available to owner-occupiers and tenants in the private rented sector. RSL's should either use PAG or their own resources to provide adaptations for their tenants and stock transfer organisations should either be afforded access to PAG or else utilise their own resources as should have been identified within their Business Plans at ballot stage. Councils with their own stock should continue to fund adaptations for their tenants via MRA or the Housing Revenue Account.
- 6.6 There is, of course, the option to scrap existing provision completely and create a single system, applied across all tenures in exactly the same manner. If this is a consideration then such a system should be a Local Authority function. Authorities could not, however, deliver this service from existing resources and so if the provision of an effective, tenure neutral adaptation service is seen as high priority then the capital funds necessary to provide such a service must be provided centrally.