

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into Home Adaptations

Response from : Torfaen County Borough Council

1. Why there are still significant variations in the time it takes to deliver aids and adaptations funded by Disabled Facilities Grants across Wales?

There are a range of reasons why there are variations in the time it takes to deliver aids and adaptations funded by DFGs. An important issue is that when DFG services are being compared we are not always comparing like for like, this covers a range of issues including:

Different Services - Different authorities take different approaches to how DFG aids and adaptations are delivered, for example in Torfaen there is a full home improvement agency, a service not provided by all local authorities which might improve quality of outcomes for service users but not necessarily speed up the time taken to administer the grant. This could impact on the length of time it takes to deliver aids and adaptations funded by DFGs as different approaches may have factors which increase the length of time required, but equally they may have factors which improve the service and outcomes for service users.

Occupational Therapists - Similar to the provision of different services different authorities have different staffing levels which can impact on the length of time taken to deliver aids and adaptations. In particular the level of OT support can have a significant impact, in some areas there is dedicated OT support for housing adaptations, but not in others waiting lists for assessments that need a qualified OT can be problematic and can hold up the delivery of aids and adaptations. In some areas there may also be different expectations on OTA's in the assessment of someone's needs and their home and again this has the potential to both speed up or delay services depending on the stance taken.

Performance Indicators - There are currently only two performance indicators being used to measure DFGs (PSR/002 and PSR/006), these PI's focus on average number of calendar days to deliver services. It may be that these indicators need to be examined to ensure that all local authorities are measuring the same thing, i.e. date of first contact with the local authority through to completion of the work, as there is the potential for different interpretations of what is to be measured. For example, what is counted as the date of first contact and with whom? If different authorities are recording the existing PI's differently then this will provide an inaccurate picture of service delivery times and could lead to significant variations being evidenced. These PI's could be tightened up and it may be worth noting that, as they are, they do not cover any aspect of quality or outcomes for those receiving the service.

Geographical Differences - Within Torfaen there is a legacy of poor housing stock, this has the potential to impact on the time it takes to deliver adaptations as it may be that as a result more complex adaptations are required – long delays relating to a few complex applications have the potential to distort the average waiting time for all adaptations. We are also currently experiencing delays due to things like Welsh Water and Planning Control agencies, where for instance following a change in legislation an increasing number of applications have to be made for adaptations situated near to Welsh Water sewers. This is leading to delays as additional consent is required before any of the adaptation work can be undertaken,

2. Has sufficient progress been made on implementing recommendations from the Equality of Opportunity Committee's 2009 report on home adaptations?

Looking at the recommendations made in the 2009 report it is unclear whether any of the recommendations made have had a significant impact on DFGs. The recommendations are focussed on the role of the Welsh Government, if progress has been made on implementing them, then at this stage it has not been communicated widely. Some of the recommendations have been taken forward on a local / regional level, e.g. monitoring performance and sharing good practice, but it is hard to say where this has been taken forward on a national level. It may be worth reviewing progress as there are a number of recommendations which have the potential to help local authorities in the delivery of DFG aids and adaptations and would help to support a more consistent and efficient approach across Wales.

3. The impact that reduced resources for housing are likely to have on the provision of home adaptations?

In order to support the inquiry it may be worth defining what is meant by reduced resources. Potentially the impact of reduced resources will include:

- Housing waiting lists are already extremely high and with the welfare benefit reforms coming in they are only going to get much bigger.
- Our allocation of social housing grant is diminishing significantly so without this funding we are not able to build as many new homes to meet the housing need, this will result in a reduction in adapted housing being included on schemes due to their high costs. There is a significant lack of adapted properties within the social stock in Torfaen this will ultimately place a greater burden on social care budgets.
- Lack of knowledge within the social sector housing of what adaptations have been carried out is a significant issue, if there were adequate resources across housing and the RSL's a full mapping process could be undertaken and potentially more people could be matched with an appropriate adapted home. There are a number of people living in adapted properties which may not necessarily meet their disability.

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

As mentioned in the responses above there are some questions regarding how well the existing DFG performance indicators support the monitoring of the provision of adaptation services. It is also unclear what impact previous reviews have actually had on the provision of services, even though a number of recommendations have been made and it has been acknowledged that there is a need to drive forward improvements. There is a feeling that the provision of minor adaptations is scrutinised in more detail than major adaptations and this may be something that warrants further investigation.

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

There are a few elements to home adaptation services that could be improved, including:

- A need to cut down on bureaucracy. DFGs are very process driven and could be more outcomes driven, this could include a review of the legislation in respect of means testing.
- There is a need for the better sharing of information, good practice and guidance. As noted above different authorities approach home adaptation services differently, employing different levels of staff and different methodologies. It would be helpful to have the Welsh Government lead an evaluation of existing services, looking at the different approaches taken, roles and responsibilities of staff, etc. to identify and share good practice and help support the move to a more consistent approach to home adaptation services across Wales.

- Improved education – for example the need to ensure that any new builds are being built in order to reduce the number of adaptations required in the future, that they allow for wheelchair access, universal design principles and key safety and enablement features ie appropriate heights for plugs, adjustable non portable equipment etc.