

Health And Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel

DATE	2 nd August 2023
REPORT OF	Katie Brown – Director of Adult Social Care
SUBJECT	Disabled Facilities Grants
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The Council has two strategic priorities – Stronger Economy and Stronger Communities. Within that second priority, it is important to adapt older and disabled people’s homes to help them to live independently and safely.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 30th November 2022, Members received a report on a proposed new approach to managing Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) in North East Lincolnshire. The Housing Assistance Policy had been revised to reflect this new approach, with processes simplified and grant levels increased to reflect additional construction costs, and other new grants created. At the meeting, Members supported the new approach and endorsed the revised Housing Assistance Policy, which would then subject to public consultation.

At the meeting, it was confirmed that due to the amount of procedural, staffing and contractual changes required to deliver this new approach, it would take between twelve to eighteen months to clear the majority of the backlog of OT assessments and DFG installations, and then we can move towards delivering the Foundations good practice targets. This report provides an update on the progress made since the last meeting.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

That the Panel notes the progress made to date.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Foundations - Guidance on Performance

- 1.1 Foundations, the Government advisory body on DFGs, has introduced new guidance for measuring DFG performance. This means there has been a change in how local authorities are compared by Foundations from previous years. Since 2017/18, the council has exceeded the previous method of performance monitor used by Foundations. The new guidance means local authorities have a maximum period of 6 months (130 working days) to approve or decline a valid DFG application. From the date of approval, adaptation works should be completed within 12 months (260 working days). This equates to a maximum period of 18 months (390 working days) to determine and construct the DFG in 95% of cases. 10 local authorities failed to meet these targets in 2021/22, down from 20 councils failing the target the previous financial year.

1.2 Foundation's good practice guidelines are up to 35 working days to assess needs; 75 working days to compile the application and complete steps to approval; and 80 working days to carry out the works – 190 working days in total (approximately 9 months). Based on the new Housing Assistance Policy and Standing Operating Procedures, the new Arcus database has been designed to collate performance information against Foundation's performance criteria. Future performance against this guidance will be accumulated to bring together the statistics from all delivery partners and this information will be made available to Members of this Panel as soon as the information is available.

Occupational Therapy Service/Trusted Assessors

1.3 The key local performance measures (averages are based on working days) are:-

Indicator	2022/23	Apr 23	May 23	June 23
Number of DFG referrals	722	40	74	89
Number of residents waiting for OT/clinical assessment	271.7	265	266	254
Average time to complete first visit from the initial resident referral - housing team	81	60	85	77
Average time to complete first visit from the initial resident referral - other	109.2	43	82	57
Number of residents actively being seen	523.4	588	549	542
Average time from initial assessment to decision to proceed to DFG assessment.	N/A - new indicator in 2023/24	N/A	32	45
Average time taken to get to panel from initial OT DFG assessment - other	66.2	61	60	20
Average time taken to get to panel from initial OT DFG assessment - housing	80.8	32	21	31

1.4 As can be seen in the table above, performance has slightly improved during the first quarter of 2023/24, compared to 2022/23. It should be noted that the team uses a holistic approach and considers all interventions before progressing to a DFG rather than clients being assessed by other teams and then being referred to the OT service for a DFG. This does sometimes create a delay with progressing to a DFG and this can adversely affect performance. However, it should be noted that the client is actively being seen for intervention during this period.

1.5 The waiting lists will improve when new staff join the team. In the past month, the Occupational Therapy service has managed to recruit to the additional band six OT post (which remained vacant during the whole of 2022/23). This postholder will start work after employment checks have been completed. In addition, the DFG Strategic Group agreed in May 2023 to recruit to a new Band 4/5 Apprentice OT post. This postholder will be required to attend university in the autumn to complete the apprenticeship course for occupational therapy. Given the shortage of OTs locally and nationally, the DFG Strategic Group felt it was important to train our own staff locally.

1.6 The job description for the Trusted Assessor posts, who will undertake the simple adaptation assessments, has now been created and evaluated. Two people will be recruited by the council to undertake these roles. The posts are out to advertisement and interviews are scheduled for 16th August 2023. They will be

required to have or complete a Trusted Assessor level 4 qualification or equivalent qualification.

Equans

1.7 The key performance local performance measures for Equans (averages are based on working days) are:-

Handyperson Scheme

Indicator	2022/23	Apr 23	May 23	June 23
Number of residents Equans have been asked to contact regarding a handy person service	184	17	11	18
Average time taken by Equans to respond or confirm next steps of handy person service process to residents	8	4	10	6

Minor Adaptations

Indicator	2022/23	Apr 23	May 23	June 23
Number of minor adaptations	1023	72	110	103
Average time taken for Equans to deliver works from OT instruction	9	7	5	5
Number of minor adaptations installed at 1st operative visit which do not require OT assessment	184	17	11	18
Average time to complete works from referral (no OT assessment required)	8	4	10	6
Number of minor adaptations completed which required OT assessment	1068	85	77	125
Average time taken to complete works after OT instruction	23	29	25	31

Major Adaptations

Indicator	2022/23	Apr 23	May 23	June 23
Number of feasibility assessments passed to Equans to deliver	117	5	7	6
Time taken to complete feasibility study from when OT approved study	24.8	24	24	24
Number of residents, post Panel waiting for an Urgent referral to commence on site (completing pre construction paper work)	32.3	25	31	32
Average time to complete paperwork / pre construction process following Panel approval for Urgent referrals	124.3	99.9	103.5	101.3
Number of residents, post Panel waiting for Non-Urgent DFG applications to commence on site (completing paperwork / pre construction work)	283.4	286	272	293
Average time to complete pre construction work from Panel approval for Non-Urgent referrals	354.7	328.4	328.4	321.8
Number of DFGs in progress and physically on site	16	12	14	11

Number of DFGs completed	147	27	16	6
Average time taken for Majors from OT decision to commence works	258.9	273.1	234.4	220.6
Average time to complete all Major DFG works from OT decision to complete works	300	290.43	266	253.7

- 1.8 Equans has brought together their DFG team and the Building Control team to introduce an additional manager who will provide managerial and technical support when developing major adaptations. The four building surveyors and two business support (1.5 FTE) roles have remained filled and continue to be managed by the DFG manager, with support from the Building Control manager. However, it has been a challenge to retain surveyors to the additional temporary roles consistently for the full period. Equans has had some successes; these have been short in duration (two to three months per additional staff member) with achieving approx. 1.5 FTE additional equivalent through 2022/23. A further architect technician will start in July and Equans continues to review the roles and are seeking to recruit additional capacity. Minor adaptations and the Handyperson scheme are managed under the Equans Facilities Management function and are delivered by Equans's maintenance team.
- 1.9 Equans has delivered 147 major DFGs, 33 stay warmth schemes and 1023 minor adaptations in 2022/23. These are all interventions which enable independent living and funded from the DFG grant allocation. The trend for 2023/24 for major DFGs is to exceed 196 schemes, with 49 delivered in the first quarter in 2023/24. The expectation is that the number of minor and stay warmth schemes will remain comparable or exceed last year's performance. A stay warmth scheme is early intervention to introduce thermal improvements to a resident's home, by introducing or replacing a heating boiler and system, windows, and/or insulation. These schemes are directed to residents with an existing medical condition, which may deteriorate and/or could lead to hospitalisation, if intervention does not occur. With the introduction of the new Housing Assistance Policy from 1st April 2023, the minor adaptation budget level has increased from £1,000 to £2,500. Since this amendment, 10 referrals which would have previously been classed at a major adaptations have been captured under a minor adaptation and completed. This is an example of how the changes in the Housing Assistance Policy is reducing the major adaptations waiting list.
- 1.10 A trial handyperson scheme was introduced in 2022/23, which is specific to prevent residents who do not meet the criteria for a minor adaptation or have any identified need for clinical services intervention, but do not require an immediate intervention from an Occupational Therapist. The project helps residents to receive support without the need to pay to have a minor adaptation introduced themselves. Residents contact the Single Point of Contact, who signpost the resident to Equans who make the arrangements for the works to be completed. 184 schemes were delivered in 2022/23, with 46 delivered in the first quarter in 2023/24. This is a demand led service and is based on the need of individuals rather than a volume of activity which is required to be undertaken.
- 1.11 By taking a holistic approach, which considers all interventions when developing the referrals, this means the designs for major DFGs have a greater complexity than in previous years and complex referrals will have a greater lead time to

complete. This is not a capacity issue, more process to ensure the designs meet immediate and future needs of the grant applicant.

Housing Assistance Policy and Standard Operating Procedures

1.12 Following consideration by this Panel, the Housing Assistance Policy was subject to public and stakeholder consultation from 1st December 2022 to 11th January 2023. The feedback received enabled some of the proposals and grant limits to be improved. The policy was subsequently ratified by the Portfolio Holder for Health and Adult Social Care on 23rd January 2023 and brought into operation from 1st April 2023.

1.13 Based on the new approaches in the Housing Assistance Policy, new Standard Operating Procedures were developed for each of the processes and grants. This document was agreed with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Adult Social Care on 8th May 2023 and has been implemented with immediate effect. It now needs to be embedded, with processes and paperwork changed appropriately.

Delivery Plan - Update

1.14 Having implemented the changes to the Housing Assistance Policy and Standard Operating Procedures, officers have produced a delivery plan to implement these changes. Progress made is as follows:-

Title	Description	Responsibility	Current position
Minor Adaptations	Adaptation up to the value of £2,500	Equans	Being Delivered
Mandatory Major Adaptations	Adaptation up to the value of £30,000	Equans	Being Delivered
Trusted Assessor	Create role profile and recruit to two posts	Council	Out to recruitment and interviews scheduled for 16 th August 2023.
OT Recruitment	Recruit additional grade 6 post and new grade 4/5 trainee post	OT	Grade 6 post accepted and going through pre-employment checks. Grade 4/5 post out to recruitment with interviews scheduled for August.
Longhurst and LHP Referrals	The Council will refer all properties owned by Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP) and Longhurst Housing Association (LHA) direct to the registered providers.	Council	NELC and LHP are currently agreeing a priced schedule of works. This work has been delayed as LHP have changed contractors during this process. Longhurst – currently agreeing terms.
Relocation Grant	Are used to provide support for applicants who are living in a home which cannot be adapted or will not meet the applicants long term needs.	Equans	Being delivered. This service will be enhanced once the Trusted Assessors are on board.

Hospital Discharge Grant	This grant is for people who have been discharged from hospital but are not yet able to return home because of the condition of their houses. This grant is designed to help these people fund the vital home improvements needed to allow them to move back home.	OT/Council	Under development as part of a wider review.
Assistive Technology Grant	Introducing Smart technology to properties	OT/Council	Under development as part of a wider review.
Children in Care/Joint Residency	Adaptation up to £30,000	OT	Being delivered
Palliative Care Grant	A working group will explore the opportunity to provide temporary adaptations for applicants who are palliative.	OT/Council	Being delivered – available. However, further work required to source a shower pod, and have stock that can be stored which can be available upon request. Demos currently being arranged.
Dementia Friendly Homes Grant	preventative in nature and allow for adaptations to be provided with a diagnosis of dementia and before the condition escalates to the point where a DFG would otherwise become necessary.	Council	Being delivered – available. However, further work required with partners within the voluntary sector.
Stay Warm Scheme	These are typically preventative in nature and allow for the applicant to heat their home easing their condition, if it is made worse by living in cold a cold home.	Equans	Being delivered

Registered Housing Providers

1.15 Discussions have been held with the two main registered providers. Both are interested in undertaking DFG works to their own premises, which is permitted in law. A process has been developed and discussions are on-going regarding costs for sub-contracting works and quality assurance. These need to be comparable to the contractor framework schedule of rates developed by Equans in order to demonstrate value for money. If this approach is successful, it would result in one third of the current waiting list being dealt with through this approach. This, in turn, would reduce the waiting time considerably for these individuals.

Contractor Framework

1.16 A new call-off procedure has been developed for the contractor framework which would allow existing contractors on the framework to draw up plans and specify works to be undertaken to DFGs, with quality control monitored. Legal has reviewed the documentation and confirmed that the modification to the framework would be lawful. It would require a deed of variation to the framework and a draft

Change of Control note which would be provided to the contractors. The approach would be used in the first instance to the straightforward DFGs.

- 1.17 This new approach will be discussed with existing contractors shortly to ascertain levels of interest and, if successful, could be introduced as a trial to assess its effectiveness prior to the main contractor framework being retendered next year. It should be noted that if any contractor did not want to partake in the trial, they would still be allocated work as normal through the existing framework. Any additional work undertaken through this approach would obviously reduce waiting times. This initiative, if successful, could reduce the waiting list by a further third.

Summary

- 1.18 The new Housing Assistance Policy and Standard Operating Procedures, which form a key part of the new way of managing how the DFG grant is allocated and spent, are now in place and being implemented and embedded.
- 1.19 Additional staffing resource for the Occupational Therapy Service has been secured and this will be supplemented by the recruitment of two Trusted Assessors in the next few months. This additional resource will help address the waiting list for OT assessments.
- 1.20 Discussions are on-going with the two Registered Providers and contractors on the DFG contractor framework regarding the direct award of DFG works. If successful, this approach could significantly reduce the waiting lists as it would significantly increase the capacity by all delivery partners to design and install major Disabled Facilities Grant works.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The new approach to managing DFGs implemented last year was essential in order to improve performance, especially given the difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff by the OT service and Equans. If no action was taken to reduce the waiting lists, clinical and technical performance levels would not improve, and this would continue to have an adverse impact on the wellbeing of individuals applying for DFGs as they would have to wait longer to receive assistance.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

The Housing Assistance Policy, which developed the new approach to managing DFGs, was subject to public and stakeholder consultation. Any changes to the processes and paperwork are being discussed with housing, Equans, Occupational Therapy service and legal as required.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The annual capital allocation from the Better Care Fund to the Council is currently £3.2m (which is ring fenced to spend only on DFGs), with a further ear-marked reserve of £3m. The in-year allocation for 2022/23 was spent and the allocation for 2023/24 is forecast to be spent, with some of the ear-marked reserve used to fund the delivery plan, as outlined in the report.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

Applications for DFGs are received from children and young people as well as adults. These applications are considered on their own merits, in accordance with the Housing Assistance Policy and legislation.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no implications to climate change and/or the environment.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As detailed within the financial considerations section above, all spending related to Disabled Facilities is funded via external grant allocations. The efficient and effective application and discharge of disabled facilities grant contributes to the council's wider budget management and value for money aims.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct or immediate legal implications arising from this report. It is an interim update report on progress after the first 6 months, with progress reporting agreed by Scrutiny as a requirement of this project. Regular monitoring and reporting is recognised as good practice.

9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

The two new Trusted Assessor posts have been authorised by People and Culture and are funded from the Better Care Fund grant for DFGs. The grade for the posts has been subject to review by the Job Evaluation Panel.

10. WARD IMPLICATIONS

There will be applicants for DFGs from all Wards.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Meeting of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel – 30 March 2022
[Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel | Democracy \(nelincs.gov.uk\)](#)

Meeting of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel – 30 November 2022
[Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel | Democracy \(nelincs.gov.uk\)](#)

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