



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	11 th January 2017
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Service Area	Housing & Adult Social Care
Committee Date	18 th January 2017

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Housing and Community Occupational Therapy Disabled Facilities Grants – Joint Working Arrangements

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report outlines the interface between the Local Authority Housing department and the Community Occupational Therapy Team in respect of the assessment and completion of housing adaptations that are completed as part of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) arrangements.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION that

2.1 The content of the report be debated and noted.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 The Housing Grants Department and Community Occupational Therapy (OT) service work collaboratively to deliver Disabled Facility Grants to enable people with a disability to remain living in their own homes. These adaptations can range from the installation of a simple stair lift to major adaptations and extensions to properties. Costs can typically range from £1,000 to £36,000+. The Housing Grants Team complete around 90 DFG projects per year and have an annual budget of £850,000 (capital).

- 3.2 The responsibility of the Community OT (COT) in this process is to undertake the assessment of the individual supported by medical evidence where applicable and recommend the work to be undertaken to the grants department. The COT determines which works are '*necessary and appropriate*'. An electronic referral (e-form) is then sent to the Housing Grants Team to consider.
- 3.3 The responsibility of the Housing Grants Team is to firstly determine whether the works proposed are '*reasonable and practicable*' – that is to consider are the works proportionate, technically feasible and can they be completed within the grant limit (£36,000 max grant). The Housing Grants Team offer an additional non-statutory service called the Grantline Agency. The Agency service provides the customer with all administrative and technical support to complete the paperwork required as part of the application and then to appoint the contractor and manage the works.
- 3.4 This report is being presented to scrutiny as concerns have been raised by a Councillor in respect of an individual citizen that subsequently brought into question whether the current working arrangements between the Community Occupational Therapy Staff and the Housing Grants Team are effective.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 There is a long standing positive relationship between the two service areas; this is predominantly in respect of the assessment and provision of housing adaptations under the arrangements in place for the provision of Disabled Facility Grants (DFG).
- 4.2 Previously assessments were completed by the Community Occupational Therapists and the recommendations were passed to the grants department with no initial consultation. Therefore the viability of the adaptation or whether it could be achieved within the financial cap of the DFG funding guidance was not taken into consideration.
- 4.3 Assessments were undertaken under the regulatory requirements set out in the "Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970" and "NHS & Community Care Act 1990".
- 4.4 Historically as part of the assessment and subsequent works undertaken, the two departments would consider undertaking an element of additional work to future proof the property to prevent the requirement of a second DFG at a future date should the persons needs deteriorate. Examples of this would be widening door access to a bathroom in which a level access shower was being installed in case the person would become wheelchair dependent in the future. Taking this approach resulted in a higher cost per adaptation when compared to the Welsh average.
- 4.5 A Cabinet Report dated 30th September 2014 (laid before Cabinet on 22nd October 2014) written by Julian Pike – the then Housing Renewal Manager (now Housing & Community Safety Manager) proposed the Council reduces the generous scope of works provided via a DFG, mainly in the creation of level access shower rooms (also referred to as wet-rooms) with a view to saving in the region of £150-200k per annum. This decision would have no bearing on the Council's ability to meet its statutory obligations but would reduce the scope of works and hence reduce costs.

- 4.6 The annual budget in 2014/15 had risen to £1,000,000 with year on year increases being experienced.
- 4.7 In 2006 the Council were ranked in the bottom quartile for DFG 'average waiting times' within Wales.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 Since 2006 significant work has been undertaken to refine processes and procedures, leading to greater efficiency with reduced numbers of full time staff.
- 5.2 Work has been ongoing to adopt a more collaborative approach to the process this has included joint site meetings to determine feasibility undertaken by members of the grants and COT teams to establish the viability of any adaptations taking into account planning and building regulations earlier in the process, rather than after referral to the Housing Grants Team. The Housing Grants Team often conduct preliminary means tests on applicants where we suspect they may have a considerable contribution to the cost of works due to their household income levels – all of this work reduces timely, costly and abortive work further down the line and improves customer experience.
- 5.3 Reducing the scope of works included in particular DFGs has resulted in over £150,000 saving per annum, resulting in the DFG budget falling to £850,000 from its peak at £1,000,000 in 2014/15.
- 5.4 Since 2006 the Council have dramatically improved performance and have consistently featured in the top quartile for the statutory performance indicator (PSR 002) which measures 'waiting time' (but which is actually delivery time). This has culminated with MTCBC being the top performing authority in Wales twice since 2011.
- 5.5 In the early part of 2016, 2 of the 3 full time qualified COTS left employment within the organisation. This resulted in a significant reduction in the ability of the team to respond to service requests. These posts have now been recruited however a waiting list remains for the lower level assessments.
- 5.6 This will inevitably affect the DFG statutory performance indicator for 2016/17. Initial analysis of the Q1 and Q2 of 2016/17 indicates a significant increase in the number of days taken to complete DFGs. MTCBC are therefore likely to fall out of the top quartile for performance for the first time in a decade.
- 5.7 The Housing Grants Team has in recent years operated at critical capacity – with only 2.54 FTE staff in the department. Any periods of staff sickness or annual leave has an immediate and significant effect on the ability of the department to provide a fast and effective service.
- 5.8 Front line officers from both teams advise that many more cases are complex in recent years, which require more in depth assessments, more medical evidence and assessments, greater uncertainty about future prognosis and hence more timely for staff to deal with and more challenging to find the best solution for our clients.

- 5.9 Our clients are also far better informed these days and as a result have far higher expectations about the level of service they receive and the level of adaptation provided to them for their home.
- 5.10 All of the above factors are adding significant pressures to the COT Team and the Housing Grants Team.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- 6.1 We want to remain a top performing Council for aids and adaptations.
- 6.2 We want to provide increased options for clients to access adaptations, rather than most proceeding down the DFG route which is heavily prescribed and can be bureaucratic.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

- 7.1 Both services and Heads of Service are exploring opportunities to innovate – exploring the idea of a Housing OT which could operate across both Teams but also assist in the identification and use of existing adapted stock within the County Borough.
- 7.2 We need to make best use of additional and new funding sources such as Intermediate Care Fund and the ENABLE grant funding, which promote innovation and less bureaucratic means of assessment and adaptation of homes (often at lower end of the adaptation scale).
- 7.3 Seek to ensure both departments are sustainable which can robustly adapt to changes in personnel – such as sickness and holidays or experienced persons leaving the workforce.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 8.1 This report relates to the following Priority Outcome of the Corporate Plan and Single Integrated plan – ‘People, who live and work in Merthyr Tydfil are supported to enjoy a healthier and better quality of life’.
- 8.2 Social Services practice is compliant with the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act.
- 8.3 Improve Performance.
- 8.4 Improve partnership working.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No