

**CUSTOMER SERVICE &
TRANSFORMATION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**REVIEW of
DISABILITY ADAPTATIONS
TO COUNCIL PROPERTIES**

December 2017

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Chair's Foreword

Following discussion at committee of anecdotal evidence, there seemed some confusion surrounding Disabled Facilities Grant's and the difference between private and social landlords.

Subsequently, the Vice Chair and myself, requested that the Head of Housing and an officer from environmental health attend a future meeting of the Customer Service and Transformation Scrutiny Committee.

Approaching a review topic in this way involved using a new mechanism of review for councillors. Due to timing, evidence was gathered from one session via the formal committee meeting. There was quite a lengthy discussion surrounding the differences and from the information gathered we have completed our first 'mini review'. We hope to use this method again in the future as a mechanism of dealing with review topics, where they allow it, in a timelier manner. We also hope that the other scrutiny committee's may look to take this approach themselves in the future

Although the evidence gathered led us to conclude that no additional action should be recommended, Members have agreed to continue to closely monitor the Corporate Plan target already in place, via quarterly reports. Members of the committee were satisfied that individual needs of our tenants are met.

Councillor Rose Bowler
Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

Within its Corporate Plan 2015 - 2019, Bolsover District Council has a target (Ref: C10) to carry out 300 disability adaptations to Council houses each year. Underpinning this target are planned activities which aim to improve the process when providing disabled adaptations. Key areas of the target scrutinised in this Review are:

- Continue to develop working practices with Adult Social Care
- Constantly review contractor pricing to ensure best value for money
- Ensure we continue to procure quality products at best rates

Disability adaptations enable an individual to live as independently as possible in their present home. As the fabric of the home is changed permanently by disability adaptations, the property must be assessed for suitability before any works are carried out. All housing adaptations are tailored to meet the individual needs of each particular applicant but generally fall into two categories of works:

- Major work such as providing an extension, ground floor toilet or installing a lift
- Minor work such as fitting a handrail, ramp or shower.

A minor home adaptation is defined as one costing £1,000 or less in the charging regulations. These are often related to mobility and the prevention of falls.

Once a request for assessment for disability adaptations is made to Derbyshire County Council, an Occupational Therapist will usually visit to assess what is necessary and appropriate to meet the disabled person's needs, including those of any carer(s). This includes any risks to safety and wellbeing arising from the applicant's disabilities e.g. risk of falls. If they are then assessed as requiring disabled adaptations to their home, the Occupational Therapist makes a referral to the Council.

Very low cost adaptations (below £250) are procured through internal framework processes and carried out by Council staff. Adaptations costing more than £250 are considered at the monthly Panel Meeting between Bolsover District Council and Derbyshire County Council's Social Services. This Panel determines whether the adaptation should be treated as a priority. Prioritisation is based on (1) dependence on care; (2) need for adaptations which assist with mobility; and (3) need for special facilities which improve quality of life. All non-prioritised works are carried out in date order.

The HRA Disability Adaptations Flowchart (Appendix 3) illustrates the process for providing adaptations to Council properties following referral by Derbyshire County Council.

Separate arrangements are made for disability adaptations to non-Council properties. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) are available for specialist adaptations to the home, whether owner occupied or tenancies. However, all major adaptation costs for adults in receipt of a DFG are means tested and a preliminary test of resources is carried out at an early stage to estimate whether any contribution can be made towards the cost of works. Children's adaptations are not subject to a means test.

For eligible Bolsover residents who are Council tenants, disability adaptations to their home are not means tested as the Council must provide these without charge.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Scrutiny Members continue to monitor performance against Corporate Plan target C10: To carry out 300 disability adaptations to council houses each year.

Monitoring of this recommendation by Committee will take place via the Quarterly Performance Reports

3. Scope of the review

The Customer Service & Transformation Scrutiny Committee wished to scrutinise Council performance in making disability adaptations to Council properties. Their purpose was to explore whether the Authority continues to receive value for money in procuring disability adaptations and ensure it is able to carry out as many adaptations as possible each year within the allocated budget. The perception of a waiting list for adaptations is a concern to Members.

The aim of the review was;

- To assess whether the process of providing disabled adaptations to Council properties works efficiently to provide what disabled residents need and delivers value for money.

The key issues identified are as follows;

- The Council continues to develop collaborative working practices with Derbyshire County Council Adult Social Care through joint site visits and a joint Panel approach which enables each case to be considered holistically, and prioritises works for those in greatest need.
- There is an inevitable time lag between the initial application for disability adaptations; assessment of need and referral by an Occupational Therapist; prioritisation of more urgent cases; and the procurement and installation of complex adaptations, all of which contributes to the perception of a waiting list.
- In Members' opinion, there is a disconnection between the assessment process, which is the responsibility of Derbyshire County Council, and the administration of funds (both Disabled Facilities Grant and Housing Revenue Account funded adaptations), which is Bolsover District Council.

The Committee comprised the following Members:

Councillor Rose Bowler (Chair)
Councillor Pauline Bowmer
Councillor Malcolm Crane
Councillor Andrew Joesbury
Councillor Emma Stevenson

Councillor Jim Smith (Vice Chair)
Councillor Paul Cooper
Councillor Ray Heffer
Councillor Duncan McGregor
Councillor Rita Turner

Support to the Committee was provided by the Acting Scrutiny Officer and the Governance Officer.

4. Method of Review

The Committee sought evidence by way of verbal evidence and questioning with key officers, allowing them to compare the process for provision of disability adaptations to both privately owned/tenanted homes and Council homes.

Evidence from the Council's performance management system detailing the volume of adaptations over time (Appendix 1) and data from the Housing service detailing the quantity and type of adaptations supplied from April 2016 – 1 March 2017 (Appendix 2) was available to Members.

Equality and Diversity

The Council has a statutory duty under s.149 Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity and to eliminate discrimination. The efficient provision of disability adaptations supports this duty and delivers positive outcomes for disabled people of all ages and for carers.

5. Evidence and key findings

As noted in the Introduction, the Council's collaborative working practices with Derbyshire County Council Adult Social Care aim to facilitate what is a complex process and ensure those with greatest need are prioritised.

A breakdown of the type of adaptation adopted between April 2016 and 1 March 2017 (Appendix 2) shows that the majority of adaptations are internal and external hand and grab rails. Almost 1 in 5 of the total adaptations to Council homes are showers/wet rooms and 3 in 5 are handrails and grab rails. Five stair-lifts were adopted, one hoist and one specialist toilet.

When questioned about whether the Council could refuse to carry out particular works, the Assistant Director – Community Safety and Head of Housing (BDC) explained that on rare occasions, Occupational Therapists made recommendations which had effects beyond their discrete area of expertise and were not viable e.g. where the property's construction or condition was later found unsuitable for the particular adaptation.

Members queried how the Council ensures it receives value for money when using contractors for carrying out adaptations. The Assistant Director – Community Safety and Head of Housing (BDC) informed Members that for specialised work, contracts are awarded through the Efficiency East Midlands Framework and for complex, but non-specialised works, their Minor Works Framework is used. Simple adaptations such as the installation of handrails are carried out by the Council's own workforce.

Efficiency East Midlands is a not for profit procurement consortium, set up to generate efficiencies for its membership through collaboration, aggregated volumes, quality products and high level service delivery. It currently supports 86 social housing providers across the East Midlands, securing best value through its tailored procurement Frameworks.

Evidence from the Environmental Health Manager showed that while the assessment process for DFGs for privately owned / tenanted properties was similar to that for adaptations to Council homes, it was more protracted, in part because of the additional requirement for means testing. The cost of works is priced against the County Council's own procurement Framework.

With regard to servicing of adaptations such as stair-lifts, the costs fall to the owner of the property and not the tenant. The Assistant Director – Community Safety and Head of Housing (BDC) explained that the Council has a duty of care which would apply in these cases. Members questioned whether other authorities funded servicing but this information was not available.

When asked what difference the Panel meeting makes in improving the process, the Environmental Health Manager explained that the Panel enabled members to gain a holistic overview of each individual case rather than their own specialist perspective, and to act as a critical friend. If any specific adaptation is refused, the applicant has the right to make an appeal.

6. Conclusions

The key issue arising from the review is that the process for disability adaptations is inherently protracted but the Council has taken positive steps with regard to collaborative working practices to ensure we are more effective in meeting individual need.

The procurement process for major works is determined by Frameworks which support competitive tendering and best value. Minor works completed by Bolsover District Council's own workforce are subject to similar internal framework processes and can be completed reasonable quickly.

The Committee will continue to monitor the Council's performance on carrying out 300 disability adaptations to Council houses each year.

7. Bibliography

Bolsover District Council – DFG Customer Service booklet

<http://www.bolsover.gov.uk/index.php/56-your-council/customer-service/231-your-council-service-standards?highlight=WyJkaXNhYmxlZCIsImZhY2lsaXRpZXMiLCJncmFudHMlLCJkaXNhYmxlZCBmYWNPbGI0aWVzIiwZGIZYWJsZWQgZmFjaWxpdlGllcyBncmFudHMlLCJmYWNPbGI0aWVzIGdyYW50cyJd>

Bolsover District Council - website information on Disabled Adaptations

<http://www.bolsover.gov.uk/index.php/resident/housing>

Derbyshire County Council – website information on Disabled Facilities Grants

https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social_health/adult_care_and_wellbeing/help_to_live_at_home/adapting_your_home/dfgs/default.asp

East Midlands Efficiency Framework: Adaptations Framework

<http://eem.org.uk/framework/adaptations-work/>

Bolsover and NE Derbyshire District Councils – Joint Procurement Strategy 2016-2019

<http://web.bolsover.gov.uk/reportsagendas/Reports/report19067.pdf>

Appendix 1: Disability adaptations – performance

Corporate Plan target: C 10 - Carry out 300 disability adaptations to Council houses each year.

Month	Comments
Oct 17/18	Q2 April - September 2017 - 156 completed adaptations
Jul 17/18	Q1 April - June 2017 - 73 completed adaptations Q4 April 2016 - March 2017 - 374 adaptations 2016/17 Achieved
May 17/18	Q4 April 2016 - March 2017 - 374 adaptations 2016/17 Achieved
Apr 17/18	Q4 - April 2016 - March 2017 - 374 adaptations completed Q3 – 133 adoptions carried out Year to date - 335 adaptations completed
Jan 16/17	Q3 – 133 adoptions carried out Year to date - 335 adaptations completed
Oct 16/17	Q2 April - September 2016 - 202 adaptations completed
Jul 16/17	Q1 April - June 2016 - 78 adaptations completed
Apr 16/17	April - March 2016 - 386 adaptations completed. Year one achieved
Jan 15/16	April - December 2015 - 353 adaptations completed
Oct 15/16	April - September 2015 - 210 adaptations completed

Source: Bolsover District Council Performance Management System

Planned activities to deliver target:

- Continue to develop working practices with Adult Social Care which includes:-
 - Joint monthly 'Panel Meetings' where all cases are considered and prioritised.
 - Joint site visits to ensure all technical issues are addressed.
 - Regular joint Team Meetings between the Occupational Therapists and Housing staff.
- Constantly review contractor pricing to ensure best value for money.
- Ensure we continue to procure quality products at best rates.
- Work with staff and tenants representatives to develop and improve procedures and information to customers.
- Continue to review team structure and resources to ensure the most effective use of resources.
- Introduce added performance measurements

Baseline Data (History)	
Output Data 2014/15	396
Output Data 2013/14	238
Output Data 2012/13	315
Output Data 2011/12	288

Appendix 2: Completed adaptations HRA April 2016 – 1 March 2017

Description	No.	%
Grab rails / stair rails	180	52
Handrails (paths etc.)	26	8
Half steps	12	3
Hoist	1	0
Lever taps	11	3
Ramps	10	3
Soundproofing	1	0
Showers / wet rooms	65	19
Over bath showers	17	5
Stair-lifts	5	1
Dropped kerbs	1	0
Specialist WC	1	0
Door entry systems	2	1
Vibrating pillow alert	1	0
Miscellaneous	12	3
Total	345	100%

Source: Bolsover District Council Housing Service

Appendix 3: HRA Disability Adaptations Flowchart

