

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Chief Executive</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>		<b>CATEGORY: (See Notes)</b> <b>DELEGATED or RECOMMENDED</b>
<b>REPORT FROM:</b>	<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTOR SERVICE DELIVERY</b>	<b>OPEN</b>
<b>MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:</b>	<b>PAUL WHITTINGHAM</b> <b>Paul.whittingham@southderbys.gov.uk</b>	<b>DOC:</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Disabled Facilities Grants</b>	
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>	<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE: (See Notes)</b>

## **1.0 Recommendations**

- 1.1 The following recommendations are to be made under the Chief Executive's delegated authority during the current suspension of Council and Committee meetings. These recommendations will be reported to the next available Housing and Community Services Committee retrospectively
- 1.2 That the Chief Executive under his delegated powers, notes the progress to date in improving the management and provision of the Council's Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) service.
- 1.3 That the Chief Executive under his delegated powers approves the amendment of Section 8.1 of the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy, to allow for eligible adaptations under the value of £6000 to be agreed without the need for the Test of Financial Resources to further improve the timely delivery of the service.
- 1.4 That the Chief Executive under his delegated powers approves the procurement of suitable software to support the more efficient delivery of adaptations, up to the value of £12,000.

## **2.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 2.1 This report illustrates current performance of the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) service within the Housing Team and compares it with other districts in Derbyshire.
- 2.2 The report also highlights the outcome of the recent internal audit and makes proposals which address recommendations from that audit.
- 2.3 The report also informs the Chief Executive of the County-wide funding and management of DFG, along with other Adult Care services and the ongoing review of these services.

## **3.0 Executive Summary**

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to deliver adaptations to householders in all tenures, which is outlined in the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy which was agreed by the Housing and Community Services Committee in November 2019.
- 3.2 This service provides essential support to vulnerable households and plays an important part in preventing the need for people to access hospital and other residential care services. Through the ongoing Derbyshire County Council (DCC) review of Adult Care Services, there are opportunities to develop this service into an exemplar service which could offer more comprehensive and holistic housing related support to residents of South Derbyshire.
- 3.3 Certain aspects of this service have already been reviewed and improved, with further suggestions for service improvement also being identified by Councillors and the Council's Better Care Fund (BCF) officer steering group.
- 3.4 A review of the Service has also been completed by Internal Audit who have confirmed a "reasonable assurance" rating and made several recommendations for improvement.
- 3.5 The Service is funded through the BCF which is managed by Derbyshire County Council through its Better Care Fund Performance Board. This Board is part of the DCC Adult Care service which itself is undergoing a comprehensive review in which the Council is a participant.

#### **4.0 Detail**

- 4.1 During 2019/20 the Council completed 73 adaptations in non Council-owned properties. These adaptations are categorised as major (e.g. level access showers) or extensive, (e.g. property extensions) These works are approved on receipt of a formal referral from the DCC Occupational Health Service.
- 4.2 The adaptations process involves district and borough councils from across the County, the customer and private contractors who deliver the physical works on site and is complex. The Council has gradually improved the "end- to-end" completion times for the delivery of adaptations over the past four financial years, as shown in Table 1 below. Comparative performance for the Council and other district and borough councils in Derbyshire are shown in Table 2. The Council has performed better than all other district and borough councils in Derbyshire in delivering this service.
- 4.3 Table 1: End-to-End Performance South Derbyshire

Year	Major Adaptations (Weeks)	Extensive Adaptations(weeks)
2016/17	33	55
2017/18	27	99
2018/19	27	85
2019/20	25	47

- 4.4 Table 2: End-to-End Performance comparison 2019/20

District	Major Adaptations	Extensive
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	(weeks)	Adaptations(weeks)
South Derbyshire	25	47
Amber Valley	37	85
Bolsover	34	98
Derbyshire Dales	42	86
Erewash	48	150
High Peak	50	78
North East Derbyshire	49	108

- 4.5 It is recognised across the County, that the end-to-end timescales for delivering adaptations are unacceptable. In extreme cases delays in this Service can have a knock-on effect on other costly health and social care services. Consequently, DCC is already in the process of reviewing the entire Adult Care service with the focus on practical help for applicants to remain in their homes. DCC has described the context and scope of this review as follows:

*“During 2019-20 the Adult Care Commissioning Team has developed three strategies in relation to specialist, older people and working age adults housing, accommodation and support. There are a number of priorities set out in the Delivery Plans of these strategies which include our commitment to*

- Enable older people to plan for their longer-term housing, accommodation and support needs*
- Develop a co-ordinated county-wide partnership approach to adaptations, technology and equipment in the home to maximise opportunities and available funding*
- Work with partners to review and re-shape the low-level support that enables people to remain living independently in their own home*
- Review and transform Derbyshire County Council’s approach to assistive technology, including the current community alarms and telecare offer*
- Provide up-to-date information and advice through a variety of channels, to enable those with care and support needs, and their families or carers, to make informed decisions about accommodation, care and support.*
- Ensure that professionals in social care are aware of the range of options available, so that assessment and support planning promote maximum independence.”*

- 4.6 Whilst the Council is a participant in this review there are aspects of the Adaptations Service that can be improved before its conclusion. The Council is already in a strong position to achieve this as it employs its own in-house Architectural Officer and funding has been agreed to recruit to an Occupational Therapist post within the Housing Team. Both posts take away the need to rely on DCC Architectural and Occupational Health Services. The Occupational Therapist role will include delivering casework-based services providing residents with a range of housing options to enable them to maintain their independence and remain living in their own homes wherever possible. This role will link with existing Housing and other Council Services, such as Careline and Housing Options to achieve this.

- 4.7 The Housing Service has made further improvements to the process by including adaptations within the NOVUS repair and maintenance contract. This has removed the delays created by having to seek three contractor quotes for every adaptation. To supplement this an additional contractor has been appointed through a procurement framework solely to carry out adaptation works.
- 4.8. The Council has recently commissioned an Internal Audit of the service. The Audit team rated the Service as giving “Reasonable Assurance” and made eight low and one medium risk recommendations: along with the following comments:  
*“Work had also begun to identify data from other Derbyshire District Councils which could be used to benchmark the service, and initial assessment indicated that performance achieved at South Derbyshire compared favourably with other Councils. However, this did not negate the need to consider the Service from a customer perspective, in terms of whether the timescales involved should be deemed acceptable given the impact of delays on customers’ ability to manage day to day life.”*
- 4.9 Three specific recommendations from the Audit will be addressed in order to improve the delivery of the service:

**Audit Recommendation 3:**

“We recommend that the Council explores options for discretionary Disabled Facility Grants, with a view to incorporating these into a revised policy”

The lack of discretion within the current Policy requires the Council to complete the test of resources for all applicants. This not only extends the timescale for all adaptations but is also an inefficient use of the Council’s resources. During the last financial year only nine applicants were required to contribute. These contributions ranged from £0.94 to £7097.85. Five contribution amounts were less than £200.00, arguably less than the cost of administering the process.

It is proposed to amend the Policy to remove the test of resources from any works valued at £6,000 or less. This threshold is generally above the cost of adaptations such as level access showers and wet rooms which ought to provide a reasonably prompt response to a household need. For works scheduled in 2020/21 this will leave only four applications out of thirty six that need to go through the test of resources. This will remove a significant administrative burden from the Team, speed up the process and may encourage other vulnerable people to apply for the grant. This proposal will bring DFG applicants into line with Council tenants who do not undertake the test of financial resources.

**Audit Recommendation 5:**

“Appropriate targets are identified for the standard types of adaptation. Performance against these targets should be monitored and reported regularly to management”

**Audit Recommendation 6:**

“The Council could not demonstrate that it had been proactive in ensuring that delays in Disabled Facilities Grant applications, particularly those marked as fast track, were minimised”

The lack of fit for purpose IT support for this Service was identified as an obstacle by the auditors who suggested that the Council should “Explore options for alternative software allowing use of workflows.”

The Service currently operates an outdated and inflexible database which does not facilitate either the proactive monitoring and progress chasing of individual cases or the collection, analysis and reporting of performance indicators and management

information. Most of this information is held on potentially insecure spreadsheets, whilst most operational documentation is in hard rather than electronic copy. To address both recommendations, it is proposed to procure specialist software in order to support the service and improve the speed at which it can assist vulnerable residents.

It is estimated that the purchase and implementation of this software will cost around £12,000 with an annual licence fee of around £2,500. This expenditure is eligible to be covered by the Better Care Fund with a contribution from the Housing Revenue Account, as this software would also assist in managing the provision of adaptations within Council owned homes. Such software would also assist the Council in providing tenants and future tenants with a quicker route to a suitably adapted home through a transfer, rather than waiting for costly adaptations to be carried out to their current home.

The implementation of new software would be managed through the Council's Business Change processes and allow for the total re-engineering of existing process and practices. This would include the ability to develop and efficiently manage overall and specific performance indicators for distinct areas of operation. Addressing these fundamental aspects of the current service will provide a robust platform on which further service improvements can be built, in conjunction with DCC, the NHS and other key stakeholders.

- 4.10 Progress of these and the other Audit Recommendations will be reviewed by the Audit Sub-Committee.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The implementation of a £6,000 threshold for the Test of Financial Resources will reduce the number of adaptations that are partially funded by applicants.
- 5.2 This will, increase the payments from the BCF, although any increase is likely to be well within existing budgets.
- 5.3 Expenditure of up to £12,000 on the purchase and implementation of new software to support the service and the annual licence fee may also be met from the Better Care Fund, with a contribution from the Housing Revenue Account. The annual licence fee will be met from existing budgets.
- 5.4 There will be a competitive procurement exercise to purchase appropriate software, as there a number of providers in the market who can offer this service.
- 5.5 Value for Money; the recommendations in the report address the four Value for Money Principles:

### **Being Economic – “Spending Less”**

These proposals will assist in identifying preadapted Council Homes and reduce the need for expenditure on new and potentially unnecessary adaptations.

### **Being Efficient – “Spending Well”**

The proposals will help to speed up the process, improving capacity, output and resilience.

The provision of fit for purpose Information Technology will reduce the resource impact of maintaining “hard copy” systems

### **Being Effective – “Spending Wisely”**

The proposals will assist in identifying customer needs and finding prompt and holistic solutions

The proposals contribute directly to the Councils aims for people to live safely and maintain their independence

### **Being Equitable – “Spending Fairly”**

This service is available to all regardless of tenure

The proposals will help provide a more efficient and customer focussed service for vulnerable people.

## **6.0 Corporate Implications**

### **Employment Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct employment implications arising from this report.

### **Legal Implications**

- 6.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

### **Corporate Plan Implications**

- 6.3 This report directly contributes to the aims of the Council’s Corporate Plan 2020/24: “We will improve methods of engagement, enable independent and affordable living and provide opportunities for everyone to enjoy social, leisure and cultural activities.” In particular it contributes to:
- “Supporting and safeguarding the most vulnerable
- With partners encourage independent living and keep residents healthy and happy in their homes.
  - Promote health and wellbeing across the District.
  - Improve the condition of housing stock and public buildings.”

### **Risk Impact**

- 6.4 This report does help to reduce health risks for residents through the more accessible provision of adaptation services

## **7.0 Community Impact**

### **Consultation**

- 7.1 The changes in service delivery brought about through this report will be communicated to the wider community and to partner agencies.

## **Equality and Diversity Impact**

- 7.2 This report does contribute directly to the Council's aims to ensure that households and individuals are not discriminated against due to any of the Protected Characteristics within the Equality Act 2010.

## **Social Value Impact**

- 7.3 This contributed directly to the aim within the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy: "Older people, people with dementia and other long-term conditions and their carers have good quality of life, retain their independence for as long as possible, and receive the support they need at the end of their lives."

## **Environmental Sustainability**

- 7.4 The contents of this report will assist in facilitating vulnerable people to remain living in their own homes for longer periods. This in turn may reduce demand on other emergency and health services

## **8.0 Conclusions**

- 8.1 The Council's Disabled Facilities Grants Service delivers services more quickly than elsewhere in the County
- 8.2 That there have already been improvements made to the Disabled Facilities Grants service which have assisted in improving performance and the procurement process.
- 8.3 The recent Internal Audit report has identified the need to improve systems. This along with other service improvements will assist in improving performance management and developing a more proactive approach to service delivery.

## **9.0 Background Papers**

### **Notes:**

- \* Category – Please see the Committee Terms Of Reference in [Responsibility for Functions - Committees](#). This shows which committee is responsible for each function and whether it has delegated authority to make a decision, or needs to refer it elsewhere with a recommendation.

- \*\* Open/Exempt - All reports should be considered in the open section of the meeting, unless it is likely that exempt information would be disclosed. Please see the [Access to Information Procedure Rules](#) for more guidance.

- \*\*\* Committee Terms Of Reference in [Responsibility for Functions - Committees](#).