

Health And Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel

DATE	20 th March 2024
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

The report provides an update on the delivery of the Housing Assistance Policy and associated action plan which aims to improve performance in respect of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) applications.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

That the Panel notes the progress made to date.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 Following a review of DFG performance by this Panel on 30th November 2022 and subsequent public consultation which led to several modifications, a new Housing Assistance Policy was brought into operation on 1st April 2023, with revised Standard Operating Procedures introduced the following month.
- 1.2 Due to the complexities of introducing new legal contractor frameworks and recruiting new posts (some aligned to university placements and training opportunities), it was confirmed that it would take 12 to 18 months from the introduction of these policies/procedures in April/May 2023 to see a reduction in waiting times. As set out below, these building blocks are now in place and are beginning to show an improving trajectory.

Occupational Therapy Service

- 1.3 There have been 637 referrals received by the Occupational Therapy Service between April 2023 and January 2024. For the whole of 2022/23, the total number received was 722 referrals.
- 1.4 The key Occupational Therapy performance measures (averages are based on working days) are:

Indicator	2022/23	Q1	Q2	Q3	Jan 24
Average number of residents waiting for first OT/clinical assessment	271.7	261	274	280	210

Average waiting time to complete first visit from the initial resident referral	95	67	83	87	84
Average number of residents actively being seen	523.4	559	527	561	573
Average time taken to get to panel from initial OT DFG assessment	73	37	25	37	39

- 1.5 Over the last year, the Occupational Therapy Service has successfully recruited to senior established posts. However, this period has also been marked by challenges in maintaining junior rotational staff across various services, including a position within the housing team. There has not been a significant reduction in the numbers of those waiting for clinical assessments but equally there has not been a significant increase either despite continuing high demand.
- 1.6 The team is currently facing several staffing challenges. One full-time Band 6 employee is about to leave, another has been on extended sick leave (albeit will return to work shortly), and a third will be absent for six weeks due to retirement, although they plan to return afterwards. Despite recruitment efforts, the Band 5 position remains unfilled. The departure of staff requires the transfer of existing caseloads, which subsequently reduces the capacity for new case allocation.
- 1.7 There is a commitment to 'grow our own' staff and plans are in place for an apprenticeship route. The team has already reviewed skill mix and there is still a need for the registered posts to support unregistered posts, which have already been maximised, and also for them to help out with more complex cases.
- 1.8 Liaison has taken place across the region to gain insight into alternative approaches that may not have been undertaken here, but this has not proved fruitful and other organisations have learnt more from us.
- 1.9 Work continues on joint working on various projects and pathways to streamline processes and embed new pathways from the revised Housing Assistance Policy. The increase in delivery options (Trusted Assessor, direct delivery, LHP) coupled with an increase in staffing at Equans has also led to an increase in work for the team.

Equans

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

Handyperson Scheme

Indicator	2022/23	Q1	Q2	Q3	Jan 24
Number of residents Equans have been asked to contact regarding a handy person service	184	46	45	28	13 (Total 132 in ten months)
Average time taken by Equans to respond or confirm next steps of handy person service process to residents	8	6	10	8	8

Minor Adaptations

Indicator	2022/23	Q1	Q2	Q3	Jan 24
Number of minor adaptations	1023	285	309	298	92 (Total 984 in ten months)
Number of minor adaptations installed at 1st operative visit which do not require OT assessment	184	46	45	28	13 (Total 132 in ten months)
Average time to complete works from referral (no OT assessment required)	8	6	10	8	8
Number of minor adaptations completed which required OT assessment	1068	287	319	248	102 (Total 956 in ten months)
Average time taken to complete works after OT instruction	23	28	27	24	37

Major Adaptations

Indicator	2022/23	Q1	Q2	Q3	Jan 24
Number of feasibility assessments passed to Equans to deliver	117	18	29	47	10 (Total 104 in ten months)
Time taken to complete feasibility study from when OT approved study	24.8	24	24	24	24
Average number of residents, post Panel waiting for an Urgent referral to commence on site (completing pre construction paper work)	32.3	29	50	57	63
Average time to complete paperwork / pre construction process following Panel approval for Urgent referrals	124.3	101	94	69	73
Number of residents, post Panel waiting for Non-Urgent DFG applications to commence on site (completing paperwork / pre construction work)	283.4	283	318	286	251
Average time to complete pre construction work from Panel approval for Non-Urgent referrals	354.7	326	321	326	325
Number of DFGs in progress and physically on site	16	12	15	11	13
Number of DFGs completed	147	49	26	28	19 (Total 122 in ten months)
Average time taken for Majors from OT decision to commence works	258.9	242	206	169	173
Average time to complete all Major DFG works from OT decision to complete works	300	270	250	240	244

1.11 Equans have achieved improvements over the last year with the delivery of mandatory DFG, minor adaptations and the handyperson schemes. Additional

resources have been introduced to provide greater capacity into the two services which deliver these type of adaptations.

1.12 The new Housing Assistance Policy (HAP) made provision for the increase of the budget for minor adaptations from £1,000 to £2,500. This has enabled simple adaptations which were previously majors adaptations to be delivered through the minor adaptation route. The number of minor adaptations received has remained high (892 up to the end of quarter three), with referrals becoming more technically complex. To meet the demand, Equans has introduces a greater number of Fabric Maintenance operatives to its maintenance team and this has assisted with minor adaptations being completed in 26 days on average.

1.13 Major adaptation completions have increased with 122 completed in the first ten months of the year. This means the team remain on target to exceed the previous year's completions. To assist with this achievement, Equans have increased the number of technical case workers from four to six. Legislation states that from the date of approval, adaptation works should be completed within 12 months (260 working days). At the start of this reporting year, major adaptations were being completed in 290 days and, by the end of quarter three, this had been reduced to 221 days. This is positive, in particular when considering all complex and large technical adaptations from a construction perspective are delivered by Equans.

1.14 It is recognised there are further improvements which can be made. That said, the positive, improved position which has been highlighted demonstrates Equans are committed with supporting the council with reducing the waiting list and improving the service provided to residents.

Housing Assistance Policy Action Plan - Update

1.15 Having reviewed and revised the Housing Assistance Policy and Standard Operating Procedures, officers produced a delivery plan to implement the changes required to implement the improvements to the delivery of DFG applications. The progress being made against this action plan 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	Both recruited and in post
OT Recruitment	Recruit additional grade 6 post and new grade 4/5 trainee post	OT	Grade 6 post - recruited to post - was working well, enjoying team and work, but long commute become too much and has given notice – post at advert. Grade 4/5 post - recruitment checks ongoing for internal candidate – on long term

			absence however, planning to return to work shortly.
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 have agreed a price schedule. LHP have changed contractors for a third time during this process. Contractor now conducting surveys. Longhurst – This is still in negotiation.
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.	Council/Equans	Council Trusted Assessors are now processing Relocation Grants to free up technical officers, so they can deliver more DFG's.
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	The Council is working with the ICB and have regular case calls. There have been cases highlighted where residents have been placed in care, and a grant has speeded up the process to move them back home.
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/Council	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	Available, if required. 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

1.16 Discussions have been held with the two main registered providers, however the process with Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP) is further developed than Longhurst. LHP have been let down by contractors on two occasions. The new contractor commenced surveys during February, completing 10. They are now drafting plans with OTs to deliver these. Rates have been agreed in advance to evidence value for money. To date, we have allocated LHP 125 grants from the waiting list.

Direct Award Trial

1.17 Three local contractors have signed up to deliver grants directly through the trial. To date, they have surveyed around 20 properties, and now these are in various stages of development.

1.18 There have been delays agreeing the tri-party legal contract between the contractor, grant applicant and the Council. A new agreement has been finalised and works began on site in February. The Trusted Assessors have a further 20 grants ready to process and will take 20 grants per tranche to assist reducing the waiting list. It is anticipated that the contractors will deliver up to 4 grants per month, per contractor on average. This will change when more contractors are added to the scheme once the new framework is launched in April 2024, accelerating delivery further.

New Contractor Framework

1.19 The Council has undertaken a procurement exercise to attract and identify additional suppliers who can undertake the DFG major adaptation works to assist with increasing the pace of delivery.

There are two new frameworks, which are:

- Lot one – Traditional Mandatory DFG – Works up to £30,000 – The procurement of the framework has been completed with 8 suppliers on the new framework. This will be introduced by 1st April 2024 and managed by Equans.
- Lot two – Contractor led Design – Minor simple and non-complex schemes - The procurement of the framework has been completed with 6 suppliers on the new framework. This will be introduced by 1st April 2024 and managed by the Council.

Summary

1.20 Since the last meeting, a number of key posts have been recruited within the Occupational Therapy Service and Council (Trusted Assessors). Although the Occupational Therapy Service has experienced the loss of more junior posts and sickness, this has not adversely impacted on their performance. Equans have maintained their core team this year. Two new Trusted Assessors began work in October and November respectively.

1.21 With regard to major DFGs, Equans remain on target to exceed the previous

financial year's completion rate. Processes and working practices will continue to be reviewed, with the aim of improving performance and speeding up the delivery of DFG applications.

- 1.22 The commencement of LHP and three direct award contractors on simple and non-complex cases in February 2024 has begun to increase completion rates for major DFGs. This delivery capability will be increased when six direct award contractors commence work under the new contractor framework which begins in April 2024. This will significantly increase the number of major DFGs completed each year and thus begin to reduce the backlog on the waiting list.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 The new approach to managing DFGs implemented in April 2023 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

- 3.1 The Housing Assistance Policy, which developed the new approach to managing DFGs, was subject to public and stakeholder consultation in early 2023. The proposed policy was amended in accordance with feedback.
- 3.2 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 spend 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 progress report on performance and delivery of the improvement plan. Regular monitoring and reporting is recognised as good practice.

9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

10. WARD IMPLICATIONS

There are 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 \(nelincs.gov.uk\)](https://nelincs.gov.uk/Health-and-Adult-Social-Care-Scrutiny-Panel-Democracy)

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

Meeting of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel – 2nd August 2023
[Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel | Democracy \(nelincs.gov.uk\)](https://nelincs.gov.uk/Health-and-Adult-Social-Care-Scrutiny-Panel-Democracy)

12. CONTACT OFFICERS

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