

Health And Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel

DATE	25 th September 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 (HAP) 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 On 1st April 2023, the new HAP was implemented, with revised Standard Operating Procedures being introduced the following month. This set out a new approach for responding the requests for DFG applications.
- 1.2 Given that the former contract framework for DFGs was operational until 31 March 2024, the new delivery methods could not begin until 1st April 2024. There are now two new DFG frameworks in place, which are:
 - Lot one – Traditional Mandatory DFG – Works up to £30,000 – there are 8 suppliers on the new framework.
 - Lot two – Contractor led Design – Minor, simple and non-complex schemes – there are 6 suppliers on the new framework.

Occupational Therapy Service

- 1.3 There have been 416 referrals received by the Occupational Therapy (OT) Service between April and July 2024. For the whole of 2022/23, the total number received was 840 referrals. This is a significant increase compared to the same time period in the last three years.
- 1.4 The key OT performance measures (average timescales are based on working days) are:

Indicator	2023/24	April 2024	May 2024	June 2024	July 2024
Average number of residents waiting for first OT/clinical assessment	283	328	323	311	313
Average waiting time to complete first visit from the initial resident referral	77	135	89	63	70
Average number of residents actively being seen	553	558	547	532	530
Average time taken to get to panel from initial OT DFG assessment	35	57	31	13	17

- 1.5 Staffing continues to be an issue within the clinical assessment service although there are some positives to report. There remain vacancies on the OT rotational rota which includes one post that would rotate into the housing team. These have now been recruited into but, as newly qualified staff, before they can start work, these staff members need to complete and pass their degree. They cannot commence work until they are qualified staff.
- 1.6 One band 6 position has been filled as of 12th August 2024. This postholder should soon start to make an impact on the waiting lists once inducted. Alas, the team also has some longer-term absence which is currently being managed by appropriate policies/process and the staff member has given notice of resignation too. The post has been put out to advert and enquiries already received, which is a positive start. Our band 7 team lead has completed a course which offers valuable input into the service and is now present for full hours at work, when they previously had a study day off work each week related to the course.
- 1.7 We have an internal band 4 member of staff who was successful in applying for the apprenticeship post. She has started her training. For some periods of time, this does take them out of the service but will ensure longer-term staffing to add to the establishment via 'grow your own' methods.
- 1.8 Work continues on reviewing the role of the Trusted Assessors, who are employed by the local authority, and how they can provide some ongoing monitoring and support to cases following OT detailed assessment and approval for recommendations. This could then free up more clinical time to progress further assessments off the waiting list.
- 1.9 As more delivery options come online, which is helpful and provides more progression of the work, this has unfortunately had a negative impact on clinical capacity to pick up more new cases as when the technical work commences, clinical review is needed. Hopefully, this should gradually ease.
- 1.10 The referrals that appear to be solely rehousing are being picked up more urgently as these should be quick assessment and report and progress to rehousing lists – this is helping to get the people progressed, also avoids delays in them waiting unnecessarily and reduces the numbers waiting.
- 1.11 In terms of those waiting, despite challenges on staffing, there has been a slight reduction in the number of clients waiting for first appointment between April and

July 2024, and also the time to get cases to Panel. Thus, as more staff come on board, this position should improve further.

Equans

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

Handyperson Scheme

Indicator	2023/24	April 2024	May 2024	June 2024	July 2024
Number of residents Equans have been asked to contact regarding a handy person service	151	19	13	12	23
Average time taken by Equans to respond or confirm next steps of handy person service process to residents	7	7	5	3	5

Minor Adaptations

Indicator	2023/24	April 2024	May 2024	June 2024	July 2024
Number of minor adaptations	1185	91	101	123	152
Average time taken to for Equans to deliver works from OT instruction	5.7	5	6	5	5
Number of minor adaptations installed at 1st operative visit which do not require OT assessment	151	19	13	12	23
Average time to complete works from referral (no OT assessment required)	7.9	7	5	3	5
Number of minor adaptations completed which required OT assessment	1130	121	74	95	167
Average time taken to complete works after OT instruction	27.9	25	19	17	18

Major Adaptations

Indicator	2023/24	April 2024	May 2024	June 2024	July 2024
Number of feasibility assessments passed to Equans to deliver	133	10	13	10	12
Time taken to complete feasibility study from when OT approved study	24.2	36	36	36	36
Average number of residents, post Panel waiting for an Urgent referral to commence on site (completing pre construction paper work)	48.1	44	45	44	44
Average time to complete paperwork / pre construction process following Panel approval for Urgent referrals	84.4	42.7	57.9	60.9	62
Number of residents, post Panel waiting for Non-Urgent DFG	282.8	171	169	174	151

applications to commence on site (completing paperwork / pre construction work)					
Average time to complete pre construction work from Panel approval for Non-Urgent referrals	329.5	370.3	320.9	334.9	334.9
Number of DFGs in progress and physically on site	13.4	16	18	17	18
Number of DFGs completed	162	31	11	1	24
Average time taken for Majors from OT decision to commence works	200.7	162.8	150	158.7	161.8
Average time to complete all Major DFG works from OT decision to complete works	253.5	155.4	126.7	171.5	181.1

1.13 Equans remain committed to explore opportunities to achieve improvements in service delivery and have continued to support the implementation of the Council's new enforcement system, ARCUS. This is used across all enforcement services including DFGs. This has assisted to support the Council with establishing a DFG caseload for Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP) and for the new Trusted Assessor roles. As part of this, Equans has supported the council's Trusted Assessors as they settle into their roles.

1.14 Equan's Facilities Management (FM) property maintenance team continue to provide the handy person scheme that is available to residents. There have been 151 requests received in 2023/24, with on average completion period of seven days. Since April 2024, the team has received 67 requests with a turnaround period of five days on average.

1.15 The FM property maintenance team undertake thermal warmth improvement works and minor adaptations (minor adaptations increased from £1,000 to £2,500) to residential properties that are carried out under the HAP. In 2023/24, the team received 1185 minor adaptations referrals with an average completion of 27.9 days. Since April 2024, the team has received 467 referrals for minor adaptations with an average completion of 19.8 days.

1.15 The type of major DFG adaptation delivered by LHP, and the direct delivery model (via the Trusted Assessor) are wet rooms, with a large proportion of other adaptations still being delivered by Equans. This means all of the more intricate construction schemes (e.g. extensions, through floor lifts and or larger scale adaptations of a property) are delivered by Equans.

1.16 Despite the introduction of the direct award trial in the latter half of 2023/24, the number of major DFGs completed saw a small increase from 147 in 2022/23 reporting period to 162 completed in 2023/24. This is a consequence of utilising resources to support the introduction of a number of the agreed system and process improvements which have been introduced.

1.17 Currently, the team have completed 67 major adaptations in the first four months of 2024/25, and this remains on target to significantly improve on last year's outturn. In 2023/24, the average days to complete a major DFG was 252.2; this compared to 2022/23 outturn of 300 days which would suggest improvements in

the delivery for major adaptations are being achieved. In the first four months of 2024/25 reporting period, this has seen a further reduction to 158.7 days.

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

Registered Housing Providers

- 1.19 LHP has begun delivering grants in their own properties. There have been issues getting contractors to start this work. In reality, work began in April 2024. LHP currently only has one contractor to deliver grants, albeit they are operating with a number of “gangs” of workmen.
- 1.20 To date, LHP has installed and completed 10 DFGs since April 2024, with a further 9 properties ready for sign-off or dealing with snagging issues. In addition, they have surveyed a further 20 properties (these are either ready to progress on site or are waiting for either plans or OT approval) and have 5 households where contractors are out on site at the moment. The LHP waiting list is currently 67.
- 1.21 To address this demand, in the past couple of weeks, LHP has entered into discussions with further contractors with a view to possibly getting them on board. If possible, this would increase the pace of delivery in their properties.

Direct Award Delivery, Hospital Discharge and Relocation Grants

- 1.22 Since April 2024, the Trusted Assessors have completed their level 3 Trusted Assessor Qualification, and later this year will complete their level 4 qualification.
- 1.23 Initially, the Trusted Assessors were reviewing the waiting list and removing grants that only required a level access shower, or simple works for direct award delivery. On 27th August 2024, there are currently 28 households in the process of being surveyed and completing grant applications; 6 households have contractors delivering works on site; and 26 DFG works have been completed and signed off. Their waiting list is currently 46.
- 1.24 The Trusted Assessors have also worked closely with the Diana Princess of Wales Hospital team to deliver 6 hospital discharge grants. This work results in patients leaving hospital or respite care much sooner, by completing adaptations to enable them to move home much quicker. It is widely recognised that patients recover quicker in their own home surroundings.
- 1.25 In addition, the Trusted Assessors have facilitated 10 relocation grants. Working with our partners (including LHP), the Council is more responsive to assessing properties and ensuring households living in inappropriate housing and receive the right support to move to housing that can be adapted to meet their needs. Some of the complex cases also require clinical input, which takes time away from OTs from progressing other works.

Housing Assistance Policy Action Plan - Update

1.26 Having reviewed and revised the HAP and Standard Operating Procedures in April 2023, 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	Both were recruited – see NLAG staffing update above for latest position.
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	Work to LHP properties are underway. A second contractor is due to start shortly. 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. This will free up clinical staff although it is recognised that in some complex cases or those that have waited a while, there may be a need to reinvolve the clinical staff for support in the process
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. Further work is needed on process once suitable kit identified and this process to be shared with all assessing clinicians so that expectations and time frames can be managed appropriately.
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

Summary

The following statistical information is correct as of 23rd August 2024:

1.27 The DFG Major adaptation waiting list (which was 382 cases in October 2023 and then 314 cases in March 2024) is now:

- Equans - 128
 - Direct Award – 46
 - LHP – 67
- Total – 241 cases**

1.28 Major DFGs underway with clients, but not yet installing on site:

- Equans - 60
 - Direct Award – 28
 - LHP – 20
- Total - 108**

1.29 Total number of Major DFGs on site:

- Equans - 18
 - Direct Award – 6
 - LHP – 14 (including 9 waiting for sign-off or dealing with snagging issues)
- Total - 38**

1.30 Since the new delivery methods became operational in April, the number of completed Major DFGs (April to July 2024) is:

- Equans – 67
 - Direct Delivery – 26
 - LHP – 10
- Total – 103 complete in four months**

1.31 There are still challenges in terms of staffing for the OT service, albeit these are being managed despite increasing caseloads. New methods of managing cases are being explored, including using the Trusted Assessors to help monitoring and overseeing cases post clinical recommendation approval to free up clinical staff time to progress on further assessments.

1.32 Although early days, the new methods of delivering Major DFGs implemented in April 2024 are now having a positive impact on waiting times. In addition, LHP are having discussions with additional contractors to increase their delivery rate. Furthermore, the time taken to construct Major DFs is starting to reduce too.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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 HAP, 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 It continues to be reviewed and any changes made to Standard Operating Procedures as necessary to improve performance. Any changes to the processes and paperwork are being discussed with housing, Equans, OT service and legal as required.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The annual capital allocation from the Better Care Fund to the Council is currently £3.51m (which is ring fenced to spend only on DFGs), with a remaining balance or underspend from previous years of £2.84m. The in-year allocation for 2023/24 was spent and the allocation for 2024/25 is forecast to be spent, with some of the ear-marked reserve used to fund the additional delivery methods and improvement 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 HAP 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 \(nelincs.gov.uk\)](#)

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

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

Meeting of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel – 20th March 2024
[Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel | NELC \(nelincs.gov.uk\)](#)

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