



Adult Social Care Select Committee
14 February 2013

Occupational Therapy Task & Finish Group Final Report

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services/Policy Development and Review

This is the final report of the Task & Finish Group set up to review the provision of occupational therapy assessments related to Disabled Facilities Grant and Major Adaptations applications.

Introduction:

1. Residents with mobility issues or a sensory or physical disability may need adaptations made to their homes in order to help them to remain independent. These can include a stairlift, easy-access shower, access ramps and various other adaptations that will help someone with mobility problems or a physical or sensory disability to carry on with daily activities.
2. There is a central government scheme called the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), given by District and Borough Councils under Part I of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, that helps to cover the costs of adaptations.
3. Surrey County Council has its own discretionary Major Adaptations Budget to help pay for adaptations if the applicant is not eligible for a DFG or it is not enough to cover the whole cost of the adaptation.
4. Following concerns about the continued underspending of the Major Adaptations Budget, a Task & Finish Group was set up in September 2011. The Major Adaptations Budget is £700k a year.
5. An identified reason for the continued underspend was the amount of time it took to complete an adaptation. The Committee had concerns that this was due to our own Occupational Therapy service not assessing in a timely manner. The Task & Finish Group has not found this to be the case and sets out its findings in this report.

6. The membership of the Task & Finish Group consisted of:
 - a) Linda Kemeny (later moved on to Cabinet)
 - b) Caroline Nichols
 - c) Ernest Mallett
 - d) Yvonna Lay (replacing Linda Kemeny)
 - e) Peter Hickman (representative from Health Scrutiny Committee to reflect crossover issues)
7. Adult Social Care officer support was provided by Liz Uliasz, Senior Manager, South West, and Claire White, Assistant Senior Manager, Transformation, both of whom have Occupational Therapist backgrounds.

Disabled Facilities Grant process
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8. When a resident applies for a DFG, the application is made to his/her local Borough or District council's housing department. This application is backed up by an Occupational Therapist assessment provided by a Surrey County Council Adult Social Care Occupational Therapist to confirm the need for the adaptations. The majority of DFG applications arise from an Occupational Therapist advising a person that his/her needs could be met from an adaptation and that DFG is a way of paying for it. The application must be made either by the owner of the dwelling or a tenant if it is rented. A landlord may also apply on behalf of a disabled tenant.
9. The local District or Borough council normally requires two written estimates for the work before deciding the application. This requires the person to contact builders, surveyors and architects, depending on the nature of the work to be done. The resident cannot pay a member of his/her family to carry out the works. There is a requirement on applicants to sign a certificate that they will not be moving from the property within five years.
10. The local District or Borough council will assess the application to ensure that the proposed works are necessary and appropriate to meet the person's needs and that it is reasonable and practicable depending on the age and condition of the property. They will consult the Occupational Therapist from the County Council to confirm that the works meet the person's needs.
11. The grant is means-tested. The amount a person gets will be dependent on the income and capital of the applicant and any spouse or partner. While the scope of this review is about DFGs for adults, it is important to point out that there is no means test for a disabled child or young person under 19.
12. The outcome of this assessment will indicate whether or not the person needs to make a contribution to the works. Someone on income support,

income-based jobseeker's allowance or in receipt of guaranteed state pension credit will not normally be required to make a contribution. The total amount payable is £30,000.

13. Surrey County Council has a discretionary Major Adaptations Budget that will 'top-up' the amount needed if the person does not meet the DFG threshold or the amount awarded is not enough to cover the cost of the works. This is also means-tested requiring a financial assessment.
14. Some more complex adaptations, especially those that involve structural work, may require planning permission. The applicant is normally advised early on in the process whether or not this will be necessary. This can add to the overall length of the process.
15. The grant will only then be paid when the council has determined that the work has been completed to their satisfaction and in accordance with the grant approval. The grant is paid via an invoice, demand or receipt of payment for the works. The grant may be paid in instalments throughout the process or at the end once works are completed. The grant may be paid direct to the contractor or it will be made in a form payable to the contractor.

Scoping the review

16. It was identified very early in the development of the Group that the scope was very broad and would need to be narrowed greatly. Concerns to be addressed included the delays in the DFG process and an alleged backlog of residents awaiting an Occupational Therapy assessment as part of this process.
17. It had already been recognised that there were significant delays in the DFG process due to the amount of joint working required between the County Council Adult Social Care directorate, District and Borough Housing and Planning departments and external Housing Associations. An officer-led group made up of District and Borough housing officers and County Council Adult Social Care staff was already underway, looking at how the DFG process could be improved.
18. Following discussions with officers in Adult Social Care in December 2011, the Group agreed that there was no need to duplicate work on improving the DFG process but that the Scrutiny Officer would attend these meetings to represent the Group. The Group were also reassured by Adult Social Care officers that a framework agreement is in place to manage the unpredictable demand for OT assessments. This agreement is still in place and is used on occasion to ensure no one has to wait long for an assessment.
19. The Group discussed with officers the concern that delays in receiving an OT assessment were also contributing to the underspending each year of the Major Adaptations Budget (MAB). The MAB is set at around £700k each year. Officers explained that, while the money can be committed to building projects in one financial year, these projects may not be completed in the same financial year. The amount that is

underspent must be rolled over into the next financial year in order to pay for the works once they are completed. The Group was assured that this would be expected of this budget, given the complexity and length of time required for some building works.

20. The scope of the review was narrowed to specifically look at outcomes for residents. Witness sessions were discussed but it was agreed that many of the residents who receive adaptations would find it difficult to attend a meeting at County Hall. A survey of residents who had a completed adaptation in the last 12 months was proposed instead, and this was agreed. The results of the survey would then be reviewed and a decision made on whether further scrutiny was required.

The Survey

Preparing the survey

21. In February and March 2012, the Group sat down with officers from Adult Social Care to discuss the content of the survey and the number to be surveyed.
22. The Group agreed it would be beneficial to ask questions around the type of adaptation, length of time needed, whether planning permission was required, level of advice given and service user involvement. It was important to have an equal number from each of the 11 Boroughs and Districts and to have an equal age range, as adaptations are for anyone of any age who may need one. Officers agreed with these parameters and the Group agreed on a figure of 100 residents to be surveyed.
23. Officers advised that it would be useful to get service user input into the survey to ensure it was accessible and asked the right questions. They had a service user in mind and would ensure his input, as well as that of Quality Assurance colleagues, before the survey was sent out.
24. In order to obtain responses from all 11 boroughs and districts, the survey was sent out in two rounds. The first round yielded responses from seven boroughs and districts and the second round ensured a response from the rest. The survey is at **Appendix 1** and the results report is at **Appendix 2**.

Survey results

25. The Group was pleased to see that there was generally a high level of satisfaction with the adaptation process amongst those surveyed. It would appear from the results that those that were not satisfied had not been as involved or supported to be involved in the process as a whole. This can be due to individual circumstances in what family or carers are available and the relationship with the housing department or social worker during the process.
26. Related to this, it would appear that it is also important to ensure the right information is available at the right time. The free text boxes at the end of the survey offered respondents an opportunity to indicate what could be

improved and the communication and information during the process were highlighted as needing improvement for some people. This includes information about the grant application process, how and when to apply for planning permission and other relevant communication.

27. Lessons should be learned from these results. Both the Adult Social Care directorate and District and Borough housing departments need to ensure that clients are supported and involved throughout the adaptation process.
28. Despite the problem of a few adaptations taking a very long time to complete, the majority of respondents indicated their adaptation took less than six months. Unsurprisingly, when an adaptation required planning permission the overall length of time was much longer. An interesting point that was made that it seemed that, often, more time was taken to obtain the DFG than it did to complete the adaptation.
29. Both Runnymede and Elmbridge received very positive results with 100% of respondents indicating either 'very' or 'quite' satisfied overall. The lowest positive responses were Spelthorne and Reigate & Banstead with 63% and 67% respectively.
30. Overall, the survey was seen as a success and provided useful information for the Group and the Service itself. Ultimately, the issues remain with the DFG process itself and the interactions between the County Council's Adult Social Care, District and Borough Housing and Planning Departments, external Housing Associations and with the clients themselves. The results of the survey were shared with the joint County and Borough and District DFG officer group and it is expected that they will work together to ensure areas for improvement are addressed.

DFG Officer Group Workshop

31. Following consideration of the survey results, the Group agreed that there would not be much benefit from any further scrutiny on its part but that the most important priority had to be streamlining the DFG process. The DFG Officer Group had been meeting for more than a year but had not yet effected any improvements in the process.
32. Adult Social Care officers suggested that a workshop be set up for the DFG Officer Group and its sole purpose would be to identify the obstacles and problems with the DFG process. This was proposed and agreed by the Member Reference Group in October 2012 and the DFG Officer Group in November 2012. The workshop was held on 17 January 2013. Attendees included Senior Managers from Adult Social Care Personal Care & Support and Transformation and Housing Managers, including private sector, from each Borough and District. A majority of the Boroughs and Districts were represented at the meeting.

Workshop Outcomes

33. At one of the first meetings of the DFG officer group, a list of issues was put together on which the group hoped to work on improving. The workshop focused on identifying where work had been completed on each issue and what further work needed to be done.
34. The following issues were identified and work discussed to take forward improvements.
 - 34.1 Data sharing between the County Council and boroughs and districts – a spreadsheet exists that all County Council Adult Social Care staff are expected to update with information on the DFG process as it progresses for each client they refer or are involved with process for. Officers in Adult Social Care indicated that they would speak with the Adult Social Care Business Intelligence team who gather this information to assess how it is used and whether relevant information can be shared with each Borough or District. There will also be work done to ensure that all social care staff update the referrer (e.g. the Borough or District officer) on the status of a case regularly.
 - 34.2 Establishing a coherent client pathway – an officer in Adult Social Care and two District and Borough officers will set up a separate group to review and revise the 2005 DFG guidance that is shared between the County Council and the Districts and Boroughs. This will also include work on producing an updated and more simplified process flowchart.
 - 34.3 Two different financial assessments – the group has learned that there is no way to avoid the two separate financial assessments. This is vital to the process and is not able to be changed.
 - 34.4 Ensuring clients are kept informed during the process – booklets and leaflets have already been prepared. Officers from the Boroughs and Districts and Adult Social Care will work together to review these and update them where necessary.
 - 34.5 Delays in receiving and the quality of the Occupational Therapist reports – officers in Adult Social Care will work to ensure that all Occupational Therapists, including those from the outsourcing company, use the same report template. There will also be work done to tackle local problems as they arise. It was agreed that the report only needed to include basic information such as the outcomes the client wished to achieve with the adaptation and basic daily living/medical and carer information. There is no need for the report to be specific in suggesting where equipment should go; this is the job of the surveyor. Simplifying the requirements and ensuring this best practice is adapted across the Occupational Therapist service, including those that are outsourced, should reduce delays in receiving the report and ensure all are to the same quality standard.
 - 34.6 Delays in procuring and servicing equipment – an officer from Runnymede Borough Council will take forward work on identifying ways to recycle equipment, such as stairlifts and ramps, and addressing issues in servicing the equipment.

- 34.7 Ensuring those with low to moderate needs are signposted and supported – the SmartAssist website is a self assessment tool for people to identify their equipment needs. Visitors to the site will answer questions about their needs and the tool will identify the best equipment that may help them with daily activities, such as large cutlery or large number phones. People with identified low to moderate needs are signposted to this website. In October 2012 alone, there were 800 visitors to the website. Adult Social Care has now put a link to each Borough and District's DFG pages in order to signpost visitors to them as well.
35. The group finished the meeting by agreeing how it would continue in future. It was agreed that a quarterly meeting would be best, with the next scheduled for March/April 2013. That meeting will consist of updating on work on areas outlined above and identifying any further work needed. There will be continued involvement of Adult Social Care Senior Managers. The group will provide a forum for County Council Adult Social Care and Borough and District Housing Managers to discuss issues and identify ways of working together to address them.

Conclusions:

36. The Occupational Therapy Task & Finish Group has worked with officers in Adult Social Care to assess the quality of the Occupational Therapy service for residents of Surrey. It has identified that the majority of residents are happy with the service they receive in the process of applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant. There are some minor improvements that need to be made and the already-convened DFG officer group is best placed to take these forward.

Financial and value for money implications

37. The Major Adaptations Budget in Adult Social Care is set at around £700,000 per year. The under-spending or over-spending of this budget affects the overall Adult Social Care budget.

Equalities Implications

38. In all aspects of this work, the Group has been mindful of ensuring equality. Officers were instructed to ensure a broad range of survey recipients.

Risk Management Implications

39. None identified.

Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy

40. The work of this Group supports Adult Social Care in ensuring residents of Surrey are supported to identify their needs and receive a timely assessment of those needs. It supports the aims of ensuring that those in need of social care are supported to remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible.

Recommendations:

41. The Select Committee is requested to endorse the work of the Task & Finish Group and the Disabled Facilities Grant officer group.
42. Adult Social Care is encouraged to learn lessons from the survey results and continue to work productively with the DFG officer group to ensure continuous improvement to the DFG process for all residents.
43. The Select Committee should continue to monitor the work of the DFG group and requests an update report in six to nine months.

Next steps:

The next DFG officer group will be in March/April 2013.

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Sources/background papers:

- Notes of Occupational Therapy Task & Finish Group meetings
- Department for Communities & Local Government booklet on Disabled Facilities Grant process
- Adult Social Care Business Intelligence report on outcomes of Disabled Facilities Grant survey
- Budget Monitoring report to Select Committee 14 February 2013