



**Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

**Tuesday, 21st September
2021**

Subject: Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) Process and Update Report

Report by:	Diane Krochmal Assistant Director Homes and Communities
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Purpose / Summary:	This report outlines the current process for DFG's, current challenges with the service and looks at ways in which the service can move forward

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. Members support the proposal for an internal review of the DFG process
2. Members offer suggestions for means of improvement, to be shared with the team undertaking the internal review
3. Members agree to receive a further report into the outcome of the internal review, in due course.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None

(N.B.) Where there are legal implications the report **MUST** be seen by the MO

Financial : None

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Staffing : None

(N.B.) Where there are staffing implications the report **MUST** have a HR Ref

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

NB: Please explain how you have considered the policy's impact on different groups (for example: young people, elderly, ethnic minorities, LGBT community, rural residents, disabled, others).

Data Protection Implications : None

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: None

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations: None

Health Implications: DFG's have an impact on the residents of West Lindsey in regards to health. DFG's can assist people to remain living within their home environment which is determined as the best place people can be to ensure they are happy, healthy and can thrive in their environment.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

Risk Assessment :

N/A

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

x

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

x

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the current position as reported through Corporate Policy and Resource Committee and details the exact process undertaken by applicants of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's)
- 1.2 The report also highlights some of the current issues affecting DFG performance then goes on to detail ways in which the service has changed and proposes new ways for moving forward with the service in the future.

2. Current position

- 2.1 The information below is a comparison of the figures over the past 4 years for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). These give a picture of the increase in demand for adaptations across West Lindsey over the last three and a half years and reflects the information provided to committee through Performance and Delivery reports.

	Referrals	Referral to completion	Completions	Spend
2018/2019	131	127 days	69	£532,867
2019/2020	158	162 days	104	£708,268
2020/2021	176	189 days	55	£516,330
2021/2022 YTD (end July 2021)	46	239 days	39	£532,867

- 2.2 Referrals are received from Adult Social Care Occupational Therapists and include information on the client and the adaptation required.
- 2.3 The time between referral and completion are from when WLDC receive the referral from LCC to when the works are fully completed. This only refers to the time the client has spent within the WLDC service.
- 2.4 Completions are the number of people who have received a DFG and not necessarily how many individual adaptations have been carried out as a client can require more than one adaptation in their home to remain independent and all adaptations are completed before the application is marked as complete.
- 2.5 Spend is the amount of money spent on the completed adaptations.

3. Customer satisfaction

- 3.1 Customer satisfaction is undertaken after completion of the grant. Ten questions are asked of the clients including their opinion on West Lindsey staff, the works, the contractors and the outcomes from their own perspective. Below is a summary of the responses from the past year:

- 94% were overall satisfied with the service they received from WLDC staff
 - 87.5% were overall satisfied with the contractor who completed the work
 - 100% think they were treated with respect throughout the process
 - 94% agreed the adaptation has helped them to be independent within their home
- 3.2 A list of all compliments received by the service since January 2021 has been included at appendix 1.

4. Procurement

- 4.1 Currently there are three procurement mechanisms used within the DFG process;
- Contract with Obam to undertake all Stairlifts, Throughfloor Lifts and modular ramps
 - Framework which includes 23 Contractors to undertake “minor” adaptations detailed as level access showers, ramps, door widening and small conversions
 - Three quote tenders for “larger” adaptations and works outside of the scope of the framework
- 4.2 The framework includes a schedule of rates and contractors are awarded works on a rotational basis.
- 4.3 Obam are a company based within West Lindsey which supports the Strategic Aim within the Corporate plan to ensure that economic growth within the district is sustainable. Obam went through a procurement process to be the provider for those adaptations and currently deliver a fantastic service to West Lindsey residents through both DFG and those who access their services privately.

5. Outcomes

- 5.1 West Lindsey District Council have statutory responsibility for administration of DFG adaptations under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. As a two tier authority, the responsibility for the spend of the grants lay with WLDC, but the determination of what adaptation is required and the outcomes from those works being carried out sits with Adult Social Care.
- 5.2 In 2018, it was agreed that the District Councils and County Council would move to using the same software system for DFG referrals. This was in an attempt for LCC to be able to clearly define and measure the outcomes that undertaking adaptations in people’s homes delivers. It was also thought that in time, a monetary value could be devised for those outcomes to give a clear picture of the savings undertaking DFG’s has on the healthcare system as a whole.

- 5.3 LCC have been monitoring those outcomes and a brief review of them was provided by LCC for the previous year (below.) The outcomes are not provided as part of current DFG monitoring as it is not an element that WLDC have direct influence over.

In the period 2020/21, in West Lindsey 52 DFG applications were completed with 46 outcomes confirmed by OT within the period. Of these 97% of the proposed outcomes were met by the adaptation. 229 outcomes were achieved. Of those, the better care fund objectives were as follows:

1 person was able to return home from hospital with the adaptation, 8 people enabled to stay at home and prevent a care home admission, and;

17 people were enabled to remain independent.

6. Current processes

- 6.1 Appendix 2 details the process a person will go through who accesses the Adult Social Care system, and consequently are referred to West Lindsey for a DFG.
- 6.2 It is important to highlight the work that is undertaken by Adult Social Care prior to a referral being made for a DFG. DFG is one option available to Occupational Therapists (OT's) to assist a customer to remain living independently within their home. The options will be exhausted before a request for an adaptation is submitted to WLDC.
- 6.3 The diagram has been colour coded to depict the responsible party for each element of the process to assist with understanding which elements of the process are completed by WLDC.
- 6.4 Three case studies have been included at appendix 3 to give an idea of the detail included within the DFG application process. The reason behind this is to give a clear picture of the work involved in the cases and to give members an understanding of both how complex some of the cases can be but also how different they all are.

7 Work undertaken outside the DFG process

- 7.1 The independent living service offered by West Lindsey goes above what is detailed in the DFG process diagram. West Lindsey are in contact with Occupational Therapist outside of the DFG process on a regular basis to determine that all is being done to ensure all people who access the Adult Social Care system are receiving the best possible service. This is in the form of a regular OT/WLDC meeting, which is a forum to ensure information is being shared and issues can be addressed with the system as a whole. These meetings have also helped to form the West Lindsey Housing Assistance policy along with building valuable relationships between WLDC and OT's.
- 7.2 The Senior Officer represents West Lindsey at the Countywide Moving Forward with DFG group. This group sits under the Housing, Health

and Care Delivery group and looks to improve the DFG process across the county as well as sharing good practice.

- 7.3 The Senior officer is also responsible for the Housing Assistance Policy and ensuring it is up to date and reflects the needs as required by people of West Lindsey. This policy outlines where West Lindsey will go over and above what is required by law to deliver under DFG's and is a more flexible approach to ensure that residents can be helped in other ways to remain living independently within the home.

8. Current issues

- 8.1 Time frames for the completion of DFG applications have increased over the past few years. There are a number of factors which influence the time taken to complete adaptations through DFG's, below is a summary of some of the current issues faced throughout the DFG process which have had an impact on the overall service.
- 8.2 Covid-19 – During the initial lockdown of 2020, DFG works, WLDC home visits and LCC Home visits all ground to a halt. This 3-month stop period had a huge impact in the timeframes for DFG both in the short term and then beyond that due to the backlog that incurred and this is still a major factor in the increase in end-to-end times of grants. Even though the period for the grants halting was only 3 months, the impact of Covid-19 in terms of contractor availability and materials is still on going now alongside the backlog that occurred during the stop period.
- 8.3 As West Lindsey operate a framework for adaptations with contractors rotating, the contractors do undertake private work alongside DFG adaptations. The increase in the amount of people wanting work undertaking has grown exponentially meaning the contractors are taking on more work and either turning down work offered by WLDC or it's taking them longer to complete the adaptations due to other commitments or material and labour availability. The time taken to undertake adaptations by contractors has risen more than any other elements of the process.
- 8.4 Procurement – larger adaptations require three quotations. As above, contractors are busier than ever and materials are often in short supply. The procurement of larger adaptations is in turn taking longer and in some cases has not been possible to obtain the required amount of quotes to fulfil the requirement.
- 8.5 Staffing – The team has been hit by staffing sickness and has had to rely heavily upon other part time staff and an apprentice to increase their working hours to cover these periods of absence. Due to the nature of the absence, it was not known if it would be long or short term and so cover in the interim was hard to determine.
- 8.6 Landlords – When adaptations are required in rented properties, (registered providers in particular) it can take a long time for those to be

approved. The Senior Officer has worked closely with the team at Acis and this time has reduced significantly. However, there was an issue with a Longhurst property, which required investigation, and in turn, Longhurst would not allow any adaptations in their properties until it was resolved. This increased the wait time for five adaptations and their residents were required to wait even longer for their adaptations. This issue has been resolved and WLDC are working alongside Longhurst in the same way as with Acis to try to improve the speed of this process.

- 8.7 Changes of circumstances – More regularly than before, OT's are changing the adaptations throughout the process, this prolongs the time as the adaptations will go back and forth from contractors, WLDC and OTs before a final scheme is agreed. When challenged on this, the OT's have responded with a few reasons for this happening including:
- more people having complex needs that can change rapidly
 - the impact Covid-19 is having on the length of time between visits, if visits have even taken place at all.
 - a high turnover of OT's meaning that inconsistencies and different approaches can elongate the time taken. Alongside that, newer OT's are also not always equipped with the relevant information to understand what can and cannot be included within a DFG and although we work with them, it can take time to gain the required level of understanding of this.

9. Moving forward

- 9.1 The reorganisation of the portfolio's at West Lindsey with the creation of the Homes, Health and Wellbeing Team has enabled West Lindsey to realign the Independent Living Service to come under the health umbrella. This shift has put DFG's at the forefront of the health agenda at West Lindsey and ensures that DFG's is going to be looked at as part of the health system, rather than as a purely housing related function which will put the people at the centre of the service.
- 9.2 It is important to reiterate that the team of equivalent to three FTE's are delivering a service, which has huge value to the residents of West Lindsey and they take a lot of pride in their work. Even though the end-to-end times for DFG's have increased, the work being undertaken by officers is still very positive and they are making a huge difference to so many people's lives every single day. Every adaptation being undertaken has the opportunity to change someone's life for the better.
- 9.3 Below are some areas where change has already taken place and we are yet to see the impact along with potential suggestions pulled from different sources as to how the service could move forward from its current position.
- 9.4 Technical officer – due to the increase in workload and the demand for complex adaptations increasing, a business case was determined to employ a Technical Officer to improve the service being offered to residents who require larger adaptations. The Technical Officer started

in post in November 2020 and so the impact of that appointment is yet to be reflected within the end-to-end time figures. Alongside that, the end-to-end times could have been much higher than they are currently with the impact of Covid-19 should this Technical Officer not have been in post and that is something we will be unable to see a measured improvement from.

- 9.5 Process update and benchmarking – it is thought an in depth internal review of the process, which can include breaking down each step by time taken, and then benchmarking that against other authorities could highlight where improvements in the process could be made. It is thought this could be undertaken by an independent party, as it would give a more subjective view. The Assistance Director for Regulatory and Change Management has offered the services of her Change and Performance team to begin to look at this in more detail.
- 9.6 Strategic Lead for Lincolnshire – West Lindsey are going to be part funding a Strategic Lead for Healthy and Accessible Homes Lincolnshire who will be hosted by Boston Borough Council. This will be funded out of the DFG funding ring-fenced for delivery of the service. As Strategic Lead, the post holder will develop and enable implementation of a clear work programme and strategy, which will lead to the identification, development and delivery of options to progress a commitment in Lincolnshire to better embed adaptations as part of a system-wide approach to keeping people independent in a home of their own. This post is due to be in place by the end of 2021. JD can be found at appendix 4.
- 9.7 Procurement – The Framework for delivery of the bulk of adaptations has been in place for 3 years. It is thought there could potentially be other procurement methods, which could decrease the amount of time that is taken for contractors to undertake adaptations. Options for this can be explored as part of the review of the service.
- 9.8 Recording mechanisms – Currently, one record is created per person, no matter what adaptations that person is requiring. Other councils set up one record per adaptation. For example, if a person required a stairlift and a level access shower this would be one record at WLDC where other councils set up one per adaptation to be able to monitor which takes longer and in turn report accurately on times taken per adaptation and this also assist with highlighting where improvements are required. WLDC currently give average end-to-end times but a stairlift can be installed in under a month where a complex extension for a child could take 18 months to complete. A breakdown of this could give a clearer picture in terms of actual service delivery.
- 9.9 Outcomes – due to the role WLDC plays in the adaptation process, the outcomes have never been monitored and fed through committee so members can understand the impact that DFG's has on the everyday lives of its residents. The information presented to members could include genuine outcomes for residents and the impact DFG's have on so many people to ensure that this positive message can play a part in

the performance of the service. Even though it is vital that adaptations are undertaken as quickly as possible, what is just as vital is ensuring that adaptation is right for the person, and a quick service does not always reflect the best service for the disabled or vulnerable person.

- 9.10 Audit - DFG's has not been audited on the DFG processes within the past 6 years with only the financial processes being completed through audit. This could be an opportunity for DFG's to be put forward for audit which could in turn determine other ways of working which could improve the service.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 Members support the proposal for an internal review of the DFG process
- 10.2 Members offer suggestions for means of improvement, to be shared with the team undertaking the internal review.
- 10.3 Members agree to receive a further report into the outcome of the internal review, in due course.