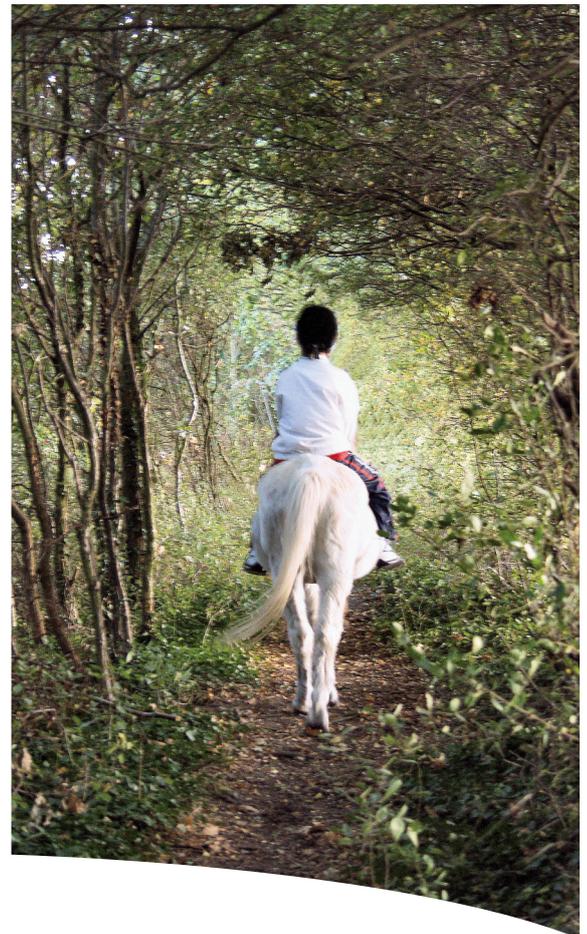


# Final Report of the Project Team to the Review Committee

# Review of the Disabled Facility Grants Process



# REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

## 1 Index

1	Index.....	2
2	Glossary.....	2
3	Introduction.....	3
4	Terms of reference .....	5
5	Methodology .....	6
6	Findings.....	7
6.1	Disabled Facilities Grants.....	7
6.2	Grant Application Process .....	9
6.3	Number of applications.....	10
6.4	Process.....	11
6.5	Home Improvement Agency .....	15
6.6	Other Authorities.....	16
7	Recommendations.....	20
8	References .....	22

## 2 Glossary

DFG	Disabled Facilities Grant
ECC	Essex County Council
HA	Housing Association
HCS	Head of Community Services
HGCRA	Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act
HIA	Home Improvement Agency
HTO	Housing Technical Officer
ITR	Initial Test of Resources
LPI	Local Performance Indicator
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
OT	Occupational Therapist
PEHO	Principal Environmental Health Officer
RDC	Rochford District Council
RHA	Rochford Housing Association
RHMAG	Rochford home maintenance and adaptation grant
SEHO	Senior Environmental Health Officer
SHM	Strategic Housing Manager

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### 3 Introduction

- 3.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) are monitored at Rochford District Council (RDC) by way of Local performance indicators. They monitor both the time taken relating to the Council's actions within the process and also the time taken by the Home Improvements Agency (HIA) and the applicant during the process. Whilst target times for each stage of the process have been reduced over recent years the actual time taken has not.
- 3.2 This review of the DFG process has been prompted by the failure to meet the targets for the local performance indicators and the real issues that the time delays cause to the vulnerable people that have applied for a DFG to assist them coping in their day to day lives.
- 3.3 Currently the target for completing a Disabled Facilities Grant from receipt of the Occupational Therapist's recommendation to the completion of the work is 40 weeks. The average time taken for completion of a DFG is 50 weeks. The Care Quality Commission's national target for completion of DFGs is 18 weeks and certain authorities are achieving this target.
- 3.4 DFGs were introduced by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act (HGCRA) 1996. Since that time the Government has increased funding almost on an annual basis and despite the current budget cutting by Central Government the funding for DFGs has not been cut.
- 3.5 Whilst the Government issues annual regulations called the Housing Renewal Grants Regulations which govern how Local Authorities administer Disabled Facilities Grants the last major change to the regulations was in 2007. At this time the means test in respect of grants for children was scrapped and subsequently the maximum grants amount was raised from £25,000 to £30,000.
- 3.6 A DFG is only available to people who are disabled within the meaning of the National Assistance Act 1948. This means that a DFG will not be granted to a person who is merely elderly or retired. The DFG is there to give the applicants a quality of life. However, in some cases where the applicant is elderly, the time taken for the whole process to be completed has meant that they have little time to benefit from the adaptation before their requirements change. The lack of the adaptation can often mean that the applicant's condition deteriorates faster than would otherwise be the case. There is anecdotal evidence that indicates that in some cases applicants are waiting nearly two years before their required adaptation is provided.
- 3.7 A number of studies have recognised that there is a financial benefit to the Government as a whole in providing DFGs that enable

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

applicants to remain in their own homes. When weighed up against the cost of a place in a residential home, the cost of a DFG which allows an applicant to remain in their own home makes financial sense. However, there is no established structural links between DFG budgets and the statutory beneficiaries of their preventative outcomes; acute health service and social care budget holders.

- 3.8 There is already pressure on the DFG budget across the whole of the Country and this will only increase as people are living longer and the percentage of the older population increases. In 2007 the population of the Rochford District over 65 was 15,244 and this figure is projected to increase to 20,600 by 2020.

## **4 Terms of reference**

- 4.1 To examine the statutory and discretionary processes involved in allocating Disabled Facilities Grants.
- 4.2 To establish what Agencies are involved in the processes and what role they fulfil.
- 4.3 To determine possible ways in which the Disabled Facilities Grant process can be improved.

## **5 Methodology**

- 5.1 The project team received an initial presentation from the Head of Community Services and the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions. This was to allow the Members of the Committee to gain an overall understanding of how the Disabled Facilities Grants system worked and who was involved in the process.
- 5.2 Following the initial presentation the project team decided to see individuals from both the District Council's Strategic Housing Unit and the Papworth Trust. The Committee also examined the work that the Community Wellbeing and Older People Policy & Scrutiny Committee had undertaken at Essex County Council (ECC) relating to the activity of Occupational Therapists at ECC.
- 5.3 During the course of the Review the Community & Older People Policy & Scrutiny Committee at ECC commenced its own review of the DFG process taking evidence from various housing officers across the County. An associated meeting was attended by the District Council's Overview & Scrutiny Officer as an observer.
- 5.4 The project team also looked at other Authorities and the reports they have published relating to DFGs, to identify best practice methods that could be introduced at Rochford DC.

## **6 Findings**

### **6.1 Disabled Facilities Grants**

6.1.1 Disabled Facilities Grants are administered by Local Authorities under the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and applications for grant can be made by owners, tenants, landlords and by occupiers of qualifying houseboats and mobile homes.

6.1.2 A grant is mandatory for essential adaptations to give a disabled person better freedom of movement around the home and to access essential facilities within it. Where necessary it can also provide the essential facilities themselves. Types of eligible work include:-

- widening doorways and installing ramps;
- provision of a shower in place of a bath;
- installation of a stair lift to enable access to a bedroom or bathroom, or provision of ground floor facilities;
- improvement or provision of a heating system.

6.1.3 Grants for owner-occupiers and tenants are means tested, except where the works are for the benefit of a disabled child. The test looks at the income and capital of the disabled person and their spouse or partner and calculates their average weekly income. This is set against an assessment of basic needs represented by a range of premiums and allowances to reflect outgoings. Where the person's resources are more than the assessment, then they will have to contribute to the cost of the works. If the disabled person is in receipt of income support, income based job-seekers allowance or guaranteed pension credit; they will not normally have to make a contribution.

6.1.4 The maximum amount of grant that can be paid is currently £30,000. Local Authorities do, however, have discretionary powers under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, to top up a DFG. Under current Council Policy, the Rochford Home Maintenance and Adaptation Grant (RH MAG) can be used to provide a top up of up to £10,000, although in practice this has not needed to be utilised for this purpose in the last three years.

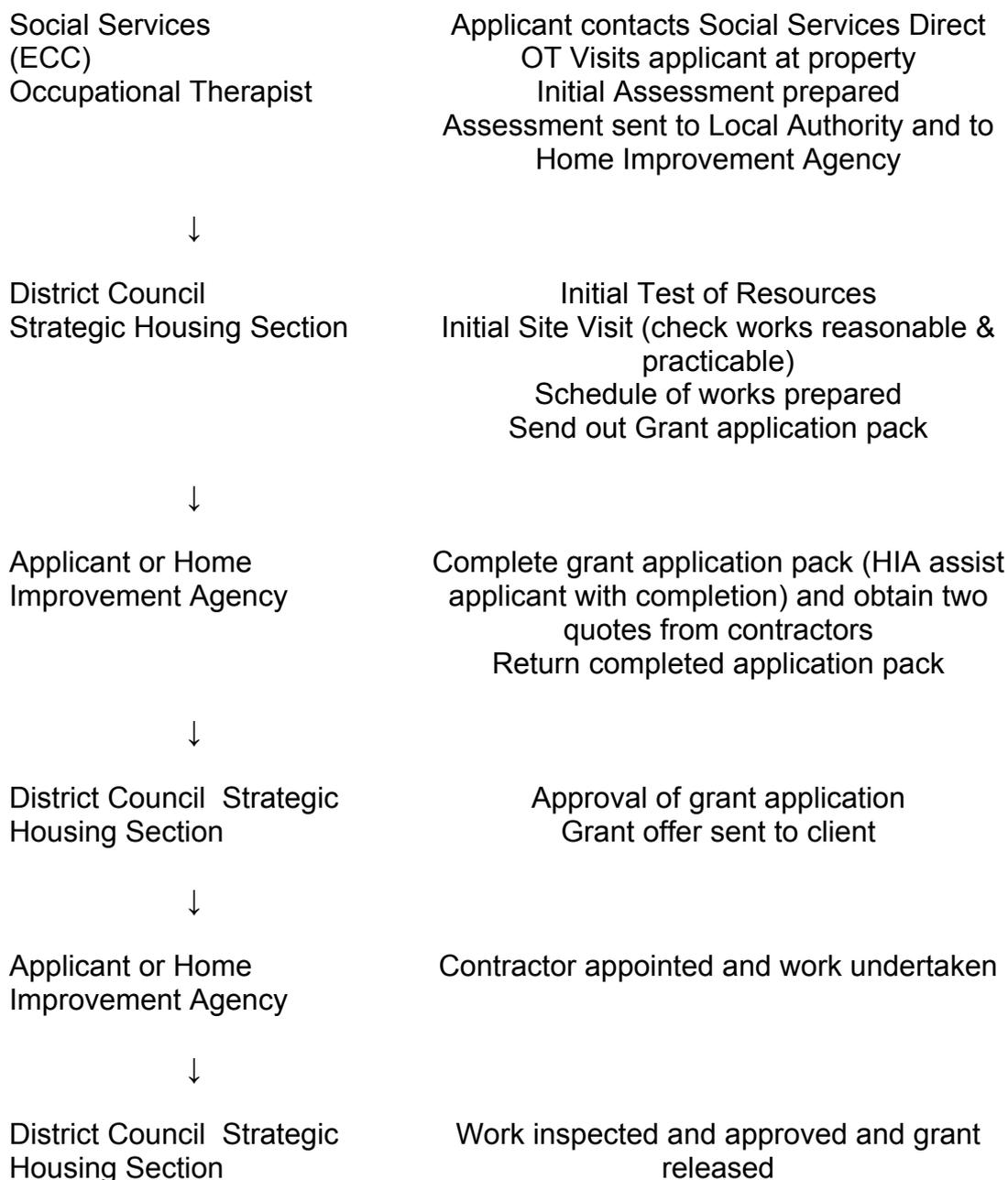
6.1.5 To be entitled to a grant an applicant usually contacts Social Services and obtains an ECC Occupational Therapist (OT) recommendation as to the type of adaptation needed. An applicant can provide a recommendation from a private OT but it will then be necessary for the Strategic Housing Section to contact an ECC OT to confirm that the adaptation is 'necessary and appropriate' to meet the needs of the disabled applicant.

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

- 6.1.6 The OT recommendation is sent directly to the Local Authority and also the Home Improvement Agency. Whilst applicants do not have to use the Home Improvement Agency it is usually recommended and all reasonable charges can be included within the grant application.
- 6.1.17 Most applications for DFGs are from private home owners although Housing Association (HA) tenants can also apply. Rochford Housing Association (RHA) has its own pot of money for adaptations which was built into the contract at the time of the housing transfer.
- 6.1.18 Legally the Authority has to deal with HA tenants & private owners in the same way although the Authority does ask a HA to make a contribution to any application for adaptations. It depends on the HA as to whether any funds are forthcoming.
- 6.1.19 There is a slightly different financial calculation for owners and tenants but both groups are entitled to apply for funds for DFGs.
- 6.1.20 As part of the Initial Test of Resources (ITR) the District Council's Housing Technical Officer (HTO) enters the financial details of the applicant into a software programme to obtain the figure for an applicant's contribution. The figure is based on how much available income an applicant has that could be used to fund a loan. Allowances are given for age, children etc. Capital does count, with savings over £6000 considered to generate a weekly income. No allowance is made for travel expenses. The project team noted how on one case this had caused issues for an applicant who commuted to work and did not have the disposable income that the calculation assumed.
- 6.1.21 If people are honest during the ITR then it provides a fairly accurate guide for the client. Approximately 80% of applicants do not have to make a contribution to the grant due to the benefits that they receive. Couples are treated as one applicant so both incomes are taken into account, although any other members of the household are not included in the calculation.
- 6.1.22 Where applications are made in respect of children under 18 there is no means test required.
- 6.1.23 At the current time Essex County Council is undertaking an experiment whereby one of its OTs has been seconded to Basildon Borough Council. This started in September and the initial feedback is that it has resulted in an increased number of joint visits by the OT and the Housing Officer which means that problems are being resolved much sooner, thus speeding up the process for the applicant. It is understood that a similar experiment is proposed by Norfolk County Council for next year.

# REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

## 6.2 Grant Application Process



## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

### 6.3 Number of applications

6.3.1 The following table gives a breakdown of the number of applications that Rochford DC has received over the last four years:-

Year	No. of OT recommendations received	No Cancelled	% Cancelled	No. Taken forward	Recommendations for Graded Floor Showers	
					No. Received	No Cancelled
2008	33	12	36%	21	21	9
2009	40	14	35%	26	24	8
2010	62	20	32%	42	22	10
2011 (to 21/11/11)	49	11	22%	38	35	9

6.3.2 As at the 21/11/2011 there were 53 applications outstanding as follows:-

- 9 Awaiting completion of ITR or scheduling
- 20 Application forms sent out for completion
- 4 Application forms received and being processed
- 20 Grants approved and awaiting completion of work

6.3.3 The project team also noted that during the past year it had taken between 8 and 13 weeks for some clients to receive an application form from the Council due to the application form being redesigned.

6.3.4 The local performance figures that are reported quarterly are based on the cases that are processed during the quarter. This can result in the average time being assessed on as few as 6 applications. If there is one application that has taken a long time it can distort the figures. Also, as the time taken for a stairlift and an extension are widely different, the figures do not necessarily give a clear indication of the performance being achieved.

6.3.5 Certain cases where the applicant has requested the work be reconsidered or where the OT has amended their recommendation during the process can result in delays being introduced which are outside the control of the processing officers. It is therefore suggested

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

that, subject to strict control the performance in relation to some cases is reported separately with the breakdown of the reasons for delay.

### Recommendation No 1

That the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services agree to:-

1. Separate the Local Performance Indicators relating to DFGs into the different categories;
2. For performance management purposes record the timing for certain applications separately with a full breakdown of the time taken and reasons for each stage.

### 6.4 Process

6.4.1 Following receipt of an Occupational Therapist's recommendation the remainder of the Disabled Facilities Grant process can be broken down into 4 stages. These are:-

- Sending out of the ITR form and application form
- Completion and return of the application form
- Approval of application
- Undertaking the work and payment of grant

#### **Sending out of the ITR form and application form**

6.4.2 The Housing Technical Officer will send out the Initial Test of Resources form for the applicant to complete. This form, while not a legal requirement, provides the applicant with an early indication as to whether a grant may be payable.

6.4.3 In some cases the OTs ask the Authority to send out the ITR form to clients in advance of submitting their recommendations in an attempt to speed up the process.

6.4.4 The amount of grant that an applicant is entitled to and the amount of an applicant's contribution is set by a Government Formula ( the aforementioned means test). The Strategic Housing section wondered whether, instead of sending out the ITR to establish if the applicant is on certain means tested benefits and therefore exempt from a further test, it would be possible to obtain details from the Revenue and Benefits Department at the Council. However, due to Data Protection rules, this is not possible.

6.4.5 The project team considered that, whilst the ITR form was not a compulsory requirement, it did provide the applicants with an indication of whether a contribution would need to be made towards the grant.

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

The form can be found on the Council's web site and is a publicly available document. The team, therefore, felt that the sooner the applicant had the form the better. As their first contact would be with the OT from ECC, then it would be better for the OT to hand out the ITR form at that time.

### **Recommendation No 2**

That copies of the Initial Test of Resources form are supplied to the Occupational Therapists at Essex County Council in order that they can be handed out to clients as soon as the need for a DFG is identified by the Occupational Therapists.

- 6.4.6 The HTO will work out the possible client contribution from the information on the ITR form and will arrange to visit the property to ensure that the work is reasonable and practical and to draw up a schedule of works. Once this has been completed an application form will be sent out. This part of the process can be delayed if the HTO is not available due to holiday or other commitments.

### **Recommendation No 3**

That the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services examine ways in which the scheduling, Initial Test of Resources and the Means test parts of the process are resourced.

### **Completion and return of the application form**

- 6.4.7 Once the application has been sent out it is the responsibility of the applicant to complete the form and return it to the authority. In most cases the applicants use the Papworth Trust (the Home Improvement Agency (HIA), responsible for the Rochford District) to assist them with the completion of the forms. In those cases where planning applications are involved, then the HIA will arrange architects drawings and obtain planning permission.
- 6.4.8 The application form consists of 5 parts and is 12 pages long, with the majority of applicants only having to complete a maximum of 6 pages. The application is sent with a covering letter which gives details of the information and supporting documentation that is required. The application form only lists some of the documents that are required to support the application.
- 6.4.9 In addition to the application form applicants must provide:-

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

- Two estimates from different contractors of the cost of carrying out the works,
- Particulars of any preliminary or ancillary services or charges
- Certificate of future occupation (i.e. owner's certificate).
- Proof of title.
- Proof of the National Insurance Number for applicant and any other owner in the Household.
- Evidence of occupation of the property e.g. a utility bill (such as an electricity, gas, water, or landline telephone bill).
- Details of their finances for at least the last 6 months, (N.B. this does not apply to a child, or if the applicant is in receipt of income support ; the guarantee credit element of pension credit; the income related element of employment and support allowance; housing benefit; council tax benefit; income based jobseekers allowance; working tax credit with an income less than £15,050.00 or child tax credit with an income less than £15,050.00 ). They will need to provide copies of any of the following that are relevant:-
  - (a) The last 6 months' worth of wage/ salary slips.
  - (b) The last 6 months' worth of statements for all of their Bank, Post Office and Building Society Accounts (including ISA's and PEP's).
  - (c) Copies of their Pension/Benefit book front statement sheets, unless the money goes into their Bank, Post Office or Building Society Account.
  - (d) The last 6 months' worth of any occupational pension payment sheets, unless the money goes into their Bank, Post Office or Building Society account.
  - (e) Copies of all their Premium Bonds.
  - (f) Copies of all their National Savings Certificates.
  - (g) Copies of all their Share Certificates.
  - (h) Copies of any investments they hold and details of any re-investment payments – e.g. Unit Trusts, Distribution or Income Bonds, Annuities etc.
  - (i) Details of any other income.

6.4.10 Whilst the majority of applications forms are sent to the Home Improvement Agency who then arrange completion, the team felt that

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

the form should have a tick list to ensure that all relevant documentation was enclosed.

### **Recommendation No 4**

That, to ensure all relevant documents are enclosed, the application form should contain a tick list for documents that are required to be submitted with the form.

#### **Approval of application**

- 6.4.11 When the completed application form is received back from the applicant the financial details are examined for any discrepancies and then inputted to the software programme which calculates an applicant's contribution. If the information on the ITR form has been completed correctly then this will have given the applicant a good indication of their contribution towards the grant.
- 6.4.12 Delay can occur in this part of the process when there are papers missing from the supporting documentation and the Department has to write back to the applicant for further details.
- 6.4.13 When everything has been processed an offer of a grant is made to the applicant and they can proceed to have the work done.

#### **Undertaking the work and payment of grant**

- 6.4.14 Once the applicant has received the go ahead either they or the HIA will arrange for the chosen contractor to complete the work.
- 6.4.15 The project team has ascertained the value that could be associated with officers ensuring that they know when a contractor has been appointed and making sure that grants are progressed as swiftly as possible. In the case of another Authority officers appear to have monthly meeting with the HIA to make sure that all outstanding applications are being worked on or allocated to a contractor.
- 6.4.16 The project team felt that this approach was worthy of assimilation. Whilst regular meetings are held between Rochford Officers and the HIA, it is unclear whether all the outstanding applications are discussed.

### **Recommendation No 5**

That all outstanding applications are monitored with the Home Improvement Agency on a monthly basis.

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

6.4.17 When the work has been completed it is inspected and approved by the District Council and the grant is then released, either to the applicant or the Home Improvement Agency.

### 6.5 Home Improvement Agency

6.5.1 During the course of its investigation the project team met with representatives of the Papworth Trust (the Home Improvement Agency responsible for the Rochford District). The Trust was appointed by ECC from the 1 July 2011. It was already the HIA for Southend BC. Under the agreement with ECC the Trust now looks after Castlepoint BC, Brentwood DC, Basildon BC, Thurrock UA and Harlow DC.

6.5.2 The HIA contacts the client when it receives a copy of the OT's recommendation to arrange a visit to explain its services. Usually the client will use the HIA to assist them with the process, and the charges for the HIAs services can be added to the grant. The charge is usually 15% of the contract price, although it is negotiable when the contract is for major works.

6.5.3 The representative from the HIA will complete the ITR form with the applicant on their first visit and they have the same software as the Council, so can advise clients of any contributions they might have to make. In the cases where it is clear that the applicant would not qualify for a grant, or where they could not afford their contribution, the HIA will look at other alternatives such as equity release or other funding to enable the adaptation to be undertaken.

6.5.4 The HIA will assist the clients to complete the application forms and will arrange for quotes from their list of approved contractors. They are members of a collective procurement partnership and their contractors are able to obtain a discount on materials for jobs undertaken on behalf of the Papworth Trust. At the current time two quotes need to be obtained, which can add at least three weeks to the process.

6.5.5 Since the Papworth Trust took over the HIA contract in July it has been consulting contractors and the other Local Authorities in Essex with which it is involved. The Trust has also studied other Local Authorities and HIAs to gain an understanding of best practice and ways in which it could streamline the DFG process and reduce the time taken for the client.

6.5.6 From its own work and with the encouragement of some other Essex Authorities the Trust is currently exploring the possibility of fixed price contracts or a schedule of rates for certain types of adaptation, such as stairlifts or level access showers. With a fixed price contract or schedule of rates the comparison of prices between contractors takes

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

place each year and contractors are expected to provide agreed prices for installation of certain standard items.

- 6.5.7 The fixed price contract and schedule of rates approach would speed up the process in that competitive quotes do not have to be sought thereby saving time. The customer / HIA can just select a contractor from the approved list who has already agreed the price of the work.

### **Recommendation No 6**

That the Home Improvement Agency be encouraged to agree a schedule of rates or fixed price contracts for level access showers and stairlifts with its list of approved contractors.

- 6.5.8 If the above recommendation is agreed then it would be necessary for the Council to change its application process as it would not be necessary to request two quotes from the applicants for certain types of work covered by the fixed price contracts. Whilst the regulations in respect of DFGs state that there should be competitive quotations, fixed rate contracts can be utilised as there is a competitive element to the quotation process when contractors provide a fixed price quote.

### **Recommendation No 7**

That the application process for Level Access Showers and Stairlifts be amended so that schedule of rates or fixed price contracts, agreed by the Home Improvement Agency with its contractors, can be accepted.

- 6.5.9 Some Home Improvement Agencies have also taken steps to help local authorities get the most from their adaptations budgets. For example, Mendip and Bath and North Somerset Care & Repair Agency can supply refurbished second hand equipment, such as stairlifts, as well as three different makes of new stairlift. Second hand equipment is donated to the Agency and, after it has been refurbished, it is offered for sale to the public.
- 6.5.10 Such initiative has two major benefits. Firstly if a piece of equipment that is in stock then waiting times can be reduced. Secondly, because second hand equipment can be supplied straight away, and at a reduced cost in many cases, clients can decide to fund an adaptation themselves rather than go through the DFG process.

## **6.6 Other Authorities**

- 6.6.1 During the course of its investigation the project team considered what other Local Authorities were doing in respect of their DFG processes.

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

Some Authorities do not advertise the existence of these grants to avoid being inundated with applications. The majority are faced with an excess of demand over available funds. This has caused many authorities problems and has meant that they operate a waiting list with applicants waiting until the next financial year for further funds to be released before they can go ahead with any work. Alternatively, other Authorities appear to operate in a way whereby delays are built into the system so that funds can be apportioned throughout the year. In either situation applicants have to wait before the adaptation can be made to their home.

- 6.6.2 Some Authorities take a more proactive stance, looking at the process itself the number and type of applications they receive and ways to speed up the process to the benefit of the applicants.
- 6.6.3 During the course of its investigation the team identified a report prepared by Foundations, the National Body for home improvement agencies, called 'Adapting for a lifetime'. Published in January 2010 this document highlighted best practice by both local Authorities and Home Improvement Agencies across the Country.
- 6.6.4 Broadland District Council, in conjunction with Social Services staff, has developed the 'High and Dry Adaptations Project' as a model of partnership working for dealing with high volume, low priority requests for DFGs where the adaptation needed concerns personal bathing difficulties. The scheme enables disabled clients to trial relevant equipment in their home and, where adaptations are found to be the only answer, fast tracks the grant and building processes.
- 6.6.5 St Helens Borough Council, a Metropolitan Authority, has broken down its adaptations process into four key stages or levels:-

**Level 1** - All initial contacts and referrals are handled through customer services officers. These are passed on to the assessment officer who makes contact with the service user and establishes the nature, priority and urgency of each referral. Cases which require no further action or simple adaptations such as grab rails or the allocation of minor equipment can be authorised.

**Level 2** is defined as where the applicant has no difficulties other than bathing. A 'bath bus', which is a van loaded with a range of types of bath aids that can be tried in an individual service user's own home, visits the applicant. Many service users find they can adequately cope with a bath aid rather than being referred for a more complex (and costly) intervention such as a level-access shower. Targets established for Level 2 mean that all referrals are contacted within three working days, and that the 'bath bus' will visit within four weeks. This response is far faster than waiting for an adaptation and accounts for 11% of all referrals.

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

**Level 3** is defined as where the service user is experiencing difficulties in more than one area, but these are likely to result in providing non-complex adaptations such as ramps or straightforward level-access showers. The majority of referrals are dealt with at this level and an occupational therapy assistant oversees most of the assessments. At this level, referrals are contacted within three working days and the assessment is completed within 10 weeks. However, high priority assessments can be completed within 48 hours.

Finally, **Level 4** represents the most complex situations, and assessments are completed by qualified occupational therapists. Although qualified occupational therapists oversee all levels and can advise on any assessment, the allocation of less complex work to other staff with very specific training to undertake the task has resulted in improved timescales for assessment and completion at every level.

- 6.6.6 The information relating to these schemes was of interest to the project team as in excess of 50% of the OT recommendations received were for level access showers. It was felt that, if Social Services at ECC operated the same sort of service as Broadlands and St Helens then some of the clients that are currently being recommended for a level access shower might prefer to have a bath lift rather than suffer the time and disruption associated with the installation of a level access shower.

### Recommendation No 8

That the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services encourage Essex County Council Social Services Department to investigate the possibility of offering a similar service as St Helens Borough Council & Broadlands District Council.

- 6.6.7 Throughout the course of the project team's enquiries there was evidence, anecdotal and actual, relating to the economic benefits that can come from an adaptation paid for with a DFG. The report 'Better outcomes, lower costs'<sup>1</sup> outlined the work that had been done with regard to this study. Indeed the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions in their own study 'Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods -A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society'

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<sup>1</sup> Better outcomes, lower costs: Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvement and equipment: a review of the evidence (Heywood F and Turner L, 2001.)

## REVIEW OF THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCESS

included examples of the savings that could be achieved by timely adaptation.

- 6.6.8 National research suggests that the payback period for a DFG funded adaptation to be cost effective (as opposed to formal care) was approximately 23 weeks.
- 6.6.9 In considering the financial benefits of the Council providing DFGs for adaptations to the acute health service and social care budget holders, the project team noted that there were no established links between these bodies. The team was also mindful of the fact that the number of grants that the Council could agree was limited by the annual budget. As the Government is encouraging more partnership working and Rochford District Council already has links with the budget holders via the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), it was felt that LSP could be the forum to enquire whether budget holders would be willing to fund some adaptation work on the basis that this would reduce their care bills in the longer term.

### **Recommendation No 9**

That all of the acute health service and social care budget holders are approached via the Local Strategic Partnership to see if they would be willing to fund certain DFGs on the basis that this would reduce their care bill in the longer term.

- 6.6.10 During investigations it was clear to the project team that any Member can be faced with questions around DFGs at any time and might become involved in the process on behalf of their residents. To this end it was felt that it would be worthwhile for Members to receive a training course on the DFG process to assist them in their ward duties.

### **Recommendation No 10**

That Members are offered a training course on Disabled Facility Grants in the next phase of Member Training.

## 7 Recommendations

### Recommendation No 1

(Section 6.3.5 Page 11)

That the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services agree to:-

1. Separate the Local Performance Indicators relating to DFGs into the different categories;
2. For performance management purposes record the timing for certain applications separately with a full breakdown of the time taken and reasons for each stage.

### Recommendation No 2

(Section 6.4.5 Page 12)

That copies of the Initial Test of Resources form are supplied to the Occupational Therapists at Essex County Council in order that they can be handed out to clients as soon as the need for a DFG is identified by the Occupational Therapists.

### Recommendation No 3

(Section 6.4.6 Page 12)

That the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services examine ways in which the scheduling, Initial Test of Resources and the Means test parts of the process are resourced.

### Recommendation No 4

(Section 6.4.10 Page 14)

That, to ensure all relevant documents are enclosed, the application form should contain a tick list for documents that are required to be submitted with the form.

### Recommendation No 5

(Section 6.4.16 Page 14)

That all outstanding applications are monitored with the Home Improvement Agency on a monthly basis.

## **Recommendation No 6**

(Section 6.5.7 Page 16)

That the Home Improvement Agency be encouraged to agree a schedules of rates or fixed price contracts for level access showers and stairlifts with its list of approved contractors.

## **Recommendation No 7**

(Section 6.5.8 Page 16)

That the application process for Level Access Showers and Stairlifts be amended so that schedule of rates or fixed price contracts, agreed by the Home Improvement Agency with its contractors, can be accepted.

## **Recommendation No 8**

(Section 6.6.6 Page 18)

That the Portfolio Holder for Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Strategic Housing Functions and the Head of Community Services encourage Essex County Council Social Services Department to investigate the possibility of offering a similar service as St Helens Borough Council & Broadlands District Council.

## **Recommendation No 9**

(Section 6.6.9 Page 19)

That all of the acute health service and social care budget holders are approached via the Local Strategic Partnership to see if they would be willing to fund certain DFGs on the basis that this would reduce their care bill in the longer term.

## **Recommendation No 10**

(Section 6.6.10 Page 19)

That Members are offered a training course on Disabled Facility Grants in the next phase of Member Training.

## 8 References

Adapting for a lifetime (Foundation, January 2010)

Better outcomes, lower costs: Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvement and equipment: a review of the evidence (Heywood F and Turner L, 2001.)

Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods, a National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society (Department for Communities and Local Government, Department of Health and Department for Work and Pensions, February 2008)

Report and minutes from the Community & Older People Policy & Scrutiny Committee (Essex County Council, 9 November 2011)

Delivering Housing Adaptations for Disabled People: A good practice guide (Department of Health, June 2006 edition)

Report of the Disabled Facilities Grant Scrutiny Working Group (London Borough of Redbridge, March 2009)

A Review of Demand for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) in the East Midlands: Presented to Government Office East Midlands (Foundations, June 2008)

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