

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **EXECUTIVE**

DATE: **27 MARCH 2012**

REPORT BY: **HEAD OF HOUSING**

SUBJECT: **PROVIDING DISABLED ADAPTATIONS IN COUNCIL
PROPERTIES**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 This report seeks approval for the establishment of an in-house team to deliver disabled adaptations within Council properties.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Council is required by the Housing Grants, Construction & Regeneration Act 1996 to respond to applications for Disabled Facilities Grants. These mandatory grants, to a current maximum of £36K, are provided to ensure that disabled persons can have full and safe access to their accommodation.

2.02 The types of work included as part of a disabled facility grant is anything that costs in excess of £1K, up to the statutory maximum of £36K. Typical adaptations are the provision of level access showers, adapted kitchens, door widening and the installation of ramps and grab rails. Specialist work includes the installation of stairlifts and through floor lifts, which are currently provided through a North Wales framework agreement with Stannah.

2.03 The administration of Disabled Facilities Grants is performed by the Council's Housing Renewal Team, following a referral from an Occupational Therapist. The role of the OT is to identify the need of the individual applicant and it is the job of the Surveyor to establish whether the required adaptations can be undertaken within the existing property and to schedule them accordingly.

2.04 In recent times the upper limit of the Disabled Facilities Grant has been increased from £30K to £36K and additional eligible works have been added, including the need to ensure that disabled applicants can access their gardens.

2.05 In order to manage the impact of these changes on the budget, Housing Renewal introduced new adaptation limits during 2010. The main impact of these limits is that the Council will no longer fund replacement of bathroom items or kitchen items where there is no

requirement as result of a person's disability. Extensions are now only considered where there is no option to adapt the property from within and tiling is limited to areas of the bathroom that require protection from water penetration e.g. shower enclosures and wash hand basin splashbacks.

- 2.06 Where a Council house adaptation is being sought, the Social Services Duty Team now refer the applicant to the relevant Neighbourhood Housing Office initially, for advice on alternative properties, which may be more suitable or, which are already adapted, or could be adapted at lower cost. The intention of these visits is to provide customers with a range of alternative options.
- 2.07 Council house adaptations are funded via the Housing Revenue Account and £1M per annum is allocated for this purpose. However, as you will be aware there is a requirement on the Council to bring up its properties to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). Therefore, the more cost effective the provision of disabled adaptations is, the more money that could be available for WHQS works.
- 2.08 The Council's Housing Asset Management Strategy has forecast an annual budget over the next 6 years of £10M per annum. The draft budget for 12/13 identifies a budget of £9.5m. A small proportion of this each year is reliant upon land receipts. Should land remain unsold, or not reach the values anticipated, extra resource that has been freed up from DFG works, could be utilised to top up this fund.
- 2.09 The Housing Renewal Team has had a great deal of success in reducing the cost of disabled adaptations in Council properties. During the 09/10 financial year, £1.4M was allocated for the provision of this service. This figure was reduced to £950K during the 10/11 financial year and is predicted to outturn at this level during 11/12.
- 2.10 This reduction in capital expenditure has been achieved without a reduction in the number of adaptations undertaken. However, there is an opportunity to reduce the cost and improve the speed of this service further, through the establishment of an in house team to provide adaptations within Council properties.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 Currently all adaptations in Council properties provided through a DFG are competitively tendered to a pool of local contractors. Administratively this involves the production of three schedules of work, one to each contractor, with a two week return date. The contractor which wins the tender must then commit to commencing the work within 8 weeks of being awarded the contract. This process therefore takes an average of 10 weeks.

- 3.02 Timescales for the implementation of DFGs are the subject of a National Performance Indicator, which monitors the time taken to deliver the adaptation from first approach to Social Services, through to completion of the job at the property. The PI is further split down to differentiate the time spent within the two service areas.
- 3.03 The Council aspires to achieve top quartile performance for the 'average number of days taken to deliver a major adaptation' and the current target is 350 days. This may seem like a long wait for an adaptation, however, this average will be impacted upon by the length of the OT waiting list and the complexity of the adaptation e.g an extension which requires planning permission will take significantly longer than the installation of a stairlift.
- 3.04 Should an in-house team be established for the delivery of adaptations in council homes, then the tendering period, award of contract and sometimes lengthy contractor start date will be stripped out of the process. This will have a positive impact on the Performance Indicator.
- 3.05 In order to establish the in-house team the Housing Asset Manager has been asked to consider the staff required and the costs associated with such staff, based upon 131 DFG's completed in 10/11. This is provided below. Should the proposal in this paper be agreed, the Housing Renewal Team would continue to work jointly with OT's to survey the properties and schedule the required work.
- 3.06 **Staffing and Associated Costs 2011/12**

Item	Number	Individual Cost	Total Cost
Team Leader	1		£37,581
Plumbing/Heating Engineers	2	£30,974 x 2	£61,948
Joiner	1		£28,280
Electrician	1		£28,280
Plasterer/Tiler	1		£28,280
Multi Skilled Trades Person	1		£28,280
Vehicle Costs	5	£5,799 x 6	£34,794
COSTS FOR 2012/13			£247,443

- 3.07 The above costs would be capitalised from within the existing DFG element of the Housing Revenue Account. They can be further broken down as follows, to establish the final anticipated DFG outturn for the HRA.

- £247,443 x 1.3 (current overhead factor) = £321,676
- 35% anticipated materials costs on £950K of work = £332,500
- Anticipated sub contractor work £150K

- 3.08 The above therefore equates to a total cost of £800K, which is £150K less than the current cost of providing the same adaptations. The skills matrix above will provide sufficient resource to undertake the majority of the work, but there will be occasions where the work will need to be subcontracted to specialists.
- 3.09 There may be further opportunities to increase income to the service by purchasing all materials through the Council's outsourced stores arrangement with Travis Perkins. The stores contract includes a profit share element, meaning that all materials purchased in respect of DFG's would fall under the terms of that contract. This may also present the opportunity to reduce the cost of subcontracting work, by requiring that all materials are sourced through Travis Perkins, with the subcontractor merely charging labour rates.
- 3.10 There is a further benefit of operating the service in-house. As the Council rolls out its WHQS kitchen and bathroom improvement programme, as outlined in the Asset Management Strategy, an aligned disabled adaptations service will coordinate activity and we should not see replacement of a general needs kitchen with an adapted kitchen within a short space of time, unless the tenants needs change dramatically. It also increases the skills base for installing level access showers and kitchens suitable for customers with a range of needs, as part of a proactive programme in sheltered accommodation (which becomes vacant and is not subject to a designation review), which further reduces the call on DFG spend in the future.
- 3.11 The Housing Asset Management Service currently delivers all minor adaptations (those valued under £1K) within Council property and therefore has the necessary skills and experience to further develop the service, to include major adaptations as described earlier on in this report.
- 3.12 It is the intention to look initially within the existing trades teams for employees seeking to be seconded to this work, for a trial period of 12 months. Posts will be backfilled as appropriate. Should a sufficient number of suitably qualified individuals not come forward for secondment, then it would be the intention to advertise for staff on a 12 month fixed term contract. Subject to the success of the trial period, any fixed term staff would, following the 12 month period, become permanent employees.
- 3.13 As part of the evaluation of this trial; customer satisfaction, timescales and cost would be monitored closely and if the trial showed positive results, as is anticipated, it would become a permanent arrangement.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 That Executive agree to establish an in-house team to deliver Disabled Adaptations in council property (via the Disabled Facilities Grant process), on the terms outlined in this report and initially for a 12 month period.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 It is anticipated that there will be a reduced cost to the Housing Revenue Account totalling £150K, which can be released for work elsewhere within the HRA Capital Programme.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 The Disabled Facilities Grant is means tested to ensure that anyone can access the adaptations they require, regardless of their financial means.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 The provision of adaptations in Council properties will allow disabled residents to continue to live at home, potentially preventing the need for admission to a care home or other such facility.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 There would be secondment opportunities for staff from Housing Asset Management who wish to form the proposed team and potentially the opportunity of 12 month fixed term contracts to plug any skills gaps.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Brief discussions have taken place with Trade Unions who welcome the proposal.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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