

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into Home Adaptations

Response from : Pembrokeshire County Council

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your Inquiry Into Home Adaptations – please accept my apologies for the delay in responding – the response was sent on 1st February, however due to technical problems was not delivered.

The comments below are sent on behalf of Pembrokeshire County Council Disabled Adaptations Working Group which works to improve the process and quality of delivering adaptations across the county.

• ***Why there are still significant variations in the time it takes to deliver aids and adaptations funded by Disabled Facilities Grants across Wales;***

We would challenge whether this statement could be made in absolute terms. For a number of years it would appear there has been a lack of consistency in the way local authorities have interpreted the definition of the performance indicator and therefore the results that have been reported; it is therefore not possible to say in absolute terms if there significant variations between local authorities. Another difficulty in recording the time taken is with complex cases where the client is already a customer of a service, such as Community Care, long before the need for an adaptation becomes apparent.

In Pembrokeshire we have experienced delays in the past in different parts of the process that effect the delivery time, the most significant example being those elements of the process are reliant on customers being pro-active. Another example is where as part of the assessment process additional medical information is requested from health services and there are delays on obtaining this information to complete the assessment.

In Pembrokeshire we have made significant improvements over the last few years in the time taken to deliver aids and adaptations in the county. We set up an inter departmental group – the Disabled Adaptations Working Group – which has focussed on improving the policies and processes which has led to the improvements delivered.

• ***Whether sufficient progress has been made on implementing recommendations from the Equality of Opportunity Committee's 2009 report on home adaptations;***

It is noted that many of the recommendations identified work the Welsh Government should undertake. Given the continuing concerns that service delivery should improve still further, whilst there have been improvements in some areas there is still improvement work to be done.

- ***What impact reduced resources for housing are likely to have on the provision of home adaptations;***

Pembrokeshire recognises the statutory basis for the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants and continues to make resources available to meet that statutory need across all tenures, however with reducing resources, meeting this statutory requirement will potentially require a realignment of resources away from non-statutory functions.

Pembrokeshire revised its Private Sector Housing Policy in 2011 to introduce a policy which provides for a maximum amount of £25,000 for a DFG (with an option to increase to £36,000 at the relevant Director's discretion in exceptional circumstances. We also introduced means testing on smaller adaptations. This policy is current being reviewed to determine its effectiveness.

In the social sector, as the level of funding for new social housing reduces at the same time as there are increasing demands on social housing to meet unmet need, this increases pressure for more adaptations. There are fewer new houses available which have been designed to "Homes for Life" standards which then impact upon the need to undertake sometimes complex adaptations in existing properties. This can be ameliorated to a certain extent through the better management of stock by social landlords and as Council we are undertaking much work to improve this.

If adaptations are not considered to be reasonable and practical, rehousing is required but this may result in a considerable wait for alternative suitable accommodation in suitable areas – a particular issue for rural counties. Families could be forced to move away from family or other support networks to gain suitable housing.

- ***Is the Welsh Government effectively monitoring the provision of adaptation services***

See above comment about the variations in delivery of adaptations. In addition the focus has for many years been on the speed of delivery of the adaptations rather than the outcomes for the customer. This qualitative monitoring is not as simple, however should be undertaken to provide a balance. Sometimes, a customer focussed approach may increase the time taken to deliver an adaptation; an example of this is where adaptations are delayed at the request of the customer due to ill health. In Pembrokeshire we undertake a broad customer satisfaction survey and find that the majority of customers are very satisfied with the service as a whole, although it is acknowledged that the main concern is one of time taken.

- ***What more needs to be done to improve home adaptation services in Wales.***

A number of issues can be addressed when looking at improving service delivery:

- Improved joint working between departments and other organisations

- Having an OT post sitting directly within the team delivering the adaptations service
- Reduce complexities of different streams of funding
- Look at the apparent inequity between DFG's and PAG's and direct works for LA tenants – e.g. no upper limit for PAG, service charges added to rent in some cases etc.
- The application is a lengthy, fairly intrusive process and can result in customers either not applying or abandoning applications – does the legislation need to be reviewed to reduce complexity?
- Providing support for customers during the process.
- Undertake a whole systems review of the delivery of the adaptations service in each Authority to reduce inefficiencies and focus on the customer experience.

Should you have any query, please do not hesitate to contact Andrew Davies Wrigley, Jim Stobbart or me.

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