

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TITLE	Scrutiny Committee - Services
DATE OF MEETING	28th of November, 2013
ITEM TITLE	Implementation and Grant Expenditure on adaptations for disabled people
CABINET MEMBER	Cllr. John Wyn Williams

1.0 Introduction

Gwynedd Council's Housing Department administers the Disability Facilities Grant Scheme which allows for adaptations within private sector properties. Different arrangements exist for housing association tenants and for Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd tenants and these arrangements have been outlined within the this report.

The Disabled Facilities Grant is intended to support people who have a disability to receive adaptations to allow people to remain in their own homes and to help maintain their independence in the community. The grant can be used towards a range of different adaptations including the installation of ramps, adaptations to bathrooms and kitchens, the installation of stair lifts and on some occasions purpose built extensions.

2.0 Discussion

2.1 Disability Facilities Grant – (Private Sector)

Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory grants in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and funded from Gwynedd Council's capital resources. Gwynedd Housing Department's expenditure on the Disabled Facilities Grants varies from year to year depending on the number and complexity of the work undertaken, but is usually between £900k to £ 1.1m per year. The fund is used to respond to the needs of owner occupiers, and with the consent of a landlord, people who rent private properties. A statutory maximum of £36k of has been set for the grant however the Housing Department can contribute an additional amount using discretionary powers. Gwynedd Council has established a Discretionary Loan in order to realise plans which exceed the expenditure threshold. The Discretionary Loan is usually awarded to allow completion of complex modifications or extensions predominantly for children and young people with disabilities or people with acute or long term conditions.

Applicants for grant assistance are subject to a Means Test (except when the disabled person is a child) and the Department's performance in meeting its duties are inspected externally. The timetable for completion of work is one of the core performance measures set by the Welsh Government.

As noted, the level of expenditure and demand upon the budget does vary from year to year depending on the extent of the work completed during the year. This is highlighted below.

Disabled Adaptations Grant	
Financial Year	Actual Expenditure
2009/10	£1,088,480
2010/11	£926,840
2011/12	£931,620
2012/13	£1,121,520

The average level of grant application is usually between £7,000 and £8,000. However this may be impacted if a number of extensions are completed within the same financial year.

It is the responsibility of Council staff (Occupational Therapists) to approve and present applications for the Disability Facilities Grant. Although Occupational Therapists employed by the Health Service can suggest adaptations any assessments undertaken have to be approved by Occupational Therapists employed by the local authority before being presented. Currently the Social Services Department employs a total of 14 Occupational Therapist – this comprises 7 Occupational Therapists who work in the areas, 3 Senior Practitioners 1 Children's Therapist and 3 Rehabilitation Therapists. The Therapists focus on trying to maintain people's independence at home using a range of support and equipment. As part of their work they will consider different intervention and exercises. Based on this assessment and the impact of other interventions they will then decide on the appropriateness of presenting a Disability Facilities Grant application.

2.2 Minor Adaptations Grant – Help at Home Scheme

In addition to the Disability Facilities Grant the Housing Department also contributes from capital resources towards Minor Adaptations Grant. This scheme allows for small individual adaptations up to £350 which can be completed quickly usually within 15 days of referral. The scheme is targeted at owner occupiers and private tenants and is administered by Care and Repair who receives further grant assistance from the Welsh Government. The purpose of the scheme is to promote expedient access to a range of small adaptations which will reduce the cost and demand on care services. The scheme is usually focused on

facilitating a return home after a hospital stay with the aim of avoiding more comprehensive and costly adjustments in the future.

	Small Works and Minor Adaptations (Individual packages which cost less than £350)	Period 2: 1 Oct 2012 – 31 Mar 2013	Period 1: 1 Apr 2013 – 30 Sep 2013
1.	Number of service users who received urgent minor works.	341	320
2.	Percentage of works completed within the 10 day target	96%	96%

The target for completing the minor works is 10 days from receipt of the referral from the Social Services Department. Work is undertaken by craftsmen employed by Care and Repair. The scheme was established specifically to try and expedite the process of completing adaptations and to ameliorate the need for some DFG applications which are allocated for adaptations likely to exceed £1,000. The Housing Department have ring fenced a sum of £100k a year towards the scheme and Gofal a Thrwsio attracts additional funding. Applications are prioritised according to need, there is no requirement to undertake a means test and adaptations do not require planning permission. Whilst advantageous to reduce dependency on the Disability Facilities Grant it may influence performance as work which is referred will be of a more complex nature and will require a longer timeframe

2.3 Adaptations for Disabled Housing Association Tenants

Tenants who require adaptations who reside within a Housing Association property can apply for Physical Adaptation Grant (PAG). PAG's are funded from the Social Housing Grant subject to a maximum expenditure limit set by the Welsh Government, currently £8.5 million a year for Wales. Housing Associations are expected to fund minor adaptations to their properties within their own resources and PAG funding applications are reserved for major structural modifications beyond what the association can fund.

Housing Associations established following the transfer of Council housing stock are not eligible to apply for money from the PAG fund as it is expected that sufficient provision has been made within their business plans based on the pattern of expenditure within the Housing Revenue Account prior to stock transfer.

2.4 Disabled Adaptations within Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd

The Transfer Agreement specified that a sum of £600,000 be allocated for disability adaptations when Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd was established, with a commitment for a period of 30 years and an annual inflationary increase. This allocation is intended to be prioritised for referrals from Council employed Occupational Therapists with an understanding that any remaining funds could contribute towards to a program of adaptations to meet the needs of disabled tenants as part of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. Any surplus funds are then transferred from one year to the following year. Responsibility for

administering the arrangements lies with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd who have employed their own Occupational Therapists (2) to oversee WHQS works.

During 2012/13 it became apparent there was pressure on the allocated funds with commitments beyond the funding identified. Subsequently discussions were held with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd to consider the prioritisation of applications and it was agreed to establish a panel to review the situation adjustments. It appears that those measures have eased the budgetary position and it is expected that the demand for disability adaptations as part of the Welsh Quality Standard will abate over the next 18 months as the program draws to a close. However it is recognized that there will be a need to carefully monitor the pattern of expenditure as the demand for adaptations can vary significantly from year to year depending on the nature and complexity of cases. It will also be important to consider the opportunities which exist to make best use of the existing housing stock and especially houses that have been designated or adapted for people with disabilities.

Financial Year	Transfer Agreement Commitment	Actual Expenditure	Over spend or under spend	Budget available +/- over or under spend
2010/11	£600,00	£565,086	-£-32,914	£600,000
2011/12	£616,800	£676,430	+£ 24,716	£651,714
2012/13	£630,366	£513,101	-£117,265	£605,650
2013/14	£645,000			£762,264

3.0 Timetable and Process for Completing an Application

The Department must follow a set process when preparing an application which includes a number of essential components. The precise steps and the allocated timetable will vary depending on the projected cost and nature of the work to be completed. If major building works are required e.g. an extension the team will follow a process similar to the one outlined below.

	Essential Elements with anticipated timeframe	Timeframe
1	Referral to Social Services	
2	Assessment of Need “Essential and Appropriate ”- Occupational Therapist	2 Weeks
3	Referral and Assessment “Reasonable and Practical ” – Housing Service	2 Weeks
4	Completion of Means Test and collection of documents– Service User	4 Weeks
5	Instruction to Proceed and Completion of Draft Plans	2 Weeks
6	Discussion - Occupational Therapist / Grant Officer/ Service User	
7	Approval of Final Plans	Variable

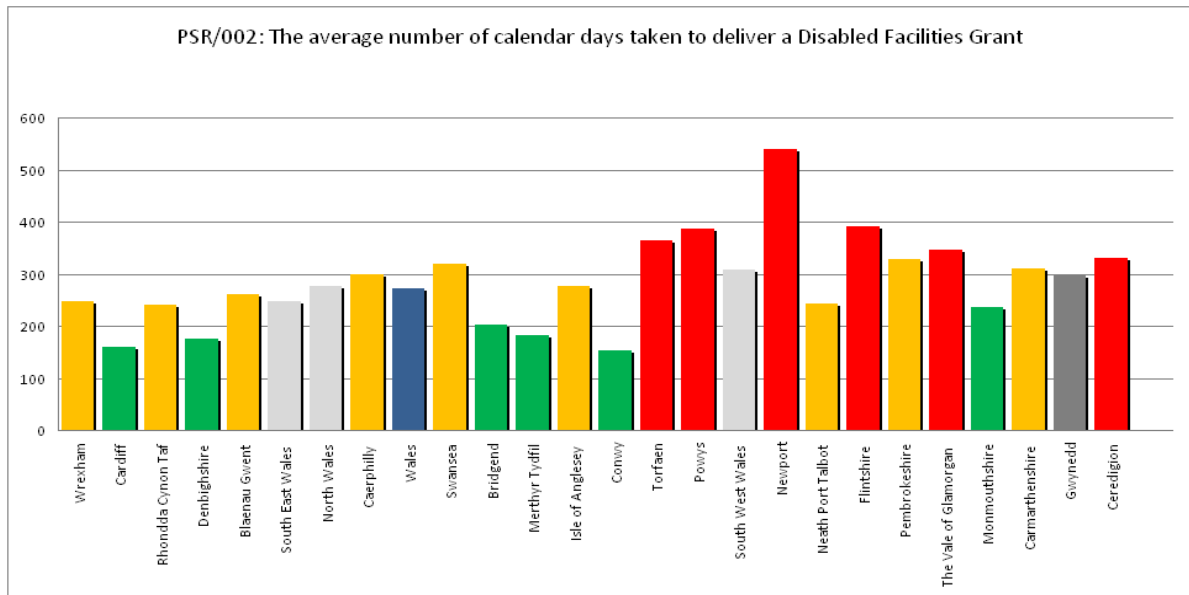
8	Present application for Planning Approval	6 weeks
10	Building Regulation and Pre Tender Works (if relevant) e.g. i) Section 104 agreement to build above a drain ii) Completion of Structural Engineer's Report	Variable
11	Completion of Tender Documents	2 weeks
12	Tender Period (minimum 3 weeks)	3 weeks
13	Tender Review and contractual negotiation	1 week
14	Instruction to Proceed to Contractor .	4- 6 week
14	Work on Site	Variable
15	Handover and inspection	1 week
16	Approval and Completion	1 week

Whilst every effort is made to align different elements within the process the above table demonstrates the challenge of completing large projects within the timescales of the performance measure and explains why some projects will exceed the timetable. Although it is possible to omit some of the steps completely and complete the work more quickly in some instances e.g. adaptation of a bathroom or installation of a stair lift there are some mandatory steps . Currently over 50% of the work is completed within 175 days.

A analysis of recent cases highlighted that a number of different factors which could contribute towards a delay intrestingly the most common was difficulties securing information and approval from applicants. As a result we have now stipulated that information must be provided with 2 months. If no information is received we can suspend the application and re-open when information has been received.

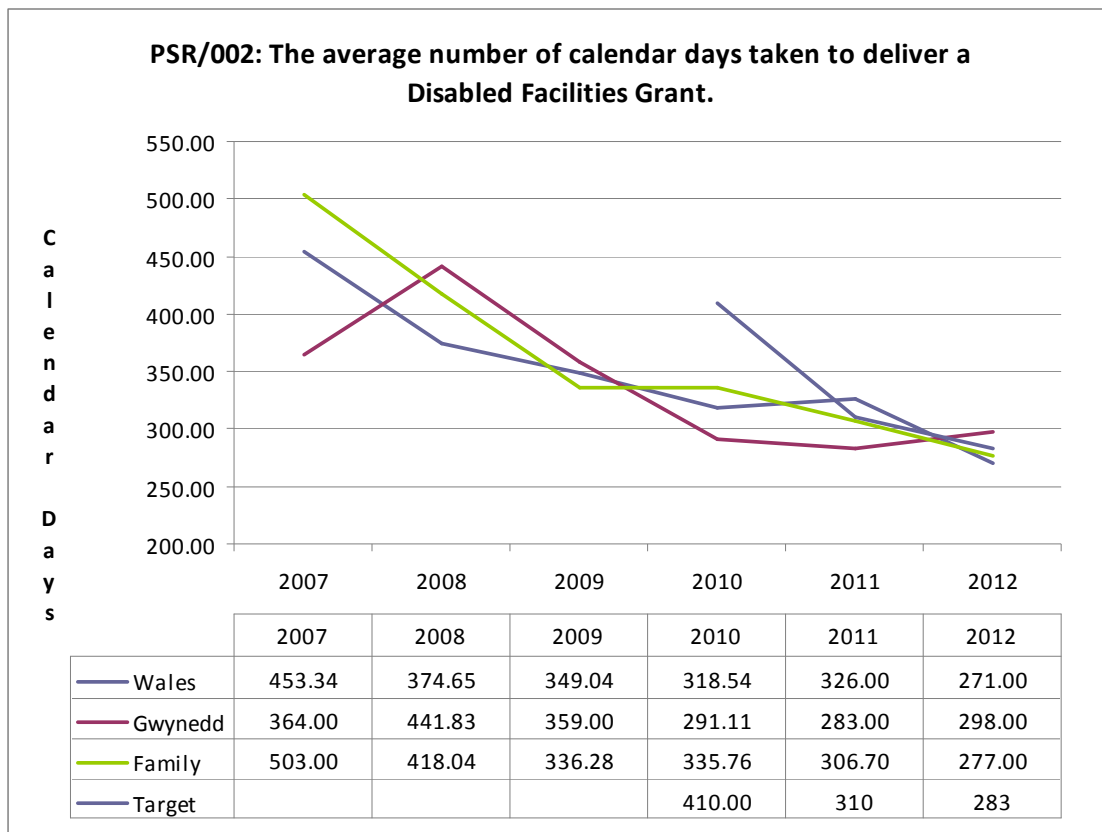
4.0 Departmental Performance Measures

The Housing Department report annually on a number of performance indicators and Gwynedd's performance has improved over the last 3 years. We must however highlight the need for some caution as the nature and complexity of individual work packages impacts on performance. It is totally fair an feasible to expect a stair lift to be installed in less than 3 months however this type of timescale would be impossible for an extension which will take at least 12 months. The Assembly have recently acknowledged the need to review the performance measures to ensure greater consistency in terms of what is measured and the type of work completed.



	Gwynedd Target		Performance 2012-13
PSR/002* Average number of calendar days to provide a Disability Facilities Grant	280 days	The Department review performance on a quarterly basis but it can sometimes be misleading to use this as a proxy for annual performance. The pattern of work tends to increase during the year and one long term case can impact on the target.	298 days
GTLLEOL2ADDASIA D13-14 Percentage of grants (DFGs) which are completed within 175 days on completion of the assessment	Need to establish baseline 52.5% to date	The Departments need to establish a local baseline for the % of work undertaken within 175 days which corresponds to the best performance in Wales. We have established that 52.5% of cases are within this target 21 cases out of 40.	New Measurement
GTLLEOL3 Percentage of service users who confirm they are happy or very happy with the work undertaken on completion of works	90%	On completion of works we disseminate a questionnaire to service users to try and measure their satisfaction with the process and areas which could be	96%

PSR/006 (SID) Average number of calendar days to undertake minor adaptations which are low cost in private properties where Disabled Facilities Grant process is not applied	15 days	Gwynedd use adaptations which cost less than £350 to calculate this measurement.	8 days
PSR/009a (SID) Average number of calendar days to provide a Disabled Facilities Grant to Children and Young People	380 days	This measurement can change significantly as is often based on a small number of cases some which are long term and complex. There is a need to examine this measurement carefully to consider the impact of the individual cases on the average.	



Appendix 1 - GUIDELINES FOR THE ADAPTATIONS GRANT

Adaptations Grant for Disabled People?

The adaptations grant for the disabled is available to support disabled individuals complete necessary adaptations to their homes, thus enabling them to continue to live independently and safely in their own homes. The aim is to facilitate reasonable access into the home and its main rooms, which includes the lounge, bedroom, bathroom with bath or shower facilities as well as appropriate toilet and wash basin facilities.

Assessing the Application

Before authorising any grant application a formal assessment must be received by an Occupational Therapist employed by The Social Services Department). The Occupational Therapist will:

- Confirm that the proposed adaptations are “**essential**” and “**appropriate**” for the disabled individual.
- Complete an assessment of the disabled individuals’ home and provide a professional opinion on what adaptations are required to meet the individual’s needs.

The assessment will then be presented to an Housing Grants Officer who is responsible for identifying the best way of completing the adaptations within the property and to decide if the proposed adaptations are “**reasonable**” and “**practical**” to complete.

On some occasions not all of the proposed adaptations can be fully completed as they may not satisfy the above principles and in such instances the Housing Grants Officer has the authority to reject the application.

If a Housing Grants Officer decides to authorise an adaptations application then they are committed to satisfying the needs of the disabled individual as identified by the Occupational Therapist.

During the assessment the Occupational Therapist will consider the long term practicality and viability of the adaptation. This is especially the case in instances where the disabled individual is suffering from a degenerative condition and where there is a possibility that further adaptations may be required in the future. Consideration will also be given to other means of meeting the disabled individual’s needs.

Who will assess and decide the application?

The needs assessment and formal request for adaptation will be completed by an Occupational Therapist employed by Gwynedd Council. Should the assessment and referral for adaptation be presented by another qualified individual other than a Gwynedd Council employee e.g. an employee from a Health Authority, then it will

be essential for a Gwynedd Council Occupational Therapist to certify that the proposed adaptations are “**necessary + appropriate**” and in line with legislation.

Schedule for completing the work

It can be difficult to specify a timescale for completing work at the beginning of the application process as there are a number of different variables such as the nature of the adaptation, size and complexity of the work which will collectively influence the time schedule. Providing there aren't any unexpected complications or that a substantial adaptation is required, the estimated time to complete most adaptations is between 37 to 43 weeks starting from the date of the Occupational Therapist formal assessment. It's possible for small scale work such as fitting a stair lift to be completed in a lesser timescale of 8 to 12 weeks.

Is it necessary to complete a means test before starting the work?

All grant applications (private sector) excluding those for children are subject to completing a statutory means test which will consider the candidates personal financial circumstances and ability to contribute.

Candidates will need to disclose all information relating to income and benefits along with details relating to savings, investments and assets.

In order to determine whether the candidate needs to contribute towards the costs of adaptations the means test will be completed at the beginning of the adaptations assessment process. Applicants are also required to present documentation confirming ownership and right to adapt the property.

Operational Standards

Only work listed under the adaptations legislation can be considered as valid. The authority is also requested to differentiate between what is “**desirable**” and “**aspiration**” by the candidate as well as deciding what is **essential** and **reasonable** to fund by public funds further to a professional assessment.

The Council cannot authorise work that isn't related to the adaptation or work that is above what is needed.

The candidate can request the Council to complete additional work on the understanding that the candidate will be responsible for organising and paying for the additional work themselves.

The maximum grant that is payable for essential adaptations has been established by legislation as £36,000.

Financial Summary

Title	Description	Budget
Facilities Grant for the Disabled	Grant up to £36,000 with statutory obligation to provide adaptations for disabled people to enable them to live independently in their own homes.	£700,000
Discretionary Loan for Disabled Facilities	Financial support for disabled individuals needing adaptations above the value of £36,000. It was decided in 2012 to present this as an interest free loan rather than a grant on the condition that the sum would be repaid upon the sale of the property. This is secured via a legal charge. Enables necessary adaptations to happen especially where the needs are complex and long term.	£200,000
Minor Adaptation Grant (Help in the Home Scheme)	Optional Grant to provide small scale adaptations that cost up to £300 e.g. install handrail. The scheme which is managed by <i>Gofal a Thrwshio</i> completes work quickly (within days).	£100,000
Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd Adaptations Fund	Fund is designated in the Transfer Agreement on the basis of previous Council expenditure to provide adjustments for disabled people.	£600,000
Physical Adaptation Grant	Central Fund for Housing Associations to undertake significant adaptations for people with a disability.	£8.5m across Wales