

Committee: **Cabinet**
 Date of meeting: **10th January 2024**
 Report Subject: **Disabled Facilities Adaptations (DFG's) – Quarter 2 – Budget and Performance Monitoring Report**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Place and Environment**
 Report Submitted by: **Mark Congreve, Team Manager – Housing Solutions**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
07.11.23	09.11.23	06.12.23			05.12.23	10.01.24		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a brief update on progress and current spend against the DFG Capital Budget and Enable funding at the end of Quarter 2 - 2023-24. The report also updates on other relevant matters – staffing pressures and the statutory performance indicator relating to disabled facilities grants (DFG) delivery times.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 On the 16th March 2022 a decision was made by the Executive Committee to remove the means test (Appendix 4) for disabled facilitates adaptations grants (Visit [here](#) for full report – item 7). This decision was based on the understanding that this would improve access to adaptations for people who need them, reduce grant delivery times, improve health outcomes, and save money in health and social care. However, recognising that the impact of this policy change would need to be closely ‘monitored’ to assess the potential consequences this could have on service delivery and capital costs, as this could drive up demand, and result in an increase in applications from people who would not previously have applied or been eligible for an adaptations grant or those people who cancelled their applications due to needing to provide a contribution to the cost of the adaptation works.

2.2 Therefore, in line with the monitoring arrangements, the position as of the 30th September 2023 (end Q2) is as follows:

2.2.1 Capital Budget 23/24

Medium/Large adaptations		£	£
DFG Capital Programme & ENABLE Grant Uplift		446,386	
Carry Forward from 2022/23		262,756	
ENABLE Grant (via Care & Repair)		92,800	
Housing Care Fund (grants over 36k)		96,260	
Housing Care Fund (top up funding)		112,000	
Total			1,010,202
Expenditure 23/24	Q2 £	Q4 end forecast £	£
Capital Budget	385,684	815,661	
ENABLE Grant (via Care & Repair)	59,022	92,800	
Total	444,706		908,461
Carry forward to 24/25			101,741

Forecast Budget 24/25

Medium/Large adaptations		£	£
Forecast Carry Forward from 23/24		101,741	
DFG Capital Programme 24/25 (& Enable Uplift)		446,386	
ENABLE Grant (via Care & Repair)		92,800	
Housing Care Fund (top up funding)		112,000	
Total			752,927
Estimated Expenditure 24/25		£	£
DFG & Enable Grant Uplift (excludes HCF - grants over 36k)		812,201	
ENABLE Grant		92,800	
Total			905,001

Key Points:

1. There will be a forecast underspend this year of £101,741. This will be carried over to 24/25 to assist with the forecast budget pressure in 24/25). However, any additional referrals which are currently on the waiting list (64) and completed (alongside existing commitments) during Q3 and Q4 will likely have an impact on the amount of underspend to be carried forward into 24/25, a further update report will be provided at the end of Q3 to determine this.
2. It's important to note that if the additional £400,000 had not been allocated (£200,000 p.a. for 2023/24 & 2024/25) within the Councils' Capital Programme at the end of Q2 and the successful award of £112,000

wasn't received from the Housing Care Fund, there would currently be a projected overspend of £210,259 for 2023/24.

3. There is a potential shortfall forecast for 2024/25 of £152,074 (excluding the grant applications on the waiting list).
4. The cost of adaptations has increased as a consequence of the high inflation currently being experienced. This may increase further. (See paragraph 5.1.4, below).

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Place Scrutiny Committee supported option 1 at its meeting on 5th December 2023.

3.2 **Option 1**

That Members note the content and accept the report.

3.3 **Option 2**

That Members note the content of this report and make any necessary recommendations prior to approval.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective / objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

- Helping people and communities to be healthier and resilient - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.

4.1.1 Local Authorities have statutory duties under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to deliver mandatory grants and can also offer discretionary assistance through the use of the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

5.1.1 **Capital Budget Availability.** Under the current approved capital programme, the current DFG budget reduced from £469k in 21/22 to £200k per annum from 2023/24 to 2025/26 (this figure includes salaries). In response to increased demand against the budget the Council were able to identify an additional resource of £400k to be utilised over the next two years (2023/24 & 2023/25).

5.1.2 Alongside the Housing Care Funding already received for DFG's that exceed the maximum grant award of £36,000 in 2023/24, the Council have also been

successful in securing additional Housing Care Funding (£112,000 per annum for the next two years) to top up the DFG capital budget.

5.1.3 Although, the allocation of additional funding above will assist to reduce the budget pressure on the DFG Capital Programme, Officers have undertaken an analysis of demand and there has been an increase in grant referrals of 208% since the removal of the means test in 2021/22. Therefore, if this continues, it is expected that if all the grants currently at an 'approval' stage (36) and which are currently on the waiting list proceeded, alongside, additional referrals being received in Q3 and Q4, it is likely that the budget will come under significant pressure in 2024/25 (See paragraph 2.2.1, above). Therefore, the Council will again potentially need to consider mitigating action going forward, which could include:

- Identifying further capital resources to allocate for DFG's; or
- Reintroducing the means test for DFG's. If this is to be considered, Welsh Government have confirmed that this would result in the loss of the annual Enable Grant Uplift funding of £46,386. Therefore, this would need to be considered in conjunction with the amount of means test contributions (Appendix 3) received each year during years 2015 – 2021. Based on current applications the reintroduction of the means test would result in an estimated £20,000 income contributions from applicants (based on the average means test over the last 6 years of this being in place). This would result in a potential overall loss of £26,000.

5.1.4 With increasing inflation over the last couple of years and the cost of materials rising, the average grant has increased from £8,010 in 2021/22 to £9,080 in 2023/24.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.2.1 With increasing demand, waiting times for clients will increase and this will be compounded if grants need to be put on hold/delayed due to lack of funding. This also increases the risk of corporate complaints and referrals to the Ombudsman.

5.2.2 Performance against PSR/002 (The average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant in private homes to support independent living) is already amongst the lowest in Wales but on a positive note, it is currently 1 day lower than the last financial year (2022/23). Please see below;

- 21/22 - 361 days (32 Social Services + 329 Housing)
- 22/23 - 329 days (20 Social Services + 310 Housing)
- 23/24 - 328 days (13 Social Services + 315 Housing)

5.2.3 Allocation of additional capital resources to DFG's will reduce the available resources to other areas of the Capital Programme.

5.3 **Legal**

5.3.1 As outlined in the Executive report of 18th March 2022, in line with the request by the Minister, the Council is utilising its discretionary powers under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 to not to apply the means-test for disabled adaptations. Also, Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are mandatory in that they are delivered in accordance with the Housing Grants, Construction & Regeneration Act 1996. Where a need is identified the Council must provide financial assistance to that applicant. If the Council cannot allocate sufficient funding year on year it will be open to corporate complaints, Local Government Ombudsman complaints and the potential for legal challenge.

5.4 **Human Resources**

5.4.1 The demand (social services weekly referrals rate) for adaptations has increased by approximately 208% (Appendix 2) compared to 21/22 when the means test was in place. This initially led to an increase in waiting time for occupational therapy (OT's) assessments in Social Services, however due to the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) team restructure the number of staff who can assess and refer for adaptations has increased (now including physiotherapists, assistant practitioners, and well-being coordinators), however without this additional staffing capacity, the waiting list for assessments would have increased further.

5.4.2 The Housing Solutions (grants) team consists of two Housing Surveyors. The Officers currently split their time between DFG's and the National Empty Property Grant Scheme, and so their caseload is extensive. Therefore, presently there is not enough capacity within the team to cope with demand. This has led to the formation of a waiting list, whereby there are currently 64 grant applications (by date order, unless deemed a priority by the OT's) awaiting a visit from a Housing Surveyor. However, in terms of the completed grants, the actual delivery time has improved, which can be attributed to the process being streamlined following the removal of the means test from the overall DFG process. However, based on the current rate of referrals from social services, it is likely that this will inevitably lead to an increase in delivery time and continue to exceed the performance delivery target of 300 days even further. (See paragraphs 5.2.2 and 5.4.2).

5.4.3 IAA staff have found that due to the increased number of referrals, the wait for the work to be completed is taking longer and so staff are regularly receiving calls from people they've referred asking when work will be completed, which takes time away from them undertaking their other duties.

5.4.4 Staff from Housing Solutions (grants) and Business Support have also confirmed that occasionally they have grant applicants, or their family members contact them to complain about the delay with carrying out the adaptation.

5.4.5 Prior to removal of the means test, this was a significant amount of work for Business Support including home visits to assist with complicated form filling and gathering of financial information. Means test forms were then passed to

the revenues and benefits section who would carry out the necessary checks (including delays resulting from requests for further information) before notification of the means test outcomes back to Business Support and then the client.

5.5 ***Health and Safety***

5.5.1 Disabled Facilities Grants is a grant essentially to improve access to and from and within the property. They promote independence and wellbeing for the person and can achieve a greater degree of comfort and safety for that of the carer as well.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

See paragraph 2.21 above and Appendices 1 & 2.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

6.2.1 Disabled Adaptations are considered to be a preventative approach to reducing risks within the home and assist individuals to live and manage independently in a safe and accessible home environment. Adaptations can also reduce and/or delay the need for care and support and also prevent/delay the admission to residential care. Therefore, failure to provide sufficient resources to meet local need will result in waiting lists continuing to grow. This will continue to have a detrimental impact on the statutory performance indicator of the average time it takes to deliver a DFG. If sufficient resources are not made available, then any grants on a waiting list will start to have a negative impact on the Council's performance time.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

6.3.1 Relevant internal colleagues (Public Protection, Accountancy, and Social Services) have been consulted on the content of this report.

6.3.2 Members have previously requested an explanation of the means test; therefore, an example has been provided in Appendix 4.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

6.4.1 The provision of financial support for disabled adaptations enables the Council to meet the needs of services users to live independently in the short, medium, and long term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

6.5.1 Investment in aids and adaptations maximises the opportunity for people to remain safely in their home for longer and to prevent or minimise care costs, hospital admissions, and a deterioration in independence and quality of life.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

6.6.1 There is currently a Service Level Agreement in place with Care and Repair to deliver grants for people 60+ by utilising the Enable funding to their core client group.

6.6.2 The DFG process involves close partnership working with Public Protection, Social Services and Business Support on a daily/weekly basis.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

6.7.1 The delivery of disabled adaptations contributes to the well-being and regeneration agendas within social services.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

6.8.1 All approved contractors are encouraged to utilise local suppliers, and therefore avoid lengthy distances to source materials which can decrease emissions by reducing fuel usage.

6.8.2 Contractors are also requested to reuse materials in the first instance as this extends the lifetime value of the product. However, when reusing or recycling is not an option, contractors are advised that the negative impact on the environment can be lessened by responsible waste management.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

An equality impact assessment has not been carried out in relation to this report as it is for information and monitoring purposes only.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Further reports will be provided to the Regeneration and Community Services Leadership Team (RCSLT) and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) as the year progresses whereby more accurate projections will be made from the end of quarter 3.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

[Agenda for Executive Committee on Wednesday, 16th March, 2022, 2.00 pm](#)

[Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

[The Regulatory Reform \(Housing Assistance\) \(England and Wales\) Order 2002 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

List of Appendices:

- Appendix 1 – DFG Capital Programme Budget Spend & Analysis
- Appendix 2 – DFG Comparison Data 2019 - 2023
- Appendix 3 – DFG Budget Analysis of Means Test Contributions 2015 - 2023
- Appendix 4 – The Disabled Facilities Grants Means Test