



bromsgrove council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

SCRUTINY REPORT

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS – SCRUTINY REPORT

**Joint Task Group Report –
Housing and Planning Policy Scrutiny Committee
Health and Leisure Scrutiny Committee
September 2004**

CONTENTS PAGE

	Page Number
Terms of Reference Members	1
Members	1
Background and Methodology	1
Disabled Facilities Grants Process and Agencies Involved	2
➤ Occupational Therapist, Redditch & Bromsgrove PCT	2
➤ Adaptation Service Advisor, Social Services, WCC	3
➤ Environmental, Financial & Administrative Services, BDC	4
➤ Building Contractors	5
➤ Home Improvement Agencies	5
Conclusion	6
Recommendations	6
General	7

Appendix I – A list of Individuals the Task Group Consulted and Contact Details

Appendix II – Report by Miss Helen Williams (Birmingham University Student)

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS TASK GROUP REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2004

TERMS OF REFERENCE

At the Meeting of the Housing and Planning Policy Scrutiny Committee on 4th December 2003 and at the Meeting of the Health and Leisure Scrutiny Committee on the 9th December 2003, it was decided a joint Task Group comprising of three to four members of each Committee would be established to scrutinise the processing of Disabled Facilities Grant requests.

See Appendix I for a list of those who were consulted and contact details.

MEMBERS

Councillors Ms. J. A. Marshall (Chairman), Mrs. J. M. Boswell (Acting Chairman), C. R. Scurrall (Acting Chairman) Mrs. S. J. Baxter, Mrs. A. E. Doyle, D. McGrath and S. P. Shannon.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The first meeting took place on the 4th February 2004 at which we were given a brief outline of what and who were involved in the processing of Disabled Facilities Grant requests. We also discussed how the Disabled Facilities Grants process could be scrutinised with the assistance of Mr. Collin, Pollution and General Manager from Environmental Services and Mr. Coel, Head of Strategic Housing. We all agreed at this meeting that we needed more information on the roles of the other bodies involved in the complex processes of Disabled Facilities Grants.

As Disabled Facilities Grants are processed within a tri-partite system (bodies involved are Redditch and Bromsgrove Primary Care Trust, Social Services and this Council), we decided that representatives from the other agencies should be invited to future meetings to give a presentation on their role. We also asked Miss. H. Williams (Birmingham University Student) who attended the meeting as part of her degree coursework, to submit a report to the Task Group and to compile responses to the questions below which were received via the National Environmental Health Enquiry System (please refer to Appendix II):

- (a) Has any other Authority, working under a regime comprising a tri-partite arrangement between the Primary Care Trust (Occupational Therapists), the County Council (Welfare Authority) and the District Council (Environmental Health & Financial Services), set up a Task Group to consider the delivery of Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants?

- (b) Has any other Authority set Performance Indicator figures for the delivery of the Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant Scheme?
- (c) With respect to the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants, has any Authority employed directly, or acquired the services of an Occupational Therapist? Both good and bad experiences welcomed.

On the 9th March 2004 a second meeting took place at which Mrs. C. Orr-Cooper, an Occupational Therapist employed by Redditch and Bromsgrove Primary Care Trust, gave a presentation on her role in the referral process and two case studies. Mr. R. Goundry, Senior Environmental Health Officer from Environmental Services also attended as he and other Environmental Health Officers often liaise with Occupational Therapists regarding requests for Disabled Facilities Grants.

At the third meeting of the Task Group which took place on the 7th April 2004, Mrs. J. Coomby, an Adaptation Service Advisor from Social Services (Worcestershire County Council), gave a presentation on her role in the referral process and two case studies.

At the meeting on the 10th May 2004, Mr. F. Collin, Divisional Manager (Pollution and General) from Environmental Services, gave a presentation on the role of the Council in the processing Disabled Facilities Grants. Mr. L. Butler, Revenues Service Manager from Financial Services, also gave a brief outline relating to financial assessments.

On the 14th June 2004 the fifth meeting of the Task Group took place at which Mr. A. Coel, Head of Strategic Housing gave a report on Home Improvement Agencies which included the proposals for developing a Home Improvement Agency in Worcestershire.

There was one final meeting of the Task Group held on the 26th July 2004 at which members finalised this Report.

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS PROCESS AND AGENCIES INVOLVED

Occupational Therapist, Redditch and Bromsgrove Primary Care Trust

Mrs. Orr-Cooper informed the Task Group that she was full-time and together with two part-time Occupational Therapists and the support of a part-time Occupational Assistant, they covered the Bromsgrove area only. It was explained that referrals to Occupational Therapy came from other health professionals such as General Practitioners, Social Workers and Housing Wardens. Referrals were screened and categorised within 24 hours of being received. It was stated that individuals were then contacted to inform them a written appointment would be sent to them. It was clarified that there were three categories which were:

- Category One – cases which are urgent and individuals were usually seen within a working week
- Category Two – medium or “soon” cases and were given an appointment within three to five working weeks
- Category Three – routine cases which were the most common and were dealt with within six weeks

Mrs. Orr-Cooper pointed out to us that the length of time individuals had to wait for an appointment with an Occupational Therapist did fluctuate and depended on various factors such as the amount of referrals being received, the complexity of a referral, staffing and time of year.

It was explained that often an Occupational Therapist will seek advice from an Environmental Health Officer and sometimes required advice from the Council's Architect regarding building regulations and planning, depending on what adaptation is needed.

The referrals are then passed on to Social Services for the next part of the process. The individuals are also advised by the Occupational Therapist which category they have been placed in.

We agreed that although some major adaptations cost a large amount, they were cost-effective in the long term as it gives individuals independence and a better quality of life.

Adaptation Service Advisor, Social Services, Worcestershire County Council

Mrs. Coomby explained to us that she worked three days per week and by herself covered the whole of the County and as a consequence liaised with six different District Councils.

Mrs. Coomby informed our Task Group that she dealt with both minor and major adaptations and the difference was explained as follows:

- Minor adaptations cost under £1,000 which Worcestershire County Council fund
- Major adaptations cost over £1,000 which goes through the Disabled Facilities Grants process.

It was explained by Mrs. Coomby that referrals were received from Occupational Therapists only and the "service-user" was then assessed by Social Services against eligibility criteria relating to financial assistance available. However, providing Social Services agreed that the adaptation(s) were "necessary and appropriate" they were recommended on to the District Council for assessment.

Once the District Council had carried out their part in the process, the Social Services would then become involved again and would carry out a financial assessment of their own if the individual met the eligibility criteria of Social Services and the service-user:

- Needed work carried out that cost more than £25,000 (which is the maximum amount an individual can receive via a Disabled Facilities Grant);
- Needed financial assistance to pay for their contribution; or
- Did not qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

If the service-user was asked to pay a contribution by both Social Services and the District Council, they would only need to pay the contribution requested by Social Services.

Although at present there are two financial assessments carried out, one by the District Council and one by Social Services, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Initiative was endeavouring to bring them together.

We were informed that there were no official performance indicators for Social Services relating to major adaptations, however for minor adaptation, the target time for the time

taken from when a referral was received to the equipment being fitted was currently seven days. Mrs. Coomby stated that this is a difficult target to reach but it was being met approximately 90% of the time.

Mrs. Coomby also sets her own target for major adaptations which is to forward referrals on to the District Council within a week of receiving them. Again, this target is usually attained even though Mrs. Coomby is part-time and is the only Adaptation Service Advisor covering the County. (Whilst Mrs. Coomby is on leave, a colleague ensures urgent referrals received are forwarded to the appropriate District Council.)

Environmental, Financial & Administrative Services, Bromsgrove District Council

Please refer to Appendix III which is a flow chart relating to the Disabled Facilities Grants system and in particular shows the involvement of this District Council in the process.

We were informed that if Social Services considers work to be “necessary and appropriate” to the disabled person’s needs, then they send a letter to the District Council’s Environmental Services recommending that the Disabled Facilities Grant process to proceed. It is at this point that an Officer from the Council visits the applicant’s home and assists them in completing a financial assessment application form, as all grants are means tested.

The completed financial assessment form is forwarded to Financial Services. Data from the application form is inputted into the “Ferret” system which calculates the amount of grant the applicant is entitled to receive. It was reported that 70-80% of applicants have no contribution to make and therefore receive 100% grant, subject to the maximum grant of £25,000. All owner-occupiers, if they wish to proceed, do have to provide proof that they own the property. Proof of tenancy is also obtained from private tenants.

The Council then obtains estimates from separate contractors if it is a small job or a private architect is employed if it is a large job. The lowest quote is chosen and an approval memo is then forwarded to Administrative Services with a copy of all pertinent documents. Administrative Services then issues a Grant Approval Certificate and the original is sent to the applicant.

An Environmental Health Officer often carries out an inspection whilst the work is in progress and it is possible that in some cases unforeseen works or problems may arise that require extra funding. Those extra costs are verified and approved by the Environmental Health Officer and on completion of works the applicant is requested to sign a slip confirming their satisfaction with the work. An invoice from the contractor is then submitted to the Council and if the applicant agrees, the grant monies are paid directly to the contractor.

The Government Guide for delivering Adaptation states that high priority work should be completed within 16 weeks and low priority works should be completed within 12 months and we believe that Officers from this Council are working towards achieving these targets.

We were informed that the process could be slowed down by many factors such as the applicant not supplying information required by the Council, or the contractor being unable to commence work quickly due to workload. We also discovered that near the

end of the financial year the Council has had to occasionally delay works until the budget for the following year was available.

People are living longer and therefore demands are increasing. We were informed that the budget was increased by a certain percentage each year however, for 2004-05 more had been requested to reduce the number of applicants on the waiting list.

Building Contractors

Feedback received regarding builders has been excellent. However, we were made aware that key delays were from waiting for the regular contractors to carry out work due to their workload. All agreed that contractors' standard of work needed to be of good quality but unfortunately, this does mean people sometimes have to wait. However, we were also informed that two more builders were soon to start work for the Council who have carried out similar work for another authority.

Home Improvement Agencies

We received a report from the Mr. Coel, Head of Strategic Housing that covered the background to Home Improvement Agencies; what service a Home Improvement Agency would aim to provide; and what the proposals were for developing Home Improvement Agencies in Worcestershire.

A Home Improvement Agency is a vehicle for assisting and advising vulnerable people, such as the elderly or disabled, of the various options open to them if they privately rent a property or live in their own property. Primarily, its aim is to help people to remain independent in their own homes.

It was explained that Home Improvement Agencies are non-profit organisations funded and supported by local and central government and that the Executive Cabinet at its Meeting on the 9th June 2004, agreed in principle to allocating up to £60,000 towards the annual revenue costs of a Home Improvement Agency covering North Worcestershire.

The development of a Home Improvement Agency in partnership with other authorities should be a cost-effective method of applying grants and enabling a broader range of services and options to be provided for clients. It was explained to us by Mr. Coel that Bromsgrove is to work in partnership with Wyre Forest and Redditch to form the North Worcestershire Care and Repair Service (whilst Wychavon, Worcester and Malvern Hill should come under a South Worcestershire Home Improvement Agency).

A bid was submitted to the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) in January 2004 for a £218,000 additional Supporting People Grant. Although the outcome of the countywide bid submission was an allocation of £96,000 (therefore £48,000 each for North and South Worcestershire), the allocation was the third largest in the country. We were also reassured that it was hoped that there would be similar ongoing funding from Supporting People in subsequent years.

To enable the North Worcestershire Care and Repair Service to proceed, the shortfall will have to be met by the fees charged by the Agency for grant-aided work. The members of the Executive Cabinet have already agreed that a 10% fee would be charged to those accessing the service. However, may it be pointed out that we were

informed that all people accessing the service were likely to be means tested and it is estimated that the majority (approximately 80%) would receive 100% of the grant and would not, therefore, have to pay the 10% fee.

There will be a Management Advisory Board for North Worcestershire and another covering both North and South Worcestershire. The local Advisory Board, once set up, will meet quarterly and will consist of both members and officers from various organisations involved.

It is our understanding that Home Improvement Agencies will not just deal with Disabled Facilities Grants but will also cover a wide range of services (for example home safety checks for the elderly). The North Worcestershire Care and Repair Service will look holistically at the needs of vulnerable people and its performance will be monitored by the North Worcestershire Advisory Board on the performance achieved across the three districts using the criteria set down by "Foundations" (the Home Improvement Agency Advisory Service commissioned by the ODPM).

CONCLUSION

At the outset we believed that the Disabled Facilities Grants scheme is a protracted process due partly to the involvement of 3 administering authorities, the legal parameters that had to be negotiated and the need to properly seek out and manage the available funds. However, despite these difficulties we all agree that the system seems to perform well and there appears to be no undue delays.

We therefore **RECOMMEND** that:

1. Officers from Bromsgrove District Council should continue to ensure there is good communication between the 3 bodies involved. This should be done by making sure letters that have been sent to another agency or to the applicant are copied to ALL agencies involved; therefore, making certain the other parties are kept up to date with the progress of each Disabled Facilities Grant application. In particular, it should be ensured that letters are copied to Social Services to make certain they are aware at an early stage that their involvement in a grant application may be required;
2. The "ODPM Guidance on Housing Adaptations for Disabled People" be used to assist in improving the Disabled Facilities Grants process by helping the tri-partite system become more streamline;
3. Support be given to the development of the Home Improvement Agency covering North Worcestershire (North Worcestershire Care and Repair Service);
4. The minutes of the North Worcestershire Advisory Board quarterly meetings be circulated to members of the Disabled Facilities Task Group;
5. If Councillor P. J. Whittaker, Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Housing Strategy (who has been nominated to be the Council's representative on the North Worcestershire Advisory Board) is unable to attend a meeting of the Advisory Board, a member of the Disabled Facilities Grants Task Group be asked to substitute;
6. All councillors be made aware of the advantages of a Home Improvement Agency and the aims of the service so to assist in making members of the public aware of the services open to them that are likely to be of benefit;

7. When available, the North Worcestershire Care and Repair Service Handbook containing all the contact details of various services be distributed to all councillors.

GENERAL

There are minimal financial implications (printing & postage costs etc) in implementing the above recommendations. Therefore, we **RECOMMEND** that the Executive Cabinet adopt the recommendations put forward in this Report.

We have agreed that in 12 months time members of the Task Group will meet again to review the effectiveness of decisions made by the Executive Cabinet relating to this Report and that Councillor P. J. Whittaker, Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Housing Strategy will be invited to report back to the Task Group on the North Worcestershire Advisory Board.

Contact Officer

Name: Della McCarthy, Administrative Officer

E Mail: d.mccarthy@bromsgrove.gov.uk

Tel.: 01527 881407

A List of Individuals the Task Group Consulted and Contact Details

1. Mr. A. Coel
Head of Strategic Housing
Planning Services
Bromsgrove District Council
Direct Line: 01527 881270
Email: a.coel@bromsgrove.gov.uk
2. Mr. F. Collin
**Divisional Manager
(Pollution & General)**
Environmental Services
Bromsgrove District Council
Direct Line: 01527 881434
Email: f.collin@bromsgrove.gov.uk
3. Mr. R. Goundry
Senior Environmental Health Officer
Environmental Services
Bromsgrove District Council
Direct Line: 01527 881435
Email: r.goundry@bromsgrove.gov.uk
4. Mr. L. Butler
Revenues Service Manager
Financial Services
Bromsgrove District Council
Direct Line: 01527 881234
Email: l.butler@bromsgrove.gov.uk
5. Mrs. C. Orr-Cooper
Community Occupational Therapist
Redditch & Bromsgrove Primary Care Trust
Community Occupational Therapy Service
Princess of Wales Community Hospital
Stourbridge Road
Bromsgrove
Worcestershire
B61 0BB
Tel. No.: 01527 488120
Fax: 01527 488228
Email: Christine.Orr-Cooper@wssa.rbpct.nhs.uk
6. Mrs. J. Coomby
Adaptation Service Adviser
Social Services - Worcestershire County Council
Community Equipment Service
Crown Lane
Wychbold
Worcestershire
WR9 0BX
Direct Line: 01527 869103 (Wed-Fri)
Fax: 01527 869105 or 01527 869102
Email: jcoomby@worcestershire.gov.uk

Other useful contacts:

Ms. J. Ring
Environmental Health Officer (Housing Specialist)
Environmental Services
Bromsgrove District Council
Direct Line: 01527 881439
Email: j.ring@bromsgrove.gov.uk

Ms. M. Taylor
Senior Revenue Officer
Financial Services
Bromsgrove District Council
Direct Line: 01527 881224 (Mon-Wed)
Email: mandy.taylor@bromsgrove.gov.uk