



**EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT COVER SHEET**

<b>Title of Report:</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Annual Disabled Facilities Grant Scheme Review	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
<b>Meeting of:</b>	Corporate Management Team 21 September 2021	X
	Leader and Deputy Leaders 22 November 2021	X
	Leader's / Leader of the Opposition's Advisory Group / Independent Alliance Advisory Group 1 December 2021 / 2 December 2021	x
	Cabinet 20 December 2021	
	Scrutiny Audit and Value for Money Council Services Committee [DATE] / Scrutiny Community Regeneration, Environment and Health and Well Being Committee [DATE]	



<b>Is this an Executive Decision:</b>	YES	<b>Is this a Key Decision:</b>	YES
<b>Is this in the Forward Plan:</b>	YES	<b>Is the Report Confidential:</b>  <b>If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A LGA 1972:</b>	NO  [ ]

**Essential Signatories:**

**ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN THE NAME OF A HEAD OF SERVICE**

Monitoring Officer: **Chris Ebberley**

Date ..... Signature .....

Chief Finance Officer: **Sal Khan**

Date ..... Signature .....

**EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Report to Cabinet**

**Date: 20 December 2021**

**REPORT TITLE: 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Disabled Facilities Grant Review**

**PORTFOLIO: Regulatory Services**

**HEAD OF SERVICE: Mark Rizk**

**CONTACT OFFICER: Rachel Liddle Ext. No. x1838**

**WARD(S) AFFECTED: All Wards**

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an annual review of the Disabled Facilities Grant Service and seek approval for amendments to the Disabled Facilities Grants and Assistance Policy and an additional temporary 1 FTE Housing Adaptations Officer Post and 1 FTE Support Officer Post for 2 years.

**2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. The current in-house Disabled Facilities Grant Service began on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 which aimed to provide significant benefits for service users by reducing the time taken to undertake adaptations and the costs currently associated with administering Disabled Facilities Grants through the use of an approved contractor and reduced administrative costs.
- 2.2. The DFG service administers the full DFG process through the provision of support, information and advice; completion of application forms and the collation of supporting evidence; technical advice, preparation of schedules of works and drawings; application of planning permission and building regulations approval; advice on funding the adaptation if not fully met by the grant; obtaining contractor quotes; arrangement and agreement of work commencement dates; supervision of the relevant works and payment of contractors. A Disabled Facilities Grants and Assistance Policy was adopted providing discretionary assistance through top up grants and grants to assist clients to move to an adapted home.

- 2.3. Whilst the full DFG process is complex the in-house DFG service has been designed to be as simple as possible, ensuring that cases are actively progressed to reduce delays. This has reduced the DFG process timescales significantly from 362 days for cases handled by the previous provider in 2017/18 to 291 days for cases handled by the in-house DFG team in 2019/20 although Covid has resulted in a slight increase to 309 days in 2020/21.
- 2.4. Since the initial setup of the in-house DFG service a number of significant challenges were encountered which impacted significantly on processing DFGs. These include a significant increase of workload due to changes in Social Care and Health; difficulties in gaining landlord permission for Trent and Dove properties; challenges associated with a contractor; additional specialist officer resources required to assist in providing plans and schedules of works to assist complex works; and difficulties in sourcing funding for complex works that exceed the maximum £30,000 grant allowance.
- 2.5. These challenges were reported in the Disabled Facilities Grant Scheme Review in 2019 and 2020, along with a number of changes and improvements identified to reduce the impact of these challenges. The performance of the DFG service has been continually monitored and corrective action taken for any challenges that have arisen; as a result the timescales associated with the delivery of DFGs has significantly reduced, despite a slight increase due to Covid in 2020/21 and the number of DFGs being granted and completed has risen (see 5.2).
- 2.6. This report provides an updated review of the Disabled Facilities Grant Service and seeks approval for amendments to the Disabled Facilities Grants and Assistance Policy and an additional temporary 1 FTE Housing Adaptations Officer Post and 1 FTE Support Officer Post for 2 years.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1. East Staffordshire Borough Council has a statutory duty under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to provide financial assistance to disabled people for a range of essential adaptations to their home through a Disabled Facilities Grant.
- 3.2. A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is available to owner occupiers, private sector tenants and registered social landlord tenants to enable adaptations to be carried out in their own home to meet disability needs. This service is available for adults and children. The purposes for which mandatory disabled facilities grants may be given are set out in section 23(1) of the 1996 Act. The primary purpose is to facilitate access and provision, this includes work to remove or help overcome any obstacles which prevent the disabled person from moving freely into and around the dwelling and enjoying the use of the dwelling and the facilities or amenities within it.
- 3.3. A DFG is a mandatory grant and in accordance with its statutory obligations the Council must either approve or, for defined reasons, refuse applications within six months of receipt and in any event without unreasonable delay.

- 3.4. In November 2013, East Staffordshire Borough Council agreed to enter a Participation Agreement with Staffordshire County Council for the procurement of a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) Service across the County and within the Borough. The service provided assistance and support to households to enable them to remain living independently in their own homes and facilitated the delivery of DFGs. The successful tender was won by Revival and following a 1 year extension the contract ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.
- 3.5 A report reviewing options for the future delivery of DFGs in January 2018 recommended the provision of an in-house Disabled Facilities Grant service to provide significant benefits for service users and the Council by adopting a more personalised approach to service delivery, seeking to reduce delivery times and costs through 'smarter' service provision and reduced administration.
- 3.5. The in-house DFG service began in April 2018 following a short transitional period for active cases that had initially been administered by the previous HIA, Revival.
- 3.6. The team consists of two Adaptations Officers and a Housing Technical Officer. The Housing Technical Officer was a post that was added in 2019 in response to the identified need. An approved list of Occupational Therapists are used to identify the adaptation that is required for each client and two approved contractors undertake the required adaptations.
- 3.7. A Disabled Facilities Grants and Assistance Policy was adopted which encompasses:
- Full delivery of an adaptation from initial enquiry through assessment to delivery.
  - Delivery by an integrated team including Adaptations Officers, Technical Officer, an approved list of Occupational Therapists, and an approved Contractor.
  - Provision of support and advice that the current HIA service provides, whilst the Council remains fully accountable for performance in relation to expenditure, timeliness of adaptations and customer satisfaction.
  - Provision of discretionary assistance to provide top-up grants, fund unforeseen works or issues of disrepair or to assist relocation to a suitable property.
- 3.8. The policy contains key performance indicators for the approval of valid applications within 3 working days for urgent applications and 20 working days for all other cases and the completion of all urgent adaptations within 55 working days from the date of initial enquiry and 150 working days for non-urgent applications. Performance indicators are also in place for Occupational Therapists and Contractors.

#### **4. Contribution to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1. Value for Money Council: The review of the disabled facilities grant service aims to secure improvements in the speed of delivery of disabled facilities grants and secure cost efficiencies through reduced service costs.
- 4.2. Environment and Health & Wellbeing: The provision of a disabled facilities grant is a key component in delivering the Government's objective of providing increased levels of care and support to disabled and vulnerable people to help them live independently and safely in their own homes.

## 5. Disabled Facilities Grant Service Review

- 5.1. The DFG service aims to provide an effective and efficient service that makes best use of DFG funding using a personalised approach to service delivery, seeking to reduce delivery times and costs through smarter service provision and reduced administration.
- 5.2. Since bringing the DFG service in-house in 2018, the number of approvals and completions have continued to increase, despite Covid being a significant barrier. DFG spend has also increased significantly and is now more aligned to the annual spend prior to 2018.

Table 1- DFG Approvals, Completions & Spend

	Number of DFGs Approved	Number of DFGs Completed	Total DFG Spend
20/21	59	49	£741K
19/20	44	35	£581K
18/19	16	32	£253K
17/18	88	77	£782K

- 5.3. One of the key aims of the service is to reduce the timescales associated with the delivery of a DFG. To achieve this the delivery of DFGs is monitored against a range of prescribed statutory and best practice performance indicators as detailed below:

Table 2- Performance Indicators

Key Stage	Performance Indicator	Type of Indicator
Application - Approval	6 months	Statutory
Approval- Work Commencement	12 months	
Urgent Case		
Application – Approval (urgent)	3 working days	KPI <sup>1</sup>
Approval – Completion (urgent)	20 working days	
Initial Enquiry – Completion (urgent)	55 working days	
Non Urgent Case		
Approval- Completion (non-urgent)	80 working days	KPI
Application – Approval (non-urgent)	20 working days	
Initial Enquiry – Completion (non urgent)	150 working days	

<sup>1</sup> Housing Consortium's Good Practice Guide for Disabled Adaptations

5.4. Throughout the process of delivery the dates of the following key stages are used to measure performance as detailed in Table 3:

Table 3- DFG Stages

Stage	Description
Initial Enquiry	Initial notification requesting a DFG. If 1 care need then client directed to the ESBC contracted OT. If a child's case or a Trent and Dove resident then the client is directed to Staffordshire County Council or Trent and Dove.
Referral	Referral received detailing the full adaptation that is required to meet the client's needs.
Application	The Adaptations Officers will process an application on behalf of the client. This involves obtaining ownership details of the property, tenant and/or owner permission certificates, financial checks or proof of benefits, drawing up plans and schedules of works, obtaining planning permission and/or building control approval if required, and contractor quotes.
Approval	A full and valid application is considered by the Head of Service for approval. Once approved the works can commence.
Completion	The adaptation has been completed and the works meet the requirements set by the OT. Certificates are obtained from the client, OT, building control (if required) along with any required certificates for electrical work etc and the contractor is paid.

5.5. The graph in figure 1 shows the timescales associated with the different stages of the entire DFG process for the previous 5 years. The graph shows that the timescales significantly reduced in 2019/20 compared to previous years, but have slightly increased in 2020/21. However, the timescale labelled 20/21\* shows the position with 5 problematic cases removed due to significant delays associated with Trent and Dove and Children's OT cases which are detailed in para. 5.7.

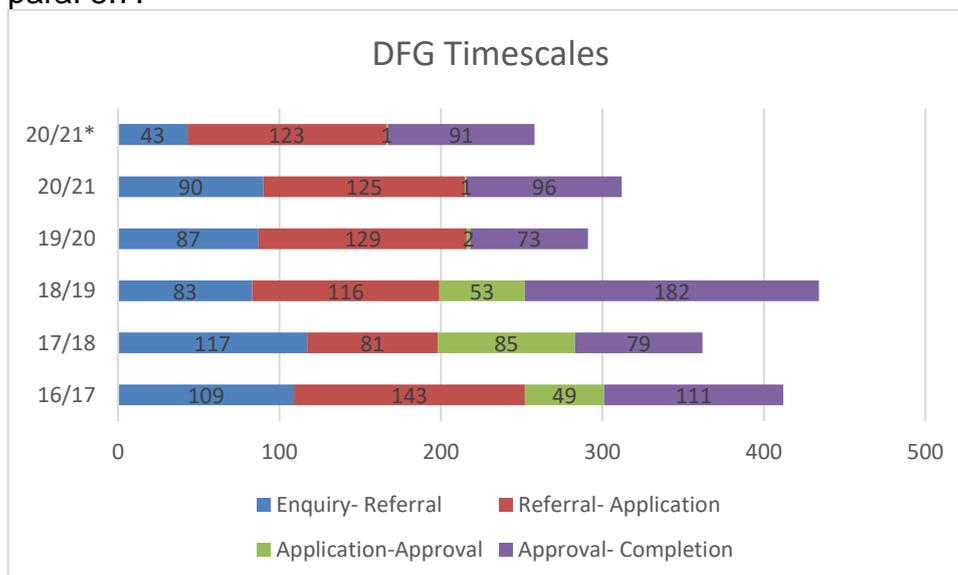


Figure 1- DFG Timescales

- 5.6. Whilst the average timescales in figure 1 provide an overview of the number of working days associated with the DFG process, they do not recognise the effect of unavoidable delays. Whilst the DFG process has been designed to be as streamlined as possible a number of unavoidable delays are still being experienced. These include:
- 5.6.1. Client delays when requesting preferred works, own contractors or providing the required documentation for financial checks.
  - 5.6.2. Delays in gaining landlord permission from Registered Social Landlords, such as Trent and Dove, Sanctuary Housing, Metropolitan and Orbit.
  - 5.6.3. Complex works requiring additional consultation with OTs, building control and contractors.
  - 5.6.4. The impact of Covid due to lockdown, lack of building supplies and lack of equipment such as wash/dry toilets and shower chairs (we are aiming at addressing this through bulk buying stock).
  - 5.6.5. Delays due to OT Assessments.

### **Client Delays**

- 5.7. Client delays are the main cause of delays in processing DFGs, often due to clients requested preferred works that are above those required for the client and outside any DFG Award. Examples include extensions being requested instead of converting the current bathroom in to a level access shower. This creates additional work for the caseworker and often results in the preferred adaptation not going ahead due to a lack of finances to fund the preferred works. Additional delays are caused whereby clients request their own preferred contractors which can result in poor workmanship and additional workload to try and rectify these issues. To reduce the burden that preferred works have on the DFG service the DFG policy has been amended to clarify that the application process for preferred works will not be managed by the DFG service and the contract with the builder will need to be managed by the client.

### **OT Assessment Timescales**

- 5.8. One of the most significant delays affecting timescales has been identified at the initial stage of the process which incorporates an Occupational Therapy assessment to determine the most appropriate works that are required to meet the needs of the client. The majority of cases are assessed by our own contracted OT service, which are processed within an average of 17 working days, however other cases that have received an assessment from either a Registered Social Housing OT or a Children's OT have demonstrated significant delays with an average of 240 working days, shown in figure 2.
- 5.9. The impact on the overall DFG process can be seen in figure 1 whereby 5 of the longest timescales due to OT delays have been removed. The timescales for these range from 344 to 613 working days from initial enquiry to completion of a referral. This has been fed back to the relevant Registered Social Landlord and Staffordshire County Council and has been excluded from the data in the rest of this document as it is not reflective of the in-house DFG process.

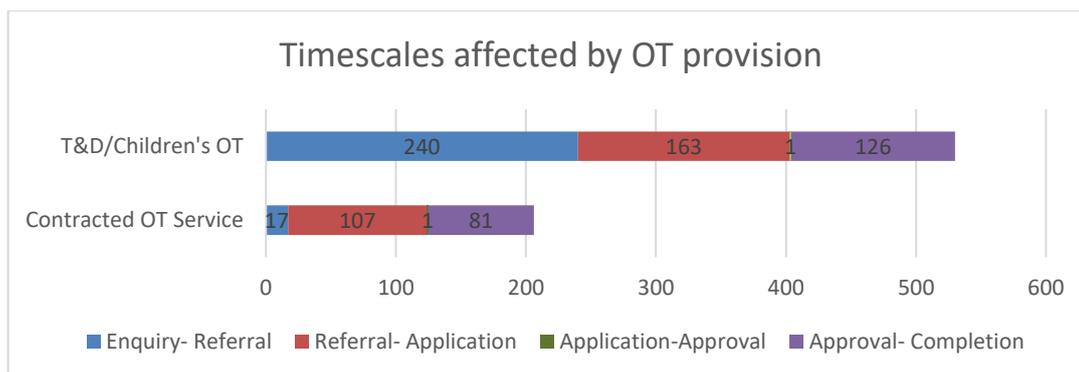


Figure 2- Timescales by OT Provision

- 5.10. To reduce the delays associated with the Registered Social Landlord OT all tenants are provided with the option to use our contracted OT as an alternative to the registered social landlord OT.
- 5.11. The timescales associated with the period between enquiry to referral has been discussed with the Children's OT service to identify areas for improvement. One of the key issues is the complexity surrounding children's cases; in comparison to adult assessment, children's cases have a much deeper involvement covering safeguarding along with wider connections with social services. Any new case has an immediate screening assessment which considers priority level based on risk and makes an initial assessment of need. The case is then assigned to an OT once this has been completed and any immediate needs have been resolved. As such the current date that is reported is not reflective of the true date in which the client begins the DFG process. This has now been amended for all future children's DFG referrals.
- 5.12. It is important that we fully appreciate the complexity associated with children's cases as this is the main cause of the extended timescales. The data in figure 2 relates to 8 children's cases, of which 5 had timescales in excess of 100 working days in the enquiry – referral stage. All cases received an initial visit within 4 weeks however the time taken to produce a referral is extended as the needs of the clients are complex. In 3 of the 5 cases the referral has had to be amended several times due to the changing needs of the client. This is not unusual for children's cases and often results in the referral being revised several times before the OT is confident to determine what adaptation is required to meet the needs of the client. Delays are also frequently impacted by hospital admissions and as a consequence the wider impacts on the family unit need to be carefully handled and not rushed.
- 5.13. To reduce the timescales associated with Children's applications we hold 6 weekly management meetings in which cases are discussed between caseworkers and OTs to ensure cases are progressing with minimal delays and any issues can be promptly resolved.
- 5.14. The option of funding a children's OT to work specifically in East Staffordshire has been considered, however there is no waiting list for OT assessments and therefore it was felt that the resources for the children's OT team are sufficient to meet demand. All children's OTs tend to work in specific areas based on

location, however they can move in to different areas depending on workloads and demand which reduces delays. Whilst a specific OT for East Staffordshire would result in additional resources for the borough it was reported that the demand for an OT was not sufficient enough to warrant this additional resource.

- 5.15. However, East Staffordshire Borough Council have indicated an interest in investigating options to improve the enquiry to referral part of the DFG journey, along with all Staffordshire districts. Options include a shared OT service either using the existing OT service, managed by Staffordshire County Council or the procurement of a single service contract. Any new service will be from April 2023 and work to begin scoping the service is due to begin in November 2021. This will enable OT resources to be considered and performance indicators to be set to reduce OT delays.
- 5.16. Alternative options to aid the progress of Children's applications were suggested by the Children's OT which included increasing the amount of discretionary funding available for adaptations, as the cost of children's adaptations are often in excess of the current £45,000 discretionary assistance. This is further supported by a significant rise in the cost of building supplies which is resulting in the cost of extensions exceeding the amount of funding that is available. The ability to award grants above the mandatory maximum will help clients receive adaptations more quickly, rather than seeking alternative sources of funding which is a lengthy process.
- 5.17. It is recommended that discretionary assistance is increased to £20,000 as a top up to the mandatory grant to reflect the increase in costs associated with building supplies. For exceptional children's cases it is recommended that discretionary assistance is provided up to £80,000 for exceptional children's cases whereby relocation would have a negative effect on the family and wider support unit. Exceptional cases will require a justification report that is supported by the Environmental Health Manager and Children's OT that will be presented for approval to the Head of Service. Where a property is unsuitable for adaptation and relocation is an appropriate option then the relocation grant can be utilised and it is recommended that this is increased from £5,000 to £10,000 and the policy amended to specify that this can also include a contribution towards the payment of stamp duty. These recommendations are reflected in the Disabled Facilities and Adaptations Policy 2018 in Appendix 1.

### **Covid**

- 5.18. Whilst timescales for 2020/21 have slightly risen compared to the previous year, the impact from Covid has had a significant, negative impact on all grants processed and completed within 2020/21, with an average delay of 12 weeks within the DFG process timescale. During lockdown Occupational Therapists, Caseworkers and Contractors were unable to visit clients to undertake any work. By promptly redesigning the process to avoid face to face contact, we were able to reduce these delays by incorporating remote OT assessments, and completion of application paperwork. The main impact that could not be avoided was the delay for contractors to visit clients to quote for works or to undertake works. There have also been additional delays due to supplier shortages such as building materials including plaster, and also shortages of

wash dry toilets and shower chairs which have had an impact on the approval-completion part of the process shown in purple in figure 1 above. As lockdown began to ease we have also had delays due to clients safeguarding due to them being high risk, or due to them being concerned about letting other people in to their property. A number of these processes have been incorporated into our standard processes to improve the application process for clients.

- 5.19. The effect of the delays associated with Covid can be seen in the timescales which are monitored alongside the performance indicators in table 4. Two out of three urgent cases were delayed due to Covid as contractors were unable to start on site for 3 months and one case was delayed due to complex works that required extensive consideration by a number of OTs.

	<b>Performance Indicators</b>	2019/2020	2020/2021	Percentage of cases within Target PI
<b>Urgent Referrals</b>				
Determination	<b>3</b>	2	1	100%
Approval – Completion	<b>20</b>	65	97	0%
Enquiry-Completion	<b>55</b>	145	262	0%
<b>Non Urgent Referrals</b>				
Determination	<b>20</b>	2	1	100%
Approval – Completion	<b>80</b>	68	80	60%
Enquiry-Completion	<b>150</b>	178	198	40%

Table 4- Performance Indicators

- 5.20. These performance indicators are recommended by the Housing Consortium’s Good Practice Guide for Disabled Adaptations which is due to be replaced by more up to date performance indicators within the next year. As soon as this guidance is available then it is recommended that these targets be replaced. Whilst it is noted that the average timescales for enquiry to completion for urgent and non-urgent referrals are not within the performance indicators, 40% of non-urgent referrals have met this PI. It should be noted that Covid has had a significant effect of timescales, however it is also considered that the ability to meet the performance indicators for urgent referrals is delayed as the works often required are highly complex, often involving significant extensions which cannot be completed within the targets that have been set.

### **Cost of Works**

- 5.21. The cost of DFGs also has a significant impact on timescales as larger, more complex grants have a longer process than smaller grants. Over the last 3 years the trend associated with DFGs has changed; grants costing £5000-£15,000 still make up the majority of grants awarded, however the amount of grants costing over £15,000 has doubled in 2020/21. This means that there is a larger proportion of complex works that have longer timescales associated with them compared to previous years.

5.22. Figure 3 demonstrates the average timescales associated with the size of grant, with grants costing less than £5000 being completed in 110 working days, grants costing £5001-£15,000 completing in 225 working days, and grants costing over £15,001 being completed in excess of 250 working days.

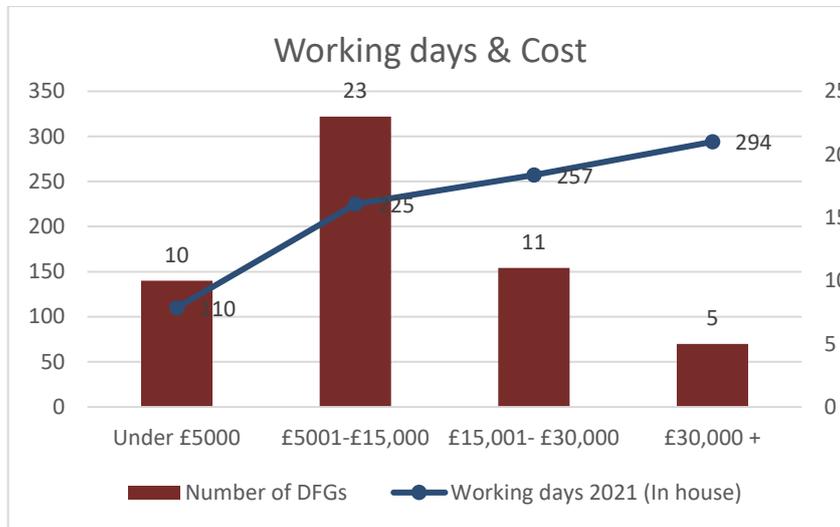


Figure 3- Working Days & Cost

### **Comparator Review & Benchmarking**

5.23. A comparison of timescales alongside neighbouring authorities has been provided in figure 4. This is based on figures for non-complex cases provided by Millbrook Healthcare as part of a Quarter 3 service update and include a 16 week deduction for Covid along with the removal of landlord and client delays. Figures for East Staffordshire Borough Council have been provided for the same period with the same delays being removed; this shows that the DFG process from request to approval is at least 10 weeks shorter than other authorities and the process from request to completion is approximately half at 9 weeks.

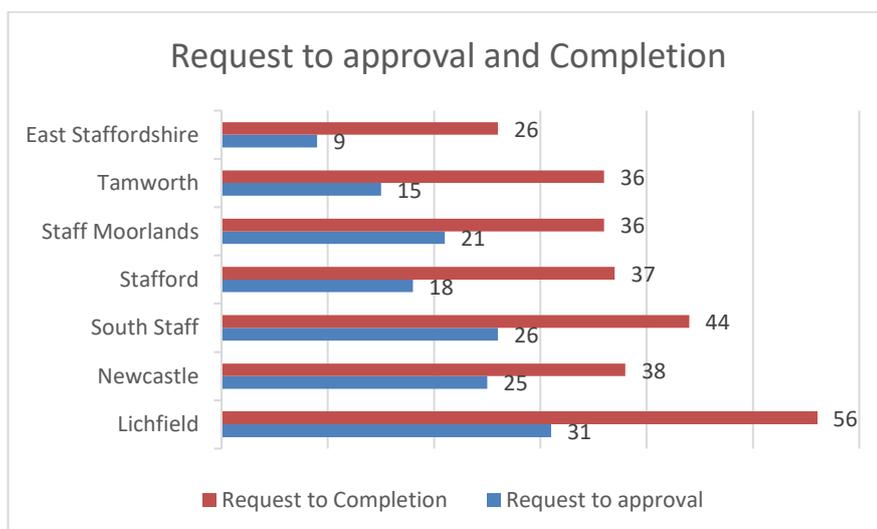


Figure 4- Comparison of Timescales with Neighbouring Authorities

5.24. A comparison of DFG spend and completed cases between neighbouring authorities is provided in table 5 below. Whilst East Staffordshire Borough

Council has one of the lowest amount of completed cases, we have delivered 72 adaptations as a number of cases received more than 1 adaptation and have the third highest value of completed cases compared to neighbouring authorities. This may be due to a higher demand for larger DFGs costing over £15,000 which we are currently experiencing, which are more complex and take longer to complete.

District	Cases Closed	Adaptations Delivered	Value of completed cases
Lichfield District Council HIA	53	53	£529,278.93
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council HIA	60	60	£566,362.06
South Staffordshire Council HIA	85	85	£769,375.44
Stafford Borough Council HIA	69	69	£653,921.64
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council HIA	71	71	£872,463.25
Tamworth Borough Council HIA	27	27	£281,511.15
East Staffordshire Borough Council	49	72	£656,106.47

Table 5- Comparison of DFG spend and completed cases

5.25. Benchmarking has been undertaken against our CIPFA neighbours to provide a comparison of timescales for the DFG process and expenditure. Information was requested from 15 authorities however only 6 responses have been received; only one response provided the full breakdown of stages throughout the DFG process and two responses were unable to report on the full DFG process from the date of enquiry to completion. Figure 5 below highlights the timescales between OT enquiry to completion for the previous 5 years and figure 6 shows the timescale from OT referral to completion.

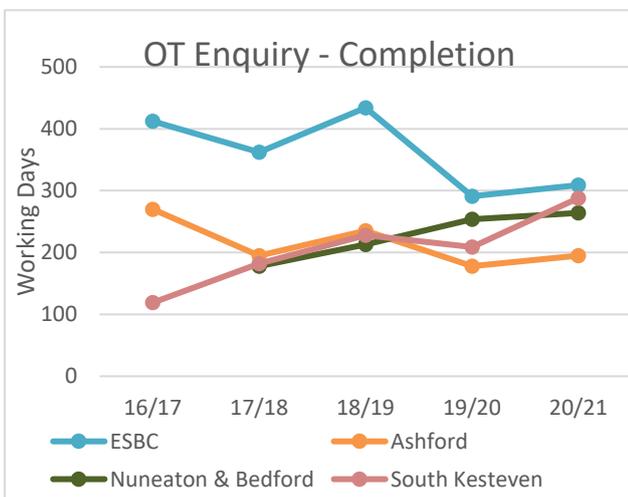


Figure 5- Timescale from Enquiry to Completion

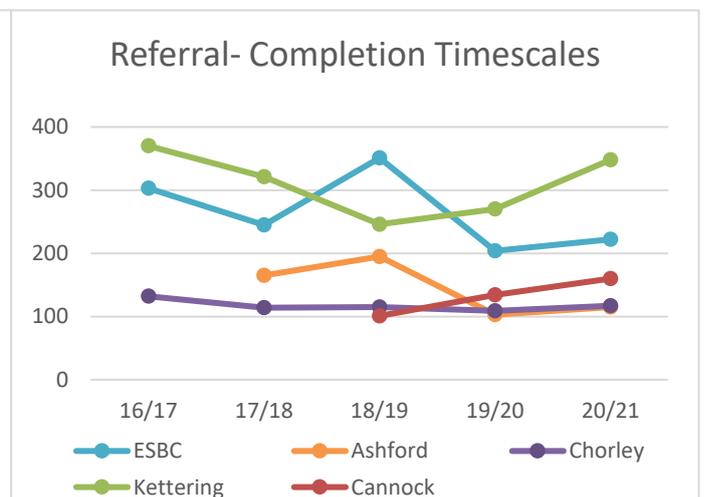


Figure 6- Timescale from Referral to Completion

5.26. Figure 5 shows that ESBC has the longest timescale from OT enquiry to completion, however it highlights a significant reduction in the timescale from 2019 onwards which is more representative of the other authorities. Figure 6 shows that without including the OT stage in the DFG process, ESBC have the second highest timescale from referral to completion, which also highlights a significant improvement since 18/19. The impact of Covid can be seen in both

graphs whereby the timescales for all authorities have increased slightly in 2020/21.

- 5.27. Figure 7 shows the percentage DFG expenditure of the grant received for the previous 5 years. Whilst ESBC had a significantly low percentage of expenditure in 2018/19, all other years demonstrate comparable expenditure against the DFG grant and in 2020/21 ESBC were the second highest against the other authorities.

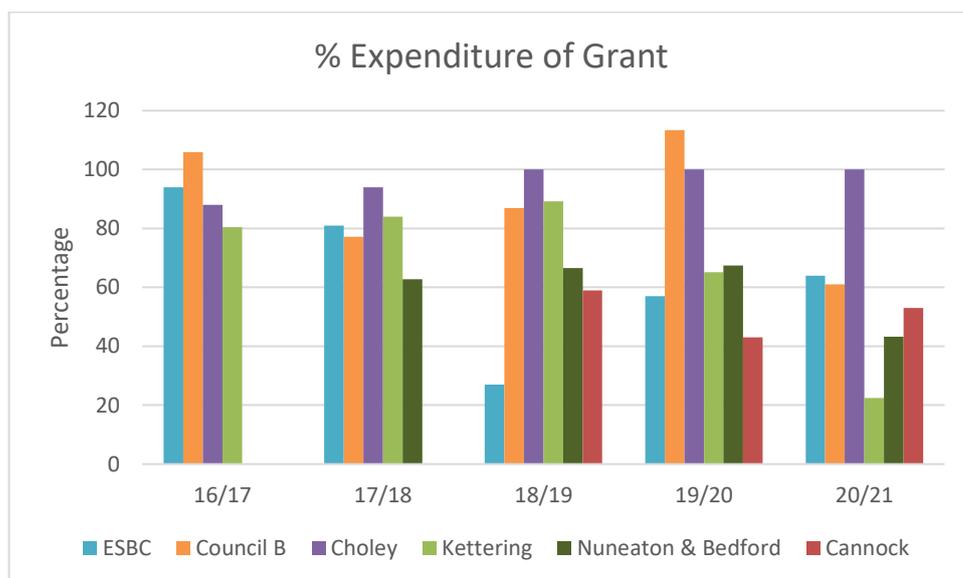


Figure 7- DFG expenditure against grant

### **Demand for DFGs**

- 5.28. Table 6 shows the current demand for DFGs with the number of cases currently at each stage of the DFG process as at August 2021. The total cost of these works is estimated at £2,176,058 which demonstrates the ongoing need to ensure that the grant funding is used as cost effectively as possible to reduce delays to the process for clients and to reduce any financial risks to the council should demand outweigh the funding that is available.

DFG Stage	Number of Cases	Cost
Enquiry	82	£574,000 (estimate)
Referral	36	£517,000 (estimate)
Application	14	£243,000 (estimate)
Approval	41	£616,833 (actual)
Completion	12	£225,225 (actual)
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>£2,176,058</b>
Expenditure to date on Caseload in Progress above		£ 367,005
Estimated Outstanding Financial Commitment on Grant		£1,809,053

Table 6- Current DFG demand by caseload

- 5.29. Despite Covid having a significant delay on processing DFGs in 2020/21 the timescales are only slightly higher than 2019/20 which demonstrates that the service is working efficiently and effectively. The amount of expenditure has also risen significantly, however with the current resources (2 caseworkers and 1 technical officer) it is not possible to secure additional expenditure to reduce

the amount of grant that is carried forward. It is therefore recommended that additional resources are brought in to the team to assist with the caseworker role.

- 5.30. Option 1 is to create an additional 1 FTE caseworker which will provide resources to process up to an additional 40 DFGs with an estimated additional expenditure of £280,000. The initial cost of the caseworker role is £27,829 (21/22 prices) which will increase the cost of the service to £129,000 in a full year. Based on expenditure in 20/21 of £741,000 this option would increase expenditure to an estimated £1,048,829 (Total cost of works and additional officer costs).
- 5.31. Option 2 is for 2 FTE caseworkers which would provide the ability to process an additional 80 applications, and expenditure up to £560,000. The cost of 2 additional caseworkers is £55,658 (21/22 prices) which will increase the cost of the service to £156,829. Based on expenditure in 20/21 of £741,000 this option would increase expenditure to an estimated £1,356,658.
- 5.32. Option 3 is to recruit a 1FTE caseworker and 1 FTE support officer that can support the caseworker role and reduce the administrative burden that is currently dealt with by caseworkers when processing applications; this will significantly streamline the work that is undertaken by the caseworkers by enabling them to focus on processing and supporting DFG applications whilst the support officer can focus on new DFG referrals and enquiries and the administration of all payments. Whilst it is difficult to estimate the increase in cases that can be progressed with the introduction of a support officer, it is estimated that administration forms 25% of the caseworker role; as such this will result in a conservative estimate of 70-80 additional DFGs being processed with an additional expenditure up to £560,000. The cost of a caseworker and a support officer is estimated at £52,539 (21/22 prices) which would increase the cost of the service to £153,710. Based on expenditure in 20/21 of £741,000 this option would increase expenditure to an estimated £1,353,539.
- 5.33. Based on the current demand, the estimated and actual cost of cases is high at £2,176,058 (table 6) and has remained at this level since 2020. It is also anticipated that the increase of discretionary assistance will result in additional expenditure for subsequent years. Whilst the current DFG budget exceeds the anticipated costs of cases (as a result of historical carry forward), the grant received in 2021/22 is lower at £1,160,000 and therefore it is important that the cost of the service is kept under close review to ensure that sufficient resources are available to fund all grant applications. Option 1 would provide an increase to expenditure, however the anticipated amount would be less than the grant that is received and would therefore not affect the carry forward budget from previous years. Option 2 would provide a significant increase in expenditure but would pose a financial risk long term once the current budget has been used as the incoming grant is lower than the anticipated expenditure. Option 3 is also in excess of the grant received which would enable the carry forward budget to be utilised but to a lesser extent and therefore lower financial risk than option 2.

It is therefore recommended that Option 3 is approved for an additional 1 FTE caseworker and 1 FTE support officer post to provide additional resources for the team (currently 3 FTE). It is recommended that these be temporary posts for 2 years and will be reviewed to consider extension subject to future funding being available.

- 5.34. These roles will be financed directly from the DFG capital grant (as a top slice) as per the other DFG officer posts, as the services provided are within those specified in the Housing Renewal Grants (Services and Charges) Order 1996.

## 6. **Financial Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit: Anya Murray*

- 6.1. The main financial issues arising from this Report are as follows:
- 6.2. Table 7 shows the expenditure for DFGs for the previous 5 years. The DFG grant provided to the Council has continued to increase and although expenditure is returning to previous levels, it is not sufficient to make up the shortfall. Any unused funding has been carried over to the following financial year to ensure that funding remains available to meet the demand detailed in paragraph 5.16.
- 6.3. There is a significant time lag between cases that are in progress and expenditure therefore the financial information will not fully cover the works that have been undertaken on cases that have not been paid for in the current financial year.

*Table 7- DFG Expenditure*

	B/F £	Grant £	SCC £	Budget £	Expenditure £	C/F £
2016/17	28,582	795,155	72,000	751,737	743,847	7,890
2017/18	7,890	962,419	6,000	976,309	781,931	194,378
2018/19	194,378	947,755	0	1,142,133	253,450	888,683
2019/20	888,683	1,022,684	0	1,911,367	581,039	1,330,328
2020/21	1,330,328	1,160,392	0	2,490,720	740,582	1,750,138
2021/22 as at 9 September 2021	1,750,138	1,160,392	0	2,910,530	255,467	n/a

Notes-

2016/17 - SCC 'expenditure' was estimated at year end as no agreement had been reached. Additional monies relating to 2016/17 were paid over in 2017/18

2017/18 - Grant received includes additional grant of £90,964 applied for during year

- 6.4. From table 8 below, it can be seen that the level of actual expenditure as at 9 September 2021 is in excess of recent past performance and compares

favourably in percentage terms but it will not be sufficient to significantly expend the outstanding budget.

Table 8- Profiled Annual DFG Expenditure

Financial Year	Total Budget	Total exp as at Q1	Spend as % budget	Total exp as at Q2	Spend as % budget
	£	£		£	
2017/18	976,309	62,547	6%	144,212	15%
2018/19	1,142,133	17,803	2%	87,923	8%
2019/20	1,911,367	60,499	3%	151,674	8%
2020/21	2,490,720	27,784	1%	193,219	8%
2021/22 to date	2,910,530	104,669	4%	255,467	9%

- 6.5. The initial cost of the 1 FTE temporary caseworker post and 1 FTE temporary support officer post is estimated at £52,539 for the first year. This means that the estimated total cost of the service being met will be £153,710 in a full year. Both costs are based on current 2021/22 salary scales/NI and Superannuation. These costs are met in full by the DFG as the services provided are within those specified in the Housing Renewal Grants (Services and Charges) Order 1996.
- 6.5 Using the estimate of £153,710 per year, the service would achieve a return of 12% (or less) if total DFG grant expenditure were to rise to £1,280,917 per annum (or more).

## 7. **Risk Assessment and Management**

- 7.1. The main risks to this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:
- 7.2. **Positive** (Opportunities/Benefits):
- 7.2.1. Reduced administrative costs through the provision of a cost effective in-house disabled facilities grant service.
- 7.2.2. Reduced timescales involved in the delivery of adaptations providing a reduction in delays.
- 7.2.3. Increased number of adaptations delivered to clients resulting in reduced social care and health costs, a reduction of accidents in the home and increasing the number of people that are able to remain in their own home.
- 7.2.4. Ability to provide a service that is responsive to local needs of the borough residents.
- 7.2.5. The provision and use of a Council approved contractor procured through a tender process providing consistent approach to adaptations.
- 7.2.6. Cost recovery of services permissible under the Housing Grants (Services and Charges) Order 1996.

### 7.3. **Negative** (Threats):

7.3.1. Covid 19 restrictions can delay or prevent visits and adaptations to properties- this has had a significant impact on delivery for 2020/21 and is a risk for future delivery. The use of remote assessments and case work is being used to negate this risk, along with improved reporting of restrictions for specific clients.

7.3.2. Reduced or insufficient funding received from MHCLG and passporting of money from Staffordshire County Council reducing the ability to provide grants, resulting in additional delays to the current service.

7.3.3. The council is unable to recover VAT on Disabled Facility Grant work and is reliant on the contractor ensuring the maximum number of invoices are zero rated as possible. This used to be the agency responsibility to arrange but will now be directly chargeable against the capital grant where incurred.

7.3.4. Increasing the amount available as discretionary grant (top up monies) reduces the overall amount available for mandatory grants.

7.3.5. Additional demands on the service due to the effects of long Covid on clients that may need to access the service (unknown impact)

7.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

## 8. **Legal Considerations**

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:  
Caroline Elwood*

8.1. The main legal issues arising from this Report are as follows.

8.2. The principal legal provisions are contained in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and associated regulations. This Act explicitly covers mandatory DFGs offering assistance once the recommendation has fulfilled the criteria of an adaptation being 'necessary and appropriate' and 'reasonable and practical'. Applicants also have to satisfy a Test of Resources looking at their income and savings which determines whether they will have to contribute towards a grant.

8.3. The maximum amount of DFG is currently set by The Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes) (England) Order 2008 at £30,000 and has been at this level since 2008.

8.4. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 provides freedom and opportunities for the Local Authority to address housing issues. This Order had important implications for local housing authorities because it repeals much of the existing prescriptive legislation governing the

provision of renewal grants to homeowners and replaces it with a new wide-ranging power to provide assistance for housing renewal.

- 8.5. Section 2 Local Government Act 2008 also gives the Council wide powers to do anything to promote the improvement of the social well-being of any of its inhabitants in its area.
- 8.6. The provision of discretionary assistance is detailed within the Disabled Facilities Grants and Adaptations Policy which is available for inspection, free of charge, at the Town Hall, Burton Upon Trent at all reasonable times and copies of a document containing a summary of the policy may be obtained by post.
- 8.7. The provision of disabled facilities grants and discretionary assistance is subject to grant conditions which are detailed within Appendix 1 of the Disabled Facilities Grants and Adaptations Policy 2018.
- 8.8. The Provision of the discretionary assistance as a top up for works exceeding the £30,000 maximum disabled facilities grant facilitates the council in meeting its statutory duties, expedites the process and maximises the amount of the grant expended.
- 8.9. The Council has the power, under s112 Local Government Act 1972, to appoint such officers as it thinks necessary for the purpose of discharging any of its functions.

## **9. Equalities and Health**

- 9.1. **Equality impacts:** The subject of this Report is not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.
- 9.2. **Health impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

## **10. Human Rights**

- 10.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

## **11. Sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)**

- 11.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) N/A

## **12. Recommendation(s)**

- 12.1. To approve a temporary 1 FTE Housing Adaptations Officer and 1 FTE support officer post for 2 years funded using the Disabled Facilities Grant received.

12.2. To approve the amendments to the Disabled Facilities Grants and Adaptations Policy to provide clarity for client referred works and to increase the amount of discretionary top up funding to £20,000 and £50,000 for exceptional children's adaptations and increase relocation funding to £10,000.

12.3. To note the contents of the report.

**13. Appendices**

13.1. Appendix 1- Disabled Facilities Grants and Adaptations Policy 2018