

# People Select Committee

## Foundations Review Feedback

4<sup>th</sup> November 2024

### Foundations Recommendations

The following recommendations from Foundations are based on the information gathered during the workshop session with the Housing Investment team:

- **Improved information from occupational therapists:** Review current referral forms used by the occupational therapy team to ensure it captures all relevant information to be able to make a decision on eligible works.
- **Improved Information for Applicants:** There is a need to ensure that potential applicants receive comprehensive information, particularly regarding the test of resources and the overall process, to support informed decision-making.
- **Tracking and Communication During Waiting Period:** A system to keep applicants informed of their position on the waiting list and check if their circumstances have changed during the wait should be introduced, helping to manage expectations and mitigate delays.
- **Consideration of occupational therapy Review Necessity:** Review with the occupational therapy team whether all cases need to be signed off by an occupational therapist could help streamline the process, particularly for straightforward adaptations that are unlikely to be changed.
- **Better Use of Technical Officer Time:** Tasks such as financial assessments and asbestos checks could be re-evaluated to ensure the technical officer's time is used more effectively, given their significant workload.
- **Increase Technical Officer Capacity:** Currently, there is only one technical officer, which limits the volume of work that can be processed. Increasing capacity would improve service efficiency and reduce delays.
- **Streamline Contractor Quote Process:** The requirement for three quotes rather than two could be reconsidered to reduce delays, which currently add up to a month to the process.
- During the workshop, the team explored ways to improve the customer experience throughout the DFG process. Several key recommendations were proposed, focusing on improving communication, support, and the overall customer journey. These suggestions aim to make the process more accessible and user-friendly while reducing delays and enhancing transparency.

### First Contact

- **Review and improve the council's website:** The information available online should be updated and expanded to give residents a clearer understanding of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and the process involved. This would help set expectations and provide essential details upfront.
- **Widen promotion of the service\*\*:** Consider increasing outreach efforts to make more residents aware of the DFG. For example, promoting the service in GP surgeries or other community spaces could help engage those who may benefit from adaptations but are currently unaware of the available support.

## Assessment

- **Provide clear and honest information:** At the assessment stage, consistent information regarding necessary and appropriate adaptations and realistic waiting times should be provided. Transparency about these factors will help manage customer expectations and reduce confusion or frustration later in the process.

## Compile the Application

- **Enhanced support for applicants:** It was suggested that an enhanced offer be provided to support residents with the application process. This could include more hands-on guidance and assistance to ensure that applications are completed accurately and efficiently.
- **Allow electronic document uploads:** To streamline the process, applicants should be allowed to upload required documents electronically. This would help reduce paperwork delays and allow for quicker processing.
- **Remove means test for smaller adaptations:** To speed up the process, it was suggested that the means test for adaptations below £5,000 be removed. This would simplify the approval process for smaller projects and ensure quicker delivery of adaptations.

## Approval

- **Inform applicants about potential wait times:** After the grant approval, there could still be a wait before the installation of adaptations begins. Applicants should be informed of this upfront to avoid any misunderstandings.
- **Provide a courtesy call after approval:** A follow-up call should be made to explain the next steps in the process, ensuring that the applicant is fully informed and comfortable with the timeline and expectations.

## Carry Out Work

- **Client liaison officer role:** Consider introducing a client liaison officer who can keep applicants informed about the start dates of their works and any changes to the schedule. This role would help maintain clear communication throughout the installation process.
- **Extend choice of materials:** When carrying out adaptations, particularly bathroom installations, applicants should be offered a wider choice of materials, such as colours for tiles and fixtures, to allow for more personalised adaptations.
- **Conduct a post-completion visit:** After the works are completed, a visit should be arranged to go through the handover pack with the applicant, ensuring they understand how to use any new equipment and addressing any final questions or concerns.

## Conclusion

The Stockton-On-Tees Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) workshop highlighted the Adaptations Team's commitment to supporting residents in Stockton-On-Tees-On-Tees-on-Tees. The team has faced challenges due to recruitment issues and staff sickness. However, the recent recruitment of an experienced DFG Manager brings valuable expertise that will support the team during a period of increasing demand.

The workshop demonstrated the team's strengths, including strong collaboration with social care, an effective fast-track process for stairlifts and ramps, and a focus on customer satisfaction. Opportunities for improvement were identified, such as enhancing communication with applicants during the waiting period and ensuring detailed information is provided for complex cases. Reviewing

staffing levels and streamlining processes, such as reducing the number of required quotes, could also improve efficiency.

Overall, the team's dedication to delivering high-quality service is evident. Implementing the workshop's recommendations will further improve efficiency, enhance communication, and ensure a smoother experience for residents receiving DFG support.