

MAYOR AND CABINET			
Report Title	Mayoral response to the comments of the Public Accounts Select Committee on the adaptation service to examine the impact of its work, and test its value for money.		
Ward	All	Item No.	
Contributors	Executive Director for Customer Services & Regeneration Executive Director for Community Services		
Class	Open	Date	26 October 2011

1. Purpose

- 1.1. In May 2011, the Public Accounts Select Committee (PAC) considered a report outlining the process of a DFG (Disabled Facilities Grant) application. PAC have set out their recommendations, for referral to Mayor & Cabinet. This report sets out the response of the Executive Directors for Customer Services and Community to the recommendations that have been made.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy contains the shared priorities for the borough. It sets out a framework for improving the quality of life and life chances for all who live in the borough. The Council has outlined ten corporate priorities which enables the delivery of the strategy. The Adaptations service assists with caring for adults and older people and working with health services to support adults and older people in need of care.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Mayor:

- 3.1. Notes the response from Executive Director for Customer Services and the Executive Director for Community Services.
- 3.2. Agrees that the report should be forwarded to PAC.

4. Response to recommendations

The PAC would like to make the following comments:

- 4.1. ***The Council should ensure that an equitable proportion of costs are recovered from the NHS, reflecting the savings to joint commissioning budgets as well as actual outlay.***

4.1.1. Response:

There is a Joint Strategic Commissioning Group who consider overall funding and how this is shared between the organisations. This group is chaired by Aileen Buckton, Executive Director of Community Services. It is this group who will

oversee funding available for preventative and reablement approaches, and will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the service.

4.1.2. Reablement can form an important part of admission avoidance and supports hospital discharge which saves money from the acute and social care sector. The NHS has made money available to support reablement this year and there is significant additional investment for social care from the Department of Health over the next two years. Some of the services that work between the hospital and home are joint funded with health, these are the intermediate care services. Intermediate care provides a multi-agency and multi disciplinary intensive support service between the hospital and home. Whilst this forms part of the care pathway this money from health does not fund major adaptations in people's homes as the statutory responsibility falls to the local authority housing department to fund under DFG funding.

4.1.3. There is pressure on this DFG budget as demand is rising steadily whilst central Government funding is not increasing. Registered Social landlords (RSLs) are increasingly drawing back from funding major adaptations, so the number of applications from residents in this type of accommodation is increasing. Lewisham continues to transfer stock to RSLs, which have differing procedures for arranging and funding adaptations. Although many have signed up to the South East London Housing Partnership (SELHP) adaptations protocol, there is no statutory obligation for them to fund adaptations and central auditing of this is inconsistent. In 2007, there were 67 different RSLs with property in Lewisham. Several RSLs have approached the Grants and Occupational Therapy (OT) Teams within the first quarter of 2010-11 to report they do not have a budget to fund major adaptations. Family Mosaic has reported that they have cut their regional adaptations budget by nearly 60% this year.

4.2. ***The Council should conduct an audit of adaptations, to involve reassessing a selection of adaptations a certain period of time after implementation, to see if they are providing the benefits they were intended to produce. This could be done alongside reablement monitoring.***

4.2.1. **Response:**

Officers will put in place a program of sample audits. This will involve monitoring both the quality of work done and whether the adaptation achieves the intended outcomes for the service user.

4.2.2. These audits will be prepared jointly by officers from the Grants Team and the OT Service.

4.3. ***There should be a presumption that waiting times in relation to all stages of the adaptations process, especially installing major adaptations following the award of a DFG, should be reduced as much as possible, whilst maintaining an affordable DFG programme. The use of external OT contractors to help to clear waiting lists, as is practice in other London boroughs, should be considered. When prioritising residents for works, officers should consider the improvement to a resident's life that will be achieved by the work, in addition to risk and overall level of need.***

4.3.1. **Response:**

A new monitoring system has been put in place to track waiting times at all stages of the process. This has already had a tangible effect on reducing timescales.

4.4. ***Data on waiting times and the savings resulting from reablement should be regularly collated and published; and provided to the Healthier Communities Select Committee at least once a year.***

4.4.1. **Response:**

Officers will collate data relating to the performance and outcomes of reablement, and present an annual report to Healthier Communities Select Committee as required.

4.5.

a) The information and advice to residents not eligible for social care services, especially DFGs, needs to improve. The initial point of contact with the resident (refusal of DFG) should be used as an opportunity to offer appropriate advice, including information on reputable companies providing appropriate equipment and signposting to suitable equipment in their catalogues.

b) The provision of appropriate advice should include signposting residents to specialist charities that can quickly provide adaptations, where appropriate and where in the resident's best interest, and providing confirmation of the resident's needs to the charity to assist in the application process.

4.5.1. **Response:**

a) Officers will continue to work to improve the range of advice and information available to service users and other people in the community who decide to fund adaptations work or disability equipment themselves, including those who are not eligible for a DFG.

All relevant documentation within the Grants/Staying Put team will be reviewed to ensure residents are fully aware of the choices available to them.

4.5.2. b) This practice is in place, and the OT team have successfully supported applications to charities on occasion, particularly where the person has a terminal condition and requires swift provision of the adaptation.

4.6. ***The respite opportunities being offered to young carers could be better advertised. In particular, sending information to schools should be considered and schools should be encouraged to support and advise young carers about the adaptations/reablement service.***

4.6.1. **Response:**

We will ensure that information about Reablement and adaptations is included in information that given to Young Carers. We have already started a dialogue with Carers Lewisham about these and they are keen to help promote this work.

- 4.7. ***The Council should investigate whether charging interest on loans of up to £15,000 (where the cost of major adaptations works is more than the £30,000 maximum DFG award) will act as a deterrent, given the loan (and any rolled up interest, should it be charged) is a charge on the property and only has to be paid back once the property is sold.***

4.7.1. **Response:**

The Grants team will carry out an investigation to ascertain what the effects of charging interest on loans would be. This will include an assessment of the interest that would be charged and the possible administrative costs inherent in setting up such a system. An initial equalities impact assessment will need to be carried out, and if appropriate then developed into a fuller assessment.

- 4.8. ***Management controls in relation to DFG declarations should increase to ensure accuracy and detect any fraud. If resources are an issue, a sample based approach could be taken. The Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Team could be asked to provide advice to the Grants Team on how controls might be strengthened. This activity should be publicised to deter fraud in future DFG applications.***

4.8.1. **Response:**

Discussions will take place with the councils' anti-fraud team to advise on measures to eliminate fraud. Obviously these could delay the process and we would need to ensure such measures are proportionate. Any recommendations that are made will be presented to Customer Services Management Team and be implemented as soon as practical.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. The recommendations within this report can be delivered within existing budgets. Where the further work indicated in the report, such as the assessment of the prospects for charging income, creates additional financial implications then recommendations will be put forward at the appropriate time.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, provides local housing authorities with a power to improve living conditions in their area. Article 3 (1) provides that Local Housing Authorities may "...directly or indirectly, [provide] assistance to any person for the purpose of enabling him – (a) to acquire living accommodation...; (b) to adapt or improve living accommodation ...; (c) to repair living accommodation; (d) to demolish buildings comprising or including living accommodation; (e) where buildings comprising or including living accommodation have been demolished, to construct buildings that comprise or include replacement living accommodation. Assistance may be provided in any form, unconditional or subject to conditions, "including conditions as to the

repayment of the assistance or its value...but before imposing any such condition, or taking steps to enforce it, a local housing authority shall have regard to the ability of the person concerned to make that repayment or contribution” (article 3(4)).

- 6.2. A local housing authority may take any form of security in respect of the whole or part of the assistance (article 3(6)).

7. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 7.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this response.

8. Equalities Implications

- 8.1. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this response.

9. Environmental Implications

- 9.1. There are no environmental implications in this report.

10. Background Papers and Report Author

- 10.1. There are no background papers on this report.
- 10.2. If you require further information about this report, please contact Tony Mottram on 020 8314 8063 or Kate Pottinger on 0208 314 8934.