

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 12 MARCH 2024

DFG SHARED SERVICE UPDATE

REPORT OF THE WELFARE AND BENEFITS TEAM MANAGER

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – Councillor Robert Reade, Cabinet Member for Welfare Services

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) shared service with Stafford Borough Council.

The report details the performance since the new service began in April 2023, the committed and pipeline spend for this financial year, and the plans for the development of the team to futureproof the workforce.

2. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT | Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives? | |
| | Yes | Prosperous communities – helping people to stay in their own homes |
| | Has an Equality Impact Assessment (Equal) been completed? | |
| | No | This is a service update |
| | Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been completed? | |
| | No | This is a service update |
| SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE | No | |
| KEY DECISION | No | |
| TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE | Report is for information only | |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| FINANCIAL IMPACT | Yes | The shared service is operating within existing Better Care Fund available grant. NF |
| LEGAL ISSUES | No | There are no legal implications arising from this for information report. LF |
| STRATEGIC RISK | No | Detail – Through the monitoring of the service and improved service delivery, the financial management is improved, therefore minimising waste and improving value for money, as well as the service delivery for the customer. |
| OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES including climate impacts and health impacts if applicable | The risks are being managed through monitoring of the service and analysis of the budgets. During the first year of the new shared service, it was anticipated that progress would be slow, due to the high number of outstanding applications at the point of transfer. It is expected that moving into year 2 there will be a reduction in length of time the customer has to wait and an improvement in the customer journey. | |
| IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS | No | |

3. PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Disabled Facilities Grants service was managed by a 3rd party from April 2018 – March 2023. The performance throughout the contract was not to the standard that was expected so when the contract ended, the decision was made by the six districts within the SILIS partnership to bring the service back in house.
- 3.2 South Staffordshire Council delegated their functions into a shared service with Stafford Borough Council, who host the service on their behalf. This commenced on 1st April 2023.
- 3.3 There are 7 team members working across Stafford and South Staffordshire, 1 of whom was transferred under TUPE from the previous provider. One other team member was recruited from another Local Authority; however, the remaining staff were all new to DFG processes and had extensive training prior to working on the outstanding applications.
- 3.4 The budget for 2023/24 for DFG's is £1,126,662 with an additional £98,312 awarded for this financial year to support with an increased demand nationally for adaptations. The table below shows the spend to date, with a strong position at the end of Qtr.3. The remaining budget along with the additional funding will allow the team to manage the flow of applications during Qtr.4 and ensure there is sufficient funding to estimate pipeline capacity.

| | Count | Value |
|------------------------------|-------|-------------|
| All Cases at Works Stage | 18 | £214,870.71 |
| Certified Complete | 37 | £223,101.71 |
| Landlord apps at works stage | 19 | £145,394.24 |
| Total | 74 | £583,366.66 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------|
| Staffing budget 23/24 | | £180,367.80 |
| OT cost projection 23/24 | | £85,859.82 |
| Capital spend in progress Q3 SSDC | | £583,366.66 |
| TOTAL | | £849,594.28 |
| SSDC budget 2023/24 | | £1,126,662.00 |
| Budget Remaining at end Q3 | | £277,067.72 |

- 3.5 When the new shared service with Stafford commenced, there were 326 outstanding applications that transferred from the previous provider. Each application has been reviewed and where appropriate another OT assessment requested. Although this has lengthened the process for some applicants, it does mean that the adaption can be designed specifically for any changes in their needs. Of these, 128 did not progress for many different reasons, including the client changing their mind, the adaption no longer required or a change in needs as the application had been open for so long under the previous provider.
- 3.6 Of the 196 applications that were made prior to April 2023 and deemed still valid, 37 adaptations have been completed and the remaining ones are progressing through the system, in date order unless it has been identified that the need is urgent. There have been 158 new referrals for adaptations between April and the end of October 2023.
- 3.7 The increase in the demand for OT's has meant there is a backlog of application that are awaiting an OT assessment. To manage the throughput of cases Caseworkers have been concentrating on ordering equipment such as stair lifts and preparing cases to be passed to HomesPlus for landlord applications. These will be up to date by the end of February.

- 3.8 The table below shows the number of applications at each stage of the DFG process, currently.

| Stage | No. at stage |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| Initial triage & application | 97 |
| Application preparation | 111 |
| Approval, Plans & Tender | 43 |
| Works on site | 55 |
| Final inspections | 20 |
| Satisfaction survey* | 28 |
| Total cases | 354 |

*the satisfaction survey is completed 10-12 weeks after completion of works

From the 354 applications, there are 419 separate work items to be completed as some residents require more than one adaption. The table below lists the individual adaptations that have been requested since April.

| Adaption | Nos. |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Door Widening | 20 |
| Extension/Garage conversion | 8 |
| Hoist | 8 |
| Ground Floor reconfiguration | 6 |
| Safety Improvements | 24 |
| Specialist Kitchen | 8 |
| Level Access Shower | 180 |
| Stair lift | 44 |
| Through floor lift | 2 |
| Ramp | 50 |
| Bathroom Alteration | 32 |
| Specialised Toilet facility | 21 |
| Level Threshold door | 5 |
| Door entry system | 5 |
| Wall removal/external groundwork | 6 |
| Total | 419 |

- 3.9 Feedback from customers has been good, despite many customers having to wait some considerable time since their first referral. One comment below has been collected from the satisfaction surveys.

"Good morning, Sue

I'd like to thank you and your team for facilitating the installation of my level access shower

Today for the first time in 18months I was able to have a unaided shower great!!

*Could you also forward my thanks to your contractors it was a pleasure to have them
Again thankyou*

In this case, a referral had been made to the previous provider in September 2022, an OT assessment done in November 2022, but no further action was taken until the application was transferred to the new service. It was picked up on the 25th April, the equipment was ordered on the 5th June, and following some delay due to pipework needed by landlord, the work was completed on the 4th August. The Caseworker maintained contact via email, at the client's request throughout the process.

- 3.10 There has been one complaint that was considered through our complaints process. There had been delays with the adaption from the previous provider and this did carry on for part of this year. As recognition of the length of time for the work to be completed, compensation was offered that the client declined, the complaint has progressed to the Ombudsman.

4. PERFORMANCE AND FUTURE PLANNING

- 4.1 The average number of weeks from referral to completion is already improving from previous years, despite the higher number of older cases that remain in the system. Once the backlog has been cleared, we will be looking to set a realistic KPI that meets the needs of the service user and is achievable.
- 4.2 Staffing levels have also been reviewed, we were unable to recruit a full-time caseworker assistant last year, so the post has been covered by a part time former Millbrook employee on a temporary basis. The number of referrals has remained high, so the advert has now gone out for a permanent full time member of staff.
- 4.3 There is also a plan to develop the Junior Technical Officers role to prepare for succession planning and create an apprentice or entry level position to develop a recognised pathway for the role.
- 4.4 Whilst we have developed a framework for contractors, this mainly consists of larger companies who were already known to us. We are working with the County procurement team to develop a second framework to allow us to increase the volume of work going out on site and by using different companies, improve the timescales and quality of work.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 5.1 not applicable

6. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 6.1 not applicable

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Not applicable

8. APPENDICES

8.1 None

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 For information only.

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