

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT BOARD

19th April 2010

**A REVIEW OF THE PROCESS AND PROCEDURE FOR THE DELIVERY
AND ADMINISTRATION OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS - LEAN
MANAGEMENT PROCESS REVIEW - LESSONS LEARNED REPORT**

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Cllr Peter Whittaker
Responsible Head of Service	Angie Heighway
Non Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report summarises the lessons learnt from the recent review carried out by officers of the Strategic Housing Team into the delivery and administration of Disabled Facilities Grants through a Lean Management Process. This area of investigation was identified as a pilot by Senior Management in order to address concerns relating to processing time for DFGs and to implement cost saving measures.

1.2 The aims and objectives of the project were to:

- Provide an effective and efficient disabled facilities grant service to the residents of Bromsgrove
- To provide cost saving measures
- To provide time saving solutions
- Eradication of duplicated works e.g. repeat home visits
- Maintain case consistency
- Reduce customer complaints and increase satisfaction
- Maximise use of Disabled Facilities Grant budget by investigating Value For Money options

1.3 Members of the Review Team:

Mr Andy Coel-Strategic Housing Manager
Mrs Elizabeth Appleby-Grants Technical Officer
Miss Katie Sharp-Fisher-Private Sector Housing Team Leader
Mrs Vicky Page-Grants Administrator

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Members consider the content of the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Bromsgrove District Council's Private Sector Housing Team was asked to review the delivery and administration of Disabled Facilities Grants through a Lean Management Process. This area of investigation was identified as a pilot by Senior Management in order to address concerns relating to processing time and to implement cost saving measures.
- 3.2 The approval and processing of Disabled Facilities Grants forms a significant part of the Private Sector Housing Team workload. There are numerous avenues to which residents may access the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant service and a significant piece of legislation that dictates various stages of the process. Disabled Facilities Grants are a highly emotive subject to the residents of Bromsgrove, not only for those in receipt of the grants, but also family members as these types of works are essential in maintaining independence and families remaining together.

The aim of the group was to identify areas throughout the process which could be streamlined, and resolve inconsistencies and inefficiencies within existing practises to improving the customer experience. The group therefore considered the benefits of implementing changes not only from a cost and time point of view but also from a customer perspective.

4. What went well?

- 4.1 The commitment to change by all members of the Project Team was essential and the main team members supported and attended all project meetings therefore maintaining consistency.

The team had an strong ability to self criticise the existing processes with the main aim to develop an excellent service, improve customer satisfaction and reduce cost to the Local Authority without compromising on quality.

The mapping of the existing process was an integral part of the process, identifying wastage and quick wins within the process and making immediate changes which had an instant effect. By implementing these quick wins we have improved interdepartmental working relationships with Finance and Administration. During the project time, the Finance Department had introduced a new computer system (POPs) for the payment of invoices. This introduced

approximately 15 new steps into an already complex existing process which potentially increased the process time of a DFG by one month. This was therefore identified as an area for immediate improvement. The team, therefore worked with the Finance Department in order to reengineer and streamline the newly introduced processes, with positive results that minimised the impact of the newly introduced system.

Another area where new systems was found to be elongating the process had been introduced the previous April since when all Occupational Therapist referrals were required to be scanned into the Iclipse Document Management System increasing the timescale by 1 day. During the process it was identified that this was an unnecessary step that was therefore removed thus saving officer time, paper and a day in the process.

Going back to basics, for example looking at the legislative requirements and working from there upwards was essential. This ensured that we were not including unnecessary steps in the process whilst still making sure that we maintain legal compliance.

The decisions to remove wastage from the process empowered staff, allowing the team to feel in control of the system that they work within each day. This promoted ownership of change, thus allowing changes to be welcomed.

The use of the customer satisfaction 'heartbeat' was essential in focusing the attention of all team members on the customer's journey through the process, rather than just financial gains. This involved plotting, at each stage of the process, the gap between the customers expectation and the actual level of service delivery.

Regular meetings, support and discussions regarding project progress with Brian Nicholls were invaluable in ensuring that the project remained on time and to the planned timetable.

5. What we would want to make sure we would do again next time?

- 5.1 Involve the whole team from the start at the process.
- 5.2 Raise awareness of managers and staff across all departments from an early stage in order to raise the profile and promote change, thus increasing understanding of the process being undertaken.
- 5.3 Use the legislation as a baseline for starting the process, anything extra are likely to be internal requirements which may be able to be worked around or analysed to assess whether necessary.
- 5.4 Keeping fuller records of all meetings and changes, therefore allowing successes to be celebrated rather than forgotten.

- 5.5 Engage with all partners, contacts and agencies involved in the service provision to maximise potential for improvement and stimulate similar exercises in parts of the process that may be operated by other agencies.

6. What went less well and why?

- 6.1 Whilst the NVQ training undertaken by Andy Coel and Katie Sharp-Fisher at Redditch provided the overall principles that were learnt and put to good practise, it was found to be unnecessarily time consuming and pitched at an inappropriate level.
- 6.2 Data collection from HR was difficult as this department were unaware of the processes that the team were going through, therefore it was difficult to obtain service costs for comparisons and identify areas for potential reduction.
- 6.3 The ability to maintain two separate processes e.g. BDHT Disabled Facilities Grants undertaken 'in house' and the private cases undertaken by the NW Care and Repair Agency.

7.0 What would you do differently next time?

- 7.1 Encourage a corporate identification of any future projects, planned changes, and introduction of new services that are likely to impact upon services undergoing Lean Management Assessment. to ensure that new processes can be drawn up taking these fully into consideration.

8.0 Was there a clear definition of success?

- 8.1 A project presentation was given to Senior Management on the 23rd November 2009, providing feedback upon the findings.
- 8.2 The following improvements have been implemented within the internal process for Bromsgrove District Council and have delivered a potential total time saving of 5 weeks 1 hour 30 minutes per case: -
- a) A 'blanket' Landlord's permission has been obtained for all BDHT properties where standard adaptations are to be installed e.g. stair lifts and level access showers. This stage within the process has therefore removed 2 weeks delay.
 - b) The contract framework has been implemented on BDHT properties for level access shower adaptations. This has removed 3 weeks from the old process that involved obtaining three separate quotations.

- c) Ensuring that all requisition order numbers and goods receipt requests are now dealt with by the Strategic Housing Section Grants Administrator rather than going through central administration officers has reduced the process time by 1 hour 30 minutes.
- d) The Care & Repair Agency have altered the information provided to BDC when a contractor payment is made. Previously the Care & Repair agency would produce a memo, photocopy the approval document and completion certificate to support the payment. However this has now been reduced down to a Completion Certificate providing not only time savings for BDC the Care & Repair Agency but also cost savings.

8.3 To improve customer care and in preparation for the implementation of a Countywide Home Improvement Agency across Worcestershire, it has been necessary to achieve uniformity in procedures across the six district councils in terms of policy and processing procedures for DFG and discretionary Home Repair Assistance Grants. Having undergone the DFG Lean Management Process, we were able to compare observations and implemented improvements with colleagues from Wychavon DC who had undergone a similar exercise and worked jointly in developing a framework and procedure for the new organisation to operate with the district / borough councils across Worcestershire. This has led on to the development of proposed future improvements including:

- a) An 'Options Appraisal' being carried out for OT referrals before a decision is made to go down the route of a DFG application. This enables other options such as rehousing into more appropriate accommodation to be jointly considered and agreed between the agencies.
- b) A Contract Framework for installation of level access showers to be implemented across RSL and owner occupied properties and potential development of the process for other works.
- c) Cross authority access to use the Home Improvement Agencies FEMIS IT system which would enable all local authorities to view the progress of each case. This has the advantage of being able to deal with customer enquires at all points of contact rather than redirecting clients to the HIA.
- d) Improved grant documentation for the Worcestershire authorities which promotes consistency throughout the processes and implementation of the legislation across the County.

9.0 Was success achieved?

- 9.1 Whilst the improvements will speed up the cases that are approved for DFG each year, it does mean that the annual budget is committed at an earlier stage. During 2009/10 the DFG budget was fully committed by December 2009, meaning that any new cases are put on hold until the beginning of the new financial year (although as much preparatory work as possible is carried out in readiness for approval). It is proposed that in future, the annual budget will be phased and allocated on a monthly basis to ensure that there is always some remaining unallocated budget available for high priority cases.

10.0 How well were risks and issues managed?

- 10.1 The project team was very conscious of risk management given that we are dealing with vulnerable, disabled customers, large sums of money and is a considerable amount of related legislation with this area of work. Risks and issues were clearly identified at the outset of the project by the compilation of formal risk and issues log in line with the overall BDC project management framework and governance procedures. This was supplemented by a High Level Project Plan and Phases, Activities and Tasks were tracked at each project team meeting. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis was also undertaken at the end of the project, analysing the impact of the new suggested processes/improvements for both the BDC internal operation and the Care and Repair operations. These are summarised as follows: -

Private DFG Works (externally provided)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased timescales• Increased customer satisfaction• Increase performance• Single point of contact-if use opportunities with locating officers in house• Control of extras (if locating officers in house)• Supporting the local economy and community• Financial savings-time, paper and works• Reduced complaints• Making best use of UNIFORM (if locating officers in house), POPs• Increased value for money-reduced visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data Protection issues when file leaves BDC• Lack of control when file leaves BDC• Unforeseen require a duplication of approval stage• Unforeseen-greater impact in reducing budget-agency/architect fees• Cost of works increasing with single contractor• Variation between contractors-quality, costs, times• Setting up times for contract framework• Inequity of service between registered and unregistered properties• Lack of interaction between IT systems

<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with contractors/suppliers to decrease prices • Single price per adaptation, increase approval and payment time • Roll over DFG budget • Consider using building control documents to estimate cost of works? • HIA 	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending budget quicker • Budget spent impacts upon timescales, PIs • Fee increase due to inflation will impact upon budget • HIA
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BDHT DFG Works (internally provided)

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased timescales • Increased customer satisfaction • Increase performance • Increased partnership working-if use opportunities with BDHT • Single point of contact-if use opportunities with BDHT • Control of extras • Supporting the local economy and community • Financial savings-time, paper and works • Reduced complaints • Making best use of UNIFORM, POPs 	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Protection issues when file leaves BDC • Lack of control when file leaves BDC • Unforeseen require a duplication of approval stage • Unforeseen-greater impact in reducing budget-agency/architect fees • Cost of works increasing with single contractor • Variation between contractors-quality, costs, times • Setting up times for contract framework • Inequity of service between registered and unregistered properties • Lack of interaction between IT systems
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with contractors/suppliers to decrease prices • Work with BDHT to decrease cost of works-use CRT no labour costs • Single price per adaptation, increase approval and payment time • Roll over DFG budget • Consider using building control documents to estimate cost of works? 	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unforeseen requires a duplication of approval stage • Cost of works increasing with single contractor • Variation between contractors-quality, costs, times • Setting up times for contract framework

11.0 Did the programme team have the right skills in place?

11.1 Both Andy Coel and Katie Sharp Fisher had received training up to NVQ standard and therefore were able to put this into practise. We were therefore acting as facilitators to members of the team that had more interaction with the service.

12.0 Overall project management

12.1 The project commenced with a formal briefing from Brian Nicholls to the project managers and was supported by a High Level Project Plan. A risks and issues log was generated and monitored at the project team meetings. The project team met every month and maintained these documents. Daily management of the project was undertaken at officer level. Well lead and managed by Katie Sharp-Fisher.

13.0 Opening and closing events

- 13.1 Full Project Briefing from Improvement Manager at the commencement of the Project in April 2009. A summary presentation was made by Katie Sharp-Fisher to Senior Management on the 23rd November 2009. Completion of Lessons Learned report for submission to the 2009 Performance Management Board and a post evaluation will be undertaken within the 1st quarter of 2010.

14.0 Communications – internal and external

- 14.1 Communication throughout the project was considered reasonable. Internal communication between the Project Group members worked effectively and directly. Communications within the organisation regarding the objectives and deliverables of the project may have been improved by the formulation of communications plan and updates through e-connect.

15.0 Additional Findings

- 15.1 Overall this was a very successful project which made staff feel individually empowered to generate significant productivity and efficiency recommendations. The concept of the Project Team and the staff 'doing the work' undertaking the review within their own functional area proved highly motivating.

16.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1 There are no immediate financial implications associated with the review of the DFG process other than the annual budget being committed at an earlier stage.
- 16.2 Process time saving enables staff to focus upon other areas of private sector housing service and improvement otherwise under resourced.

17.0 COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

- 17.1 The Housing priorities and actions within the document link with the following Corporate Objectives and Priorities:

Council Objective One - Regeneration – CO1 Priority Housing

Council Objective Three – Sense of Community and Wellbeing

Council Objective Four – Environment – CO4 Priority Climate Change

18.0 CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

18.1 The actions set out within the document are designed to enhance the Council's response to the identified housing and support needs of the community and to improve the quality, standard and accessibility of housing services provided.

19.0 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

19.1 The review process was carried out in accordance with corporate equality and diversity policy and where appropriate, housing services undergo impact assessment.

20.0 VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

20.1 The Councils Housing Strategy is based upon bringing together partners and resources to maximise the benefit to the community. The vision that we have since developed; ***“Making best use of existing accommodation by improving the quality and accessibility and addressing the imbalance in the housing market through the provision of more affordable housing”***, has helped us to focus our efforts to achieve the greatest impact by making better use of existing resources across all tenures.

21.0 OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	No
Executive Director - Partnerships and Projects	N/A
Executive Director - Services	N/A
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	No
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No
Head of Organisational Development & HR	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

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22.0 WARDS AFFECTED

All Wards.

23.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Bromsgrove District Council – Housing Strategy 2006 – 2011.

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