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Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol / Director General

Y Grŵp Addysg a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus
Education and Public Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Nick Ramsay MS
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

22 October 2020

Dear Mr Ramsay,

THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE – HOUSING ADAPTATIONS UPDATE – OCTOBER 2020

Further to my previous update of 28 May, I am writing with an update on developments in regard to housing adaptations.

I should start by saying that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the provision of adaptations during this exceptional year. I thought it might be helpful to set out some detail on that impact for you and your Committee.

From the beginning of the restrictions in late March, there was a reduction in activity in all adaptations programmes. This was due to the restrictions on movement and in working in people's homes, especially those who were shielding. Providers responded positively to guidance we issued, which ensured that priority work to facilitate hospital discharges, urgent works to protect individuals' health and independence and support for people needing palliative care, continued safely during the lockdown.

Providers have noted a number of issues during the spring and summer. These include:

- Staff in local authorities being transferred to critical COVID-19 related roles. However, in most cases, authorities report that housing improvement teams are returning to normal.
- Issues caused by remote working i.e.:



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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- some local authorities report that some of their grant management processes relied on paper files which were inaccessible during lockdown;
 - clients were unable to access critical documentation from solicitors' offices whose staff were furloughed;
 - a number of providers did not have the ICT systems or equipment to support full remote working.
- Constraints on Occupational Therapist (OT) capacity. Demand on OT resources increased considerably due to the rehabilitation needs of COVID-19 patients. OTs were able to conduct far fewer face-to-face assessments for home adaptations, except in urgent circumstances. Use of telephone and digital communication to conduct both OT and technical assessments has, therefore, increased across the board.
 - In August and September, many providers reported contractor shortages, due to pent-up demand and furloughed staff. There were also supply chain issues with some materials and specialist equipment, although the situation is much improved.
 - All providers reported some anxiety amongst many older residents about permitting contractors into their homes to undertake work. There is some evidence this led to a reduction in applications for adaptations and a reluctance to proceed with works which had already been approved.

Most local authorities are currently reporting backlogs of work and a small number are forecasting the number of Disabled Facilities Grants completed this year could be around 50 percent fewer than last year. Care & Repair core services are back at 100 percent capacity, and agencies are currently receiving around 415 Rapid Adaptations referrals per week, about 10 percent higher than last year. This is attributed to the backlog.

The Care & Repair *Hospital to a Healthier Home* scheme is currently receiving around 80 referrals per week, the same as pre-pandemic levels. In the last quarter, the service helped to discharge safely over 850 older people back to their own home. The number of Delayed Transfers of Care (DTocS) caused by people waiting for an aid or adaptation remains low, averaging around 10 on any given day across Wales, less than 1 percent of all DTocS.

The main interest of your Committee, of course, is progress on the recommendations made in your report on adaptations, and in particular the outstanding recommendations 3 and 5. Following a pause during the spring and summer due to COVID-19, the Housing Adaptations Steering Group (HASG) met again on 30 September 2020.

In relation to Recommendation 3, which concerned guidance to local authorities about the removal of the means test for small and medium DFGs, the HASG supported an action for the Welsh Government to draft guidance for consideration at its next meeting on December 9, with a view to issuing the guidance in this Senedd term. In so doing, we will take into account the research commissioned from the Wales Centre for Public Policy to assess the implications of removing the means test. This work was delayed by the pandemic, but is scheduled to report by the end of November. I am pleased there is now full support for issuing this guidance amongst stakeholders.

In relation to Recommendation 5, I reported previously our intention to undertake a programme of work through the HASG to provide an overarching strategic framework for the planning and provision of housing adaptations by all providers in the seven health and

social care areas of Wales. The Framework will implement an integrated multi-agency approach, with a focus on prevention, equity, and clear pathways into services.

The HASG Task and Finish Group to take this work forward was paused during the pandemic. That Group has now been reconvened and will present a draft Framework to the HASG at its meeting in December. The delay due to COVID-19 means that implementation from April 2021 will not be possible, but our intention is that once the framework is agreed, we will make transitional arrangements during 2021/22, with full implementation from April 2022.

I hope this is helpful. I would be pleased to provide the Committee with a further update whenever you would find that most helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracey Burke', written in a cursive style.

Tracey Burke