

Home adaptations

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 11 Hydref 2016
Petitions Committee | 11 October 2016

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-711

Petition title: Ensure disabled people's housing adaption needs are adequately met

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to commit to ensuring that disabled people in Wales do not have to wait for more than three years to receive the essential housing adaptations/houses they need and to work with local authorities to ensure staff dealing with adapted housing cases are adequately trained and accountable to ensure individual needs are met.

Background

Issues surrounding home adaptations, such as funding, awareness of the help that is available and delays in carrying out work, have been high on the political agenda for some time in Wales.

The best known funding stream for adaptations is the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The DFG is funded by local authorities and can be provided across different tenures – though in practice it is generally used to help owner occupiers and private tenants. The DFG is a statutory grant, and is subject to a means test (except where the adaptation is for a child). The DFG system has been criticised for being overly bureaucratic, with particular criticism focused on the means test and delays in the system – such as the initial assessment. While a local authority **must** tell the applicant whether they are eligible for a DFG within 6 months of an application, the whole process can take significantly longer than that in some cases.

Latest [statistics](#) show that the average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant has fallen from 349 days in 2009–10 to 241 days in 2015–16. Data on other adaptations programmes is more limited.

It is often quicker for adaptations to be delivered outside of the DFG framework on a non-statutory basis. For some time, local authorities have been encouraged to provide small scale adaptations in this way and the Welsh Government has provided specific funding for

this to happen in certain cases. Housing association tenants will normally be provided with adaptations funded either by their landlord's own resources, or with Welsh Government support. Again, this will be outside of the DFG system. Delivering grants outside of the DFG system means there is no requirement for a means test.

In March 2016, the Welsh Government [announced](#) a new framework for the delivery of home adaptations – *Enable: Support for Independent Living*, including some additional funding. This new system should be more straightforward for applicants to understand as it will be less relevant how the adaptation is being financed. The Cabinet Secretary notes in his letter to the Committee that he expects all local authorities and housing associations to be delivering adaptations under the revised arrangements from April 2017.

Some areas in Wales now have adapted housing registers, which allow the needs of prospective and existing tenants to be better matched to existing accommodation. It also reduces the likelihood of adaptations having to be removed from existing properties.

Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government commissioned a [review](#) of home adaptations in 2014, and this was published in January 2015. The review contained 18 recommendations addressed to both local authorities and the Welsh Government. Amongst the recommendations were that the Welsh Government should make a long term commitment to remove means testing from the adaptations process, accessible housing registers should be developed in all areas, staff should be suitably trained and that adaptation provision should be reorganised into a tiered system that is consistent across Wales – something that is now being taken forward and is noted in the Cabinet Secretary's letter.

National Assembly for Wales action

A number of Assembly Committees have looked at the issue of home adaptations in recent years. Most recently, the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee published the findings of its [Inquiry into Home Adaptations](#) in July 2013. Recommendations included setting target times for the delivery of home adaptations, delivering more adaptations outside of the DFG system where possible, and an improved system of performance monitoring for all adaptation services. The Welsh Government commissioned its own review following that inquiry which came to similar conclusions.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.