

SCRUTINY PANEL B

**Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road,
Kirkby-in-Ashfield,**

on Thursday 3rd March, 2016 at 6.30 p.m.

Present: Councillor A. Brown, in the Chair;
Councillors L.A. Mitchell, L.S. Morrison and P. Roberts
(substitute for H.J. Hollis).

Apologies for Absence: Councillors L. Anderson, C.J. Baron, H.J. Hollis,
R.E. Madden and J.B. Zadrozny.

Officers Present: J. French, M. Joy and J. Robinson.

In Attendance: Councillor J.F. Aspinall.

SB.13 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

SB.14 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 21st January, 2016 be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.15 Scrutiny Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

The Chairman introduced the new topic of Disabled Facilities Grants. She explained that this topic had been placed on the Scrutiny work plan to consider the process for the allocation of grants and to ensure that the service was both robust and effective following some concerns that were highlighted last year with regards to waiting times.

In considering this topic Members were advised that the Disabled Facilities Grants policy was approved in January, 2016 to provide a consistent and clear process for all grant applicants.

The Chairman explained that this meeting would provide Members with an opportunity to establish whether there remains any issues with the service, consider how the service operates and whether there were any areas for Scrutiny to add value to the process.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Jenni French, Business Contingency and Sustainability Manager who had been invited to the meeting to give an overview of the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's), explain how the new Policy aims to improve the service and outline any recent improvements or concerns. Councillor J. Aspinall, Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing was also in attendance to assist the Panel in the discussion.

The Business Contingency and Sustainability Manager proceeded to give a brief overview of how the service works. She explained that Disabled Facilities Grants provide an important mechanism for supporting people with disabilities to live independently. The initial referral for a grant must come from the Occupational Therapy Team at Nottinghamshire County Council's Social Services Department.

She circulated to Members at the meeting a summary sheet outlining the budget and casework load in respect of the waiting list/cancellations and completions for Disabled Facilities Grants for 2015/16 and 2016/17 and summarised the purposes for which a Disabled Facilities Grant may be given as follows:-

- Extensions
- Minor Works
- Level Access Showers
- Access

Members were advised that extension projects have the biggest impact on the budget spend as some cases can cost up to £30,000.

The Business Contingency and Sustainability Manager reported that over the last two years, waiting times for the process of grant applications and the number of outstanding cases had been concerning. She emphasised that at this point in time the budget allocation for this service was considerably smaller and staffing resources were limited. Members were also asked to note that a number of factors could affect the data which measures performance for example, certain cases such as extension work can take longer to complete which consequently can delay the case being signed off.

The introduction of the Governments 'Better Care Fund' has provided additional financial support to local authorities and NHS organisations to jointly plan and deliver local services. The Better Care Fund allocated to the Council for 2015/16 was £482,000 which considerably boosted the Disabled Facilities Grants budget.

In addition, through the Better Care Fund the Council has been able to apply for ancillary costs which has funded the employment of an additional Technical Officer from November, 2015. This additional post has provided much need support to the Team and significantly improved the service provision.

The Business Contingency and Sustainability Manager was pleased to report that out of the 152 cases on the waiting list for the current year only 8 cases were yet to be started.

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing also extended his appreciation and support to the Disabled Facilities Grants Team for their commitment and hard work to improving the service. He added that clients on the whole had expressed their satisfaction with completed works and it was imperative that satisfaction levels were maintained.

The Chairman thanked the Business Contingency and Sustainability Manager and the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing for their attendance and updates and Panel Members took the opportunity to discuss and ask questions in respect of the following:-

- What adjustments would need to be put in place should the Council decide to bring back 'in-house' the management arrangements for the housing stock?
- Was there any scope to further streamline the process?
- Analysis of data outlining the clients opinions following the completion of the work;
- Level of advice given with regard to planning issues;
- Future funding for this service and level of staff resources.

During the discussions, Members enquired as to how satisfaction with the service was measured and analysed. The Chairman commented that user feedback was essential to ensure that the service both addresses any issues at an early stage and celebrates good practice. Members commented that in view of the fact that the performance for this specific service had greatly improved since November, 2015 it might be more beneficial to review this topic again in 6 months time. This would enable further evidence to be gathered and provide a more accurate picture of the performance levels for this service.

To conclude, the Scrutiny Manager reminded the Panel that this topic was placed on the workplan to enable Members to develop a clear understanding of the Disabled Facilities Grants process and to ensure that the process and delivery was robust and effective. Members of the Panel commented that the information received both at the meeting and the supporting information prior to the meeting had provided them with sufficient knowledge and understanding of the process.

In revisiting the topic in 6 months time, Members would be able to assess whether the improvements to service provision are sustained. The Panel expressed their thanks to the officers involved in the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants and congratulated them on the improvements to the waiting times over the past quarter.

RESOLVED

that the Scrutiny Manager be requested to compile a report based on the findings of the review and the following recommendations be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration:-

- (a) this topic be reported back to Scrutiny in 6 months time to assess whether the trend for a reduction in waiting times continues;
- (b) the achievements of the Disabled Facilities Grants Team in reducing waiting times be noted and commended;
- (c) consideration be given to the impact of an aging population and the future demand for adaptations within Ashfield;

- (d) the referral system from Nottinghamshire County Council's Social Services Department be acknowledged;
- (e) support be given to the work being undertaken to improve the delivery time of Disabled Facilities Grants and on the exploration of alternative solutions which allow for more timely installations of adaptations;
- (f) it be noted that whilst the Disabled Facilities Grants process is rigid, the outputs always have to be flexible;
- (g) customer satisfaction should remain key with regular updates to highlight any issues and acknowledgment where positive action is being taken;
- (h) consideration be given to what adjustments would need to be put in place should the Council decide to bring back 'in-house' the management arrangements for the housing stock.

The meeting closed at 7.30 p.m.

Chairman.