

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
2.	Date:	17th June 2013
3.	Title:	Aids & Adaptations Service Improvement Report
4.	Directorate:	NAS

5. Summary

The Aids & Adaptations service has gone through several reviews over the last year, a series of service improvements have been made to improve the delivery and accountability of the service with reductions in the back log of adaptations being made. However further work is required to improve the customer journey and reduce the waiting time it takes a customer to know if they have been approved for a non-urgent major adaptation. This report outlines what further improvements are required so that the service can achieve the recommendation in section 6 of this report.

The report also seeks authorisation to approve £297,716 of HRA resources to cover the shortfall for public major adaptations

6. Recommendations

- **That the actions within this report and attached action plan are implemented to reduce the back log of non-urgent major adaptations to 0 (currently 231), with an average reduction in waiting time for an application to be processed from 6 months currently down to 3, this is to be achieved by 31st December 2013.**
- **Agree to allocate additional £297,716 HRA funding for public major adaptations and £145,709 RTB receipts funding for private major adaptations.**
- **That a further report is submitted at the end of quarter two, which will provide an update on progress.**

7. Proposals and Details

Background

The Aids & Adaptations service underwent a service improvement and Internal Audit review in the summer of 2012, both reviews found that improvements were required to the internal processes of delivering the service to achieve accountability, improve communication and ultimately provide an excellent customer experience.

To summarise, the internal audit review highlighted concerns around the process of the procurement of contractors for private adaptation work, the separation of duties when quality checking work carried out, the standard of documentation and files, customer payment process, customer feedback, performance management and budget monitoring.

The performance and quality review concluded that improvements were required to the timeliness of the application process, communication between the service and its customers, its partners and the Community Occupational Therapists.

The service has historically held a large backlog of work of non-urgent referrals for major adaptations; this is usually between 5 and 6 months, this is not unusual and is within the legal requirement of 6 months. The overriding aim is to reduce the backlog to 0 and the time to within 3 months of the adaptation being received to approval. However whilst operational processes can be changed and improved to reduce the backlog, sufficient finance is required to enable them to be processed and passed onto a contractor within the improved timeframe.

A project group was set up to deliver the improvements, however due to the retirement of the Adaptations Co-ordinator, secondment of the Service Manager and long term sickness of the Adaptations Control Officer, the speed at which the improvements could be implemented has been disrupted.

However a temporary manager and coordinator took charge of the service in November 2012 and have started to make the changes necessary to improve the service in line with the recommendations from both reviews.

Service Improvements

Following on from the recruitment of the temporary manager and coordinator, the service has started to undergo transformation, as well as progressing with the implementation of the recommendations from the service reviews, further work and learning has been carried out to fully understand the issues the team has faced when processing grants and facilitating adaptation requests from customers. The full action plan can be found as appendix A, however, below identifies the main areas of work that has been necessary to facilitate the improvements, this has included:

- Staffing review to change the historical culture and energise the team to embrace change and the improvements recommended.

- Reintroduce customer consultation and satisfaction to obtain feedback of the service and systems introduced.
- Data cleansing, I.T system training and system functionality consultation to improve budget and work in progress monitoring with more accuracy and confidence.
- Consultation with the team to identify issues with progressing work, this included meeting with partner organisations to expedite documents required to assist with the timeliness of work being carried out.
- Improved communication with contractors to assist with the progression of work in progress and budget monitoring. This has included introducing monthly meetings and weekly work in progress updates to check scheduled work and consult on any customer issues that may arise.
- Re-introduction of the Aids and Adaptations Panel to discuss more complex cases and cases above £8,000, this has improved communication between the team and the community occupational therapists, increased an understanding of both teams roles and ultimately put controls in place for the approval of major adaptations.
- Robust finance monitoring systems have been introduced to improve the accuracy and confidence in the reporting of monthly budget forecasts. However, further improvements are being made to introduce smarter ways of reporting via automated reporting to make the process more efficient.
- The introduction of smarter and flexible I.T hardware to process documents and payments within the customer's home, and the provision of VPN tokens for O.T. staff to improve operational efficiency.

The work carried out above and the actions implemented so far within the action plan have already improved performance; the backlog of major adaptations in November was 445, in March this had been reduced to 231, and the time taken to carry out an adaptation from approval was 13.9 weeks in November, this has been reduced to 12.25 weeks in March. However to continually improve, and also reduce the length of time of the backlog from 6 months, a number of further actions will be required.

Following a review of work in the back log and work being undertaken the review found that:

- The ratio of on-going jobs allocated between technical officers was disproportionate.
- The current backlog is 6 months; work is now being issued from referrals received in September/October.
- The longest case being assessed by a technical officer is from August 2012.

- Concerns of how work is allocated and progressed through to a contractor making it fair and transparent to customers.

To improve these areas, the service is going to completely change the way that major adaptation referrals are allocated, approved and issued to contractors. The service is going to do this by:

- Abolishing the backlog system and instead of allocating to a technical officer to process from the back log, the referral will be allocated “up front” from removal of the referral from the adaptations email inbox. This will then be processed up to approval. Once approved, it will be the responsibility of the Team Coordinator to issue to the Contractor; this enables the service to monitor and issues major adaptations in date order, and also monitor workflow against the budget.
- Whilst customers are waiting for their adaptation to be approved/carried out they will receive a contact every 6 weeks notifying them of current waiting time and have a contact name and number to get in touch with if they need any advice.
- Work is currently being carried out to improve the monitoring of work from the I.T system. This will enable managers to monitor work load, work flow, and implement a check list to assist officers to monitor, gather and store documents electronically, which will reduce the amount of paper work required.
- The service has already implemented a performance management framework, this includes weekly checks of work on-going, sent to contractor and allocated to technical officer. This is logged on a spread sheet and is also checked against the system and with our contractors to make sure that the information re jobs is accurate and allocated fairly. Weekly performance and work in hand meetings are now operational where work is discussed and problems solved as a team. One to one meetings are also to be held monthly to discuss individual performance.

Overall performance of the service will be reported via the monthly NAS34 performance report. The report will now also include the number of referrals and the length of time of any current back log.

Assuming that the service receives the same amount of major adaptation referrals next for next year as this, to achieve the target, each of the 4 Technical Officers will need to complete 3.5 major adaptation applications per week, this total's 737 major adaptation referrals for 2013/14. Performance meetings will be held with technical officers initially weekly to make sure that this is being achieved.

Actions required to reduce the backlog in the next six months

1. Approve the use of £297,716 from Housing Revenue Account to cover the shortfall for public major adaptations. Finance Section is exploring the use of

capital receipts from Right to Buys and utilising some of the surplus Furnished Reserve account which is ring fenced to HRA.

2. Identify staffing capacity to process more adaptations by reviewing the work patterns and capacity of existing staff within the Adaptations team.
3. The Empty Homes Technical Officers be utilised to undertake property inspections for stair lifts and level access showers in the backlog; the Adaptations Technical Officers would be allocated the remaining backlog work.
4. Meet with Contractors to alert them that more adaptations orders will be processed in next 3 months.

8. Finance

Although procedural and system changes will assist with the reduction of the back log a financial commitment will be required to make inroads into reducing this. Without extra resources allocated, the improvements will have to be aligned to the issuing of work to contractors, closely matching that to the budget allocation for 2013/14.

It has been agreed that applications for a DFG that were received in 2012/13 can be carried out using underspend "slippage" from that year to continue to progress through the backlog of applications.

The back log of major adaptations currently stands at 230 this is split up into 122 public adaptations and 108 private adaptations. The approximate costs for clearing the back log in year 2013/14 would be £364,980 for public and £328,235 for private adaptations; this would be a total allocation of £693,215.

At P11 approval was sought via the Capital Programme monitoring for slippage on DFGs to be carried forward into 2013/14 and this was approved in principle. The actual underspend at the end of 2012/13 was £182,526 for Private and £67,264 for Public to be used towards the clearance of the backlog, these amounts will now be put forward (total £249,790) for approval.

Even if approved, this would leave a shortfall of £297,716 for Public and £145,709 for Private. An increase of **£443,425** to the 2013/14 budget would be required to complete the backlog in year. This may result in a differential management approach to both public and private adaptations.

If approved the costs of the additional funding to cover the shortfall for public orders of £297,716 can be met from HRA, this will enable orders to be processed quicker, will reduce waiting times for those customers in the backlog, whilst continuing to process this year's orders via the existing DFG budget. The additional funding to cover the shortfall for private orders of £145,709 can be met from capital right to buy receipts carried forward from 2012/13.

If the shortfall cannot be allocated this year, the team would work within the budget setting and achieve the shortest back log number using the resources available.

The performance measures set in place for the technical officers are achievable and at this time, no further requirements for additional staff will be required. This position will be reviewed after 6 months.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Current risks include the temporary nature of the staffing structure within the team. Both the team coordinator and the service manager are temporary which will cause instability within the team when the recruitment of a permanent coordinator takes place. Also the teams control officer who provides office support has been on long term absence for 1 year, this has had a huge detrimental effect on the service, with additional tasks being carried out by the Technical Officers. This has had a negative impact on their work load, making them less able to carry out more assessments. If the service was to continue without this resource it could put the achievement of reaching the target at risk.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Changes and implementation of these procedures do not have any direct implication on policy however changes will need to be reflected in the to the process documentation.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- National Assistance Act 1948
- Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, 1970
- Disabled Persons Act 1985
- NHS and Community Care Act 1990
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996
- Housing Act 1996
- RMBC Aids & Adaptations Policy
- RMBC Allocations Policy

Contact Names:

James Greenhedge – Home & Property Services Manager

james.greenhedge@rotherham.gov.uk 01709 255619

Sandra Tolley – Housing Options Manager

Sandra.tolley@rotherham.gov.uk 01709 255619