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The Service User Perspective – the Housing Adaptations and Disabled Facilities Grants Service – **Ceredigion County Council**

Audit year: 2017-18

Date issued: April 2018

Document reference: 549A2018



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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Sara Leahy, Gareth W. Lewis and Jeremy Evans directed by Huw Rees.

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Summary report

- 1 When receiving housing adaptations and disabled facilities grants, as for many local government services, users do not have a choice of service provider. As there is no alternative service provider, the ability of service users to influence services relies on 'voice' rather than 'choice'. This means that ensuring the views of service users are heard is important when designing and delivering services and interventions aimed at meeting people's needs.
- 2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a requirement on local authorities and other public bodies to have regard for the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working that define it. 'Involvement' is one of the five ways of working identified in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 3 The Welsh Government's Local Government White Paper also highlights the importance of working in partnership with citizens:
'We want to develop a more equal partnership with citizens. The role of public services should be to support people to live independent lives and to seek to de-escalate demand, intervening only when necessary and only for as long as required. In doing so, the focus inevitably shifts to prevention and a public service which is able to put more effort into helping people to avoid crisis, rather than one which is focused on supporting people in crisis. This is about creating prudent public services for the future.'¹
- 4 In 2017-18, the Wales Audit Office completed work to understand the 'service user perspective' at every council within Wales. We followed a broadly similar approach at each council but agreed the specific focus and approach to the work individually. In Ceredigion County Council (the Council) we reviewed the housing adaptations and disabled facilities grants service. In particular, whether the Council was using the experiences and aspirations of service users to inform the design and delivery of services.
- 5 Although we could not speak with everyone who had received a disabled facilities grant, we engaged with a sample of service users through a telephone survey, in January 2018, to help us understand their perspective. In total we called 208 service users who had received Disabled Facilities Grants or Disabled Small Works Grants between April 2016 and the end of December 2017. We completed 73 surveys.
- 6 This information, as well as data on performance and service standards, informed our discussions with the Council. These discussions took place during February and March 2018. This helped us understand the Council's view of the current arrangements for dealing with housing adaptations, and how the Council approaches and responds to the needs and expectations of service users.

¹ Welsh Government, **White Paper Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed**, January 2017.

- 7 We concluded the Council is making good use of the views of service users to inform the design and delivery of its housing adaptations service. We came to this conclusion because:
- the Council effectively considers service users' views in the design of the service they receive;
 - service users are very satisfied with the quality of the service they receive; and
 - the Council could do more to raise awareness of the housing adaptations service, but once aware service users can access services easily.

Proposals for improvement

- 8 The table below contains our proposals for ways the Council could improve the effectiveness of its Housing Adaptations Service to make it better placed to meet current and future challenges.

Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P1	Create a charter of service standards for clients The Council should put together a list of expected service standards for clients to refer to as they apply for and receive a housing adaptation. This will enable them to assess the service more effectively.
P2	Review methods for collecting client feedback The Council should consider new ways of gaining client feedback to increase the amount of information collected.
P3	Review methods to raise awareness of the Housing Adaptations Service

Detailed report

The Council makes good use of the views of service users to inform the design and delivery of its housing adaptations service

The Council effectively considers service users' views in the design of the service they receive

- 9 Ninety-two per cent of the people we spoke to felt their needs, views and wishes had been 'fully' considered by the Council when it assessed them for their housing adaptation. The remaining 8% felt their needs, views and wishes had been 'partly' taken into account.
- 10 Officers we spoke to were clear that the aim of the housing adaptations service is to provide adaptations that preserve people's independence and improve their quality of life, thus keeping them in their communities for as long as possible. All officers interviewed stated the outcomes for clients are far more important than the time it takes to process a grant. They worked actively towards achieving this goal in every case.
- 11 The Housing Adaptations Service holds joint visits to clients' homes where an occupational therapist and a technical officer meet with the client to discuss the adaptation needed. They also talk about how the works will move forward. The clients' thoughts, concerns and wishes are all considered. Joint visits increase the efficiency of visits and reduce the disruption to clients. The joint visits have also fostered strong communication and created strong working relationships within the team.
- 12 Two specific officers from the housing adaptations service visit client sites to plan, monitor and sign off building work. These officers will explain to clients what will happen during the works, but there is no written list of service standards covering the quality and expected performance of the Service. Such a list or a charter of expectations would enable clients to assess the adaptation process more effectively.

Service users are very satisfied with the quality of the service they receive

- 13 Our telephone survey with service users clearly showed that most people were satisfied with the quality of the housing adaptations service:
 - eighty-seven per cent of the people we spoke to were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the time it took for the Council to approve their housing adaptation. A further 8% were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'.

- eighty-two per cent of the people we spoke to rated the help the Council provided them with when appointing a builder to do the adaptation work as 'very good' or 'good'.
 - ninety-five per cent of the people we spoke to were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the quality of the housing adaptations service provided by the Council.
 - ninety-nine per cent of the people we spoke to felt the adaptation had helped them with the needs they had.
- 14 Although the telephone survey results about the housing adaptations service and the adaptations received were positive, there were some negative comments from the people we spoke to about issues with the building contractors.
- 15 In 2016-17, the national performance indicator for the time it takes to deliver an adaptation showed the Council was 21st out of 22 Councils in Wales. It took, on average, 296 days to deliver a disabled facilities grant adaptation. The Welsh average was 224 days.
- 16 The housing adaptations service reviewed its Contractors' Framework and introduced tighter monitoring controls within a renewed framework from 1 December 2017. The Council took action against contractors who were not performing to standard. They closely monitored subsequent work for quality and delivery time. As a result the performance against the indicator has improved. The third quarter of 2017-18 saw 77 grants completed with an average of 216 days.
- 17 The housing adaptations service actively seeks client feedback on the quality of the service and the adaptation. The Service posts a questionnaire to all service users once the building works are complete. The questionnaire is clear and brief. It aims to collect feedback on the quality of the service provided. It asks if the adaptation has met the clients' needs, and if has had a positive impact on their life. While the Council seeking client feedback is positive, the response rate for the questionnaire is low, around 40%. The Service does not currently follow up on any non-returned questionnaires. We found from the people we spoke to in our telephone surveys:
- only 50% said the Council had asked them for their opinion on how well its service worked; and
 - only 54% said the Council had been back in touch after the works to ask if the adaptation had made a difference to their lives.
- 18 There is, therefore, potential for the housing adaptations service to do more to collect feedback from their clients. The officers we spoke to expressed surprise on hearing these results. They believed they discussed the quality of the service with clients when they visited homes to sign off the building works. The occupational therapists said they revisited clients in their homes following the works to see if the identified outcomes of the adaptation had been achieved.

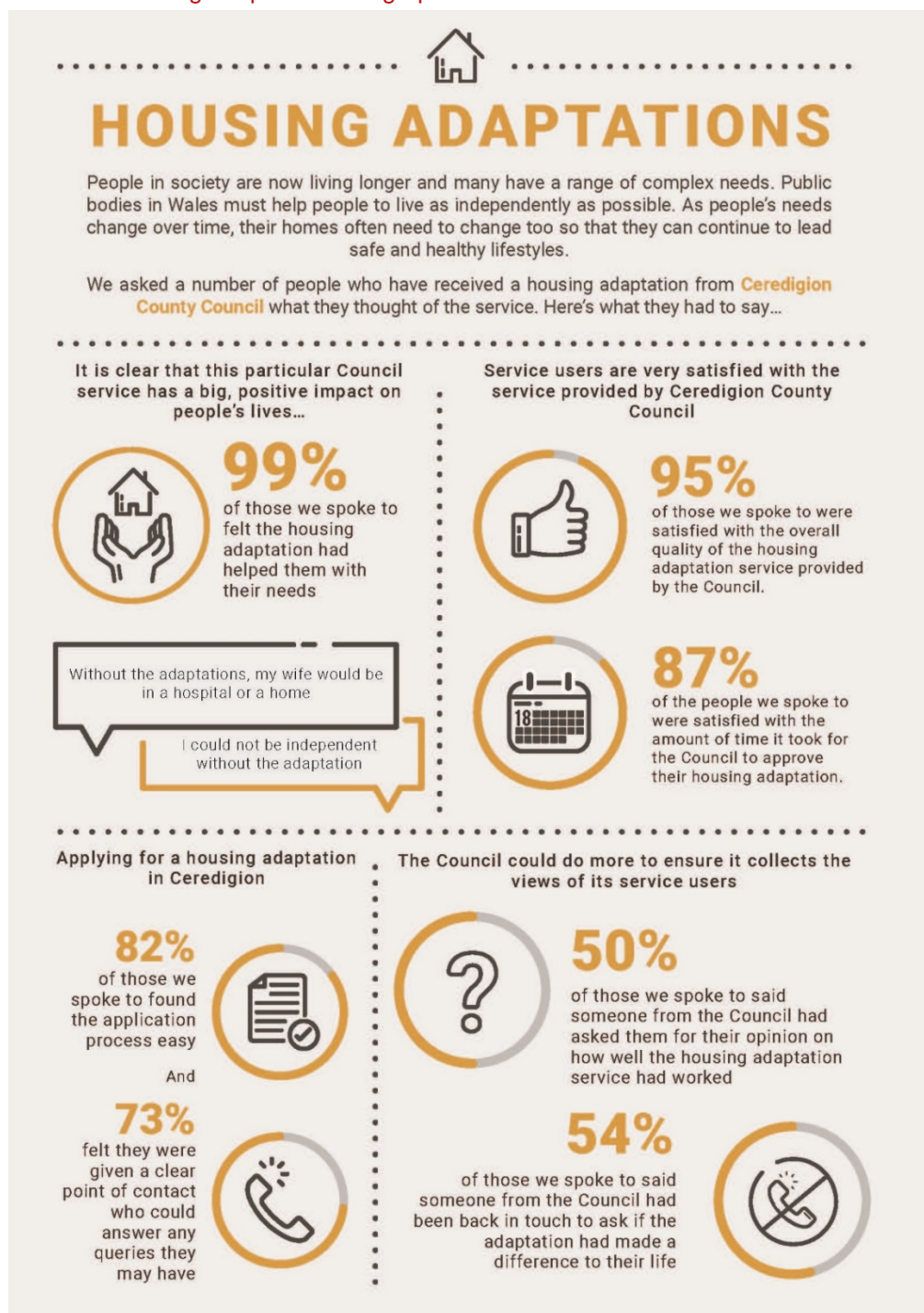
The Council could do more to raise awareness of the housing adaptations service, but once aware service users can access services easily

- 19 Most of the people we spoke to felt they could access the services they needed:
- eighty-two per cent of the people we spoke to found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to apply for a housing adaptation; and
 - only 17% of the people we spoke to were not clear who they should contact with any queries about their application for an adaptation.
- 20 The Council's Social Care Service created the Porth Gofal call centre last year as the first point of contact for all social care enquiries. Within Porth Gofal the Council has created a multi-disciplinary triage team to handle and evaluate all calls it receives about housing adaptations. This team contains occupational therapists, social workers, and health representatives. The Porth Gofal Triage Team can fast track jobs to the West Wales Care and Repair Service if they are small enough. They will also refer direct to Care and Repair if they have any doubt the caller will follow up. The main purpose of the triage team is to listen to the client, suggest the best course of action going forward and produce a joint solution. To further speed up the process, the Council has provided training to the Porth Gofal officers to enable them to become Trusted Assessors. Trusted Assessors provide advice on equipment which can help support people in their own homes.
- 21 The application forms needed for a housing adaptation are long and complicated. The Council has done a lot of work to streamline this process for the client. Members of the Housing Adaptations Service pre-populate forms with appropriate information and visit the clients at home to work through the application form with them.
- 22 The Service is updating its information leaflet **Support for Independent Living**. The leaflet is clear and comprehensive and explains clearly how a potential service user could get a housing adaptation. The Service has also attended and presented at various events across the County. However, many service users were told about the service through friends and family rather than being aware of it from the Council publicity. The Service could do more to raise awareness of the adaptations it can provide to ensure that those who need to know about the service are aware of it.

Appendix 1

Infographic summarising the key findings from the completed telephone surveys

Exhibit 2: housing adaptations infographic



92% of those we spoke to felt their views and wishes were fully taken into account when their need for an adaptation was assessed by the Council.



They understood my husband's needs and what would make things easier for him

I was impressed with what we were told – the adaptation was exactly what we wanted



Read the full report on Ceredigion County Council's housing adaptations service on our website – www.audit.wales

This survey was completed via telephone interviews by Wales Audit Staff during December 2017 and January 2018. We spoke to 73 people who had been provided with an adaptation during the 2016-17 or 2017-18 financial years. This represents around 21% of all those who received an adaptation from the Council during this time.

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