

Blog

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The future of DFG

By Strategic Network Lead Associate Jo Barrett

The government-commissioned Review of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) has finally been released. Undertaken by industry experts including Foundations, Ferret and the University of West England, the review gave practitioners the opportunity to contribute views and evidence throughout the process.

Funding changes in recent years have seen the DFG allocation transferred into the Better Care Fund. As government has increased resources for DFG, many local authorities have responded by cutting back on their contributions. This means that the increased government grant has not necessarily resulted in enhanced services. Some authorities continue to be flummoxed by how the capital allocation can be used to fund revenue services and – despite government encouraging practitioners to use the DFG flexibly – this has caused much debate between housing and finance professionals.

The review sets out typical recipients of DFG, and typical types of work. It is no surprise that the majority of DFG is spent on older people, who own their own home, funding level-access showers and stairlifts. Tenure inequity is identified as an area for further thought given that only 8% of DFG recipients live in the private rented sector. Inequity in service provision among housing associations is also identified as an area for further thought as at the current time there is a ‘landlord lottery’ with registered providers contributing different amounts towards tenant’s adaptations.

Anyone involved in the delivery of DFG will agree that the delivery process is slow and cumbersome. Assessments and referrals take place at various stages and the customer journey is often lengthy and confusing. Whilst some authorities have taken strides to simplify this and formed multi-agency teams, these are small in number and this innovation is not widespread.

The review makes 45 recommendations for change. The most significant of which are:

- A housing and health partnership board be established in order to oversee use of the DFG, joining the budget with the equipment ICES budget, setting local policy and reporting on ‘the number of people helped to remain independent at home’

- Operational improvements including integrated teams and 3D design centres to improve the customer journey and understanding, single point of access with established pathways, review of policies to ensure flexible use of the DFG, a stronger focus on prevention and the ability to use 1% of the grant for systems change
- Funding changes including a further review of the DFG distribution formula, inflationary uplifts on the £30k maximum grant also taking build costs into account, review of VAT on chargeable works, removal of means test for stairlifts and palliative care, and a review of the means test to bring it in line with social care eligibility
- Recognition of advances in technology and the impact that procurement can have on DFG, including a five-year funding commitment from government to enable authorities to plan and procure with certainty, national accreditation of tradespeople, and greater use of smart technology.

The potential creation of a further raft of 'partnership boards' may lead professionals to groan. These can be bureaucratic, time consuming and slow to implement change. Having said that, there is great scope to simplify and speed up the delivery of DFG and in doing so, improve the quality of life for disabled and older people. This will improve health and social care outcomes and reduce costs through greater prevention, getting upstream from more expensive interventions. No one can argue with the logic of this. Will change happen? In their press release this week, government said they are 'carefully considering the findings'. We will wait and see!

Download a full copy of the review [here](#).

About the author

Joanna Barrett is a Housing Consultant and Lead Associate for HQN's Strategic Network. Jo has twenty years' experience in senior housing roles in local authorities. This includes management and delivery of strategic housing, enabling, private sector housing, homelessness and housing advice services. She is a committed housing professional and is a Corporate Member of the Chartered Institute of Housing. She also has a first-class honours degree in Housing Studies.