

North Yorkshire Council

Executive

4 November 2025

Report to consider the findings of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman report – Housing Services Disabled Facilities Grant

Report of the Corporate Director of Community Development

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's investigation into the handling of a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) application, including the Council's proposed actions to address the issues raised, including improvements to service delivery, waiting list management and publishing of target delivery timescales.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Ombudsman upheld a complaint regarding delays in a DFG application for a child with disabilities. The final report, published on 21 August 2025, identified failings in the Council's processes and recommended a series of remedial actions. The Council has accepted the findings and is implementing a comprehensive action plan to improve service delivery, reduce waiting times, and enhance transparency.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The complaint concerned delays in progressing a DFG application (a grant to help adapt homes for disabled residents). The Ombudsman identified several issues that contributed to the delays, including delays in receiving documents and approvals from the housing association, planning permission setbacks and redesigns, limited availability of structural engineers and contractors, internal ICT issues that affected design work, and raised concerns around the current waiting list for DFG-funded adaptations.
- 3.2 The Ombudsman's recommendations included a formal apology and symbolic payment of £500, immediate progression of the DFG application, development of an action plan with defined timescales, quarterly reporting to elected members, and twice-yearly public updates on backlog clearance.

4.0 ISSUES

- 4.1 This case highlights the challenges of delivering complex adaptations, especially where delivery relies on external partners such as housing associations.

- 4.2 Increasing demand has extended delivery timescales beyond acceptable limits. We are undertaking a review of the end-to-end process from the initial needs assessment (carried out by our social care colleagues) to on-site delivery. In collaboration, we are working to ensure residents are supported and well-informed while awaiting adaptations.
- 4.3 To improve performance and align with sector expectations, we want to adopt the five-stage good practice model for home adaptations and consistently achieve these standards for the majority of our applicants.
- 4.4 Although we consistently meet statutory timescales for DFG, we recognise this is not sufficient. Our goal is to meet or exceed the sector's good practice benchmarks.
- 4.5 The good practice timescales include 5 key stages of delivering a home adaptation:

Stage 0: first contact with services

Stage 1: first contact to assessment and identification of the relevant works

Stage 2: identification of the relevant works to submission of the formal grant application

Stage 3: grant application to grant approval

Stage 4: approval of grant to completion of works.

- 4.6 The good practice model outlines the key stages, from first contact to completing the work in someone's home. Target timescales are shown in 4.7 below and vary by urgency and complexity, with the aim of meeting these in 95% of cases.
- 4.7 **Target timescales (working days)**

Type	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Total
Urgent & Simple	5	25	5	20	55
Non-urgent & Simple	20	50	20	40	130
Urgent & Complex	20	45	5	60	130
Non-urgent & Complex	35	55	20	80	180

- 4.8 Minor adaptations (e.g. grab rails, half steps) are delivered via our Handyperson service, which currently has no waiting list.
- 4.9 To ensure timely and appropriate routing, we will assess complexity at the outset. We've clarified therefore the types of work that fall into each category and aligned them with urgency criteria.
- 4.10 The good practice guidance recommends that authorities treat cases as urgent in the following circumstances:
- Coming out of hospital and at risk
 - Living alone and at risk
 - Severe cognitive dysfunction and at risk

- Living with a carer who is elderly or disabled
 - Living without heating or hot water and at risk
 - Limited life expectancy
- 4.11 Our Housing Assistance Policy includes a 'Fast Track' grant for eligible urgent cases. Other urgent cases are prioritised through a separate triage/prioritisation system.
- 4.12 To provide further clarity, simple vs complex works would be defined as:
- **Simple Works:** stairlifts, prefabricated ramps, wash/dry toilets, door openers
 - **Complex Works:** bathroom adaptations, through-floor lifts, concrete ramps, safety fencing, door widening, this would also include our highly complex work with major structural changes (e.g. extensions, loft conversions, internal reconfigurations)
- 4.13 In terms of some of the highly complex cases such as an extension, it will be very difficult to meet the stage 1 and 2 timescales, as these invariably include the need for detailed feasibility and case discussions, complex designs, planning submission and decision, specification and tender preparation, tender analysis, landlord agreements. What is key in these instances is that the client is regularly updated on progress (and any potential delays) at all stages and are supported to mitigate any problems.
- 4.14 Data from our new joined-up IT system helps us to track and manage cases better and this highlights that the delays are most acute in Stages 1 and 2. Stage 1 involves the Occupational Therapy assessment by our social care teams; Stage 2 begins when the Home Improvement Agency (our in-house team that organises and manages home adaptations) receives the referral and initiates design, quotations, and permissions.
- 4.15 The Home Improvement Agency currently has a waiting list at Stage 2 due mainly to a shortage of technical resource. We are addressing this through recruitment (including potential apprenticeship pathways) to support both immediate capacity and succession planning.
- 4.16 To address the issues raised in the Ombudsman case and reduce future risk, we are also implementing the following improvements:
- Establishing service level agreements with housing associations
 - Expanding contractor and engineer capacity (including the use of Align Property Partners)
 - Enhancing planning liaison to flag issues early
 - Formalising escalation routes for complex cases
 - Strengthening performance monitoring through regular audits and reporting
- 4.17 Our occupational therapy colleagues in both adult and children's services are also reviewing ways to reduce assessment timescales (Stage 1).

- 4.18 These actions aim to reduce waiting times, improve communication, and ensure timely delivery of adaptations. With current funding levels, we aim to clear the backlog within 18–24 months. Recruitment and system improvements began in autumn 2025, with full rollout continuing through 2026.
- 4.19 We are developing performance dashboards with our corporate performance team to monitor progress and publicly report improvements over the next 24 months.
- 4.20 We will also need to closely monitor the level of referrals into the service both via Occupational Therapy and to the Home Improvement Agency and further resources may be required to clear the waiting list should current referral levels increase.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 5.1 The steps been taken to address the identified failings in the service support the council's strategic priority of "Safe, Healthy and Living Well." The proposal ensures that residents are safeguarded and supported to lead healthy, independent lives by addressing key service gaps and enhancing access to critical support. Furthermore, the measures outlined promote overall wellbeing through improved service delivery and responsiveness, aligning with the Council's commitment to enabling residents to thrive through accessible health, leisure, and support services.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 Inaction on the Ombudsman's findings would risk repeated service failures and signal a lack of accountability, eroding public trust. It may also expose the Council to legal scrutiny and compromise its commitment to improving resident-centred services.
- 6.2 There are no viable alternatives. Failure to implement the proposed actions would risk continued service gaps, delayed responses, and unmet needs, particularly for vulnerable residents who depend on timely support to maintain their independence. Further increases to waiting lists, are likely to increase pressure on emergency services, reduce wellbeing outcomes, and damage the Council's reputation.

7.0 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS

- 7.1 Effective implementation will require close collaboration between Housing, CYPS (Children and Young People's Services) and HAS (Health and Adult Services) to ensure a joined-up approach across the full customer journey. Joint working will be essential to align proposed timescales, streamline referral pathways, and avoid duplication. A shared monitoring framework is recommended to track progress and ensure that no backlogs or bottlenecks emerge, with an aim that all actions are completed within agreed delivery timescales to maintain service continuity and responsiveness.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The council carried forward an underspend from some of the legacy councils. To support the implementation of the action plan, the Council will need to allocate resources. The expected staffing costs are in the region of £200,000. The bulk of the backlog relates to adaptations required to support bathing (level access showers), the value of these works are estimated to total £2.3 million. These costs will therefore be met from previous underspend of the ringfenced DFG allocation.
- 8.2 The government is currently undertaking a consultation on revising the DFG allocation methodology. The implications of this are not yet clear, but this may have future financial implications depending on changes to the funding formula.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council is required to confirm its response to the Ombudsman within three months and present the report to Cabinet or an appropriate committee. This ensures accountability and compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 An Equalities Impact assessment screening tool has shown there are no significant impacts. See Appendix A.

11.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Climate change impact assessment screening form has shown there are no significant impacts. See Appendix B.

12.0 PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Quarterly reporting and case audits will be used to monitor delivery against the timescales. We will be tracking progress, identify delays, and take corrective action to ensure improved performance across the service. We will also publicly report improvements over the next 24 months.

13.0 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 Continued delays in the delivery of DFG adaptations have been significantly influenced by external dependencies, particularly the responsiveness of housing associations. To address this, North Yorkshire Council has initiated discussions to establish service levels with these partners, aiming to formalise expectations around documentation timelines, escalation procedures, and communication standards
- 13.2 Previously we have also had limitations in contractor availability, which have further hindered timely delivery. To mitigate this, efforts are underway to onboard additional local contractors to increase capacity and improve scheduling flexibility and we will also work with our colleagues in Align Property Partners to utilise their technical services, as appropriate.

14.0 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

14.1 Human resources support will be required particularly in relation to the recruitment training, performance management and the introduction of any apprenticeship scheme.

15.0 CONCLUSIONS

15.1 The ombudsman's findings have highlighted significant service delivery challenges in the handling of DFG applications, particularly for complex cases involving multiple external partners. The council is taking action to address the issues raised.

15.2 A comprehensive action plan is underway, including improvements to staffing, contractor capacity, planning liaison, and performance monitoring. These measures aim to reduce waiting times, improve communication, and ensure residents receive timely and effective support.

15.3 The council aims to enhancing transparency through publishing delivery timescales and regular reporting and will continue to work closely with internal and external partners to ensure sustained service improvements.

16.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 Having reviewed the Ombudsman's findings, the service is already taking steps to implement the proposed action plan. This includes working towards the good practice timescales, regular reporting, and allocating appropriate resources.

16.2 Ensuring both democratic and service-level oversight will support transparency and help improve delivery timescales in relation to adapting the homes of some of our most vulnerable residents.

17.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- i) Accept the findings of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's investigation into the handling of a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) application.
- ii) Endorse the proposed actions to address the issues raised, including improvements to service delivery, waiting list management and publishing of target delivery timescales.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix B – Climate Change Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Ombudsman Report

Corporate Director – Nic Harne
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Northallerton
2 October 2025

Report Author – Lynn Williams Head of Housing Renewal

Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.