

Housing adaptations

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

June 2026



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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

- 1 We looked at how the Council plans, delivers and monitors housing adaptations to help people stay in their homes.

Why this is important

- 2 Home adaptations are changes to a home that make it easier for people to get around or do everyday tasks. Adaptations may prevent falls and admissions to care settings, saving public money. Examples of adaptations include:
 - installing ramps or grab rails;
 - adding a stairlift or wheelchair lift;
 - fitting a level access shower or shower seat; and
 - widening doorways for wheelchair access.
- 3 The Council assesses people's needs to decide if they are eligible for support. When they are, the Council has a legal duty to provide services, such as home adaptations or equipment, to help children, young people and adults stay at home.
- 4 In our [2018 report](#) we found an overly complicated system across Wales which reinforced, rather than addressed, inequality in provision of adaptations.

What we have found

- 5 Overall, the Council understands demand and is using its resources flexibly in the short term to deliver adaptations which are rated highly by service users. However, despite waiting times reducing, it still takes a long time for an adaptation and the Council does not have a delivery plan to address this. The Council is taking some steps to understand how it is providing value for money when delivering housing adaptations but it is not currently assessing if intended outcomes are being achieved.

What we recommend

- 6 We make three recommendations. These include:
- reducing the time it takes to deliver a housing adaptation by developing a delivery plan that matches resources with current and future demand;
 - involving Occupational Therapists in developing the Council's approach to housing adaptations and reviewing completed adaptations; and
 - further improving its approach to assessing value for money.

Key facts and figures

The Council's Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) indicates that 39.9% of applicants on the Homefinder waiting list in 2024-25 need some form of adapted property.

In 2024-25, the Council completed 832 adaptations to people's homes, 437 of these being funded by a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The Council uses funds flexibly to top up grants.

The Council's Adaptations and Community Equipment (ACE) team completed 1,517 assessments during 2024-25, with an additional 660 moving and handling assessments, reducing risk and supporting care staff to use equipment effectively and safely to keep people living at home.

To support people to maintain their independence for longer at home, the ACE team delivered 5,975 pieces of equipment to Rhondda Cynon Taf residents and collected 6,726 items of equipment for reuse or recycling.

The Council spent £7.464m on housing adaptations in 2024-25, this includes managing the ACE team and store. The DFG budget in 2024-25 was £4.485 million. The three-year DFG capital budget for 2025-26 to 2027-28 is £11.125m.

In 2024-2025 feedback from clients who received a DFG and completed a satisfaction survey shows:

- 98% were able to do things they couldn't do before, and felt more confident and independent;
- 99% felt it was easier for their family / carer to help with their daily needs; and
- 98% felt that the quality of their life had improved after receiving the adaptation.

Our findings

The Council is clear about what it wants to achieve but it does not have a clear plan to deliver housing adaptations

Strategic Planning

- 7 The Council sets out its strategic approach to housing adaptations across a number of different service strategies, with the Council's Housing Investment Policy being a key document. This policy focuses on:
 - promoting independent living by adapting properties, enabling people with disabilities to remain in their own homes; and
 - making the best use of resources available to deliver housing improvements to those in most need.
- 8 Objectives within these strategies are not all linked to clear actions, and there is no delivery plan for housing adaptations that supports these. Some objectives do not have delivery timescales and objectives do not always align with each other. Without a clear delivery plan, it is not clear how the Council is planning to deliver on its objectives for housing adaptations.
- 9 The Council involves health and housing partners in developing its approach to housing adaptations. However, we found that Occupational Therapists (OTs) have had limited input. This is a missed opportunity to take account of their professional expertise and knowledge, particularly given their role in assessing people's needs.

Understanding demand

- 10 The Council has a good understanding of current demand for housing adaptations based on a wide range of information. This includes the numbers of people who require an adapted property and projected future need, based on demographic data and its Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA).

- 11 The Council has identified that demand is increasing based on changing demographics and a growing population of older people. The Council has also identified that its decision to remove means testing for medium sized works, based on Welsh Government guidance, and an influx of referrals following the Covid-19 pandemic, meant that referrals rose by 74%.
- 12 The Council gathers a lot of information about demand for services including about demand from children and young people. However, it is not using this information to make decisions about how it will use its resources to meet longer term demand. Without proper forecasting and linking demand with planned actions, there is a risk the Council may not be doing all it can to deal with demand and reduce waiting times.

The Council has a clear process for assessing and delivering housing adaptations and has reduced timescales, but people still wait too long for their adaptations

Delivery

- 13 The Council has clear and accessible information on housing adaptations on its website. The information covers eligibility, available works, application procedures, and funding details, primarily through the DFG and minor aids schemes. Access to services is by phone, email, online and using printed paperwork. Having clear, accessible information helps applicants understand the process at every stage and increases the chances of finding the right support for their needs.
- 14 The Council understands user needs for housing adaptations through a structured assessment process. This is mainly through OT visits, who directly engage with residents. The core aim of these visits is to understand how a person's medical condition or disability impacts their ability to live independently. As a result of engaging directly with applicants, the Council is more able to meet the needs of the applicant.

- 15 The Council actively seeks service user feedback to shape its housing adaptation work and uses this learning to improve services. For example, the Council made improvements to its application forms for all housing tenures. Forms are now clearer and written in plain language, making them more accessible to applicants.
- 16 Within the Council, teams work well together to assess and deliver housing adaptations. The housing grants team works closely with planning and building control staff and with building surveyors in the grants team. The Adaptation and Community Equipment (ACE) Service centralises the assessment and delivery of minor aids and major adaptations, supporting communication between internal teams.
- 17 The Council has clear procedures in place to support the daily running of the service. This includes the recently updated ACE Team operational guidance. This includes clear steps for referral, allocating cases, case management and managing delays. These procedures can help ensure consistency of approach.
- 18 Residents in the area wait on average nine months to have a DFG adaptation. The Council has reduced this wait by 91 days over the last three years, with the average wait now standing at 284 days. The Council has suggested that a contributing factor to long waiting times is that higher-value grant applications are becoming more complex in nature.
- 19 The Council wants to reduce waiting times further but it does not have a target nor a delivery plan setting out how it will do so and how it will allocate the resources it needs to do this. Therefore, there is a risk that actions are not taken, or fed into resource planning. The lack of an action plan also makes it more difficult to monitor progress.
- 20 Having to wait a long time for a housing adaptation can have a significant impact on someone's health and well-being. It could mean they are unable to manage daily tasks. It could also increase the risks of falls and trips, leading to need for hospital care, placing pressure on other public services.

Managing resources

- 21 The Council understands and has identified its medium-term financial resources, and staffing needs to deliver housing adaptations. It uses its financial resources flexibly, including topping up grants, to deliver housing adaptations and help reduce waiting times.
- 22 The Council reviews its resources for housing adaptations annually as part of its service planning process. The Council is training trusted assessors¹ to prescribe equipment and minor adaptations. If successful, this approach could reduce the workload on the OTs by enabling them to focus on more complex referrals. However, the Council has not identified its longer-term resource needs to manage any future increases in demand.
- 23 The Council has arrangements in place to recover costs and generate an income. For example:
 - The Council has controls in place to recover some of its costs should a service user move property. If the property is sold within 10 years of the completion of the adaptation, the homeowner must repay the full grant award, less the first £5,000.
 - The Council procured the Disabled Adaptations and Repairs Contract (2024-2027) through a competitive tendering process, ensuring that service users receive home adaptations at competitive market rates.
- 24 The Council has increased the capacity of its contractor pool from 20 to 30 to deliver housing adaptations. The Council also has a separate framework with Care and Repair² to deliver small-scale adaptations. Having enough contractors to deliver adaptations can reduce the time it takes to complete works making it more likely that service users are able to remain in their homes.

¹ A Trusted Assessor is someone acting on behalf of and with the permission of multiple organisations to carry out an assessment of health and/or social care needs in a variety of health or social care settings.

² Care & Repair Cymru is a Welsh charitable organisation dedicated to helping older people live independently in safe, warm, and accessible homes.

- 25 There are examples of the Council working with other organisations, but it has not fully explored how it can work with others to provide adaptations. The Council considers input and advice from NHS OTs and hospital discharge teams. The local housing association funds an OT who sits in the ACE team. Collaboration is important because there may be opportunities to build capacity and reduce waiting times, and to make the most of existing resources.
- 26 ICT systems are not well integrated, and the Council relies on some manual processes to administer housing adaptations applications. This includes a combination of hand-written assessment notes, locally stored spreadsheets and voice notes. Some of these formats are not compatible with the WCCIS system, and surveyors use a different system altogether. As a result, Council processes are not as efficient as they could be, and there is a risk of staff duplicating effort.

The Council monitors the cost and quality of housing adaptations, but does not know if it is delivering against personal care plan outcomes as intended

Managing performance

- 27 The service regularly monitors a range of information to help it understand its performance. This includes:
- costs and spending;
 - waiting times;
 - percentage of people satisfied with the adaptations;
 - quality of housing adaptations; and
 - performance of contractors.
- 28 The Council assesses, oversees delivery, and checks the quality of all adaptations in private dwellings. For tenants living in housing association properties, the Council has limited involvement, but it does monitor DFG adaptations of its local housing associations. This helps gives it an understanding of the position across the area.

- 29 The Council monitors housing adaptation costs as part of its quarterly capital budget monitoring process. Monitoring reports include spend of housing adaptations against projected costs, with exceptions highlighted to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. Members, therefore, have the opportunity to challenge the position and identify actions to address issues.
- 30 The Council is taking some steps to understand how it is providing value for money when delivering housing adaptations. A recent Council review found no cases where service users with recent housing adaptations had moved into residential care. This suggests the adaptation helped them to continue living independently at home. The Council estimates it saves £141,000 per year in care costs, because of people no longer requiring more intensive support from services.
- 31 Understanding and evidencing cost avoidance helps show how housing adaptations can provide good value for money from the Council's preventative and early intervention activity.
- 32 However, we have identified some areas for improvement which would strengthen the Council's performance management arrangements. Although the Council monitors waiting times, it has not clearly set out actions to improve timeliness or to evaluate if its actions are making a difference. This is important when assessing the efficiency and effectiveness elements of value for money.
- 33 The Council inspects all completed housing adaptations to check that they are of the expected quality and service standards. The completion visits do not routinely involve OTs. This may be particularly helpful for more complex cases as they would be well-placed to assess if the adaptation is helping the person as intended.

User satisfaction

- 34 The Council asks service users for their views on the adaptation at the point of completion. Service user satisfaction with housing adaptations is high, with 98% of applicants saying they were able to do things they couldn't do before and feel more confident and independent. However, the Council does not assess if the adaptation has achieved agreed personal care and support outcomes as per the care plan. This means the Council may not fully understand if the housing adaptation has been value for money.

Recommendations

R1 Delivery and reducing waiting times

The Council should develop a delivery plan setting out how it will manage current and future demand and further reduce waiting times, identifying the resources and IT system it needs to do this. This should include an appropriate set of measures to monitor and report timeliness, cost, quality and value for money (**paragraphs 8, 12, 19, 26 and 32**).

R2 Involving Occupational Therapists

The Council should involve Occupational Therapists (OTs) in developing its policy approach to housing adaptations, drawing on their expertise in assessing people's needs. In more complex cases, the Council should also consider asking OTs to review completed adaptations to check quality and confirm the adaptations have achieved the intended outcomes (**paragraphs 9 and 33**).

R3 Assessing value for money

The Council should take further steps to determine if it is achieving value for money through its housing adaptations, including understanding whether original personal care and support plan objectives have been achieved. This would also help the Council strengthen its understanding and further demonstrate the preventative impact of the service (**paragraph 34**).

Appendices

About our work

Scope of the audit

The audit considers whether the Council's arrangements for housing adaptations support service users to remain at home. This includes reviewing the Council's approach, delivery and monitoring arrangements.

The audit did not include interviews with other stakeholders who are involved in the delivery of housing adaptations such as local health boards, contractors, and housing associations. Neither did we contact service users to obtain their feedback on the service they received.

Questions

The audit uses the following high-level questions:

- Does the Council have an informed and clear approach to housing adaptations which supports people to remain at home?
- Is the Council delivering its approach to housing adaptations to support people to remain at home?
- Does the Council have arrangements to monitor the progress and impact of housing adaptations to support people to remain at home?

Criteria

We considered our previous audit from 2018 which helped to develop the audit criteria. We also had discussions with councils to understand Housing Adaptations further.

Methods

We reviewed documents and data relating to the housing adaptations process. We interviewed key officers and elected members involved in the housing adaptations process.

Key terms in this report

Term	Description
Adaptations	Adaptations are categorised into Minor Aids such as grab rails and lever taps and Major Adaptations such as level access showers, stairlifts, ramps, door widening, or building extensions. Specialised services like Care and Repair Cwm Taf provide a rapid response for smaller works.
Sustainable development principle	The sustainable development principle is defined as acting in a manner 'which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'
Care and support plan	A care and support plan is a personalised document created by the council, under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, outlining how an individual's assessed needs will be met to achieve personal outcomes.
Needs assessment	The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 dictates that anyone who may need care or support has a right to a needs assessment. This process is designed to identify what matters to you and what help you might need to maintain your independence and well-being
DFG	Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are usually administered by the housing department of your local council. They are means-tested unless you are applying on behalf of a child under 18 so you may need to pay towards the cost of the work, based on your income, your partner's income (if applicable), and any

savings you have over £6,000. The Grant can provide up to £36,000 of funding.

Service standards

The Welsh Government's service standards for Housing Adaptations published in 2019 aim to 'ensure service providers deliver housing adaptations in a more consistent manner and inform service users on the level of service to expect when they seek support for a housing adaptation.'

Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

Local authorities may also use their own funds for home adaptation works. Under the 2002 Order, local authorities can introduce grants or loans and are able to set their own conditions or financial limits. This might be used to top-up a DFG, or sometimes instead of a DFG

Value for Money

Local Value for money is about whether money is being used to deliver intended outcomes at the best price. This is also sometimes referred to as 'cost effectiveness'. Value for money is commonly associated with the 'three E's' of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. We have summarised these as:

- Economy – Getting the right deal – securing the necessary inputs, to help achieve intended outcomes, at the lowest possible cost.
- Efficiency – Doing things right – making the most of the inputs to generate outputs designed to achieve intended outcomes.
- Effectiveness – Getting the right results – achieving the intended outcomes for the short and longer term.

Councils have legal duties relating to value for money. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a duty on councils to review the extent to which they are using resources economically, efficiently and effectively.

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