

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 19TH OCTOBER, 2023

REFERENCE FROM HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 11TH OCTOBER, 2023

“ INDEPENDENT LIVING POLICY (DP) –

The Operational Manager, Regeneration outlined the report to the Committee, the purpose of which was to set out the proposed implementation of an Independent Living Policy in the Vale of Glamorgan for the consideration of the Committee prior to Cabinet oversight.

The draft Independent Living Policy (attached at Appendix A to the report and described in the accompanying presentation / slideshow) outlined the Vale of Glamorgan Council's strategy to facilitate home adaptations that preserved individuals' independence in their homes, particularly those in need of assistance. It established guidelines, informed enquirers about available provisions, and addressed individual needs effectively. The relevant Grants funded the adaptation of privately owned / rented homes to allow residents to live as independently as possible in their own home for as long as possible. Key points from the report and presentation included:

- The multifaceted background to the proposed changes, ranging from changes in Welsh Government (WG) legislation through to the Disability Facilities Grant (DFG) / Adaptations Future Recommendations Report.
- The incorporation of relevant advice and guidance from WG into the Policy by introducing a new Discretionary Adaptations Grant (DAG), a more consistent approach around adaptations and grants for independent living and the removal of means testing, which could exclude those persons who had a real need and required assistance to get adaptations to their home, but just missed out due to their circumstances.
- Details concerning the key components of the new policy, including the statutory DFG, the new DAG and Relocation grant for medium and large adaptations, in conjunction with the use of case conferences and a multi departmental, interdisciplinary approach by the Council and partners in order to adequately and fairly assess these applications with a longer-term view in mind.
- Tied into this, would be a new means of funding these adaptations:
 - DFG: with a Means Test, and a 10-year charge on their property.
 - DAG: without a Means Test, and a lifetime charge on their property.
 - Relocation grant if the proposed adaptation was not feasible or practical.
 - For DFG and DAG, the funding would ultimately be recouped and recycled for further, future funding.

- For smaller scale adaptations, the focus would now be to make better use of the Care and Repair trusted assessors to help facilitate these, thereby freeing up Occupational Therapy services.
- The creation of a single adaptations and Occupational Therapy team.
- The range and scale of adaptations undertaken was also addressed, as well as the financial scale and limits on these and the legal and policy implications.

The Independent Living Policy meant that individuals could continue to thrive at their homes by ensuring transparency, collaboration, and support by providing additional options, thereby enabling them to maintain their autonomy and quality of life for longer, as well as helping the Local Authority to more effectively manage and mitigate its social care costs.

Following the presentation of the report, the following comments and questions were raised by the Committee and others:

- Councillor Morgan welcomed the new Policy, particularly in light of a rising aging population in the Vale and the concerns of older residents around care costs. The Policy would help to prevent older persons from becoming stuck in hospital because their homes could now be adequately adapted / safeguarded. It was important to share this information with residents in order that they were aware of the funding and support available for adapting their or their family members' homes.
- On Councillor Campbell's query on the impact of high and rising material and labour costs on the various forms of grant funding for adaptations, in particular with regard to the maximum, statutory, grant limits, it was explained that the Council did allow for discretionary increases for the grant(s) above the set limits (i.e. for DFG, there was a statutory limit of £36,000 with a discretionary maximum grant of £60,000). This was particularly the case for those applications where there was a clear indication that the adaptations would help to provide significant benefits to the applicant(s) in question and savings in their social care in the longer term. Another challenge was the backlog in supplies of specialist equipment for adaptations as well as the need to re-tender due to a shortfall in suitable contractors to undertake adaptation work, which the Council was also trying to address.
- Councillor Lloyd-Selby referred to the Council's house building programme and the efforts to future proof these homes in light of an increasingly aging population within the Vale i.e. power points near to stairways for the potential installation of stair lifts, etc. The new Policy was most welcome, but it was important that it also made reference to advocacy support for those people that required it as part of any appeals process or for those persons that were applying for grant funding / adaptations who may have vulnerabilities due to age, disability or mental health issues. The Operational Manager, Regeneration stated that this was a valid point concerning advocacy support and this suggestion would be taken forward when finalising the Policy, and that the case conference framework was designed to enable decision-makers to take into account advocacy support as well. The Committee also asked that the Councillor's suggestion on advocacy be forwarded as a comment / recommendation to Cabinet.
- The Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, with permission to speak, stated that this Policy would be vital in ensuring that

the most vulnerable residents living within the Vale could continue to live in their homes, with dignity and with the necessary adaptations in place so that adequate support could be provided to the residents and in the longer term provide the most efficient and cost-effective care.

- G. Doyle, a Tenant Representative, asked how Vale residents could apply for such grant funding. It was explained that most applications came through referrals via Occupational Therapists and Social Services (i.e. as part of the discharge process from hospital or persons requiring additional care and support due to disability, age, etc.), although people could also apply directly to the relevant team via telephone and email.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the report, subsequently

RECOMMENDED –

(1) T H A T the draft Independent Living Policy be referred to Cabinet for their consideration.

(2) T H A T the following comment(s) from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet:

The draft Independent Living Policy should include details concerning the availability of advocacy support for people applying for funding under this policy and who may require additional assistance or help due to their age, disability or other vulnerability.

Reasons for recommendations

(1) To enable Cabinet to consider and approve the Independent Living Policy.

(2) In order for Cabinet to consider the comment(s) from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee prior to approving the Independent Living Policy.”