

Housing adaptations

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

August 2026

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

- 1 We looked at how the Council provides housing adaptations to support service users to remain at home. We reviewed the Council's approach, delivery and monitoring arrangements.

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. They have the potential to prevent falls and unnecessary admissions to care settings and may lead to positive impacts on people's wellbeing. Examples of home adaptations might 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 to stay at home.
- 4 It is key that adaptations are delivered as quickly as possible to help people stay living at home safely and independently. Delays may mean people are unable to undertake daily tasks or at risk of falls and needing to access other public services.

- 5 In our 2018 report we found an overly complicated system which reinforced, rather than addressed, inequality in provision of adaptations.

What we have found

- 6 The Council does not have a clear strategic plan to deliver its housing adaptations. It does not fully understand future demand and its approach is shaped by available funding rather than need. The Council is not regularly monitoring delivery times or whether it is providing value for money. This limits its ability to plan resources, demonstrate impact and ensure adaptations are delivered in a timely way. However, the Council provides a clear and supportive service for users, with effective operational practices and partnership working.
- 7 We have summarised the main strengths and areas for improvement below:

Strengths

- The Council works well with partners to use temporary adapted accommodation to support discharge from hospital.
- The Council has a contractor framework with established relationships with local building suppliers to give service users a degree of choice in some finishing details.
- The Council has a single point of contact for applicants.

Areas for improvement

- The Council has a short-term view of funding.
- The Council does not understand if it is delivering value for money.
- The Council does not understand the medium to long term demand for adaptations.
- The Council does not monitor the time it takes to deliver adaptations.

What we recommend

- 8 We have made three recommendations to the Council about:

- Strengthening strategic planning.
- Developing a longer-term funding and resource plan.
- Improving evaluation and oversight of performance and outcomes.

Key facts and figures

The number of Disabilities Facilities Grant (DFG) requests has increased over the past three years as follows:

2023-24: 751

2024-25: 770

2025-26: 810

The level of funding the Council has allocated to housing adaptations has not changed for 10 years.

When adjusted for inflation, this is a real terms reduction of 26%, with the current £850,000 budget worth £600,000, when compared to its original value.

To maintain its original value, the budget would need to be approximately £1.2 million today.

Our findings

Planning

The Council does not understand future demand and has no clear plan to deliver housing adaptations

Understanding demand

- 9 The Council broadly understands the current demand for its housing adaptations but has a limited understanding of future demand. The Council draws from a broad range of information including backlog and waiting times data, social services and housing data and population needs assessments. However, it does not use this information to anticipate future demand or plan resources to meet this. It also does not forecast demand for adaptations for children and young people.
- 10 Without a clearer forecast of demand, the Council cannot be sure it has the resources it needs to meet future need.

Strategic importance

- 11 The Council does not have a clear framework for housing adaptations bringing together objectives, demand assumptions, and no delivery plan setting out how these will be achieved. Without this, it is not clear how the Council is planning to deliver on its objectives for housing adaptations.
- 12 The Council does not clearly show how housing adaptations support wider priorities. For example, its well-being objective says, 'A Healthier Merthyr Tydfil: We will empower people to live independent and dignified lives'. However, the Council has not shown how housing adaptations contribute to this objective. This means it may miss opportunities to demonstrate impact and value for money.

Housing Adaptations approach

- 13 The Council's approach to housing adaptations is driven by available funding rather than demand. When the allocated budget for the year runs out, the Council stops delivering any further adaptations. When this happens, the Council uses interim measures, such as care packages and telecare to support service users.
- 14 However, it does not assess the full cost of these measures when planning future resources. Some costs may fall elsewhere in the Council, but these costs are not considered when the Council assesses the overall cost of delays. For example, if the Council uses up its adaptations budget before the end of the financial year there is a risk that despite being categorised as a priority, the service user's adaptation will not start until funding becomes available in the following financial year. During that time, the service user may need extra care or may be at greater risk of a fall.
- 15 By not planning activity against current and future demand, the Council cannot be sure it is prioritising interventions based on need, risk or likely outcomes. This increases the risk that resources are not used effectively.

Managing resources

- 16 The Council does not have a strategic or flexible approach to managing its housing adaptations budget. The budget has remained unchanged for 10 years, while demand and costs have increased. In real terms, the budget has reduced by around 26%. The Council has not assessed the impact this has had on waiting times, backlogs or its ability to meet need.
- 17 The Council's reactive approach to funding means that the Council cannot always make effective use of available grant funding to deliver timely housing adaptations. This makes it difficult for the service to always accept additional funding, due to the funds arriving at short notice. By not planning for this eventuality, this creates a further risk because demand has increased by 8% since 2025-26, and waiting lists are likely to grow further. Increasing demand is also placing pressure on Occupational Therapy capacity. This is likely to delay assessments and extend waiting times, particularly for more complex cases.

- 18 Without better resource planning or a more flexible approach to funding, the Council may struggle to meet service users' needs in a timely way. This increases the risk that people lose independence, need more care, or go into hospital putting pressure on other public services.

Delivery

The Council provides a supportive service to users but does not know what its average delivery times are for housing adaptations

Supporting service users

- 19 The Council provides clear and accessible information and advice on housing adaptations. Written correspondence explains eligibility, funding limits, assessment stages and delivery timescales. Officers also provide telephone and face-to-face support where applicants need help. This helps applicants understand the process and find the right support for their needs.
- 20 The Council triages applicants and has access to a Care and Repair trusted assessor to manage demand and prioritise complex cases. This helps target specialist capacity where it is most needed. Officers also support applicants throughout the process and provide updates when there are delays.
- 21 The Council works closely with partners to provide housing adaptations, including housing associations, health services and Registered Social Landlords. For example, it works with its housing providers to provide temporary adapted accommodation to enable people to leave hospital. This helps partners share resources and support service users live independently.
- 22 The Council also has a contractor framework. This offers established relationships with local building suppliers to give service users a degree of choice in some finishing details.

Performance management

- 23 The Council is not always sighted of how well the housing adaptations process is working or the impact adaptations have on service users. Monthly operational monitoring includes case numbers, application progress and costs. The Council also records expected and actual costs for each adaptation. However, this information is not routinely reported beyond the immediate team. This limits oversight of service performance and how the service supports the Council's well-being objectives.
- 24 The Council does not regularly monitor the average time it takes to deliver an adaptation. Through our review, the DFG team were able to provide delivery times for both 2024-25 and 2025-26 of 323 days, but this has not been subject to any formal reporting beyond the DFG team. By not regularly monitoring this data, the Council does not know how the service is performing and cannot put steps in place to improve performance, if necessary.

Impact and value for money

The Council does not know whether housing adaptations are providing value for money or if its overall approach is securing the right outcomes for users

Quality

- 25 The Council checks the quality of adaptations at completion to ensure they meet agreed standards. However, it does not analyse or report this information more widely. It also does not assess the impact that delays have on applicants.

Applying learning

- 26 The Council has reviewed its approach to delivering housing adaptations. In 2024, the Council reviewed its waiting lists and decided to bring the service back in house.
- 27 The Council collects service user feedback, but it does not analyse this information or share learning. This limits its ability to improve the service for users.

Outcomes for users

- 28 While the Council asks users whether adaptations meet their needs at installation, it does not routinely follow up to check whether users' needs are still being met once they have had a chance to use the adaptation. Community Occupational Therapists inspect some complex cases. However, this is not routine for all adaptations. Without follow-up checks, the Council cannot know whether adaptations are delivering the intended outcomes in line with the original assessment.

Value for money

- 29 The Council has not set out how it will evaluate whether housing adaptations provide value for money. It monitors costs through its contractor framework and tracks spend against budget. It also recognises that adaptations can help people remain independent and reduce the need for hospital admission or enhanced care. However, it is not evaluating these outcomes. This makes it difficult to understand the overall effectiveness and value of the service.

Recommendations

R1 Strengthen strategic planning for housing adaptations

The Council should set out a clear strategic approach for housing adaptations. This should include

- how the service will assess future demand;
- how it will ensure its approach supports its well-being objectives; and
- the outcomes it wants housing adaptations to achieve **(paragraphs 9, 12 and 29).**

R2 Develop a longer-term funding and resource plan

The Council should develop a longer-term resource and delivery plan for housing adaptations. This should be based on:

- current and future demand;
- resources needed to meet this demand in a timely way; and
- wider costs of delays, such as additional care, telecare or hospital-related costs **(paragraph 16).**

R3 Strengthen evaluation and oversight of performance and outcomes

The Council should strengthen how it evaluates and reports the performance, outcomes and value for money of housing adaptations. This should include:

- reviewing its performance management information for housing adaptations to ensure this is sufficient to measure progress;
- determining how it will evaluate whether its housing adaptations are providing value for money. This may include cost, timeliness, quality and user outcomes, including whether adaptations help people remain independent and reduce demand for care and other public services; and
- More systematic evaluation of service user feedback to improve the service **(paragraphs 25 to 29)**.

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

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

This audit did not include interviews with other stakeholders who are involved in the delivery of housing adaptations. Neither did we contact service users to obtain their feedback on the service they received.

We undertook the fieldwork for this audit in February to May 2026.

Questions

We drew on the previous Housing Adaptations report to determine the audit criteria.

The current audit used 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 the previous audit which helped to develop the audit criteria, and we also had discussions with councils to understand Housing Adaptations further.

Methods

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

2 Key terms in this report

Term	Description
Value for Money (VFM)	Value for money is about whether money is being used to deliver intended outcomes at the best price. It is commonly associated with the 'three Es' - economy, efficiency and effectiveness. We have summarised these as: • Economy – Getting the right deal by securing the necessary inputs, to help achieve intended outcomes, at the lowest possible cost. • Efficiency – Doing things right by making the most of the inputs to generate outputs designed to achieve intended outcomes. • Effectiveness – Getting the right results by achieving the intended outcomes for the short and longer term. VFM is therefore not just about costs, but about the quality and effectiveness of the services delivered for the money spent. 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.
Adaptations	Adaptations are categorised into Minor Aids such as grab rails and lever taps, Medium Adaptations such as level access showers, stairlifts, ramps, door widening, or Major adaptations like building extensions. Specialised services like Care and Repair Cwm Taf provide a rapid response for smaller works.

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 the person and what help they might need to maintain their independence and well-being.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) helps pay for changes to a home so residents can live there more safely. They are means-tested for large adaptations unless you are applying on behalf of a child under 18. The Grant can provide up to £36,000 of funding.

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