Facts about the area

**Locality:** Walsall, West Midlands.

**Type of authority:** Metropolitan Borough Council

**Population:** 296,300

**Description:** The area is urban and is within the 10% most deprived districts in England although pockets of affluence exist.

**Health and Disability:** Overall health is poorer in Walsall than in England and Wales, 7.3% experiencing bad or very bad health (5.6% nationally). 5.2% of Walsall adults are economically inactive because they are long-term sick or disabled (compared to 4.2% nationally).

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**Good practice illustrates:**

* Lean, cost effective adaptations service
* Effective joint working across housing, social care and health
* Proactive falls prevention and affordable warmth programmes
* Promotion of independent living solutions in visible environment
Home adaptations service at a glance

Walsall MBC provides an in-house agency service based within the Regeneration Directorate. The agency service employs a manager, three improvement officers and two case workers and works closely with occupational therapists (OT) within social care, including staff at the Independent Living Centre (ILC).

Staff based at the ILC include a Head OT, three ILC facilitators, an OT, two OT assistants and a duty Blue Badge Assessor. All staff within the agency and the ILC are trained as Trusted Assessors. The Centre also provides space for a daily sensory support drop in service, healthy living and smoking cessation sessions and the Shop Mobility and Wheelchair loan services.

The budget for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is £4 million (including £1.39 million from the Better Care Fund) although this is used flexibly, including some funding for the ILC.
Faced with increasing demand for DFG and increasing waiting times for customers the authority embarked on a project to prevent spiralling need, simplify the process for applications and reduce unit costs.

David Lockwood, Housing Standards and Improvement Manager said “We worked with partners in social care, health and housing providers to review the way we work and made radical changes including:

- Increase in threshold for minor works to £1,500 – immediate response and no means test;
- Reduction in hourly rate for handyperson services provided by contractors;
- Shift from provision of extensions to stairlifts or through lifts where appropriate;
- Reduction of application form for jobs under £12,000 to three pages, two of which are declarations - no proof of income and savings is required;
- Land charge applied on grants over £5,000 to enable recycling of budget;
- Framework contract across West Midlands for building work, lifts and hoists – a straight stairlift now costs us £900;
- Reduction in number of quotes required from three to one and compare with agency schedule of rates;
- Block approval for installation of stairlifts in Walsall Housing Group properties to avoid need for individual consent.

“Streamlining our processes and reducing costs to the council and our customers has had a marked impact on satisfaction and the number of people we can help. We have also managed to cut our revenue costs by reducing the number of staff in the team from 15.5 FTE in 2008 to 6.5.”
As well as promoting and delivering adaptations and other falls prevention measures the service is proactive in developing schemes to help people live more comfortably and safely. The Council works with utility companies to promote affordable warmth measures provided with Eco Funding. The recycled DFG funding reclaimed through the Land Charge is used to fund home safety promotion resources and activity.

Public Health funding has been provided for the service and is used to seed fund other funding opportunities by, for example, paying for promotional material and thermometers in advance of 'Winter Warmth' scheme start dates.

In 2012 the authority took out a lease on two modern shop units from a supermarket in the town centre to create an independent living centre. Sue Lloyd, Head OT said

“We work on the basis that it is cheaper and better for the customer for us to provide equipment than to send two carers out where people need this level of help. We carry out assessments at the ILC and can order minor adaptations directly or help people complete an application form for DFG and refer it directly to David’s team. Recently a man visiting the ILC on a Friday told us he had carried his wife, who was terminally ill up the stairs to allow her to shower. We immediately ordered a stairlift and it was installed the following Monday.”

“People can visit the centre at any time without an appointment. One of our facilitators will help visitors to identify what might help them live more independently and advise them on the best solution and where to buy this, or we order equipment for them if they are eligible.”
What we’ve achieved:

Through smarter procurement the average unit cost for DFGs in Walsall has reduced from £11,576 in 2008 to £6,049 in 2014. This has been achieved by asking contractors to demonstrate the quality of their service and provide a percentage over/under against a priced schedule of rates. All contractors scoring over a threshold were then invited to participate in a reverse auction to establish a single schedule of rates that all contractors adhere to. It was originally envisaged that a saving of 10% below the priced schedule would be achieved; the exercise generated a further 30% saving giving a total saving of 40%. Individual customers not wishing to use the agency service can utilise the framework contractors but a 7% mark-up is applied to the schedule of rates.

Since 2010 £1,597,127 has been reclaimed in land charges. This together with the procurement savings above have resulted in more people being able to benefit from the service. Since 2008 the number of DFGs completed has increased by 107% from 219 to 453 in 2014.

Customers’ experience of the service has also improved through reduction of the time from referral to approval from 92 weeks to 11 weeks between 2008 and 2014 and this has resulted in the number of people waiting being cut from 861 to 103 over the same period. As mentioned in David’s quote this has all been achieved with less than half the number of staff originally in the team.