
COMMUNITIES AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 1st December, 2025

Present: Councillor Stephen Button (in the Chair),
Councillors Jodi Clements (Vice Chair), Clare Yates, Clare McKenna,
Mike Booth, Tina Walker and Judith Addison
Co-optees Sandie Dent and Shaw

In Attendance: Councillor M. Fisher – Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Health and Social Care
Sarah Whittaker – Regeneration Manager
Justine Williams – Chief Executive of Citizens Advice East Lancashire
Nick Pilling – Vice Chair of Citizens Advice East Lancashire
Justine Williams – Chief Executive Citizens Advice East Lancashire
Pick Pilling – Vice Chair Citizens Advice East Lancashire

Apologies: Councillors David Heap, Loraine Cox, Rawstron and Jean Battle

229 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Heap, L. Cox, Jean Battle and Jackie Rawstrone.

Councillor Addison acted as substitute representative for Councillor Heap.

230 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Councillor Fisher and Matthew Shaw (Co-optee) declared a personal interest in item 4 – Disabled Facilities Grants, due to both being employees of Lancashire County Council who allocate funding to Hyndburn Borough Council. Both remained in the meeting and took part in debate.

231 Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the Communities and Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee of the meeting held 13th October 2025 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

Resolved - **That the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.**

232 Disabled Facilities Grants

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regeneration, Councillor Melissa Fisher, and the Regeneration Manager, Sarah Whittaker, submitted a report to update the Committee on Disabled Facilities Grants, the process, the funding received and what is delivered with the funding. The report also updated the Committee on the current programme and waiting list times.

The Regeneration Manager explained that Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs) were:

- Mandatory grants and delivered under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
- The Act gave local authorities a legal duty to award grants where the criteria had been met and allowed for a maximum amount to be set by the regulations.
- The current maximum grant had been set at £30,000 which had been in force since 2008 and no longer covered the full cost of an extension.
- The aim of providing grants was to enable a disabled person to remain in their own home.
- Applicants had the choice of the Council managing works on their behalf or for self-management.
- Funding for the DFG programme became part of the Better Care Fund (BCF) in 2015/16 meaning that funding was no longer paid directly to the Local Authorities but was paid to Lancashire County Council before being distributed to individual Local Authorities.
- The allocation of funding to Hyndburn in 2025/26 was £1,359,906. Hyndburn Council carried forward £357,069 from 2024/25 and had a total of £1,716,975 for 2025/26.
- Hyndburn Council had the authority to produce its own grant policies and introduced several types of grants including Discretionary DFGs, which had removed the need for a means test for any items under £7,500 and introduced an additional £20,000 top up if people were on a low income or had low savings. Several other grant types were also introduced to enable and encourage more people to apply for grants.
- The policy had been reviewed again in April 2025 when the upper limit for some grants had been changed, taking the amount before means testing, from £7,500 to £10,000.
- Fees for non-agency grants had also been introduced (7.5% + VAT) giving the Council greater opportunity to offer more support to those carrying out works themselves.
- 218 projects were in operation and all were bespoke.
- Occupational Therapists and Trusted Assessors were able to prescribe works.
- The number of applications had increased as there was now greater awareness of the grants.

The Regeneration Manager referred to appendix 1 of the report – ‘Better Care Fund Allocations and Performance to end October 2025, DFG Current Performance to end October 2025 and Performance in previous years’ and explained that it was incorrect and that a new appendix would be circulated to Members after the meeting.

Advanced Questions

Questions were submitted in advance of the meeting. A summary of the responses was provided as follows:

1. Does the grant funding need to be paid back if the owner dies or moves? Is the equipment recycled or reused?

The DFG is a Grant for equipment, to that particular person, and belongs to them. If they move the equipment could be taken with them.

If a grant is awarded to fund an extension on an owner/occupied property, a charge of £10,000 will be recorded against the property on the Land Registry. The Council may

ask the owner to repay some or all of this if they move within 10 years of the grant being approved. However, discretion is exercised.

2. Could you provide details of where the main demand for Disabled Facility Grants comes from. Why is there a waiting list?

Almost all, of our DFG referrals come from either Lancashire County Council's (LCC) Social Services, or the Integrated Therapy Team within the NHS, and occasionally from private Occupational Therapist's. Requests for disabled facility grants cannot be processed without a referral from a medical professional. A DFG is a 2-part process, the OT states what is necessary and appropriate for the disabled person, then the Technical Officer has to assess what is reasonable and practicable within the property.

There is a waiting list because we do not have the staff capacity to process the grants any faster.

3. Appendix 1 refers to performance and spend in previous years to date. Members understand that several years ago there had been an underspend of grant funding and this was carried forward but are confused about the financial data provided. Could you clarify how much has been carried forward each year and the amount spent to give the difference between spend and allocation please?

Please see revised Appendix 1 with the allocations, outturn and slippage. Hopefully this will explain the situation more clearly now.

4. The Affordable Warmth grant was underspent last year. Could you explain why?

For clarification, all of the grants mentioned are funded through the Better Care Funding pot. All of these can have the amounts allocated to them altered to meet the demands of the programme, and spend is maximized over the whole programme. DFGs are the mandatory grants that we have to provide, the other grants are not mandatory and we can remove money from them to divert to the DFGs. There is also an affordable warmth grant which is funded via LCC, this falls outside of this funding as it is the CHIL scheme and a Lancashire wide scheme. We have received an additional £30,000 this year from underspends in the Lancashire wide scheme which I need to add into the funding pot, the figures here do not currently reflect that money.

5. How long does it take, on average, from the submission of an application to the completion of works? What is the time scale on an installation or alteration?

This varies depending upon the type of works but from the date that we receive a completed application form, the typical time scales for starting the work are:

<i>Stairlifts</i>	<i>4 – 8 weeks</i>
<i>Step lifts</i>	<i>8 – 12 weeks</i>
<i>Vertical lifts</i>	<i>8 – 12 weeks</i>
<i>Showers and baths</i>	<i>4 – 18 weeks</i>
<i>Specialist baths</i>	<i>3 - 4 months</i>
<i>Extensions</i>	<i>6 – 12 months.</i>

Some can be quicker than this, and some can be slower, this all depends upon if people end up in hospital, or contractors get private work.

The installation times vary but as a guide some typical time scales for the work are:

Stairlifts ½ day, although preliminary works may be needed.
Step lifts 5 – 10 working days, but additional works may be required
Vertical lifts 5 working days, but additional works may be required
Showers 5 to 7 working days
Extensions 3 months construction.

6. There are several grant types, if funding allocated to one grant is more popular than another, could the funding be transferred to another grant?

Yes - see answer to Q2. However, the allocation to the LCC Respite Centre Great Harwood is a one-off payment that needs to be made and the amount will not change.

7. Committee Members are concerned that grants are not reaching those who require them. What action does the Council take to ensure grants are advertised?

Disabled Facilities Grants do not need to be advertised as there is a large waiting list.

8. Are there many grant applications that require the maximum amount of £30k and does the maximum amount need to be increased?

Last year we completed 9 DFGs over £30,000. These grants invariably take the longest to complete because we also have to assist the applicants in finding the rest of the funding for their adaptations to go ahead. We are now working on the basis of getting preliminary approval from LCC prior to us getting the actual prices for the work because if they will not fund it then we need to look at funding from elsewhere.

The maximum DFG of £30,000 is not sufficient now to carry out complex adaptations, however, should this amount increase it would also mean that the funding for DFGs would need to increase or we would not be able to do as many DFGs. Currently anything over £30,000 (or £50,000 if people are eligible for the Discretionary £20,000) other means have to be found to pay for it and it does not come from the DFG pot. This is a national problem.

9. Is there an assessment of future needs by an OT before there is approval of an installation or works?

Yes. The OT, if carrying out an assessment for a child will look at the needs of that child up to age 18 based on the medical conditions that they have and the prognosis for future needs. When the assessment is done for adults it takes into account any potential recovery that may be made following rehabilitation based on current prognosis, and also the possible deterioration of someone.

10. Who does a person contact to discuss needs prior to the work to be undertaken?

Lancashire County Council can be contacted on 0300 123 6720 and they will carry out an OT assessment which will inform HBC of the needs of the disabled person. Or they can carry out a needs assessment by completing an on line form at [Lancashire and South Cumbria - AskSARA](#).

Christine Brown is the Council's Adaptations Officer and can be contacted to discuss the whole DFG process. She can be contacted on 01254 380153 or Christine.brown@hyndburnbc.gov.uk

11. What sort of work is most likely to have been completed by HBC in the past? (We see handrails and ramps in our wards, stair lifts were mentioned and wet rooms).

The DFG is given for any adaptation that facilitates access to the home, makes the dwelling safe, improves heating, gives access to essential amenities including the garden for the disabled occupant. The adaptations can be anything from handrails, to an extension for a downstairs bedroom and bathroom, and anything in between. We now also get referrals for autism or pika (where people eat masonry, plaster, wiring), which involves creating safe spaces, or spaces where the walls or fittings cannot be eaten by the disabled person. Below is a list of the type of grants and numbers of items fitted in 2024/25 via the DFG programme. This is much more extensive now and more complex than just the traditional stairlifts, ramps and level access showers.

<u>Type of installation</u>	-	<u>Number</u>
Rails		2
Access to Garden		7
Through Floor Lift		4
Level Access Shower		69
Wash dry toilet		7
Extension		3
Stairlift		35
Steplift		5
Automatic Doors		2
Hoists		10
Wash pod		1
Bath		1
Ramp		18
Padding		2
Door widening		8
Total number of the different types of installations		174

Members raised several comments and questions regarding Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs):

Members submitted comments and questions as follows:

- Demand for adaptations was increasing whilst funding was reducing.
- The Committee was advised that Homewise was able to supply disabled facility equipment such as walking frames and also able to provide the services of Trusted Assessors.
- Matthew Shaw gave details of the process for minor adaptations (dealt with by Social Services) and pointed out that small changes often made a big difference. He also advised that the process of adaptation was more straightforward if the person had been in hospital.

Sarah Whittaker explained that they had to act quickly once quotes for works were received, as they did not last long, so they worked with Lancashire County Council to obtain an agreement in principle so that planned works could be progressed. She reported that a further issue was that the maximum disabled facility grant was £30k and this no longer covered the cost of building an extension, so home-owners/landlords, were not always able to continue with the adaptation due to the total cost not being covered through contributions.

She referred to the different types of grants that could be applied for, including small grants. She reminded the Committee that grants over £30k were means-tested and that adaptations may also require planning permission but that the Council was flexible and would work with families to ensure the best outcome.

The Regeneration Manager was thanked for her hard work.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

233 Citizens Advice

Justine Williams (CEO) and Nick Pilling (Vice-Chair of Citizens Advice East Lancashire) were in attendance at the meeting to give a presentation on the services they provided in Hyndburn and East Lancashire.

Justine Williams delivered an update on the services of Citizens Advice, including in the Hyndburn area:

- **Organisation overview:**
 - Citizens Advice is a network of 280 local charities operating across 1,600 locations in England and Wales.
 - Each local office is responsible for securing its own funding.
- **Service delivery channels:**
 - Phone, email, webchat and face-to-face appointments.
- **Citizens Advice East Lancashire:**
 - A merged organisation covering Rossendale, Ribble Valley, Hyndburn, Burnley and Pendle.
 - Staff team includes **45 paid staff** and **40 volunteers**, including Trustee Board members.
- **Hyndburn services:**
 - Drop-in sessions, including at the New Era Centre.
 - Adviceline telephone service and digital advice options.
 - Team includes **6 volunteers** and **8 paid staff**.
 - Monthly community drop-ins at Rhyddings Family Hub.
- **Project delivery in Hyndburn includes:**
 - British Gas Energy drop-ins
 - Macmillan advice service for cancer patients
 - Specialist debt advice (by appointment)
 - HMRC service support (drop-in and by appointment)
- **Accessibility:**
 - Hyndburn residents can use any Citizens Advice East Lancashire office or community drop-in location.
- **Partnership work:**
 - Collaboration with Hyndburn Borough Council to deliver the Household Support Fund.
- **Volunteer training:**
 - The organisation is part of a national pilot introducing a new streamlined learning pathway to improve volunteer capacity.

Impact in Hyndburn (April–September 2025)

- **573** clients supported **face to face**
- **850** clients supported via **phone or WhatsApp**
- **250** clients and partners used the **online contact form**
- **£620,000** generated in benefit gains, grants and budgeting-related savings
- **£360,000** of debt written off
- A Hyndburn case study was presented (details noted).
- For every **£1** of the **£25,000** core contribution from Hyndburn Council, residents received **£39** in value.

Members submitted the following comments and queries:

- Concern that working people were also finding the cost of living difficult and were, increasingly, facing mounting debt. The Committee noted that these people would benefit from being able to receive professional advice from Citizens Advice but would only be able to attend services in the evening or at weekends.
- Request for further details about how Whatsapp worked.
- Where Citizens Advice received their funding from.
- There was increasing debt mounting problems and financial pressure on households.

Responses to the above issues were as follows:

- Citizens Advice East Lancashire already had plans to extend services to rural areas. Additional provision of out of hour services would depend on funding in relation to the cost and provision of staff.
- The Committee would be provided with more information on the use of Whatsapp within service provision.
- Citizens Advice thanked the Council for their annual contributions and referred to the importance of this in keeping services available to residents in Hyndburn. She reported that most of the organisation's funding came from project funding and from local contributions from local authorities.

Resolved - **That the Communities and Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend that Cabinet agree to provide a minimum grant in line with previous years (£25,000) to Citizens Advice East Lancashire, in its 2026/27 Budget Proposals and that it further considers an increase on this amount to £30,000, due to the rise in costs and the Committee proposing the provision of out of hour services.**

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed