



The key issues raised in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report '*Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*' which are of particular relevance to the current review of the Disabled Facilities Grants

1. Overview

1.1. Published by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU) in January 05, '*Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*' sets a radical new policy agenda for the way that government acts to improve the quality of life of disabled people and is underpinned by the concept of supporting disabled people to help themselves (p4).

1.2. Its stated vision is that '*By 2025, disabled people in Britain should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and will be respected and included as equal members of society*'. (p4)

1.3. The Government has accepted all of the recommendations in the report and annual reports on progress have to be presented to the Prime Minister.

1.4. The report is primarily focussed on disabled people under pension age but notes that many of the proposals will help to improve the life chances of disabled people of all ages.

1.5. The report identifies a need for practical action in four key areas (p4 & p8)

- achieving independent living
- improving support for families with young disabled children
- transition into adulthood
- support and incentives for getting and staying in employment

1.6. The report states that independent living is at the heart of the strategy and calls for a new way of supporting this based on merging of existing funding streams and a move away from multiple assessments (p8/9).

1.7. Giving an individualised budget to the disabled person which they can use '*to get whatever type of support [they] need including equipment, personal assistance, housing adaptations, help with transport to work or something else entirely*' is another element of this radical vision for change (p9).

1.8. A national roll out of a new approach to supporting independent living, including merged funding systems, is envisaged for 2012.

1.9. Centres for Independent Living are seen potentially a key part of the future delivery of support for independent living as they are '*well placed to provide advice and information, advocacy support and practical assistance in managing individualised budgets*' (p9).

2. The Role of Housing

2.1. Housing is recognised as a key component of independent living. Three main areas are noted:

- Adaptations to existing property
- More effective use of accessible/ adapted properties
- Wider application of Lifetime Homes Standards in both new build and to the existing stock through enhanced Decent Homes Standards.

2.2. Housing is one of the issues identified as being so acute that action is needed sooner rather than the 2012/ 2025 timeframe for the wider vision. The report calls for:

'Consideration of the adoption of updated Lifetime Homes standards and improvements to the use of accessible properties and Disabled Facilities Grants – making sure that disabled people can access housing accommodation which is more able to meet their needs' (p10)

3. Adaptations and the Review of Disabled Facilities Grants

3.1. The report acknowledges that there is evidence that equipment and adaptations increase independence, reduce the need for personal assistance and prevent or reduce health problems (p62).

3.2. It identifies specific problems with the current DFG system (p67) including

- a means test that does not take account of mortgage repayments or expenditure on young children, does not disregard earned income in order to avoid creating disincentives to work,
- the upper limit on the level of the DFG,
- lengthy administration and delays in processing DFGs

4. Recommendations for Action of Relevance to DFG Review

4.1. **Recommendation 4.4:** DH supported by DWP, DfES and ODPM should –by 2012 – work towards a new approach to supporting independent living which delivers support, equipment and/ or adaptations in a way that;

- addresses all aspects of needs for support and/ or equipment or adaptations
- is underpinned by the principle of listening to disabled people....
- maximises choice and control ...

4.2. The new system would be based on merged budgets – to include current budgets for '*community care resources and social services expenditure on equipment and minor adaptations, Independent Living Funds, Disabled Facilities Grant, Family Fund and Access to Work*' (p78)

4.3. There should be a national charging policy which so far as is possible minimises financial disincentives to seek paid employment.

4.4. There should be a separation of the role of assessment from the role of determining eligibility.

4.5. Recommendation 4.5: An evidence base for individual budgets – bringing together various sources of funding, services, equipment and adaptations – should be developed over the next three years within existing resources (p79)

4.6. DH should take the lead – with input from ODPM and DWP – in considering .. a bid for the Spending Review 2006 for funding on an ‘invest to save’ basis to fund further pilots.

4.7. Recommendation 4.9: ODPM should consider, by 2005, reform to the DFG in the light of the forthcoming findings of the review. In particular it should consider whether changes to existing eligibility criteria could mitigate disincentives to paid employment (p82).

4.8. It describes the current research and review process saying that *‘This will address many aspects of the costs and benefits of delivering home adaptations including alternative options such as providing more moving grants. It will also provide some evidence of the implications for other government programmes of not providing DFGs.’* (p82)

4.9. It goes on to say: *‘There is at present no effective process for considering the implications of failing to provide – or of delays in providing – adaptations, on other programmes and budgets..... Making such relationships transparent and taking them into account in decisions about budget allocations should enable a more cost- effective approach to supporting independent living. If this can be done for the funding of adaptations, important lessons may be learnt for extending this approach to other areas.’*