



Foundations

# Disabled Facilities Grants: Structures & Staffing

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# About Foundations

Foundations is the National Body for Home Improvement Agencies in England and includes improving the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants. We are funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government which means almost all the support we provide is completely free of charge.

This includes:

- **FREE** DFG Champions Roadshows
- **FREE** In house training on DFG rules and regulations
- **FREE** facilitated workshops on DFG processes and procedures
- **FREE** assessment against the DFG Quality Standard
- **FREE** advice and support

## Our Mission

To share the magic about what makes good home improvement and adaptation services

## Our Vision

A thriving range of home improvement agencies – supporting people to live safe, independent and happy lives in the home of their choice

## Our Values

- We are different and make a difference
- We work in perpetual beta
- We challenge our own thinking
- We speak with integrity
- We trust each other
- We seek partnerships that serve our mission



## Introduction

Disabled facilities grants (DFG) are a statutory grant available to people with a disability of some sort. It was originally introduced in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and is now part of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. It is a means-tested grant that funds adaptations to a home, such as showers, stairlifts or other changes that enable children and adults lead more independent lives. It restores dignity, improves safety and makes life easier both for disabled people themselves and for their carers. It can be crucial in avoiding a move into care or in enabling someone to leave hospital.

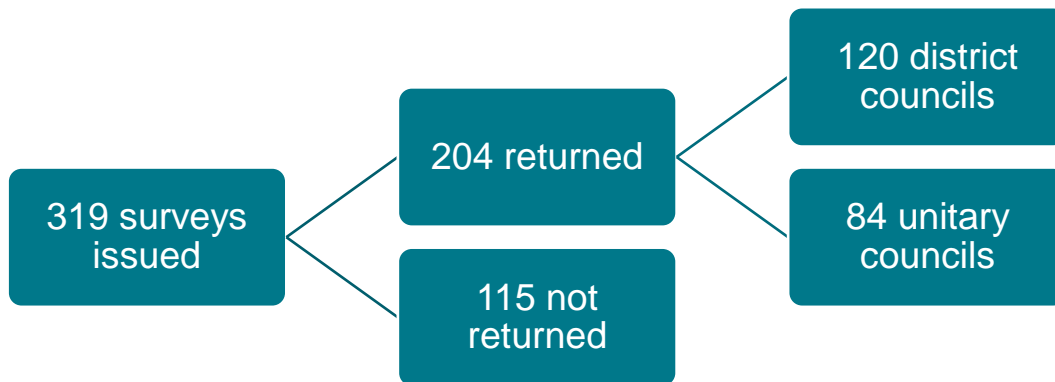
2019/2020 sees the largest ever amount of capital funding allocated for DFGs: £505million which is now a part of the Better Care Fund. Despite annual increases to the DFG budget, demand for adaptations has often outstripped supply and this is set to continue as the population ages. Local housing authorities retain a mandatory duty to approve a DFG where they receive a valid application under the current governing legislation and in 2018/19 they helped over 53,500 people.

There are currently 319 local housing authorities, and while they all follow the same legislation, they have different approaches to how they manage DFGs in their area. This report looks at some of the key differences and uses data to draw some conclusions on the most efficient and effective ways to support people to access the Disabled Facilities Grant.



# Theory of Change Survey

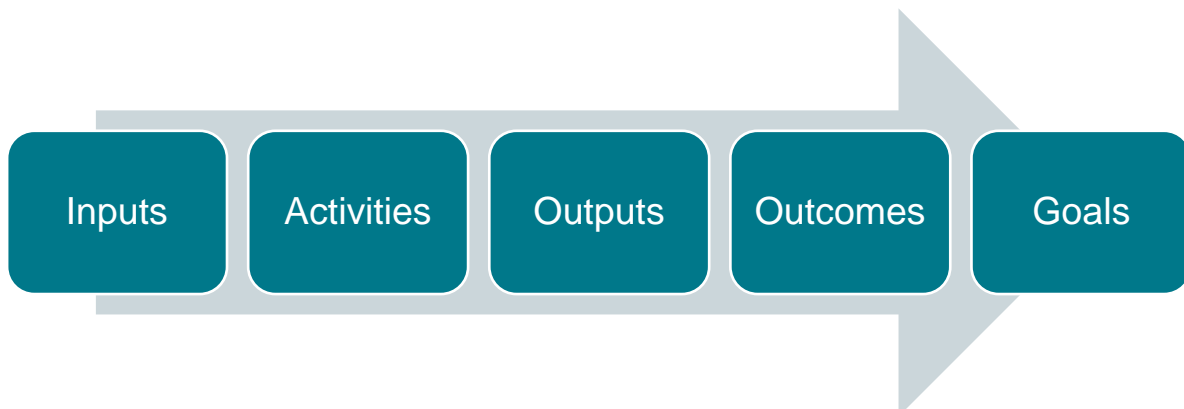
We sent a survey (See Appendix A) to the 319 housing authorities in England - the unitary and district councils who are responsible for administering DFG applications. The breakdown of returns is:



**58% of the completed returns were from district councils, 42% from unitary councils.**

The survey was based on a Theory of Change model - a description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a context. It looks at each element in a process to see how 'inputs' lead to the 'outputs' that we need to achieve the desired goals.

To set up a Theory of Change model you first identify the desired long-term goals and then work back from those to identify the outcomes that must be achieved for the goals to occur. Working further back through outputs, activities and inputs gives you a model that you can then use to implement and monitor improvement programmes:



For example, the Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015 set out the 'goal' of preventing 8,500 people from needing to go into a care home in 2019-20 based on an anticipated 'outcome' of 85,000 home adaptations.

The Theory of Change allows us to investigate how different inputs, activities and outputs impact on the outcome and goals.

The survey asked 'input' questions about DFG delivery in 2017/18 and 2018/19, such as:

- do Councils have an RRO policy;
- what is their DFG allocation with any additional funding;
- any underspend carried forward to the next financial year; and
- housing staff numbers involved (not including occupational therapists).

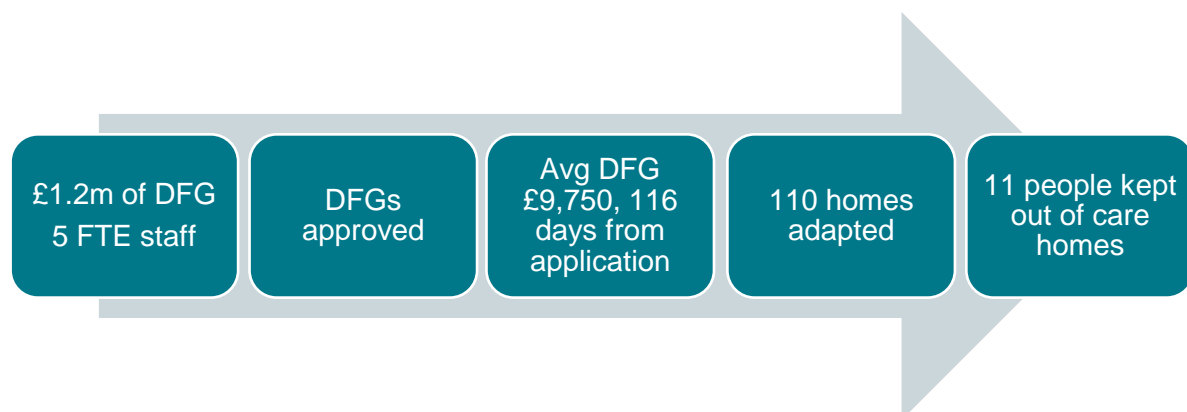
'Activities' or interventions including the number of grants approved, by tenure of applicant, age of disabled person and average grants values were also collected.

And finally, we asked for 'outputs' such as grants delivered and how long it took for them to be completed. From this measured approach to the data we have been able to explore the variation of DFG delivery in local authorities.

We supplemented the survey data by conducting a number of telephone interviews with a sample of local authorities to seek explanations for some of our findings.

## Headline Results

From the data we estimate that DFG funding was used to adapt around **53,500 homes** in England in 2018/19. For the typical (median) local authority, the base Theory looks like this:



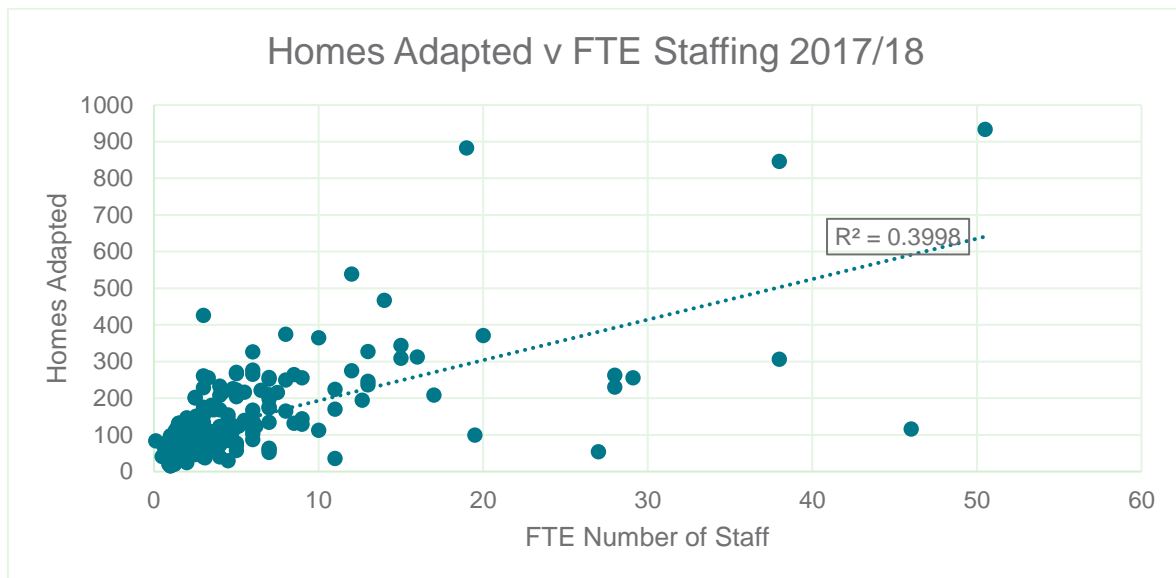
We mostly use the 2018/19 figures within this report as they show improvements in the effectiveness of the DFG programme as local authorities are ramping up delivery to match the increase in allocations.



## Economies of Scale

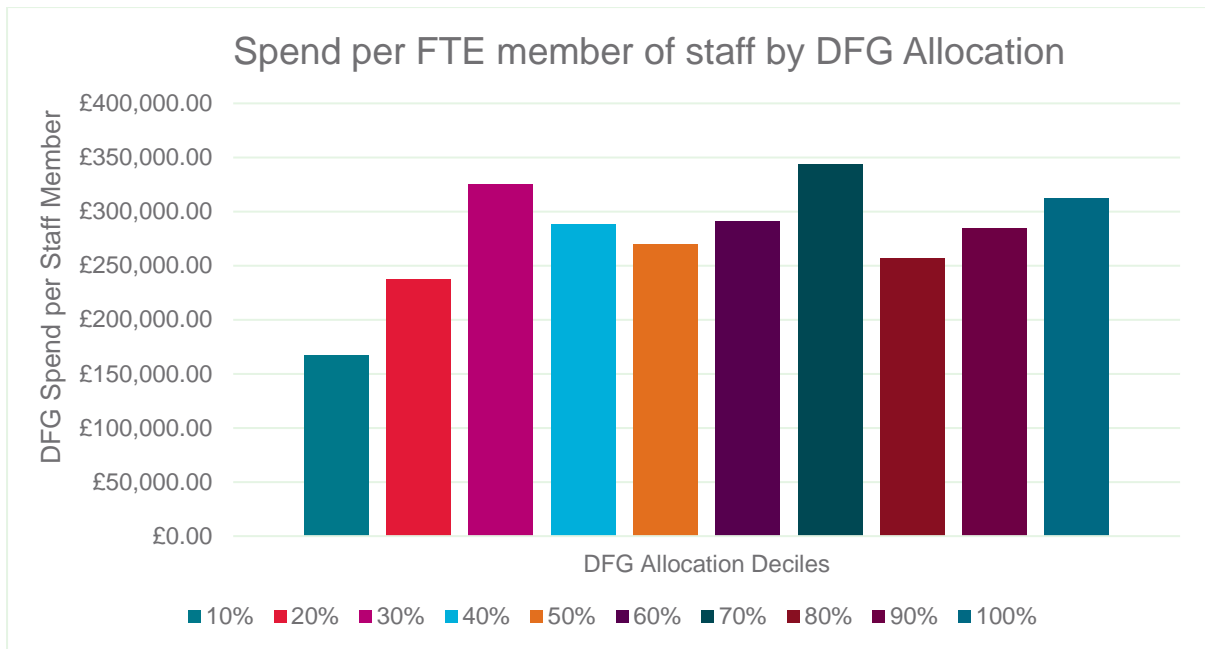
We were interested to see if there are economies of scale in how a DFG programme is delivered. Is a larger council with a bigger budget more efficient than a smaller council?

We started by comparing the amount of completed DFG's and the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff employed by a local authority (not including Occupational Therapy staff). The chart below shows that there is a generally positive correlation between the number of staff employed and the number of homes adapted, but with some significant outliers. The survey did not ask for any details of roles or salary costs.

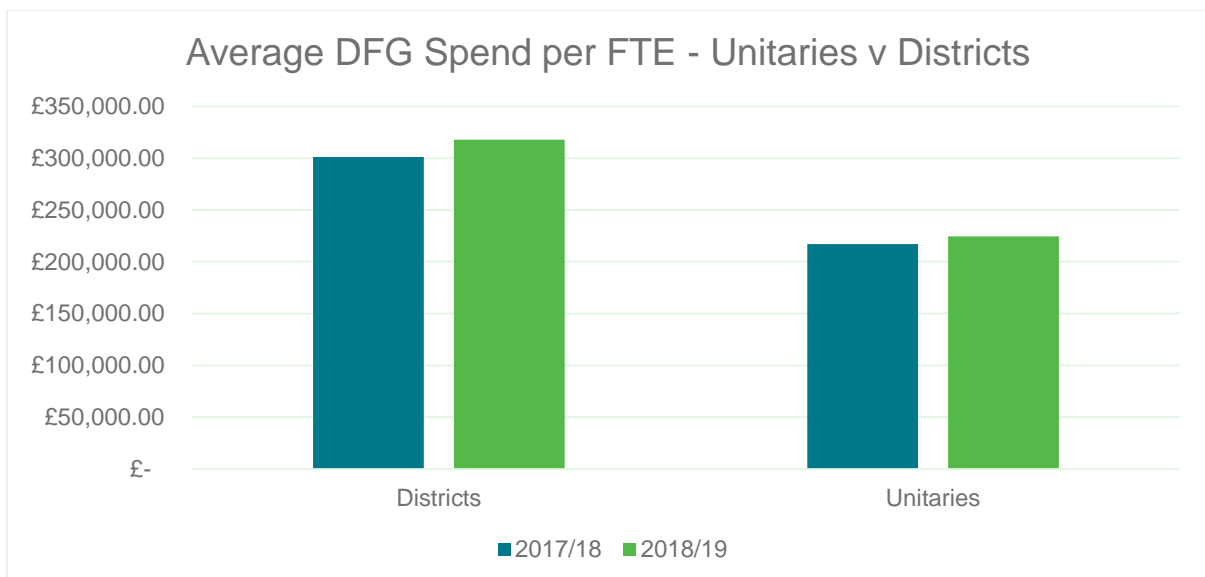


We then looked at the amount of DFG spent against the number of staff employed. This gave us the average spend per FTE. To see if there are economies of scale to be found, we split the local authorities into deciles based upon the allocation of DFG funding, i.e. the 10% with the smallest allocation through to the 10% with the largest.

The analysis shows that the 10% of local authorities with the smallest allocations have the lowest spend per member of staff at just around £165k per year. For the remaining 90%, the average is around £k but there is no indication of further economies of scale with increased allocations.



However, this isn't to say that District Councils are less efficient than Unitary Authorities. Further analysis shows that Districts spend more per member of staff than Unitaries.



The data from our study does not explain this difference, however from the telephone interviews we found some evidence that an increasing number of Districts are employing an Occupational Therapist directly and starting to use Trusted Assessors to assess more straightforward cases.

One council explained that when they employed an Occupational Therapist their backlog in assessments decreased from 450 to 130 in the first year. Another council said that since they



employed a private occupational therapist in their agency their waiting list has disappeared completely.

Further research is required on the benefits of integrating OTs into housing teams.

But, if size isn't them main factor of delivery, what is?



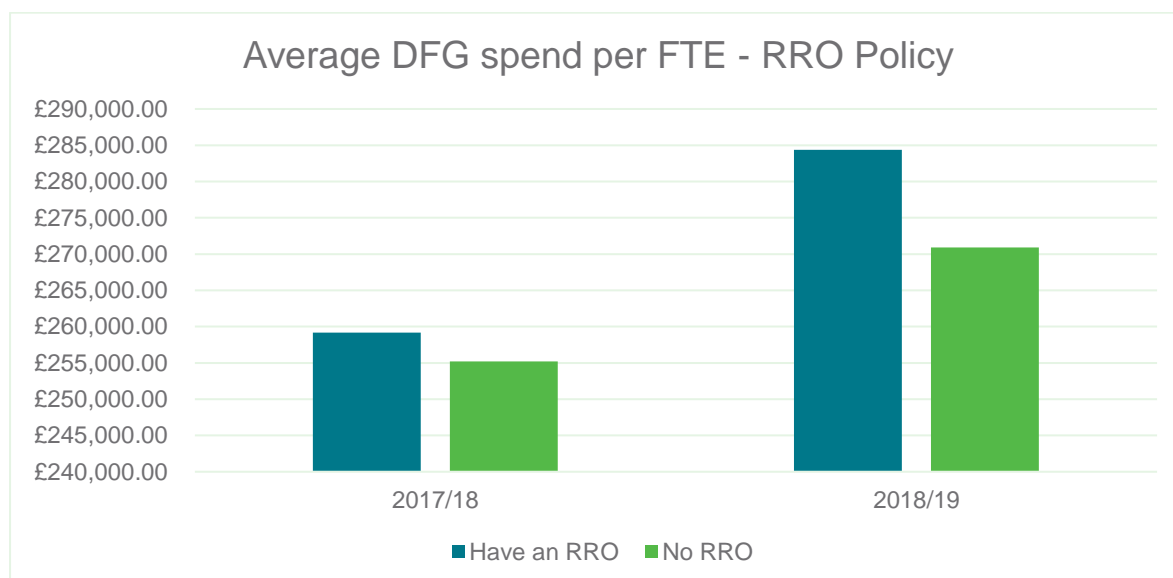
# Regulatory Reform Order

In 2008 the Government decided that local authorities should have greater control over the way they help their residents with home adaptations. They began to allow Councils to use their DFG allocations more flexibly where they set out their plans in a Housing Assistance Policy. These policies were originally introduced by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 and are often called “RRO Policies”.

In a previous survey from 2016 we found that only 53% of local authorities had a published RRO Policy. Since then Foundations has strongly advocated the benefits of an RRO Policy, and **now 85% of Councils have a formally adopted policy**. The Foundations website includes a map with links to over 150 examples.

This means that councils are using their discretion to do things like topping up DFGs over and above the upper limit of £30k, removing means testing for lower cost works or fast-tracking adaptations for hospital discharge.

We compared the spend per member of staff of those local authorities that have an RRO Policy and those who don't.



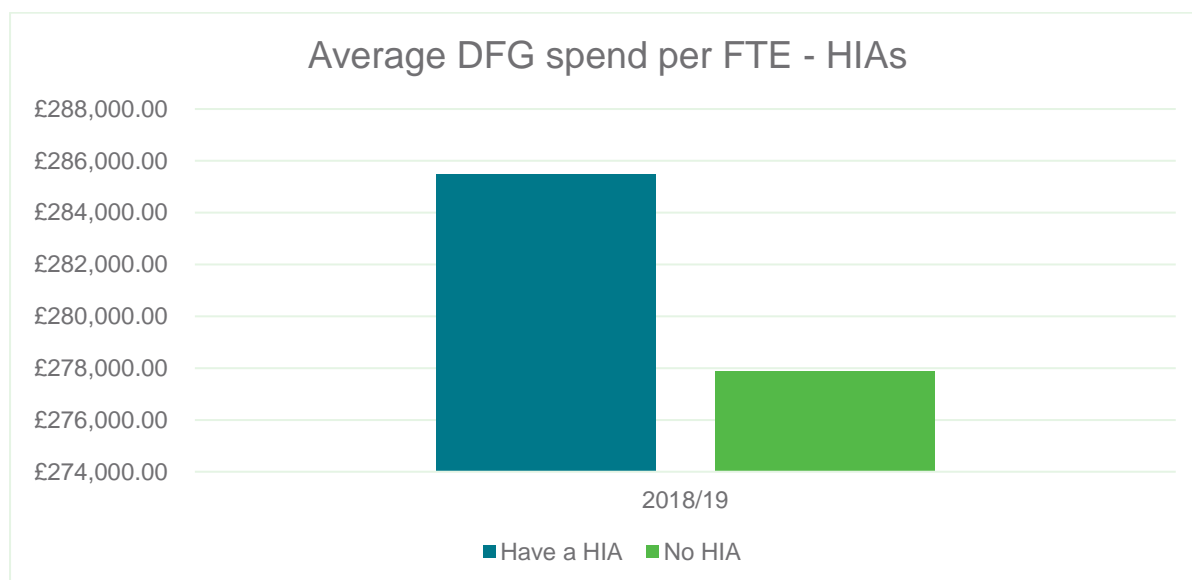
As the vast majority of councils do now have a policy, the impact is significant. It confirms that **being able to use discretion does allow staff to be more effective in how they deliver DFGs**.



## Agency Services

Home improvement agencies (HIAs) are often the first point of call for a people who want to remain safe, secure, warm and independent in their own home. Their role in the delivery of the DFG includes using the expertise of caseworkers, technical officers - and increasingly occupational therapists and trusted assessors - working together to identify the needs of the individual and help with the provision of aids and adaptations to improve the persons wellbeing.

We found that **where an agency approach is used for DFGs then, on average, each member of staff supports more DFG spend than those who don't.**



Most, but not all, agencies charge a fee to cover some or all their costs. These charges can be properly added to the DFG for things like surveys and preparing drawings. We found that where a fee is charged the average grant value decreases. **In 2018/19 for those areas where a fee is charged the average grant was £530 less than those areas where there is no fee.** That includes the cost of the fee.

We also found that most **councils who charge a fee can employ additional members of staff compared to those who don't.** As one local authority told us: “you need staff to deliver a grant scheme such as the DFG as you can't expect disabled people to be administering the grant, working with builders, getting two quotes, etc.”



## Conclusions

Councils across England recognise there is a shortage of accessible adapted properties to help the needs of their disabled residents. To alleviate this the DFG is there to provide financial assistance, if eligible through a means test to support people to stay safe, secure, warm and independent in their home. Through our research we have found that councils that have a home improvement agency, charge a fee and have a regulatory reform order are more efficient and effective at delivering DFG's - but overall more staff are needed to fulfil the demand that is out there.

We've shown how using an agency service, charging a fee to provide additional support and having an RRO Policy can have a big impact on the efficiency of DFG delivery. If we look at those areas where all three are already in place, we find that they are around 25% more efficient at delivering their programme as a result.

### **Recommendations**

The smallest local authorities should consider partnering with neighbours to improve the efficiency of their delivery

Staffing levels are important and local authorities should charge a fee which is used to employ sufficient staff to enable delivery of an efficient and effective service.

All local authorities should provide proper support through an agency led approach to DFG delivery that is person centred and focussed on outcomes. Any additional revenue funding should be invested into agency services.



# Foundations

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