

# **HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

## **Agenda Item 14**

Brighton & Hove City Council

**Subject:** Adaptations and Allocations Focus Groups Update  
**Date of Meeting:** 22 July 2008  
**Report of:** Director of Adult Social Care & Housing  
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**Wards Affected:** All

### **FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

#### **1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 Reports on the Chairman's Working Groups on Allocations and Adaptations were presented to Housing Management Sub-Committee on 15 January 2008.
- 1.2 The Housing Management Sub-Committee noted the conclusions of the respective Working Groups and approved that these be taken forward as the basis for wider pieces of work to reflect ideas, solutions and suggestions outlined in the summary of findings.
- 1.3 The Housing Management Sub-Committee was given an undertaking that progress would be reported back to tenant working group members and via a future Committee meeting.
- 1.4 This report provides an update of the progress made following our report of 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008. The report recommends that a final update report, including implementation of proposed policy changes, be considered in detail by the respective working groups prior to a final report being brought back to Housing Management Consultative Committee in the autumn.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Housing Management Consultative Committee note progress to date and that a full and final report will be brought back in Autumn 2008 to amend the Allocations Policy and incorporate an Adaptations Policy.

### 3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 Housing Management Sub-Committee considered a report on Housing and Adaptations in autumn 2007. This report outlined the existing and projected demand pressures in relation to adaptations and the constraints that currently frame our capacity to respond. The report proposed consultation on the development of an Adaptations Policy for those living in or seeking social housing and in parallel consideration of implications for and improvements to Allocations Policy.
- 3.2 A key aim was to promote best use of resources in order to ensure that limited adaptations and housing resources are effectively invested and that this investment is being targeted at delivering more value for money. This includes making best use of available budget resources and of Council housing stock that of Registered Social Landlords and of other available housing options across the City.
- 3.3 Housing Management Sub-Committee approved a tenant working group be set up to review Adaptations.
- 3.4 In addition, an Allocations Working Group was also set up to review the operation of the Council's housing Allocations Policy. One of the key areas for consideration by this group was the best use of adapted/accessible housing stock in the City and the effective assessment and management of applicant eligibility criteria in relation to this housing. In light of this, the Allocations Group ran in parallel to the Adaptations Group. Both groups were kept informed and contributed to the findings and recommendations of the other.
- 3.5 A number of key themes emerged from the meetings which tenant representatives wished to see addressed.
- 3.6 The themes that relate to progress reported in this paper included:
- 3.7 **Best use of stock and budget resources** - The establishment of a detailed register of adapted, adaptable and accessible homes was seen as key.
- 3.8 **Allocations** – Themes included the need for a detailed and up to date register of adapted and adaptable homes and more support with matching people with needs to suitable properties. In addition more should be done to encourage agreement to moves where tenants live in adapted homes they don't need or require adaptations where homes aren't easily adaptable.

- 3.9 **Assistance with moving** – There was a strong feeling that more practical assistance be offered / provided with moving in order to assist people to find new property that meets their needs or can be quickly and easily adapted.
- 3.10 **Communication** – the need for improved communication with tenants and tenant representatives was a central and consistent theme throughout the work of the Group. Better use of tenant local knowledge, more targeted and accessible information and promotion of initiatives (especially around under-occupancy), and opportunities (new build and private sector housing) were key areas to be taken forward.
- 3.11 **Best use of housing resources** – the need for more practical assistance for downsizing, use of tenant representatives to promote initiatives and better marketing of new and alternative housing opportunities were key themes.
- 3.12 **Adaptations** – The work of the Adaptations Group was discussed and priorities shared with the Allocations Group. In particular, reassurance was sought over best use of adapted/accessible housing stock in the City and effective assessment and management of applicant eligibility criteria.
- 3.13 Details of progress in these key areas made as a result of the work of the tenant focus groups are outlined below.
- 3.14 **Best use of new affordable housing.** As part of developing a clear and transparent response to allocations and adaptations issues raised by tenants we aim to ensure we maximise the opportunities the new affordable housing in the city provides. One of our key objectives is to develop a mix of new affordable housing delivered through our development partnership with Registered Social Landlords ( RSLs ). Including a proportion of larger family sized homes ( 3 beds ) and fully wheelchair accessible homes to our adopted standard now set out in Planning Advice Note ( PAN 03 adopted Jan 2008) on Accessible Housing and Lifetime Homes.
- 3.15 All new affordable homes for rent are advertised through Homemove and the wheelchair accessible homes ring fenced for households with a matching need. We have now developed and implemented a New Build Nominations Agreement with our RSL partners setting out our nomination rights and procedures including the requirement the RSL advertise all wheelchair accessible homes for rent 8 - 12 months before completion. Advertising these properties 'off plan' ensures they can be matched appropriately. It gives the Housing Allocations and Adaptations Service, Children's & Young Peoples Trust (CYPT) and the RSL the opportunity to work together on the bespoke specification and agree those works that can

be accommodated in the construction period. This reduces costs, preventing waste and avoiding delays after completion.

- 3.16 To complement this Housing Development and Housing Adaptations Services have worked together to introduce a Protocol for the Letting of Accessible Homes. This is to ensure that all new affordable wheelchair accessible homes that meet the standard agreed by Brighton & Hove are advertised and matched appropriately making housing more accessible, and that Homemove has a positive impact on disability equality.
- 3.17 **Releasing more family and adapted homes.** All households who are underoccupying family accommodation or require major adaptations are now being considered for how we may best encourage or enable them to move.
- 3.18 The Transfer Incentive Scheme encourages tenants under-occupying a family-sized or wheelchair-adapted property to downsize, and so releasing this type of accommodation for those in housing need. Tenants receive assistance and support from a dedicated Under Occupation Officer funded from existing staffing resources.
- 3.19 The Under Occupation Post has been a hugely successful. In 2007-8 we helped 81 people move from larger family homes, over twice the number released in the same period in 2006-7. All applicants get a home visit, a copy of the latest Homemove Magazine each fortnight and follow-up casework. Following a publicity drive, 132 Tenants have now registered on the scheme.
- 3.20 The Under Occupation Officer is now routinely involved in consideration of alternative housing options for those clients whose complex adaptations requirements are being reviewed by the Housing Adaptations Team.
- 3.21 In addition we are actively looking at various ways to promote new housing opportunities effectively, for example by advertising private rented properties in the Home-move magazine and advertising new- build properties early.
- 3.22 **Accessible Housing Officer Role.** As a direct result of consultation with the tenant working groups we have used existing resources to fund recruitment of an Accessible Housing Officer who has been in post since January of this year. The Accessible Housing Officer remit is to improve the way in which accessible and adapted properties are advertised and let in the City. This is being achieved by:

- 3.23 Improving our understanding of the access needs of everybody on the Joint Housing Register;
- 3.24 Undertaking an audit of Council-owned housing stock in terms of their accessibility and feasibility for adaptation;
- 3.25 Providing a more equal service for Disabled applicants within Homemove through more informative advertising and prioritised allocation for mobility properties.
- 3.26 Since January, over 1200 applicants have been individually assessed for their mobility level, including all applicants in Band A, and given one of four categories relating to their access requirements to match the mobility categories used in the Homemove magazine. As a result, we have identified, in band A alone, 90 households that require wheelchair accessible housing and 72 households that require a property with level access, to meet a mobility 3 standard. Homemove is currently working on all applicants in Band B, sending out the newly developed Self-Assessment Mobility Forms to capture the relevant information. In addition to the development of this self assessment form, the Accessibility section of the Joint Housing Register application form has been re-written to encourage the provision of more relevant information for the Homemove officers to be able to assess how someone's disability is affecting their current housing.
- 3.27 Properties advertised in the Homemove magazine as Mobility one, two and three are now clearly marked as such and priority is given to those with a matching requirement when short-listing. The Accessible Housing Officer has spent a great deal of time working with Housing and Lettings Officers within the Council and within the partner Housing Associations to ensure that relevant information and appropriate mobility categories are identified in the advert.
- 3.28 The AHO has attended meetings, accompanied on home visits and assisted in training sessions to ensure that information about steps, lifts, current adaptations, geography and the location of shops is now provided for all properties, wherever possible.
- 3.29 The AHO has also been undertaking individual access audits of all Council Sheltered Schemes, to improve the way in which we advertise some of these properties, particularly those that are hard to let. Visiting these schemes has also offered an excellent opportunity to meet some of the residents and receive feedback on their views about Homemove and their schemes, as well as to provide advice on adaptations and their Homemove applications.

- 3.30 In addition, it was identified that some fully adapted properties were being advertised in the Homemove Magazine incorrectly. This meant that it was difficult for disabled applicants to 'bid' appropriately for a property that might meet their needs. As a result a two-day training session for 23 local authority and housing association staff was run by the Housing Occupational Therapy Team. An accessible housing toolkit was produced to complement the training. The standards of adverts going into the Homemove magazine has improved greatly, bids have increased and awareness raised of the issues disabled applicants face.
- 3.31 The feedback on the training was excellent and as a result we intend to rollout this training to all housing management staff in the Council. Various Housing Associations are keen to undertake and extend the same training for more of their own staff. This will result in more understanding of the way in which housing impacts on the independence of Disabled people in the City. This training will also assist the officers in carrying out an accurate audit of all properties to ascertain, prior to the property becoming void, what level of access it can provide to the next tenant, thereby reducing void turnarounds and creating longer more secure tenancies in the long run.
- 3.32 **Housing Management Survey**
- 3.33 As a direct result of the work of the tenant working group a surveyor was appointed (using existing resources) to complete the following work:
- 3.34 Checking the accuracy of adaptations data held on OHMS database. This was both a desk- top exercise and a manual audit with a sample of 10% of adapted properties selected for a visit (258 were visited with 98 not providing access). Data was found to be largely accurate. The mobility category of each of these properties was identified. In addition, properties with a mobility rating which, with additional work could be upgraded to a higher level i.e. 2 to 1, 3 to 2 were also identified.
- 3.35 An accessibility audit of the City was also completed and areas identified which may lend themselves to be more suitable for adapted properties in the future. External audits on our sheltered housing stock were also completed.

## 4. CONSULTATION

4.1 The tenant-led focus groups identified areas for improvement in the Allocations Policy and development of an Adaptations Policy. We are in the process of consulting with stakeholders in the City over these proposals. Stakeholders include our communities of interest, our partner agencies, Age Concern, people on the Housing Register, support providers. The consultation is on going and feedback is coming in. Once the consultation is closed and all information compiled will go back to the tenant led focus groups and the proposed policy developments will be considered by Housing Management Consultative Committee and Housing Cabinet Member Meeting in the Autumn.

## 5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendation made in this report. The capital resources available for Disabled Adaptations to housing stock is £888,440 for 2008/09 and this is forecast to be fully spent this financial year.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley Date: 8/7/08*

Legal Implications:

The council is entitled to have an adaptations policy and is statutorily required to have an allocation policy (Section 167 Housing Act 1996). The work described in the report will help develop robust policies for the future.

*Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley Date: 8/7/08*

Equalities Implications:

An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out as part of the policy development process to inform the final report to Housing Management Consultative Committee and Housing Cabinet in the autumn.

As a result of the work reported above the standards of adverts going into the Homemove magazine has improved greatly, bids have increased and awareness raised of the issues disabled applicants face. We have sought to improve understanding of the way in which housing impacts on the independence of disabled people in the City and improve use of resources to better meet the needs of people who use a wheelchair or have restricted mobility.

#### Sustainability Implications:

Housing is one of the 12 key objectives in the council's Sustainability Strategy which aims 'to ensure that everyone has access to decent affordable housing that meets their needs'.

The developments outlined in this report seek to make best use of existing housing and budget resources and promote lifetime homes. Further sustainability implications will be kept under review for future reports.

#### Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.5 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

#### Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

Development of policy in this area will be undertaken with due regard to appropriate risk assessment requirements.

#### Corporate / Citywide Implications:

The aims of the focus groups and the improvements outlined in this report support the priorities and aims of the 2020 Community Strategy and Council strategic goals of improving housing in the City and ensuring that residents have a healthy living environment.

### **6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

6.1 None considered for the purposes of this update report.

### **7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 The report is to note. Reasons are contained within the body of the report.



## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1.None

### **Documents In Members' Rooms**

1.None

### **Background Documents**

1.Chairman's Working Group (Allocations) Housing Management Sub-Committee report 15 January 2008.

2. Chairman's Working Group (Adaptations) Housing Management Sub-Committee report 15 January 2008.

