

ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 68

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Housing Adaptations Update		
Date of Meeting:	5 March 2009		
Report of:	The Director of Adult Social Care & Housing		
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Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

The special circumstances for non-compliance with Council Procedure Rule 23, Access to Information Rule 5 and Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act as amended (items not considered unless the agenda is open to inspection at least five days in advance of the meeting) are that the report could not be concluded prior to the despatch of the agenda.

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This paper is presented to update the committee on work being undertaken following Chairman's Tenant Focus Group on Adaptations and review of private sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy to improve value for money and use of resources in housing adaptations for disabled people.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the strategy.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Value for money- use of resources in housing adaptations.

The Council seeks to make best use of new and existing housing adaptations resources through:

- i. Promoting early discussion of housing options to encourage consideration of a move to more appropriate housing as an alternative to major adaptations.
- ii. Making the case for proactively funding adaptations to existing homes through use of mainstream procurement programmes in addition to existing funding routes.
- iii. On-going development of our accessible housing register, continuing to fund an Accessible Housing Officer to identify and

make best use of existing adapted and accessible social housing stock in the City targeted at those who need it.

- iv. Best use of new build adapted housing opportunities through proactive involvement in development and implementation of the City Council's Planning Advice Note – Lifetime Homes & Accessible Housing (PAN 03).
- v. Entering into new build nominations agreements with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to allow for early letting and finalisation of adapted homes to meet individual client needs.
- vi. Revising the Private Sector Renewal Strategy to allow for renewal assistance to private landlords who adapt and lease properties to the Council to help meet the need for adapted homes.
- vii. Exploring options for private owners to be offered loans to assist moves to more suitable accommodation as an alternative to grant aiding adaptations to unsuitable properties.
- viii. Seeking to maximise funding available for adaptations.

3.2 Demand projections in Brighton & Hove

The 2005 Housing Needs Survey found that 19.8% of households in the City contain somebody with a long term illness or disability (around 22,362 households) of which 14% had two members affected. Over half of all household members were over 60 and 25.9% under 45.

The largest group affected by a named support need were those with a walking difficulty but who did not use a wheelchair, representing 52.3% of those with a support need. 8.1% of all households reported that they contained a member who was a wheelchair user, suggesting 1,765 households in the City as a whole.

There is a projected 15% increase in the retired population and 60% in the over 80 year old population up to 2026. Over a quarter of all people with a disability are over 75 and over half have a walking difficulty with likely requirements for adaptations

11.7% of all dwellings in the City have been adapted to meet the needs of a disabled person. In terms of the nature of adaptations 46.9% of these have handrails / grab rails, 36.2% have bathroom adaptations and 41.8% have had adaptations to enable access to their property.

The Council rented sector has over double the average of households and people with a disability when compared with other main tenures in the City.

3.3 Housing Adaptations Team

Adaptations to Council homes and major adaptations to private and housing association homes are assessed and delivered via the integrated Housing Adaptations Team based within the Housing Strategy Division at Hove Town Hall.

This integrated service assists elderly, vulnerable and disabled people in acquiring and maintaining an independent, safe, and secure living environment. The team works with residents and their carers in finding the best housing solutions to meet their needs. This may be through identifying more suitable housing, adapting their home environment, or by finding other technological, housing solutions or therapeutic intervention.

The team consists of Occupational Therapists who confirm the need and recommend adaptation where appropriate and the adaptations technical team who oversee the delivery of any adaptation work required.

3.4 Housing Adaptations Investment

Disabled Facilities Grant

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is a mandatory entitlement administered by local housing authorities to help fund the provision of adaptations to enable disabled people to live as comfortably and independently as possible in their homes.

Eligible work is wide-ranging, providing for access to the home and basic facilities within it, for example: providing ramps, door widening, stair lifts and level access showers. The grant is subject to an assessment of need and a financial means test. Over the last 3 years the Housing Adaptations Team has doubled Disabled Facilities Grant expenditure on private sector housing adaptations, as can be seen in Table 1

Table 1: Disabled Facilities Grants Awarded 2005-8

Year	Number of Disabled Facilities Grants awarded	Disabled Facilities Grant Expenditure
2005/6	48	£559K
2006/7	123	£989K
2007/8	124	£930K

The Council makes a 40% contribution to match fund the government's 60% contribution toward Disabled Facilities Grants. This 40% match funding and considerable additional funding by way of additional Disabled Facilities Assistance is provided by the Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Grant allocation via the Housing Renewal Assistance Policy. This increased investment has been achieved

through the Council securing higher private sector renewal grant settlements as a result of successful bids for regional funding.

Widening the Scope of the Housing Renewal Policy

We have recently amended our Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy to deliver more disabled assistance and to support adaptation of private housing stock to meet our need for adapted homes.

We have introduced a new temporary accommodation adaptations grant, created to provide assistance towards the cost of including wheelchair accessibility and / or other appropriate adaptations to private sector properties leased to the council for the accommodation of homeless households.

We have amended the disabled facilities assistance scheme to widen the scope of the assistance provided. The maximum limit on disabled facilities assistance has been increased from £25,000 to £50,000 (or 50% of the equity, whichever is the lesser). We have also amended the occupiers' minor adaptations grant to enable certain types of straightforward adaptations to be carried out under this scheme.

We also aim to explore options for private owners to be offered loans to assist moves to more suitable accommodation as an alternative to grant aiding adaptations to unsuitable properties

Newly Built Homes

During 2007/08 Registered Social Landlords working in partnership with the Council completed 159 new affordable homes of which 18 (11%) were fully adapted wheelchair homes.

The Housing Adaptations and Housing Development Teams were actively involved in the development and implementation of Planning Advice Note – Lifetime Homes & Accessible Housing (PAN 03) and the implementation of new build nominations agreements with RSLs to allow for 'off plan' allocation and finalisation of adapted homes to meet individual client needs.

Council Homes

The annual budget for investment in adaptations to Council homes is £750,000. This enables the Council to assist with around 400 adaptations a year. In addition to this budget, the Council has worked closely with tenants and other stakeholders on best use of resources and housing options to meet adaptations need. This work was led by Chairman's Tenant Focus Group on adaptations. Details of this work and implementation of proposals are outlined below.

3.5 **Housing Options for those Requiring Adaptations**

Making best use of existing social housing, new build housing association homes, and the private sector are means by which we can maximise the benefit of limited adaptations resources available.

Improving access to social housing

Where it is not 'reasonable and practical' to adapt an applicants home it is often better to explore other housing options as an alternative to undertaking expensive and very disruptive major adaptations. The council has an Under Occupation Officer, who, as part of his role works with households requiring complex and expensive adaptations to explore other options for moving, particularly into social housing in the City.

Matching Adapted Properties to those who need them

The Councils' Allocations Policy sets out the criteria under which all lettings to permanent council housing and nominations to housing association housing are made.

Applicants are given priority if they need to move for a medical reason that makes their current home unsuitable or does not provide adequate facilities. Priority may also be given where an applicant is releasing an adapted property or to make best use of adapted stock at the Council's discretion, where the tenant does not require adaptations or where the existing property cannot be adapted to meet the applicant's needs.

Properties are advertised openly in the Homemove Magazine, and on the website, www.homemove.org.uk. All homes adapted for use by disabled people are clearly labelled with a mobility classification and ring-fenced for those with a matching need to ensure that these properties are let to those who need them.

Details of mobility classification are outlined below.

Mobility Group 1 – Typically suitable for a person who uses a wheelchair full time i.e. indoors and outdoors. The property will provide full wheelchair access throughout.

Mobility Group 2 – Typically suitable for a person with restricted walking ability and for those that may need to use a wheelchair some of the time. The property will have internal and external level or ramped access, but some parts of the property may not be fully wheelchair accessible.

Mobility Group 3 – Typically suitable for a person able to manage two or three steps but unable to manage steep gradients. The property may have adaptations to assist people with limited mobility.

The figures below identify how many fully adapted wheelchair accessible homes became available for letting in 2007/08. The majority of these homes were new build homes owned by housing association partners.

Table 2: General Needs Lettings to Property Adapted for Wheelchair Users 2007/8 (Source: Locata)

	Mobility 1 (Fully Adapted)	Mobility 2 (partially adapted)
One bedroom	9	12
Two bedrooms	12	3
Three bedrooms	8	1
Four bedrooms	2	0
Sheltered	1	8
TOTALS	32	24

Table 3: Applicants on the housing register waiting for Wheelchair adapted Properties at Feb 2009 (Source Locata)

	Applicants requiring Mobility 1 Properties (Fully Adapted)	Applicants requiring Mobility 2 Properties (partially Adapted)
One bedroom	37	82
Two bedrooms	36	28
Three bedrooms	9	10
Four bedrooms	6	6
TOTALS	88	126

The highest need is for one bedroom properties (this includes those waiting for Adapted Sheltered Properties).

Newly Built Properties

These properties are also advertised through Homemove, Housing Associations must advertise these at least six months before they are completed, allowing applicants to have bespoke adaptations completed in partnership with their Occupational Therapist while the property is being built.

3.6 Chairman's Tenant Focus Group on Adaptations

This group was set up to work in consultation with tenant representatives and other stakeholders on the development of policy for those living in or seeking social housing to ensure that we are funding

adaptations that make best use of available budget resources, social housing stock (both Council and RSL) and other options.

A. Key Themes from the Focus Group

A number of key themes emerged from the meetings which tenant representatives wished to see addressed. These are detailed below.

Use of resources

In addition to the existing budget the Group felt that pro-active investment in adaptations/accessible homes should be considered as part of the mainstream procurement process.

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.

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.

Other Themes

The Group felt more minor adaptations should be fitted as standard, for example lever taps and this should also be considered for some major adaptations such as level access showers. More planning ahead to anticipate demand was also seen as very important.

B. Focus group outcomes

As a direct result of consultation with the Chairman's Focus Group, an Accessible Housing Officer (AHO) was recruited in January of last year. Her remit is to improve the way in which Accessible and Adapted properties are advertised and let in the city. This is being achieved in three ways:

- improving our understanding of the access needs of everybody on the Joint Housing Register
- undertaking an audit of all Council-owned housing stock in terms of their accessibility and feasibility for adaptation
- providing a more equal service for disabled applicants within Homemove through more informative advertising and prioritised allocation for mobility properties

Assessment

Since the recruitment of an Accessible Housing Officer all new applicants as well as existing applicants in Priority Bands A and B have been assessed for their mobility level and given one of four categories

relating to their access requirements. These can be used to guide and advise disabled applicants as to which properties may be suitable for their needs, as indicated by corresponding mobility categories on the adverts. In total 2800 applicants have been individually reviewed for their needs. As a result, we have identified, in band A alone, 90 households that require wheelchair accessible housing and 69 households that require a property with easy access, to meet a mobility 3 standard. In addition, 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.

Advertising and Allocation

The Accessible Housing Officer has spent a great deal of time working with Housing and Lettings Officers within the Council and the partner Housing Associations to ensure that relevant information and appropriate mobility categories are identified in the advert.

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.

As a result, there has been a marked increase in the number of properties identified in the Homemove magazine as mobility homes, with full access details in the text of the advert and properties advertised as Mobility 1, 2 and 3 are now ring-fenced for those families that match the requirement for an adapted or accessible home.

Training

Accessible housing training was undertaken for representatives of our Homemove partners and the feedback was excellent. We have now rolled out this training to all Housing Management staff within the Council and our partner RSLs. This training promotes a better understanding of the way in which housing impacts on the independence of disabled people. It will also assist the officers in carrying out an accurate audit of all properties to ascertain what level of access it can provide to the next tenant, thereby reducing empty property turnarounds and creating longer more secure tenancies in the long run.

Adaptations

With the success of the work that we're doing in the identification and allocation of properties that are either pre-adapted or would lend themselves to further adaptation, BHCC can look to utilising this knowledge to make better use of its limited adaptations budget. If adaptations are either not feasible, or not considered to be 'reasonable and practicable' then a dedicated officer from either Housing Options or the Under-Occupation Officer can work with the family to see what alternatives may be available to them, and makes the links with the

supply of new affordable homes delivered in the city all built to Lifetime Homes, at least 10% fully wheelchair accessible from the start. If an adapted property was unable to be re-let to a disabled applicant due to external steps or other inaccessible feature, the AHO is working closely with the Adaptations team to ensure that the adaptations can then be recycled. We will endeavour to identify a person with a matching need and re-site the equipment

Procurement

In addition to existing procurement of adaptations the Council's new framework contracts for long term procurement of works to Council homes will include capacity for provision of additional adaptations.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Council's Housing Renewal Assistance Policy was established following a comprehensive consultation exercise conducted both within the Council and with external stakeholders.

The Chairman's Tenant Focus Group on adaptations consisted of nominees from tenant representative bodies and has reported its findings to Housing Management Sub-Committee.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Adaptations is funding through the Disabled Facilities Grant and the Best Capital Allocation (£660k and ££440k respectively). There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations made in this report. [Neil Smith, Accountant, 4 March 2009]

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Since the introduction of The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 local authorities have had a statutory duty to provide grant aid to disabled people to adapt their homes in order to meet their needs. There are further relevant provisions in the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, and the Housing Act 2004 which govern assessing the conditions of dwellings. The strategy outlined in this report assists the Council to ensure those provisions are met fairly and reasonably. [Elizabeth Culbert, Solicitor, 4 March 2009]

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 As a result of the work outlined above we have sought to raise awareness and address the needs and issues faced by disabled applicants for housing and adaptations assistance from the Council. 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:

- 5.4 Housing is one of the 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 the best use of existing housing and budget resources and promote lifetime homes. Further sustainability implications will be kept under review.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 Policy development in this area is undertaken with due regard to appropriate risk assessment requirements.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 The aims of the Focus Group 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 health living environment.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. None

Documents in Members' Rooms:

None

Background Documents:

1. None