

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA**12TH SEPTEMBER 2012****REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING****LETTINGS OF ACCESSIBLE ACCOMMODATION**

This report provides an overview of a pilot project designed to support disabled households in highest priority need for accessible housing on the Common Housing.

FOR INFORMATION**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Housing Department has initiated a six month pilot to provide enhanced support services to disabled people on the Common Housing Register with a high priority for housing on health and disability grounds and/or needing high cost adaptations.
- 1.2 The key objectives of the accessible housing pilot are to:
- a) Allocate accessible housing effectively to those in highest priority need.
 - b) Make best use of existing accessible social housing stock and funding for housing adaptations.
 - c) Deliver services that are tailored to local needs and supply of accessible housing.
 - d) Work in partnership with housing association partners to make best use of accessible housing stock and funding for adaptations.
 - e) Maximise opportunities for joined up working between Housing, Social Care and Environmental Health to deliver housing adaptations in the context of wider housing options.

2. SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR ACCESSIBLE HOUSING

- 2.1 In 2011/12 there were 123 accessible homes that became available for let. These made up 22% of the total social housing lets for the borough. While there is a steady supply of accessible properties being let through choice based lettings, and a demand for accessible

housing remains high, the proportion of lets to accessible homes to those who require them remains low. Only 25 of these properties were let to households with an assessed need for an accessible home.

- 2.2 At the end of the 2011/12 period there were 133 applicants with high priority to move on health and independence grounds (i.e. with 700 supporting health and independence points or 1000 emergency health and independence points). While there is still a limited supply for family homes, those with three or more bedrooms, there is sufficient supply of smaller accessible homes to meet demand yet some households have been waiting on our Common Housing Register for more than ten years.
- 2.3 It is understood that the proportion of accessible homes being let to households with a disabled person is low because:
 - a) Disabled people need assistance with the practical and financial aspects of moving home.
 - b) Short void periods are insufficient to allow a disabled person to prepare for a move.
 - c) Housing applicants are unfamiliar with accessible housing design standards and less aware of the low numbers of accessible homes than housing staff.
 - d) Households with high priority points refuse properties while waiting for their desired home with a perception that their high priority will enable them to remain top or close to the top of a shortlist. Location of the property is usually cited as the refusal reason.

3. DEMAND FOR HOUSING ADAPTATIONS

- 3.1 Housing adaptations are designed to remove or alter physical features of a home to improve the independence and/or ability to support care of a disabled person. The Council supports and finances the installation of adaptations to homes of all tenures including homes that are Council-owned, housing association managed, owner occupied and private rented.
- 3.2 Requests for major adaptations are mostly dealt with by the Adult Social Care Occupational Therapy Service. Assessments will consider the suitability of the existing home. Where there are access barriers within the home environment, the occupational therapist will take into consideration the range of options available. These include recommendations for the installation of adaptations and/or re-housing opportunities to an accessible home.

- 3.3 In seeking to make best use of existing resources, the Council aims to explore whether households needing high cost major adaptations could explore alternative housing options. Re-housing to an accessible home is now a viable option for disabled residents. With demand for adaptations increasing as demographics change and resources to fund adaptations limited, the Council should seek to carry out adaptations in social rented properties where:
- the property is adequately occupied (i.e. properties that are not under-occupied or overcrowded).
 - the adaptation results in an overall improvement in the accessibility of the property so that both internal and external areas are accessible.
 - the adaptation creates a property that is accessible beyond the current tenancy for future occupants.
- 3.4 Where a request for an adaptation does not satisfy the above criteria, re-housing to an accessible property of the correct bedroom size will be recommended.

4. IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY

- 4.1 In seeking to improve both the lets of accessible properties to households who need them and effective use of housing staff support, the borough will need to address the potential barriers that are causing disabled households to refuse accessible accommodation. Lessons learnt from a sheltered housing pilot indicate that some households have difficulty engaging with choice based lettings and with the practical and financial tasks associated with finding accommodation and with moving home. This may result in there being a low interest in properties being advertised and properties refused being at the viewing stage.
- 4.2 Disabled housing applicants often require assistance to identify and view suitable properties. Support services, such as Housing Occupational Therapy, will focus on housing applicants in highest priority need for housing, as reflected in their points, to expedite the moves of those who need accessible accommodation most. This could be enhanced through the delivery of a package to provide the support, financial and practical assistance that disabled need to move. The pilot will seek to replicate the elements of the sheltered housing pilot which were deemed to improve the efficiency of lettings. Households with high priority for accessible housing through their health and independence points could be assisted through direct offers of accessible accommodation.

- 4.3 It is expected that the benefits of funding assistance for disabled households will reduce staff time and costs associated with repeat visits, re-assessments and ongoing support. A package of support could make use of existing services in the borough, such as the de-cluttering and handyperson services, but would provide a single point of contact for the housing applicant who needs them. The package will include arranging and funding:
- packing and unpacking
 - removals
 - handyperson services
 - flooring (where specialist flooring is required)
 - resettlement services such as submitting new benefit applications and changing addresses with utility companies.
- 4.4 To make best use of the budget and manage demand only households with more than 700 health and independence points will be eligible for the financial assistance.
- 4.5 Funding for removals and relocation will only be available to households who move to an accessible property that meets their needs. In the first instance, the pilot will be limited to supporting moves from and in to social housing properties. Requests for support to facilitate moves outside of the borough will be considered.

5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- 5.1 Impacts from the introduction of revised accessible housing allocation guidelines and an enhanced support package for high priority disabled applicants will be measured through the evaluation of the:
- Number of moves of disabled households to accessible homes.
 - Points priority of households moving to accessible homes.
 - Time from application date to tenancy sign up.
 - Proportion of first time lets of accessible homes.
 - Cost benefit analysis of the move as opposed to installation of the required adaptation.
- 5.2 The pilot will also seek to collect information on the reasons that housing applicants give when refusing individual properties. This will enable the Housing Options team to consider the impact of refusal penalties currently being considered as part of the review of the Housing Allocation Scheme.

- 5.3 Outcomes will also be reviewed using Housing Lettings Performance Indicators. These will feed into existing reviews of the Housing Allocation Scheme, Choice Based Lettings and Housing Needs processes.

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