

ACCESSIBLE HOUSING LETTINGS PILOT

Mid Point Review- 23rd November 2012

1. Introduction

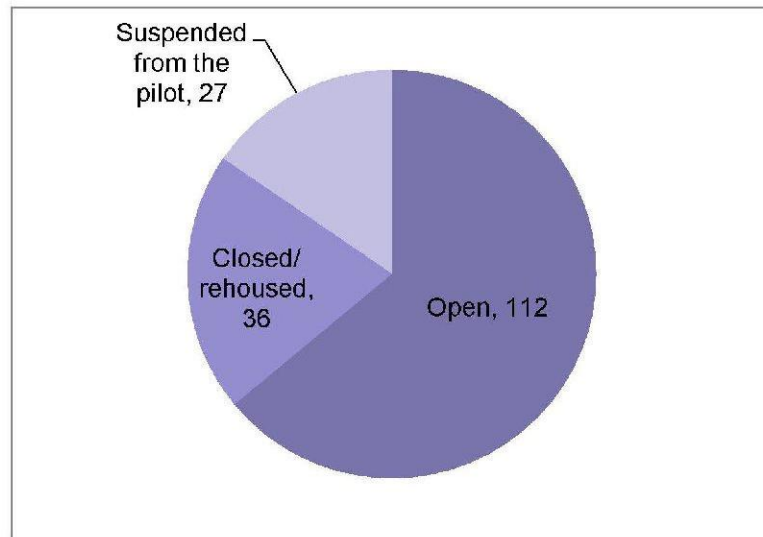
- 1.1 In July 2012, the Housing Department initiated a six month pilot to provide enhanced support services to disabled people on the Common Housing Register with a high priority for housing on health and disability grounds and/or needing high cost adaptations.
- 1.2 They key objectives of the accessible 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. Housing applicants with high health and independence points

- 2.1 For the purpose of the pilot, housing applicants with a high priority on health and independence grounds are those with more than 700 health and independence points or with 1000 emergency medical points. During the first three months of the pilot there were 175 such applicants, including seven new qualifying applicants made during that period.
- 2.2 Eighty of the households have been waiting for re-housing for more than 5 years, with 20 of these waiting for more than 10 years. During this time accessible homes have become available and, at times, been let to households who do not need accessible features due to limited interest from disabled applicants.
- 2.3 The Housing Occupational Therapy Team has worked with the housing applicants to inform them of the pilot process and update their records where there had been a change in circumstances. This has resulted in 36 housing applications being closed¹ and 27 applications suspended from the pilot². The remaining 112 housing applicants continue to require re-housing.

¹ Reasons varying from applicant deceased, moved into residential care, no longer needing housing or being re-housed.

² Mainly awaiting proof documents or no correct contact details on the system. Letters have been sent to the latter requesting correct contact details and they have been suspended from the pilot until contact can be made. Their CHR records remain open.

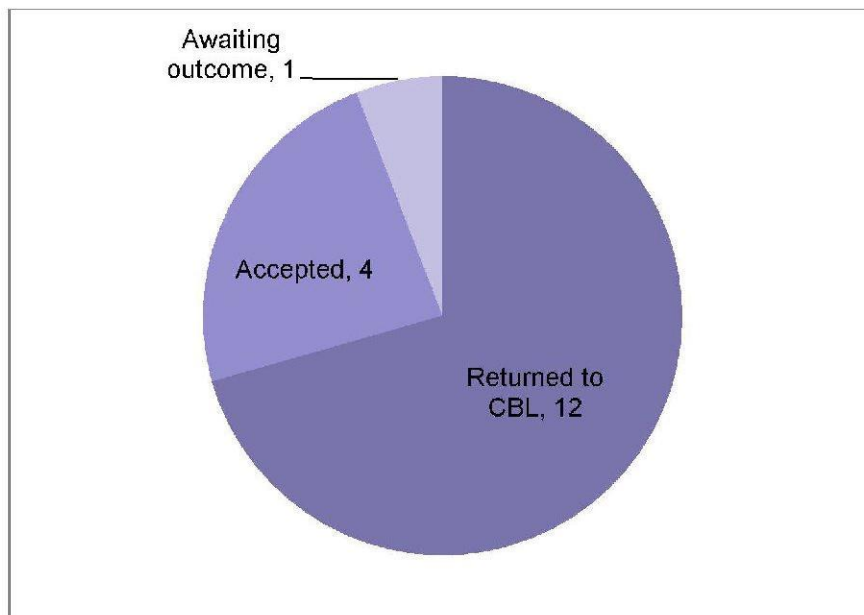


Applicant activity during the pilot

- 2.4 The Housing Occupational Therapy Team continues to work with the 112 housing applicants to identify suitable properties for direct offers. They now work closely, through a lead officer approach, with housing applicants to provide detailed information about the type and quantity of accessible housing in the borough and to identify homes that will meet their access needs.

3. Accessible housing lettings activity

- 3.1 Seventeen accessible homes were selected for direct lets during the first three months of the pilot. Of these, four were accepted by housing applicants through the pilot and 12 were returned to the Allocations Team to be advertised on CBL.



Outcome of direct lets

- 3.2 Many of the properties offered to households as direct lets were refused by housing applicants. The main reasons for refusal were location and property deemed by the applicants to be too small. So that staff resources are not focused on households with limited prospects to move, and to test the potential impacts of refusal penalties, households will be suspended from the pilot if they decline three suitable offers. Location is not considered a reasonable reason for refusal unless the household is dependent on local care networks. Suspended households, as with those who are actively involved in the pilot, can continue to bid for properties on CBL. The impact of this process is yet to be tested as insufficient offers of accommodation have been made to date.
- 3.3 Four accessible homes have been successfully let via the pilot to date. One of the lettings was to a household who has been waiting since 2006, unaware that they needed to use CBL to bid for accommodation. The detailed input that Housing Occupational Therapists had with the applicants that accepted these properties was deemed instrumental in the let as most needed assistance and persuasion to make the decision.

4. Impacts of providing assistance to move

- 4.1 Eleven housing applicants were referred to the Council's Floating Support Team for assistance with moving home and resettlement. While some referrals were received from Housing Occupational Therapy, others were received from the Allocations Team as some of the applicants with more than 700 health and independence points are also registered for sheltered housing or bidding for properties via CBL. All of the referrals were accepted as appropriate by the team. The pilot has considered the different points at which housing applicants could be referred for floating support and taken a view that referrals are most effective at the point that an applicant is made an offer of accommodation. Otherwise cases may be kept open by the team for some time while offers of accommodation are being considered while response rates to referrals are fast, not impacting on void turnaround times.
- 4.2 The package of support that can be set up by the Floating Support Team includes 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.
- 4.3 Households with more than 700 health and independence points and unable to self-finance the move will be eligible for the financial assistance. Funding for removals and relocation is only available to households who move to an accessible property that meets their needs.
- 4.4 Seven applicants have, or will, receive assistance with moving home with six requiring financial assistance from the pilot budget to fund the relocation package.

- 4.5 The support of the Floating Support Workers has been valued by housing applicants that have used the service as they would otherwise have encountered difficulties and anxieties arranging their move in often very short move-in periods. While the pilot has a budget to assist households financially with moving home, early indications show that housing applicants welcome most the practical support with moving home. It is anticipated that financial support (to pay for removals, packing and handyperson services) could be most useful where void periods are too short for households to arrange their own finances or for low income households with limited resources.

5. Re-housing residents needing high cost housing adaptations

- 5.1 The pilot was introduced to Adult Social Care Occupational Therapists on the 1st August 2012 with staff encouraged to redirect social housing residents requiring accessible housing, particularly those needing high cost housing adaptations, for re-housing and support via the pilot. No referrals have been received to date indicating that further partnership working is required with Adult Social Care colleagues.

6. Initial outcomes from the pilot

- 6.1 Lettings activity has been limited within the first three months of the pilot predominantly because it has taken time for the Housing Occupational Therapy Team to contact the applicants eligible to take part in the pilot. However, initial findings from the pilot show that:
- a. An average of 2.3 new applications per month (housing applicants with more than 700 health and independence points) were received in the first three months of the pilot. This compares with more than 5 accessible homes selected for direct lets. This would indicate that the supply of accessible homes exceeds new demands. Further offers are needed to re-house existing applicants.
 - b. Housing applicants are prioritised in order by health and independence then total CHR points. Accessible housing categories are used to determine property suitability rather than to prioritise applicants allowing staff to focus on those in highest priority need.
 - c. Further case work with housing applicants from the Housing Occupational Therapists is required to manage applicant expectations about their housing options.
 - d. The Housing Occupational Therapy Team should continue to respond rapidly to identifying accessible homes when voids become available to improve the ratio of property offers to acceptances.
 - e. Refusals of properties remains high even with the increased support. Households with a genuine intention to move have valued the assistance and accepted properties while others have exercised their right to refuse properties under the current Allocation Scheme. Refusal penalties are yet to be tested through suspension from the pilot of applicants who refuse three suitable offers of accessible accommodation. There have been insufficient lets/refusals to date.

- f. Further joint working is required with Adult Social Care Occupational Therapists to re-direct eligible households for assistance through the pilot.
- g. Floating Support Services are valued by housing applicants and useful in expediting home moves and enabling Housing Occupational Therapy resources to be focused on providing specialist housing advice on direct offers and property suitability. Further analysis of the demand and proposed eligibility criteria for funding of moving-related services to be included in the end of project evaluation.

7. Final review

- 7.1 Activity within the first three months of the pilot has been limited so conclusions cannot be drawn from this review. Further analysis and evaluation against the pilot objectives will be undertaken at the end of the pilot.
- 7.2 The pilot is due to end at the end of January 2013. A final review will be carried out after this and a report presented to HSDMT and the CBL review project group.

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