

Report for: **Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel**

Date: 1 November 2022

Item number: 10

Title: **Aids and adaptation**

Report
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Lead Officer: **Robbie Erbmman, Assistant Director for Housing / Vicky Murphy,
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Ward(s) affected: **All**

Report for Key/
Non Key Decision: **Non-key**

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of the process for assessing need and providing adaptations to residents' homes, as well as an overview of planning requirements to ensure that new adaptable homes are developed.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny is recommended to note this report.

3. Adaptations to existing housing

- 3.1 The council is committed to assisting people who are registered, or eligible for registration, as a disabled person, to help them in gaining access to and from, and in and around their dwelling to help them remain in their own home whenever it is practicable to do so.
- 3.2 The council is also committed to improving people's lives by giving people more choice and control in the services they use. Wherever possible, the council will seek to carry out the most cost-effective adaptation to the property which adequately meets an applicant's assessed needs. Usually this means that an adaptation is carried out within the existing structure of a dwelling.
- 3.3 The occupational therapy service helps people who have physical disabilities to live as independently as possible and helps their carers and families to care for them safely. Occupational therapists work with residents to identify how their disability is affecting their ability to carry out daily tasks.

- 3.4 Following an assessment, the council will discuss options with residents, with a view to giving choice and control over the services they receive.
- 3.5 The council will offer information and advice regarding alternative ways of carrying out activities independently. If needs can be met with simple equipment and minor adaptations, these can usually be prescribed. If necessary, the council can recommend major adaptations for the home. It may also recommend that people are re-housed and a report is written describing particular needs of residents.
- 3.6 Examples of minor adaptations include grab rails, stair rails, chair raises and step alterations. Installation of minor adaptations is dependent on ownership of the property. Adult social care undertakes work for both council and owner-occupied properties. If residents live in privately rented accommodation, the council requires the landlord's permission before it is able to install rails or other minor adaptations. Housing Associations usually undertake minor adaptations for their tenants based on the council's recommendations.
- 3.7 Examples of major adaptations include stairlifts, ramps for wheelchairs, level access showers. Occupational therapy staff will recommend major adaptations if it is necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of a person who has a permanent disability. Once an adaptation has been agreed, the process of arranging for the adaptations to be carried out will depend upon who owns the property. If a resident is an owner, a tenant of a privately owned or Housing Association they can apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) towards the adaptations.
- 3.8 Disabled Facilities Grants fall under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. The principles of the Act are:
- To ensure that all residents have access to accommodation that enables independent living, privacy and dignity for the individual and their families. This may include offers of alternative accommodation or modifying disabling environments;
 - To provide a service that seeks to best meet the needs experienced and identified by the disabled person;
 - To ensure that constraints on independent living are not imposed on disabled people by virtue of the construction, layout or design of their homes;
 - The process utilises the skills and experience of a wide range of disciplines and includes consultation and choice for the disabled person;
 - The appropriateness and acceptability of the adaptation is measured by the extent to which it meets the needs of the individual; and
 - To examine all the options available to the individual before embarking on plans to adapt the current property where major adaptations are required

- 3.9 If a resident resides in a council owned property they are also eligible for major adaptations and the process is the same regardless of tenure.
- 3.10 The council has developed a new DFG policy that gives more flexibility and improves accessibility to the DFG for residents in need of adaptations to their home. This is in line with the Regulatory Reform Act 2012 which gave local authorities the ability to be more flexible with how the DFG is provided. Haringey is one of a few councils who have taken this approach.
- 3.11 Following the implementation of the policy, the council was able to remove the financial means testing for all applicants so provision of adaptations for residents is based on need; remove the mandatory grant ceiling, which allows to provide adaptations that met the assessed level of need without grant restriction, therefore removing the need for people to pay the difference; use the grant funding to facilitate and meet Better Care Fund outcomes around prevention, hospital discharge and equipment provision and use the grant to make properties safe and appropriate for residents with complex behavioural need.
- 3.12 A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is available to pay for alterations to a disabled person's main residence. It is possible for a disabled person to apply for a DFG if they are a tenant, either private or RSL in which case the landlord can also apply for a DFG on the disabled person's behalf. The disabled person must have lived, or be intending to live, in the property in question for at least five years, or for such a shorter period as their health and other relevant circumstances permit.
- 3.13 Any alterations must be reasonable and practicable, necessary and appropriate. An assessment is required by an Occupational Therapist (OT)/ or Trusted Assessor (TA) before an application for a DFG or council adaptation is granted. Following the OT/ TA assessment where the outcome is major adaptation, a specification is completed outlining what the resident requires. This is then sent to the Surveying Team in ASC to undertake a site visit and complete a schedule of works. This is then allocated to one of our approved contractors on the adaptations DPS Framework to complete.
- 3.14 When major investment works are carried out to council tenants' homes, if adaptations could be required and an OT assessment is completed. At the point the investment works are delivered the adaptations will also be completed. In the majority of cases, this will be installations of wet rooms or showers to assist the resident to continue to live independently.

4. New adaptable and accessible homes

- 4.1. The 2015 Building Regulations establish standards that must be achieved in the construction of buildings. Schedule 1 of the Building Regulations sets out requirements for three different types of new dwellings:

- M4(1) – Visitable dwellings.
- M4(2) – Accessible and adaptable dwellings.
- M4(3) – Wheelchair user dwellings.

4.2. The requirements set out in M4(2) and M4(3) are optional requirements that only apply if imposed on new development as part planning permission.

4.3. The council as a Planning Authority does impose those requirements on new developments. Haringey's existing Local Plan sets out the criteria for planning decisions, and it requires 90% of new housing to meet Building Regulation requirement M4(2) and 10% to meet M4(3). The council is currently consulting on a new Local Plan.

4.4. In specific relation to affordable new homes, 2019 amendments to the 2017 Housing Strategy set out that a minimum of 10% of affordable homes should be wheelchair accessible, with an aspiration of 20%.

4.5. The council is aiming to go beyond this in its own housing delivery programme. By 2031, the Council will have built and let more than 3,000 new council homes for social rent. More than 1,000 have already started on site - the first new council homes in Haringey for 40 years.

4.6. All these new council homes are designed to M4(2) standards, which means they have enhanced accessibility in circulation spaces and bathrooms along with features to make homes easily adaptable. Most of our new council homes are in lifted developments: homes in all schemes that have suitable lift access to all floors can therefore be regarded as fully accessible and adaptable.

4.7. Beyond that, the council is currently consulting on a proposal in our new Housing Strategy to ensure that 20% of new council homes from 2023 are wheelchair accessible and to encourage other housing developers to meet this higher standard.

4.8. The council has introduced a 'Bespoke Homes Programme' to match households with disabilities to adaptable council homes at a stage early enough that those homes can be designed and built around the specific needs of each individual household. 20 out of the 184 new council homes completed so far have been let with adaptations tailored to the specific needs of individual households with disabilities.

4.9. In 2019, the council established the Haringey Community Benefit Society (HCBS), a formally independent organisation dedicated to letting homes to homeless households at low rents on five-year tenancies. These homes are additional to those built by the council: in general they are former council homes sold under Right to Buy that have been bought back by the council and leased to the HCBS for these purposes. In the

last six months, the council has started a pilot project to adapt a number of HCBS homes to the needs of wheelchair users living in Temporary Accommodation.

5. Contribution to strategic outcomes

6.0 Use of appendices: N/A

7.0 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 : Not applicable