

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 15TH APRIL 2014**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

SUBJECT: **DELIVERING COUNCIL HOUSE ADAPTATIONS**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To seek Cabinet approval for a new Policy, to guide decision making for the provision of major adaptations in Flintshire County Council's family houses and upper floor flats.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Council has given a great deal of focus to reducing the timescales for the delivery of adaptations. However, in addition to ensuring timely delivery of disabled adaptations, focus is also being given to the number, cost and type of major adaptations within the Council's own stock. This is an important consideration as the Council must balance the need of the individual customer, alongside the best use of its housing stock and the capital resources it has at its disposal.

2.02 The budget for home adaptations within Council housing is £850K for major adaptations and £150K for minor adaptations. This £1M budget is always fully spent. When comparing the level of annual budget provision in Flintshire to other social landlords, spend here is consistently higher than many other organisations. With the number and complexity of adaptations required increasing, a focus on considering re-housing to a more suitable property has been taken over the last 2 years where appropriate. The basis of this approach has been taking a considered approach where adaptations cost over £10K.

2.03 Since the 1st April 2013, 111 requests for level access showers have been actioned by the in-house adaptations team and these remain the most common adaptation that takes place. The price of a standard level access shower is approximately £4.5K to install within a property through the in house team as a split of labour and materials. Approximately 25% of all level access showers in Council homes are currently being installed in family houses. This equates to an annual spend of circa £470K, almost half of the total budget.

2.04 A further £150K is expended annually on stairlifts, with a straight

stairlift costing approximately £3.5K, and up to £6K for a complex curved stairlift. Examples of other major works provided through the disabled adaptations budget include ramped access, widening of doorways, over bath showers and installation of kitchens designed specifically for people with a disability.

- 2.05 Level access showers in family housing seriously affect the future ability to let a property when it becomes vacant. Young families will often not accept a house with a level access shower, as there is no facility to bathe children. The result is often the need to remove the level access shower and reinstate a bathroom. This can cost a further £4.5K, along with increasing the period the property is empty and in turn resulting in an increased loss of rental income.
- 2.06 The Council is proactively installing facilities for disabled tenants in older persons and sheltered accommodation through its capital works programme and using the opportunity of all bathroom upgrades to ensure they meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). The Council is also following the lifetime homes principles to ensure that its older persons and sheltered accommodation in particular can flexibly meet the needs of aging tenants where there is a decline in mobility.
- 2.07 However, there remains a need to reduce the number of level access showers which are provided in family houses and upper floor flats. There are historic examples of level access showers in 2nd and 3rd floor flats where the tenant can only access their accommodation by using one, or sometimes two communal stairlifts to reach each floor. Communal stairlifts are difficult to manage and maintain and the Council has been proactively removing those no longer required.
- 2.08 This proposed Policy is designed to ensure that new requests of this type are unlikely to be progressed and alternative accommodation at ground floor level will be explored and if appropriate offered. In these cases a list of tenants requiring specialist accommodation is maintained and updated on a fortnightly basis. As soon as alternative accommodation is sourced through Council or Housing Association stock, smaller scale adaptations within the new property are installed where needed to make it fit for purpose, (by either the Council or Housing Association).

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 As stated above, along with the improvements to timescales in the provision of Disabled Adaptations, focus is also being given to the appropriateness of Adaptations within the Council's own housing stock. This can particularly be an issue in family houses or upper floor flats. Historically, extensive adaptations have been provided in these types of properties and there is a recognition that greater consideration should be given to offering customers the opportunity to

relocate, rather than having the adaptations carried out at their existing property.

3.02 Within the proposed Policy for Council housing, when determining whether it is right to adapt a property, or propose that the tenant relocates to a property better suited to their needs; the following points are considered on a case by case basis, whether:-

- the applicant occupies a property that is scheduled for modification, or major refurbishment within the next two years
- the resident is actively seeking re-housing
- the adaptation requested is not structurally practicable
- there are properties within the same community which are already adapted, or can be adapted more cost effectively (access to support networks, school catchments, and community facilities will be considered).
- the property is under-occupied
- extensive adaptations are requested (Over £10,000)
- suitable alternative accommodation can be provided within a reasonable timescale, which the housing service deems to meet the needs of the household, following the recommendations made in the Occupational Therapy assessment
- the future ability to let the property would be adversely affected
- the tenant has made an application to purchase the property under the 'Right to Buy' scheme.
- the tenancy is less than 12 months old and/or the tenant failed to declare that they, or a member of their family had a pre-existing disability, where it is reasonable to do so, i.e. those with an enduring condition

3.03 The proposed policy is also backed up by a robust appeals process and funds from the Tenants Incentive Scheme (TIS) will be utilised to help support the cost of moving home.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 Cabinet approve the proposed policy regarding the adaptation of family houses and upper floor flats within the Council's housing stock, as attached.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 The falling number of adaptation requests in the owner occupied sector is not reflected within the Council's own housing stock, which is disproportionately affecting the HRA. The Council continues to spend in excess of £1M per year adapting its housing stock to meet the needs of disabled tenants. This is despite largely eliminating the building of extensions in favour of promoting relocation and creating

efficiencies through delivery of disabled adaptations in house.

- 5.02 It is envisaged that the introduction of this Policy would help satisfy the rising number of referrals for major adaptations to the Council's housing stock, within the existing £1M annual budget.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 Since 1st April 2013 and with the approval of Cabinet, the Council no longer expects tenants to submit to means testing through the disabled facilities grant regime. This therefore provides equal access to all for an adaptation regardless of their financial situation.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 There are no environmental impacts arising out of this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.01 All policy changes are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.01 None arising as a result of this report.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

- 10.01 None in addition to that already taken

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

- 11.00 All staff groups involved in the delivery of home adaptations have attended workshops. Staff groups consulted include Occupational Therapists, Disability Officer's, Building Surveyors, Neighbourhood Housing Team Leaders and the in-house adaptations team. Feedback on the Policy has been positively received and no concerns were raised.

- 11.01 The Policy was circulated to the Flintshire Tenants and Residents Federation for their feedback and was similarly well received. There was an appreciation from Federation members of the need for this Policy. Five written responses were returned, one of which requested a longer time period for the submission of an appeal from 21 days to 28 days. This recommendation was accepted and has therefore been included within the new Policy. Additional comments in relation to accessibility e.g. typeface and language will also be taken in to account when the Policy is produced. A joint Overview and Scrutiny committee of Housing and Social Services was held on the 6th February 2014 where this draft policy was considered and supported.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Proposed Family Houses and Upper Floor Flats Policy and Procedure

12.02 Proposed Appeals Process

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

Contact Officer: Gavin Griffith

Telephone: 01352 703248

Email: Gavin_Griffith@flintshire.gov.uk