

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** **JOINT HOUSING AND SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE  
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **THURSDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2014**

**REPORT BY:** **DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**SUBJECT:** **DELIVERING HOME ADAPTATIONS**

**1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.01 To provide Members with an update on the delivery of home adaptations, including Disabled Facilities Grants and Minor Adaptations.
- 1.02 To share with Members the Home Adaptations Action Plan, developed jointly by officers from Social Services and Housing and to seek support for the Plan, including progress to date.
- 1.03 To seek Member support 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**

**Disabled Adaptations Performance**

- 2.01 Delivery of disabled adaptations is a challenge for Council's, given the scale and complexity of demand. Over the last two years the Council has made significant performance improvements and is now seeing the benefits of this work. Waiting times for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) have significantly improved. Also, within the period January to September 2013, 258 minor aids and adaptations (those costing under £1K) have been completed outside of the DFG process, to ensure less complex interventions are completed without undue delay.
- 2.02 Flintshire's performance at September 2013 for DFG's against the national performance indicator was 207 days. This meets Flintshire's local improvement target of 400 days for adaptations to meet the needs of adults and 350 days to meet the need of children and is a dramatic improvement on last year's performance of 391 days for all DFG's.
- 2.03 However the guidance for the calculation of this performance indicator has been revised. The new guidance was an attempt by Welsh government to ensure that all Council's are calculating the PI in the

same way, to allow for more accurate national benchmarking. The new guidance clarified a number of exemptions that can be included when calculating the PI and which Flintshire had not been making use of. Therefore, in order to provide a better comparator for Members between the current financial year and the 12/13 financial year the PI for last year has been recalculated using the new guidance. This provided a figure of 283 days for 12/13, against the current performance for 13/14 of 207 days. It is therefore pleasing to note that to date an improvement of 76 days can be seen from the last financial year. All DFG's completed between April and September 2013 therefore comfortably met the target set by the Older People's Commissioner of 365 days.

2.04 The average performance for minor adaptations for the same period was 55 days. The waiting times for occupational therapy assessment have also significantly decreased. People referred to Social Services for an OT assessment can expect to wait on average 1 month, with the longest waiting time in September 2013 being 3.3 months. This again compares favourably with April 2013 when the average wait was 1.5 months and the longest wait of 21 months.

2.05 The Modernisation of Social Services Board has driven the development of reablement and preventative services and highlighted the need to develop locality teams to ensure that Social Services work more closely with health colleagues. This led directly to an increase in OT capacity by 1.5 posts and an increase in the minor adaptations budget by 63% up to £241K. The Council has also seen a small reduction in the number of major disabled adaptations from 157 to 149 and the number of people needing residential care from 481 people in September 2012 down to 445 people in September 2013. Whilst it can be positively assumed that these changes have directly contributed to the reduction in demand, it is not possible to evidence the direct correlation due the number of social factors and other changes being undertaken at this time.

#### **Adapting Council homes**

2.06 In addition to ensuring timely delivery of disabled adaptations, focus is also being given to 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.

2.07 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 and there is some additional support provided through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to ensure that demand can be met in each financial year. Meeting demand means there is a need to prioritise the resource. 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.

- 2.08 Since the 1<sup>st</sup> 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. It costs approximately £6K to install a level access shower within a property, a total spend of £666K so far in 13/14. Approximately 25% of these level access showers are currently being installed in family houses. 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.
- 2.09 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 £6K, along with increasing the period the property is empty and in turn resulting in a loss of rental income.
- 2.10 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), regardless of how the need arises. 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.
- 2.11 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.
- 2.12 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 Services are never static and an action plan is already in place to further improve the performance of major and minor adaptations. The action plan is attached at the end of this report and the views of the Members are sought on this Plan.

3.02 To date the following actions within the plan have been completed, or will be by the end of February 2014: -

- Management of initial demand on OT services – this has been achieved through the redirection of enquiries for basic adaptations, such as handrails, stairrails and lever taps in Council properties to the Housing Asset Management Team, without the need for OT assessment. The impact of this will be monitored for 3 months to evaluate whether it leads to increased demand.
- Reduction of delays for service user – through the introduction of a more streamlined approach between Occupational Therapy and Housing Renewal. Schedules will no longer require individual sign off by OT's unless they are complex.
- Reduced duplication of work within the OT Service - so that when an adaptation recommendation is made, responsibility for the case is transferred in its entirety to Housing Renewal who will case manage the adaptation thereafter, providing a clear separation of roles and responsibilities.
- Robust management of tendering and contracts – ensuring that contractors commit to starting on site with 4 weeks as a condition of award, along with a reduction to the tender period down to 10 days and the issuing of tenders as soon as they arise, rather than being batched on a fortnightly basis.
- Improved flow of information between Social Services and Housing – the Paris share functionality is being introduced to ensure that adaptation recommendation forms are securely and instantly transmitted between teams.

3.03 Further timed actions are present within the Plan and these will be progressed and reported back to Members in either the Social and Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee or the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee, via the standard reporting mechanisms.

3.04 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.

3.05 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)
- there is an active notice of seeking possession on the tenancy
- suitable alternative accommodation can be provided within a reasonable timescale which the Housing Service and Occupational Therapist deems to meet the needs of the household
- 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 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

3.06 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.

#### **Use of adapted pods to provide disabled facilities**

3.07 Whilst the above Policy will reduce the number of major adaptations taking place in Council housing, it may still be appropriate to provide additional facilities in the form of a ground floor extension to accommodate bathroom and/or bedroom facilities in limited cases. When these situations arise consideration will be given to the length of time the facility will be needed. Where a need exists but it is likely to be short to medium term, then consideration will be giving to the use of an adapted pod, secured to the rear of the existing property. This allows for the pod to be removed and recycled when no longer required and ensures that future ability to let a family home is not impacted by a new permanent structure. It also ensures that the

additional bedroom is not a deterrent for those who would have accepted the property, but would now be impacted by the bedroom tax as a consequence of an additional spare room. (Bedroom tax would not apply if all the bedrooms remained fully occupied once the adaptation was complete, so a child was sharing a bedroom but no longer had to as a result of the extension, or a spare room for an overnight carer was required). Stairlifts would continue to be offered in this type of accommodation as they can be recycled and reused and the Council has facility to store them.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 Members note the reduction in waiting times for Occupational Therapy assessment and improved timescales for the delivery of home adaptations.
- 4.02 Members support the action plan and the workstreams contained within.
- 4.03 Members support 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 realignment of resources has allowed for the increase to the minor adaptations revenue budget within existing resources. This realignment was predicted as a result of the transition to the reablement model.
- 5.02 Despite an aging demographic across Flintshire, there are fewer requests for major adaptations coming forward in the owner occupied sector, meaning that the private sector renewal capital budget has been able to accommodate the 20% cut to Council fund in 2013/14 whilst continuing to meet demand.
- 5.03 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.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 The means tested disabled facilities grant regime targets resources towards those unable to fund adaptations themselves. The national means test considers both income and savings and is a robust tool for prioritising the limited resource.

## **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**

10.1 Staff groups involved in the delivery of home adaptations.

10.2 Tenants will need to be consulted via the Flintshire Tenants and Residents Federation prior to seeking final approval for the proposed policy on the adaptation of family houses and upper floor flats.

## **11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

All staff groups involved in the delivery of home adaptations have attended workshops and have been involved in identifying opportunities to streamline processes and reduce cost.

## **12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 Home Adaptations Action Plan

12.02 Proposed Family Houses and Upper Floor Flats Policy and Procedure

12.03 Proposed Appeals Process

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

None.

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