

# Equality of Opportunity Committee

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## **Inquiry into Home Maintenance and adaptations services for Older People in Wales**

This paper is being submitted by Cardiff Accessible Homes to inform the committee's discussions in relation to the inquiry regarding home maintenance and adaptation services for older people in Wales.

### **The role of Cardiff Accessible Homes (CAH)**

Cardiff Accessible Homes exists to provide physically disabled people with homes that meet their needs and wants thereby enabling them to live independently with increased safety and comfort.

### **Background**

There are many families and individuals who are living in inappropriate accommodation that need to move to suitable adapted properties to attain a reasonable standard of living. Whilst some existing properties have been partly adapted, a large number of properties will need to be purpose built and fully adapted for wheelchair users. Existing properties will have to be sought and adapted for people with sensory and mobility problems of varying degrees. However, due to a short supply of suitable accessible properties in the social housing sector, the housing needs and preferences of a high number of disabled clients are extremely limited, often leading to an extremely long wait for a suitable adapted property to become available.

### **Introduction**

CAH was created to investigate ways in which these problems could be overcome to better meet the needs of physically disabled people in Cardiff.

The project has been operational since May 2003 and was initially funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff Council and three Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) these being Cardiff Community (managing and host partners), Cadwyn and Taff.

In 2005 the following RSL's became partners of CAH, Hafod, Linc-Cymru, United Welsh and Wales and West. Since this date CAH has been fully funded by Cardiff City Council and the seven RSL's mentioned above.

### **Why the need for Cardiff Accessible Homes**

Prior to the introduction of Cardiff Accessible Homes, when properties with adaptations became vacant and a new tenant sought, RSL's often had difficulty in finding suitable tenants despite the fact that there is a high level of demand and low level of supply of suitable properties. As a result, adapted properties would often be let to an able-bodied person/s or family, or the adaptations would be removed from the property altogether thus further reducing the adapted housing stock in Cardiff.

The introduction of Cardiff Accessible Homes has led to adapted properties being let effectively and efficiently to those clients who require them and without adaptations being removed.

### **What does CAH do?**

CAH provides the following services to disabled clients:

A joint register of households needing adapted accommodation

A joint register of adapted properties

A common procedure for identifying potential adapted properties

A common lettings policy

Manages a central assessment centre for grant applications involving adaptations

Identifies gaps in provision and recommends how these areas may be developed

Manages the only Adapted housing exchange scheme in Wales

CAH identifies physically disabled persons who would be most suited to the type of accommodation available with regard to housing needs and personal preferences. A single application form is used to gather information about the requirements of the disabled person.

An Occupational Therapist assessment is completed for each applicant, this assessment highlights each applicant's needs and requirements and provides CAH with the information needed to match available properties to applicants.

CAH plays a pivotal role, acting as the main point of contact within a multi-agency partnership to identify and allocate adapted accommodation to suitable clients. The benefits of CAH are as follows:

Provides a comprehensive service to disabled persons, including: assessment of needs, information, housing advice and support

Provides a source of housing, health, economic and sociological data for use in development planning to meet housing and other needs of disabled persons

Accurately identifies the housing needs and preferences of disabled persons

Identifies locations where disabled persons would most like to live and plan future development in these areas

Accurately predicts the demand for housing needs for disabled persons in development areas

Improves the reallocation of void accessible/adapted properties to disabled persons who require such accommodation and reduce revenue loss in terms of voids, tenancy turnovers and re-lets

Avoids unnecessary spending on the removal of adaptations

Ensure that all applicants are dealt with in a consistent manner

A common register which enable applicants to be considered for accessible and adapted housing managed by all social housing providers within the city

Minimise Delayed Transfer of Care or admission to hospital or long term care - this is achieved by actively seeking properties that could be adapted as and when they become available, this has led to over 20 Delayed Transfer of Care applicants being suitably housed since March 2008.

### **Adapted Exchange Scheme**

The only adapted exchange register in operation in Wales. Due to the high demand and low supply of adapted housing, CAH has implemented an Adapted Exchange Register to increase and improve housing options for those requiring adapted accommodation. Those already living in rented adapted accommodation or requiring adapted accommodation now have the option of registering for the scheme whereby they can mutually exchange with someone else on the scheme. When clients find a mutual exchange, clients will then contact their landlords to progress the exchange.

### **CAH managing all Fast-track Physical Adaptation Grants (PAG's) assessments for partner RSL's**

Physical Adaptation Grants are the equivalent of a Disabled Facility Grants for RSL tenants. PAG's are funded by the Welsh Assembly and can only be applied for by RLS's. The process involves the RSL tenant obtaining an Occupational Therapist report which highlights the required adaptations. This report is submitted to the Welsh Assembly by the RSL for approval. Once approval is received the adaptations can be installed and funding for the work's can be claimed. In April 2008 an arrangement to fast-track certain PAG's was introduced, this was done for the following reasons:

#### **Streamlining the grant application procedure was intended to:**

reduce the time between the identification of the tenant's needs and the necessary adaptations being provided

enable registered social landlords to adopt more efficient procurement processes

simplify the grant application process

#### **Key features of fast-track procedure:**

No prior approval by Assembly Government

No technical scrutiny prior to commissioning of the works

Grant claimed on completion of the works

Grant to be claimed within three months of completion of the works

#### **Categories of work qualifying for fast-track procedure**

Relates to straightforward installations

Installation of a stair-lift

Installation of a level access shower and associated bathroom fittings (over-bath showers are not eligible for grant as they are part of Welsh Housing Quality Standards)

Access aids - includes ramps, door widening and entry systems

#### **Supporting documentation**

Recommendation report from an occupational therapist indicating that the adaptation is necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the tenant.

One of the key issues surrounding this new process was the time tenants had to wait for an Occupational Therapist to visit them and carry out the assessment. CAH drafted a proposal which outlined its intent to employ an Occupational Therapist specifically to complete these assessments. CAH currently employs two Occupational Therapists who carry out the fast-track PAG assessments, waiting times for such assessments prior to CAH involvement was four to six months. This had a major impact on vulnerable clients who, only needing simple adaptations felt the upheaval of move would be speedier. The risk of falls and injury during this waiting time also became apparent. Current waiting times for an Occupational Therapist assessment via CAH is two weeks. Once the RSL receive the assessment for fast-track work they are able to get the adaptation/s installed without prior approval from the Welsh Assembly. This has led to many vulnerable clients being able to remain in their home in the knowledge that the required adaptations would be installed within a short period of time.

### **Benefits of a centralised PAG referral system**

CAH manage a central register of all PAG assessments

Single point of contact for vulnerable client group

Screening process in place to establish fast-track and non fast-track adaptations

OT's complete the necessary reports - providing a consistent and concise approach by using two experienced OT's with a wealth of housing knowledge

A speedier OT assessment service - reduce tenant waiting times

A process that reduces the amount of disabled people moving, reduce voids and increase adapted housing stock in Cardiff

A detailed record of PAG's within partner properties, easy to identify when the same properties become available in the future

Help vulnerable clients remain in their homes with minimal disruption by providing an effective and efficient service

### **Minor adaptation service**

When minor adaptations such as grab-rails, stair hand-rails and lever taps are highlighted as being required the Occupational Therapists complete a recommendation report which is sent to the landlord for them to have the work's completed. This has led to many clients receiving minor/simple adaptations within weeks of these recommendations being sent thus further reducing the risk of injury and falls within the home.

### **Current statistics**

294 applicants awaiting adapted housing in Cardiff (ranging from clients requiring fully wheelchair accessible properties to minimally adapted properties)

Over 500 successful lets since 2003 - averaging 100-120 lettings per year

Over 2,000 referrals dealt with since the start of project

OT's have completed over 800 assessments since their introduction in 2005

Mechanisms and processes in place to identify urgent cases - achieved by managing effective partnership working with CCC housing, housing strategy, DFG and social service teams

Completion of over 250 PAG assessments by the end of 2009

23 Delayed Transfer of Care clients re-housed since March 2008 - (current average cost of each client remaining in a hospital bed is £1,750 per week - by housing those clients ready for discharge hospital bed space has been freed and also the unnecessary cost of keeping a client ready for discharge in hospital has been reduced.

### **Problems encountered**

High demand for certain areas of Cardiff where minimal adapted housing exists

Adapted family housing - high demand, short supply

Slowing turnover of adapted properties - CAH have found that the matching of applicants to available properties has been so successful once a client moves into a property they remain there for many years, this has an impact on the amount of adapted properties becoming available

### **Issues CAH needs to tackle in the future**

Better links with other projects throughout Wales to ensure mobility is increased

Sustaining its funding beyond 2010.

Consider further the recommendation in the 2005 Jones 'Review of Disabled Facilities Grants' that all work under £1000 should be carried out without recourse to PAG or DFG should be adopted widely by RSL's and Local Authorities.

Minor adaptations without delay - training for housing/maintenance staff regarding the installation of minor adaptations such as grab-rails, stair-rails and lighting

Consider the introduction of an RSL handy person's service - help with small jobs including gardening and fitting of minor adaptations such as grab-rails (Possible link to Care and Repair)

More new build disabled units in Cardiff, high demand for large units that could be used to accommodate families with disabled children thus providing long term housing solution