



To: Executive Councillor for Housing

Report by: Trevor Burdon, Head of Estates and Facilities

Relevant scrutiny committee: Housing Scrutiny Committee

Wards affected: All wards

Key Decision Yes

*18<sup>th</sup> January 2017*

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## **POLICY ON ADAPTATIONS FOR DISABLED TENANTS**

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### **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1. A comprehensive review of the Disabled Adaptations Service has been completed and this Policy will replace the previous version dated 2008.
- 1.2. Care and Repair England has highlighted that “Home Adaptations” have a critical role to play in delivering a policy which includes:
  - Continued extension of independent living
  - Efficient delivery of health and care services, at or closer to home,
  - Reduced use of NHS services/reductions in delayed transfer of care,
  - Better management of long term conditions and
  - Prevention of high cost incidents, such as falls in the home”.
- 1.3. In order to continue to provide a high quality adaptations service to its tenants and to balance the best use of its resources, the City Council aims to bring greater parity between the way housing adaptations are managed through the housing revenue account and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) regime applied to other social housing and the private sector.

## **2. Recommendations**

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

- 1) approve the Disabled Adaptations Policy 2017

## **3. Background**

- 3.1. As a result of government changes announced in 2015, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is facing significant financial pressures requiring fundamental reviews of all HRA funded housing services. These reviews are described in the Housing Transformation reports submitted to Housing Scrutiny Committee throughout 2015 and 2016 and are further reported to this meeting in January 2017. Proposals previously approved by the Scrutiny Committee specifically included for a review of the adaptation service for disabled tenants which has not been examined since 2008.
- 3.2. The City Council is committed to providing suitable housing to meet the needs of disabled people. In the last five years, Cambridge City Council has invested £4.3m in adapting council housing for use by households including a disabled person or for those with a long term physical need.
- 3.3. Although tenants may also apply for financial assistance to modify their homes from a system introduced in 1989 (amended in 1996) called the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) typically stock retaining landlords provide and fund adaptations for their own stock.
- 3.4. The previous (2008) Policy has resulted in council tenants being treated more favourably than private occupiers or other social housing tenants who have to apply for mandatory DFG funding which is financially capped, is means tested and has to adhere to the basic principles that any adaptation must be “necessary and appropriate” to meet the disabled person’s needs (as assessed by a medical professional), and is “reasonable and practicable” having regard to the age and condition of the property.
- 3.5. A peer review of other social landlords completed in 2016 shows that, unlike the City Council, 70% of those surveyed make use of DFG to help fund the costs of adapting social housing tenant’s properties.
- 3.6. Last year, as a comparison, the City Council spent almost twice as much adapting its council owned stock for use by disabled people than that funded through the DFG scheme for all other [disabled]

householders in Cambridge City. A number of these adaptations were for households whose needs may have been more appropriately met by moving to other suitable or pre-adapted housing.

- 3.7. With an increasing ageing population, it is expected that demand for adaptations will increase resulting in an increasing need for the council to prioritise where its limited budgets are spent.
- 3.8. The city council has achieved demonstrable success at supporting older and vulnerable people to move when needed and this new Policy also aims to provide financial assistance to further support those who decide to move.
- 3.9. As a result of the government restricting rent increases (and enforcing a reduction for 4 years), the funding needed to meet the increasing costs of disabled adaptations cannot be achieved by increasing rents and the available budget must therefore be prioritised for those in greatest need.
- 3.10. Each year the council completes a large number of adaptations. The following data provides an overview of the current service provision and demand:

a) full year delivery of adaptations

- 58 level access showers
- 25 over bath showers
- 15 modular ramps, 4 automatic door openers, widened a number of doorways
- 21 stair lifts and 1 through floor lift
- 11 fencing jobs
- 5 specialist WC's and 1 WC lifter
- 2 property extensions
- 381 minor jobs (rails, half steps, lever taps etc)

b) Housing Stock detail

Statistically, at least 23% of all council housing in the City has already been adapted to some extent for disabled residents.

c) Housing need

- In 2015/16, 39 households with an urgent medical need to move were housed by Cambridge City Council, 54% of those considered themselves disabled although only 15% required property adapted to the highest mobility levels. Applicants had been on the housing register for up to two years.

- In May 2016, there were 233 applicants on the housing register with a live application and a mobility rating. 12% of those require a property adapted to the highest mobility levels and 35% of those were aged over 65. 17 people registered with an urgent medical need to move, of which the majority classed themselves as disabled.
- Of the adaptations completed between 2013/14 and 2015/16, on average 84% of adaptations were completed for adult household members and 16% were for children.

3.11. Nationally, older people are living longer and there is an estimated 27% projected growth in older people in Cambridgeshire by 2031.

3.12. A recent profiling exercise of Cambridge City Council tenants indicated that one third of tenants are aged over 65. Data on the number of disabled tenants is limited although an exercise completed in 2008 indicated that about 11% of all tenants at that time identified themselves as having some form of disability.

3.13. Over the last 10 years, Cambridge City Council has also spent several million pounds refurbishing its older people's sheltered housing. The standard of this accommodation is very good and many flats in the category 2 sheltered schemes (ie those with a number of flats all under one roof) are modernised to lifetime standards and are therefore equipped and appropriate for disabled residents.

3.14. The proposed Policy therefore takes account of the service demands, and existing stock provision and sets out how available financial resources can be better targeted to continue delivery of "reasonable and practicable" adaptations, which are generally consistent with DFG criteria, whilst also ensuring that, wherever possible, consideration is given to alternative property that could be better matched to a disabled tenants' individual needs. The Policy highlights how disabled people will continue to exercise choice in terms of where they live and how targeted support will be offered to maximise opportunities to enable applicants to bid via choice based lettings as well as enabling the city council to direct let its most adapted properties to those in greatest needs where required.

## **4. Implications**

4.1. A desktop review of 142 completed adaptations between 2010 and 2016 shows that 76% of the tenant households were in receipt of full

or partial housing benefit. 28% of tenancies had ended by June 2016.

- 4.2. The Disabled Adaptation Policy aims to align its processes more closely with that applied to other social rented and private sector housing by assimilating some of the criteria used when a householder applies for a disabled facilities grant (DFG).
- 4.3. This Policy therefore intends to implement a test of resources for council tenants applying for an adaptation. The impact of this will be mitigated because evidence suggests that at least 76% of those applying for an adaptation will be in receipt of a benefit which means they are exempt from the means test. The remaining 24% will have their benefits and income assessed and where appropriate will be asked to financially contribute towards the cost of the adaptation.
- 4.4. The Policy also intends to introduce a weekly recharge to those householders with an adaptation which requires some form of on-going maintenance service costs. This charge would become payable as part of a weekly charge collected alongside the rent. For those in receipt of full or partial housing benefit, this charge would be met in part or full in accordance with the benefits regulations that apply at the time. A table showing the charges is included in the Policy.
- 4.5. These measures, along with others identified in the Policy will help reduce the impact of increasing demand on the disabled adaptations budget.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1. The implementation of this Policy will result in some tenants having to financially contribute towards their adaptation. Others, who decide to relocate, will be able to access financial assistance if their adaptation would have exceeded £2500 or more generally as part of the council's under-occupation incentive scheme.
- 5.2. The financial impact for tenants who are assessed as having to financially contribute will be reduced or exempted entirely for those in receipt of housing and certain other benefits as identified in the Policy.
- 5.3. It is envisaged that the revised Policy will enable the council to better utilise its limited budgets to ensure that the money spent on adaptations is prioritised for those in greatest need and where that need cannot otherwise be met with suitable alternative housing.

5.4. A desktop exercise applying the new Policy to a small sample of adaptations completed in 2014/15 indicated that the amount spent could significantly reduce due to a combination of the effects of the proposed changes described in this Policy. However, this is a small sample and future financial effects would clearly depend upon the individual circumstances of new applicants. It is expected nonetheless that the Policy could realise a saving of £150 000/year from an existing annual budget of approximately £900,000.

5.5. In the absence of a Policy to manage the overall delivery of adaptations it is likely that the cost of unrestricted adaptation requests will continue to rise and would not be sustainable within budgets currently available within the approved 30 year HRA Business Plan.

## **6. Staffing Implications (if not covered in Consultations Section)**

No additional staffing implications

## **7. Equality and Poverty Implications**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is available on the Council's internet site.

## **8. Environmental Implications**

The updated Policy will promote recycling of equipment as far as practicable.

## **9. Procurement**

There are no procurement implications.

## **10. Consultation and communication**

10.1. A list of the consultation completed is included within the Equality Impact Assessment. Consultation has included two focus groups with disabled tenants, a series of meetings with and presentations to representative tenants and relevant professionals.

10.2. The City Council commissioned an independent organisation run by people with disabilities for people with disabilities, Cambridge Alliance for Independent Living to assist it's communication with tenants and an article inviting further contact was placed in the tenant's newsletter, Open Door.

10.3. The council also sought further legal advice with regard to the Equalities Act and the proposed means testing.

#### **11. Community Safety**

There are no community safety implications.

#### **12. Background Papers**

See appended Policy

#### **13. Appendices**

### **CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL POLICY ON ADAPTATIONS FOR DISABLED TENANTS (HRA Property) : effective 1 April 2017**

#### **14. Inspection of papers**

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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