



Minutes of the meeting of the HOUSING IMPROVEMENT TEAM - DISABLED ADAPTATIONS held on THURSDAY 4 NOVEMBER 1999 at 6.30 p.m. in Room 2, Saxon Court

**Present:** Councillors Barton, Kilkenny, Tilley and Woodcock

**Officers:** D Jones (Strategic Director Neighbourhood Services), M Vine (Housing Needs Manager), D Nickless (Head of Neighbourhood Services - Housing), R Cooper (Senior Environmental Health Officer of Private Sector Housing Team), D Ewing (Team Manager - Physical Disabilities), K Page (Head of Neighbourhood Services - Social Care), W Marsden (Senior Committee Manager), S Stares (Members' Services Section)

#### **Tenants'**

**Representatives:**

C Allum	(Central Area Housing Board)
A Laing	(Bletchley Area Housing Board)
J Marling	(Bletchley Area Housing Board)
B Moore	(Netherfield/Newport Pagnell Area Housing Board)
P Prop	(Netherfield/Newport Pagnell Area Housing Board)
A Richardson	(Netherfield/Newport Pagnell Area Housing Board)
M Simon	(Bradville/Greenleys Area Housing Board)
H Taylor	(Bradville/Greenleys Area Housing Board)

#### **RSL**

**Representatives:**

J Abra	(Midsummer Housing Association)
K Veen	(John Grooms Housing Association)

#### **Other**

**Representatives:**

D Fielding	(Milton Keynes Community NHS Trust)
D Nicholson	(Milton Keynes Community NHS Trust)
M Weeks	(Citizens' Advice Bureau; User of disabled adaptations)

**Apologies:** J Taylor (Carer)

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

David Jones opened the meeting, stating that this was the first meeting of the Housing Improvement Team created by the Housing Committee on 29 June 1999 covering the service area of Disabled Adaptations. The Housing Improvement Team would be time limited, hold approximately six meetings and make recommendations to the Housing Committee. The Team agreed the

following draft Terms of Reference for the Disabled Adaptations Housing Improvement Team;

1. To review the Service provided to people with a physical impairment in respect of their needs for disabled adaptations and equipment (e.g. aids for daily living) across all forms of housing. This would include examining accessibility and availability.
2. To make recommendations on improvements to the service and more effective use of resources.

It was noted that these Terms of Reference were intentionally broad, and would not apply solely to Council owned properties.

## **2.0 MEMBERSHIP**

David Jones stated that the Housing Committee on 29 June 1999 had resolved that the Housing Improvement Team would comprise three Councillors from the Housing Committee, two Tenant Representatives from each Area Housing Board and one Head Officer from the Neighbourhood Services Directorate Management Team.

In response to a question from Councillor Woodcock regarding representation from the Health Authority, David Jones said the Health Authority would have a reduced role and the Primary Care Group (PCG) would be important, therefore the key players were at the meeting. The Team agreed to the provisional membership list of Councillors, Officers, Tenant Representatives, RSL Representatives, Carers and Users. Margaret Weeks noted that she wished to represent the Citizens Advice Bureau as well as users of disabled adaptations.

## **3.0 PRESENTATIONS**

In the first presentation, **Roger Cooper** (Senior Environmental Health Officer, Private Sector Housing Team) spoke in detail about funding disabled adaptations - in particular, through Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

He outlined official definitions of Disability (which are set out in Section 100 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996).

He explained eligibility criteria for applying for such grants, methods of assessing the needs of applicants and the consideration of the suitability of properties for adaptation. He also outlined the mechanisms of the waiting list system for DFGs. In this, occupational therapists assigned a priority rating to applicants for DFGs.

The Local Government Housing Act 1989 made housing provision means tested and demand led cash limited. Since 1995/96 Housing budgets had been decreasing but demand rising. The Council contributed 40% of the cost of DFGs; 60% was contributed by the DETR.

Other means of funding adaptations were noted; Housing Association adaptations (which were financed by the Housing Corporation) and Home Repairs Assistance Grants (which did not entail the means-testing element of DFGs).

Alan Richardson noted the lack of NHS contributions to disabled adaptations, despite the fact that such projects free hospital beds.

Keith Veen stated that money had not been available to Housing Associations from the Housing Corporation and John Abra said Housing Association had to fund small minor adaptations under £500.

Alan Richardson mentioned the matter of the reuse of adapted properties, where adaptations may no longer be required (e.g. in the case of users moving house) and could not always be put to useful purpose. Derek Nickless commented that families living in adapted houses could apply to have alterations undone (such as reconverting flat showers to full bathrooms); however, these represented a cost to the Authority.

Councillor Barton noted that imminent changes in the Disabilities Act could have significant impact on the matter of disabled adaptations. He also asked the extent to which consideration of the needs of the disabled could be integrated in the work of planning and architecture sections of the Council.

In the second presentations, **Debbie Nicholson** (Milton Keynes Community NHS Trust) outlined the role of occupational therapists in the process of recommending housing adaptations.

In the first stage of the process, referrals were assigned one of three priority ratings;

- (a) immediate need - response up to five days
- (b) urgent need - response up to six weeks
- (c) non-urgent need - response up to ten weeks

Councillor Barton stated that he was often asked about the priority system, and the fairness of giving complete precedence to “immediate” (Priority 1) cases. Derek Nickless said that approximately one third of people waiting for disabled adaptations were Priority 1 cases which MKC needed to deal with. Alan Richardson asked if there was an appeals procedure and Debbie Nicholson said that the process regarding the priority rating system was explained fully to applicants, who were entitled to raise complaints or queries.

At the second stage, an assessment of need was undertaken with the user and any appropriate carers.

Any recommendation of how to meet the identified needs of the user needed to be approved. Complex needs were discussed at Council Adaptations Meetings, and works in excess of £5000 were processed via the DFG Panel.

In the fourth stage, a priority criterion was awarded based on risk analyses. A new system was currently being piloted for DFG cases, using a scheme of assessment points (with points added for time waiting) to determine priority. Debbie Nicholson noted that she would welcome feedback from the Team on this system.

A copy of the handout referring to the Practices for Recommending Housing Adaptations is attached as an **Annex** to the minutes.

Margaret Weeks, as a user of disabled adaptations, mentioned the waste of funds involved in removing equipment (such as stairlifts) when they were no longer needed.

In the third presentation, **Dave Ewing** (Team Manager - Physical Disabilities) outlined the role of Disability Services in providing interest free loans to fund adaptations. It was noted that to qualify for such a loan, an applicant must have been refused a loan by a commercial lender (which was a common occurrence for disabled users). Loans were secured to property (although repaying loans via the sale of homes was rare) and usually repaid in monthly instalments. There was no set budget for such loans, since they were met from reserves.

Dave Ewing stressed that people should first make approaches to commercial lenders; the Council was a last resort.

Alan Richardson asked whether it might be possible to make an interest charge on the rare occasions when loans were recalled via property sales.

Dave Ewing noted the need to publicise these loans - by producing leaflets, etc.

#### **4.0**

#### **AGENDA FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

David Jones requested Team members to suggest issues of concern to be addressed at future meetings. The following matters were raised:-

Councillor Barton wished to consider the broad area of communication with the public in respect of explaining processes and meeting expectations, and also the area of communication between Officers and Occupational Therapists.

Malcolm Vine was concerned with the supply side of suitable property; allocation of homes and transfers through the Council's Housing Policy, and classification of properties.

Councillor Tilley asked for a survey of the Council's stock of equipment for disabled users.

David Jones suggested investigating how to bring budgets together for disabled adaptations and equipment.

Roger Cooper commented, though, that a unified funding system would imply a uniform way of providing a service, which would not necessarily be desirable.

Alan Richardson asked to consider alternative ways of carrying out adaptation works (- often the cost of installing equipment exceeded the cost of the equipment itself) to reduce labour costs.

David Jones said that information on Waiting Lists and Budgets could be provided and brought to the next meeting.

Margaret Weeks noted with concern the means testing process - in particular the fact that assessments of disabled children's circumstances were based on their parents' financial situations.

John Abra suggested considering other sources of funding for disabled adaptations and involving other organisations, such as Voluntary Organisations. Margaret Weeks noted two charities she knew of which dealt with such matters. Alan Richardson suggested investigating possible EU funding.

Derek Nickless said there had been a high spend last year across the private and public sector on disabled adaptations of £900,000.

Debbie Nicholson noted that if Occupational Therapists could not meet all needs they must determine what could be afforded.

## **5.0 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Team noted that the next meeting would be held in Saxon Court on 24 November 1999 at 6.30pm in Room 2.

**THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 8.45 PM**