



Minutes of the meeting of the HOUSING IMPROVEMENT TEAM - DISABLED ADAPTATIONS held on TUESDAY 25 JANUARY 2000 at 6.30 p.m. in Room 2, Saxon Court

Present: Councillor Tilley

Officers: D Jones (Strategic Director Neighbourhood Services), T Chapman (Policy and Development Officer), R Cooper (Senior Environmental Health Officer - Private Sector Housing Team), D Ewing (Team Manager - Physical Disabilities), T Huff (Neighbourhood Services Finance Manager), M Vine (Housing Needs Manager), S Stares (Committee Manager)

Tenants'

Representatives: B Moore (Hanslope Residents' Association)
H Taylor (Greenleys Residents' Association)

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)
J Taylor (Milton Keynes Carers Project)

Apologies: Councillor Barton
M Kidd Service User
D Nickless (Head of Neighbourhood Services – Housing)
K Page (Head of Neighbourhood Services – Social Care)

1.0 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Improvement Team – Disabled Adaptation held on 24 November 1999 were approved as a correct record.

2.0 INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBER

The Team welcomed Jackie Taylor (representing carers) to the meeting.

3.0 UPDATE ON WAITING LISTS

Malcom Vine updated the meeting on the Council Housing adaptation waiting list situation. The total number of cases on the waiting list had risen, from 475 last

summer to 510 currently. Last summer there had been 20 Priority 1 cases waiting, in contrast to the present figure of 25. The oldest outstanding Priority 1 application had been made in July 1999.

4.0 FUNDING OF DISABLED ADAPTATIONS

Tony Huff informed the meeting that a report on the Housing Budget, including the allocation for equipment and adaptations, would be considered at the meeting of the Housing Committee on 1 February 2000.

An underspend was anticipated for the Housing Revenue budget for the year 1999/2000. The spending required before the completion of the year could not be viably directed towards disabled adaptations because of the lead-in time involved in such spending. Compensation would therefore be made in terms of funds for aids and adaptations the following year.

The budget for disabled adaptations for the next year would therefore be approximately as follows:

£150,000 base
£ 90,000 underspend from this year
£100,000 additional spend

£340,000 TOTAL

This figure was approximately on a par with previous years' budgets (discounting last year and the additional funds made available with the sale of the Food Centre).

Margaret Weeks asked for some indication of the approximate costs of various adaptation works. Debbie Nicholson informed the meeting that it was normal practice to apply for £1200-£1500 for each adaptation. This figure included everything from installing a grab rail, at £150, to a flat floor shower, which could cost up to £4000. It did not include works costing less than £60 or more than £6000.

Jackie Taylor informed the Team that, although users and carers received copies of letters of recommendation made by the Occupational Therapy department, they were not kept informed of the progress of applications for equipment or adaptations made to Milton Keynes Council. This uncertainty caused significant mental as well a physical stress to both users and carers. Debbie Nicholson confirmed that copies of recommendations sent to Milton Keynes Council were sent to users and carers, but that it should be possible to periodically update applicants on their positions on waiting lists for adaptations. It was also necessary to keep in contact with applicants who had been waiting a long time for works, to ensure that at the end of a period of waiting they still required the equipment or adaptation work originally requested.

Tony Huff stated that after the meeting of the Housing Committee on 1 February 2000, it should be possible to advise applicants on the funds available for adaptations, and that a general letter could be sent to all waiting applicants informing them of the situation. It would be more difficult to translate this general situation into the implications for individual applicants.

Jackie Taylor stated that often the first indication that a work had been approved may be a telephone call from a contractor, wishing to start work immediately. She asked that users and carers be contacted when a piece of work was approved, so that a reasonable amount of time (perhaps two weeks) could be allowed to enable them to prepare mentally and physically for the disruption caused by the work.

Debbie Nicholson informed the Team that a letter was sent to applicants to inform them that a disabled adaptation had been approved. However, it did not state the name of the contractor or the expected date of commencement of the work. Debbie Nicholson would try to arrange for this information to be communicated to applicants.

Malcom Vine stated that relevant Housing officers should be part of the process here, and could serve as a link between Occupational Therapy, contractors and clients.

Keith Veen informed the Team that John Grooms Housing Association overcame this lack of communication by copying orders for adaptations sent to contractors to clients, so that the name of the contractor was made known.

Roger Cooper explained that arrangements were different with privately owned homes. In such cases, the Council provided funds only, and applicants arranged for works to be done. A letter was sent to applicants informing them that funds had been approved. If applicants were to have a substantial piece of work carried out by a contractor unknown to the Council, it was recommended that professional surveying services be sought.

John Abra informed the Team that in the case of Midsummer Housing Association, Housing officers liaised with tenants, and wrote to them giving details of when work could be expected to start.

David Jones stated that the problem was exacerbated when applicants had to wait a long time for work to be carried out – and this in turn was partly a result of funding problems.

5.0 FEEDBACK ON QUESTIONNAIRE TO OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Roger Cooper reported to the Team that a questionnaire had been formulated to send to approximately eight comparator local authorities (including Leicester, Reading, Luton, and a London Borough) to ask them about their arrangements in place for allocating disabled adaptations works and Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). Tom Bates would be approaching authorities for answers in the near

future. It was hoped that it would be possible to present the results of the consultation to the next meeting of the Team.

A list of the questions to be asked, along with explanations in italics of the reasons for asking these and the context, is attached to these Minutes.

David Jones requested that some figures relating to the demographic features of the comparator local authorities be included in the report produced as a result of the consultation.

6.0

ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF FUNDING ADAPTATION WORK

Margaret Weeks and Roger Cooper had produced a collection of information on alternative ways of funding adaptation work. They reported that approaching charities was a worthwhile exercise. Most charities would want to know if the client had a statutory right to adaptation work, and most would accept referrals from the Citizens' Advice Bureau, social workers or health professionals.

Margaret Weeks circulated extracts from a booklet published by the Citizens' Advice Bureau. The Team was informed that the Family Fund had been found to be helpful, and that Occupational Charities, the Occupational Benevolent Fund, and Charity Search had good helplines. There were many service and Ex-Service charities, which should be used more.

Margaret Weeks and Roger Cooper had worked through a hypothetical case study of a working person in a low-income family, seeking a DFG. This was based on the total income of the parents of a severely disabled child who had a £45,000 mortgage and incurred £3,000 per year travel costs to London. **The calculations made (including grant premium, excluding mortgage payments) are attached to these minutes.**

Roger Cooper stated that the notional loan a person in this situation was expected to be able to repay over a period of ten years was £1764.18. He noted that Social Services could be approached for a loan in the case of two refusals being made from the private sector. Dave Ewing informed the Team that this loan was interest free, but still had to be repaid eventually; some people might therefore prefer to approach charitable services for a grant.

Jackie Taylor asked about the arrangements in place for those with deteriorating conditions (such as multiple sclerosis), who would need more equipment or adaptation work as their needs increased. Roger Cooper stated that in the case of the private sector grant scheme, as long as a second application was made within a ten year period, no extra contribution was required from the applicant. So if £1500 was contributed initially, then in the second application there would be no required contribution. Officers therefore always encouraged people to go through the formal application process for each application.

Debbie Nicholson and Dave Ewing would copy the Grant Information Pack to their staff. Margaret Weeks suggested that people looking for funding should be

referred to her at the Citizens' Advice Bureau for this purpose. Staff there would arrange applications and send these to Occupational Therapy to sign. David Jones reiterated that staff should be made aware that this money is available, and that Margaret Weeks should be contacted.

7.0 PROGRESS ON WRITTEN CRITERIA ON ADAPTATION WORK

Delia Fielding reported that a group of Community Occupational Therapists was working on a document formally setting out current practices and arrangements, and that a final document should be ready for the next meeting of the Team.

Debbie Nicholson informed the Team that this work would enable discussions to take place on how to make decisions on adaptation work in the future, in the event of either increased or decreased availability of funds.

David Jones suggested that a sub-group could be formed to complete this project. Debbie Nicholson stated that the list of criteria would be completed and distributed to members of the Team before the next meeting, when volunteers could be chosen to form the sub-group.

8.0 PROGRESS ON WORK ON SUPPLY OF PROPERTY AND INCREASING THE STOCK

Malcom Vine reported that the group addressing this concern had revisited a past project which set out to classify Council properties according to the amount of adaptation work carried out in them (on a scale of a – e), to make better use of properties. This had commenced in 1996. The current project would take this as its point of departure, and would be funded until the end of the financial year. Malcom Vine had requested a volunteer from Occupational Therapy and one from Housing to contribute to this process.

The project, once complete, would be evaluated. The aim would be to produce a comprehensive list, looking at the total housing stock in Milton Keynes, including eventually Housing Association properties and private owner-occupier properties.

9.0 AVAILABILITY OF EQUIPMENT (WHO PROVIDES WHAT)

Debbie Nicholson and Dave Ewing reported that they had been reviewing the provision of equipment, and would be continuing consultation with officer groups, with a view to bringing a full or interim report to the next meeting of the Team.

The possibility of reducing installation times had been considered, but needed further work to address safety considerations. The possibility of merging budgets had also yet to be considered.

Margaret Weeks asked if pressure could be put on Housing Corporations to provide funds for equipment in Housing Association properties. Debbie

Nicholson replied that it was hoped that Housing Associations would attend to this themselves.

John Abra stated that every effort was made not to refer applications to other bodies, to avoid increasing waiting time for equipment wherever possible.

It was agreed that the matter would be raised by David Jones at the RSL Forum meeting that week. Malcom Vine reported that it had been considered at a previous RSL Forum, and agreed to speak to it again.

Roger Cooper reported that Councillor Conchie had written to the Housing Corporation complaining that social landlords were often found to be neglecting their duties. Roger Cooper reported that Housing Associations were often unable to fund adaptations in their own properties.

Malcom Vine asked if the National Federation was taking the matter up with Housing Corporations. John Abra and Keith Veen replied that they were not aware that it was. Keith Veen stated that Housing Associations endeavoured to maintain a consistent approach to the provision of aids and adaptations.

David Jones stated that the other items on the work programme agreed at the last meeting would be considered at future meetings of the Team.

10.0

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Team noted that the next meeting would be held in Saxon Court on Monday 6 March 2000 at 6.30pm in Room 2.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 7.45 PM