Raising the Standard for Homes and Neighbourhoods

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The Housing Corporation thanks all those involved and acknowledges the help provided by the authors of the bGPicture series and the many other people who have carried out projects and given information.
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This paper looks at 15 studies on disability and housing. Learning difficulties and mental health have been excluded, so the paper covers physical and sensory impairment only. Obviously the definitions of various disabilities overlap, for instance with learning difficulties, where a project has covered multiple disability or complex sensory impairments. Issues of disability also overlap with those concerning older people and ill health, as 65% of disabled people are over 65 years of age. Ill health is not, however, synonymous with disability.

Other bIGPicture papers have recently been completed on older people and on health and housing, and the three papers together should enable housing practitioners to understand a broad range of issues and problems arising from age, disability or ill-health which affect quality of lifestyle and independence.
Policy and legislation

To place issues arising from disability and housing in a policy context, we must draw upon many different strands of policy and legislative development. The disability lobby has campaigned energetically against all sorts of discrimination over the last 15 years. Its most notable outcome has been the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. The DDA is relevant to housing providers because it obliges them to ensure non-discriminatory practice and to make adjustments so that disabled people can access their services. In consequence, the Disability Rights Commission has been set up to complement the commissions on race and gender.

Other relevant policy developments relate to the physical design of and adaptations to homes, and to the vast area of support services to disabled people living independently. The extension of Part M of the Building Regulations\(^2\) in October 1999 to include housing and to require homes to be accessible for disabled people was a significant achievement for the lobby that had challenged the continued building of inaccessible new homes.

The legislative framework determining responsibility for the provision of fixed equipment and adaptations in housing is clear but problematic, because it allows local authorities scope for differing interpretation. Interpretation can depend on whether the disabled person is a council tenant, a housing association tenant or an owner-occupier, and whether the adaptations require structural changes to the property. Local authorities are responsible for assisting disabled people under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, which usually means they will help with equipment that can be installed and removed without structural changes. Housing authorities deal with alterations to homes to help disabled people with daily living, by providing Disabled Facilities Grants under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996. Council tenants can receive help with aids free of charge from their council, but for alterations they may apply for Disabled Facilities Grants. The Housing Corporation has no statutory responsibility to fund adaptations for tenants of housing associations, but it has funded one adaptations programme, and some of the studies we reviewed look at what happened to this programme.

A third area of policy development has been social care. The role of housing in underpinning social care was acknowledged in the White Paper Caring for People (1989), which later became the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act. A decade has passed during which people have tried to reconcile the priorities of housing agencies with those of social care agencies and to implement health and community care reforms. The change of government in 1997 prompted a more corporate approach, especially by local authorities. They aimed to integrate the work of different agencies and to target resources more effectively in line with community demands. Policy documents that emphasise this partnership approach include Home Alone by the Audit Commission (1998), Supporting People (1998), Modernising Social Services (1998) and Quality and Choice: A decent home for all (2000).

Disability and housing

There are 8.5 million disabled people in Britain.\(^3\) According to a medical model definition, these are defined as people who have a physical, sensory or mental impairment that seriously affects their day-to-day activities. This can include people with heart disease, epilepsy and even depression. In England the estimated number of disabled people is 6 million, of whom some 4 million have a mobility problem.\(^4\)

\(^2\)The Building Regulations (Part M)

\(^3\)Source: Disability Rights Commission: Fact Sheet, 2000

Good housing is a key to independence for disabled people, older people and those with poor health. Independence here means managing your own life even if you need support networks. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines good housing as economical, secure, warm and not isolated, and defines good housing services as housework, repairs, decorating, gardening, appropriate adaptations and better heating. Both good housing and good housing services are seen as critical in enabling disabled people and older people to live independently and in preventing ill health. Over the last 25 years, several research projects with older people have shown that repairs, household cleaning and gardening cause significant anxiety.\[5\]

The projects covered by this bigpicture paper range from general service to more specialised issues that housing agencies must consider if they are to keep abreast of legislative changes and gain a deeper and better understanding of disabled people's varying requirements and of developments in good practice.

Most notable is the growing acceptance of the analysis of two models of disability, medical and social. There are various ways to define them, but the medical model can be explained as a straightforward description of the person's condition or illness, for example cerebral palsy, while the social model anticipates the barriers and consequent needs that may arise from the medical condition. The social model goes further, to look at how barriers in the environment, or indeed society, constrain the person's ability to live life to the full.

A housing provider that considered only the medical condition of a housing applicant would offer inadequate or inappropriate solutions to meet the applicant's housing need. Applying the social model would lead to an outcome more suited to the applicant's actual housing needs, for example in location, accessibility and adaptations.

In short, the social model of disability looks at how general environmental problems can be remedied and then seeks to organise housing or living arrangements to meet any specific requirements.

The social model of disability has been more widely accepted than the similar social model of ageing. In considering old age, too many housing providers still assume that being frail means accepting restriction and exclusion. The disability lobby has had greater influence on government and is more sophisticated and more advanced than the older people's lobby. It has scored some significant achievements, namely the DDA, Codes of Practice arising from this Act, the establishment of a National Care Standards Commission\[6\] and the Social Care Institute of Excellence.\[7\]

Scope of this paper

The 15 disability and housing projects addressed in this paper covered a wide range of issues but with recurring themes, findings or experiences.

The main topics covered are:

- **discrimination** - using the DDA to guide and amend policies and service delivery;
- **access to housing** - looking at the use of disability housing registers to improve allocations to social housing for disabled people, and also the scope for disabled people to access alternative types of tenure;
- **accessible housing** - looking at housing for people in wheelchairs, and at lifetime homes;
- **adaptations** - including an analysis of the funding problems;
- **housing and care** - where support services are essential for independent living;
- **sensory loss** - and the implications for service delivery;
- **user involvement** - and the problems of correlating aspirations with successful participation.


\[6\] The National Care Standards Commission is a non-departmental executive body that reports direct to the Secretary of State for Health

\[7\] The Social Care Institute of Excellence is an advisory body that reports to a minister in the Department of Health
Most of the 15 projects offered advice on good practice, in line with their remit to promote innovation and good practice. A recurring theme in most was to recommend that housing policy-makers and providers should use the social model of disability as a framework for their policies and service delivery, although they should be pragmatic about what people need in any situation. The concept of ‘universal design’ – providing for everyone’s needs – supports the social model in helping to ensure that the environment and all the functions that take place in it are accessible for all.

Project reports referred repeatedly to the lack of quality information, both numerical data and needs analyses, to underpin policy development. The absence of reliable data made it difficult to offer greater choice and a wider range of housing options to disabled people.

Community care, its legislative framework and the interrelationships between agencies figured largely in many of the reports. The problems of poor joint working came up frequently, but without corresponding solutions because of the complex web of legislation. Relying on individuals with the energy to find their way round institutional obstacles was often the only way to make joint working effective.

The problems of involving users effectively in both housing and support services were highlighted in specific projects describing strategies for participation. The reports revealed particular concern among disabled people with sensory or multiple impairments and among older people, mostly because of the difficulties of communicating. This is clearly a sensitive area and both users and service providers remain dissatisfied with the lack of achievement in this area. The problem is exacerbated because involving people is labour intensive and raises expectations that cannot always be met with the available resources. The key messages appear to be that there must be a range of strategies to match the wide range of needs of disabled people, and that where people are unwilling to participate this should be respected.
MESSAGES

- Disabled people experience significant discrimination and consequent disadvantage in accessing and enjoying appropriate housing.

- Service providers continue to prioritise medical needs.

- Policy-makers and service providers suffer from a lack of information: data collected on disabled people and their needs is both insufficient and incomplete.

- Many service providers equate disabled people with wheelchair users.

- There is significant unmet need for adaptations among disabled and older people.

- Disabled people have limited housing options, because of low incomes and lack of appropriate housing.

- When housing agencies need to work with social care or health agencies, joint working and co-ordination of services is poor.

- Although user involvement is a central principle of housing and social care, service providers have experienced difficulties in getting people to participate effectively.

- There is very little data that could inform policy on appropriate services for ethnic minority disabled people.

Some issues from the practitioners

As part of the study and as a backdrop to the studies reviewed in this BigPicture paper, we held some short telephone discussions with practitioners to explore some of their concerns and their key messages. Their contributions are not specifically attributed but are mentioned in the acknowledgements.
SOCIAL INCLUSION

Specialist housing is not wanted; housing should not be differentiated for disabled and non-disabled people. The concept of ‘universal design’ should apply to housing.

The social inclusion agenda is not about integrating a group of people with special needs; it is about designing for everybody.

Brownfield policy encouraging high density development in urban areas can clash with the drive for better standards of space and accessibility for all.

Despite the high incidence of mobility problems revealed in the Housing Corporation’s own research, the Corporation has not demanded lifetime home standards. The development of lifetime homes usually forms part of the local authority’s strategy or is at the local authority’s request.

Given the large number of sick or disabled people in the housing association sector, housing policy and the Corporation do not adequately address the issues.

Choice

Disabled people’s expectations are rising, more disabled people are being appointed to public office, and their lobby is having greater impact, for example in transport. Extended choice in housing must be on the way.

Bureaucracy severely limits disabled people’s choices; they need a more comprehensive and holistic service.

Supporting People

There are concerns about the introduction of ‘Supporting People’; the range of people covered by it keeps changing.

The Government is committed to improving the quality of care services with better resources. However, care services employ the lowest paid workers and funding is a real concern.

Regulation of domiciliary care is pending but how this will affect independent living is uncertain.

The prospect of charging disabled people for their support is a major concern, in particular the proposal to meet the support costs of severely disabled people who are working and living independently by taking up to 55% of their disposable income. (Recent government guidelines on charging have changed this so that people who are earning will not have income taken into account.)

Diversity

There is growing support for a policy of broader diversity at board and senior management level of the Corporation, which is making considerable organisational effort to bring about change. The Corporation now has its own Disability and Housing Advisory Group, comprising board members and experts in the field. Its role is to advise the Corporation on disability housing and related issues.

Housing and disability needs to sit alongside the black and minority ethnic strategy as part of a broad diversity policy.
• Housing Corporation policy does acknowledge the overlap between age and disability, but its policy on older people is more developed.

• Take up of services is poor among black and minority ethnic disabled people.

• There are different cultural attitudes to disability among black and minority ethnic communities; shame still prevails, though recently there has been evidence of a more accepting attitude.
WHERE NEXT

The IGP programme has supported a broad range of disability and housing projects. With the bIGPicture papers on older people and health and housing, the project reports offer comprehensive coverage from which housing associations and other agencies can draw valuable lessons.

Clearly some excellent work at ground level is taking place, including some imaginative work to improve the quality of information supplied by housing providers and the quality of services for users. However, the key messages from the studies are disappointing, as they seem to point to a gap between what is happening on the ground and successes achieved at a campaigning level or indeed in other services such as transport. It is tempting to suggest that it would be better to translate some of these messages into positive attitudes or outcomes than to venture into new territory.

Nevertheless, another clear message is relevant for housing policy makers and providers alike. The Demos publication An Inclusive Future: Disability, social change and opportunities for greater inclusion by 2010 says that until recently the disabled people’s movement has campaigned on the distinctiveness of disabled people’s needs rather than as part of a broader campaign that recognises the common needs of both non-disabled and disabled people. It argues that long-term changes in technology, the age structure of society and the growing economy create new scope for greater equality for disabled people.

These structural changes offer an opportunity to redesign policies, products and services for the benefit of disabled people and non-disabled people alike. The Corporation expresses its commitment to equal opportunity for both disabled and older people in its new Regulatory Code8. There is further scope for developing good practice in disability and housing and for the Corporation to develop its own forward-looking strategy for disability in a way that reinforces the social model of disability.

8 The Housing Corporation, The Way Forward, our approach to regulation and inspection. 2002
OTHER PRIORITIES

Two further issues could be usefully addressed. Firstly, housing and social and health care agencies have gone a long way to embrace ‘diversity’, especially in tackling racial discrimination. Disabled people and older people have not featured as significantly, although both represent excluded communities, and housing and support services could go a long way towards greater inclusion. Most notably, much of the housing literature and research excludes disabled people of ethnic minorities, despite the high profile of race in the diversity debate.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has supported some recent research looking at young disabled black people’s views and experiences of independence and independent living, and how minority ethnic families make sense of disability and caring. Nevertheless, the Innovation and Good Practice studies supply little material to draw upon, despite the Corporation’s concern that housing associations fail to make services appropriate or accessible.

A second area is around disability and planning issues. Planning does not have a high profile despite affecting both housing agencies and owner-occupiers. The DDA does not cover planning because planning is viewed as a public function and not a service. The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) does have an interest, as the Disability Rights Task Force considered public functions in its representations to Government. The Government responded by agreeing to look at the issue with the DRC, as it is seen as a loophole in the Act. The impact of both the Human Rights and Disability Rights legislation on the planning process should be considered.

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Below is a summary of all the projects reviewed for this bigpicture paper. For ease of reading the projects have been divided into three categories:

- General information
- Specific impairments
- Services

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scope for Fair Housing (1) – A literature review**

**Context**

The difficulties of providing housing and support for younger disabled people include complex funding mechanisms, lack of resources, and confusing legislation that confounds rather than enables joint working. Added to this is a lack of reliable data on the number and needs of disabled people who require accessible housing and on existing suitable housing.

**Description**

This is the first part of a two-stage study that reviews the literature on the provision of housing with support in the community. The aim of the study is to promote good practice by housing associations, local authorities, voluntary organisations and landlords.

**Key messages**

- Strategic planners and policy makers should adopt the social model of disability rather than the medical model, as the latter focuses on the deficits of disabled people and ignores the way their physical and social environment is constructed.

- A needs-led service taking account of users’ views should be central to community care, despite the lack of resources and the cumbersome legislative and policy machinery.

**Findings**

- Flexibility is needed in housing and support to take account of the diversity of disabled people and their wide-ranging needs.

- Personal assistance must be tailored to the individual.

- Physical design should include the removal of barriers and the capacity to introduce additional design features.

- Data collection on the needs and numbers of disabled people should be improved to facilitate better planning.

- Disability is at least as prevalent in the black community as in other sections of the community but little information is collected as evidence.

- There is a low take-up of services by black disabled people.
Comments

• The laws that define the rights of disabled people to housing and support fall within housing, community care and disability legislation. They overlap but sometimes contradict.

• Inter-agency working has proved difficult because agencies are sensitive about their different roles. Problems arise from insufficient resources and a lack of formal mechanisms for joint working, but the root cause may be legislative complexity.

Outputs

This literature review offers a useful discussion of a broad range of disability, housing and related issues. For example it covers the social and medical models of disability; different housing models; the housing/care divide; user involvement; service provision for black disabled people; and twelve principles of good practice in meeting housing and support needs.

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In conjunction with the Housing Corporation and Tai Cymru for Wales
More Scope for Fair Housing (2) – Good Practice Guide to Housing and Support for Disabled People

Context

‘All I want is to be like any other tenant.’ Disabled people want the same as non-disabled people: the opportunity to live independently either alone or with whom they choose, to be able to take part in the community and access transport, jobs, education and leisure activities.

Description

This is the second stage of a three-year project called ‘Scope for Fair Housing’ to encourage good practice in the provision of accessible housing and support for disabled people. This research has sought examples of existing housing and support that represent good practice in so far as they meet the good practice criteria identified in the first-stage report described earlier. The aim of the guide is to demonstrate the range of housing choices available to younger disabled people. The guide will interest housing associations, local authority housing and social services departments, planning and transport agencies and health authorities.

Key messages

• Housing and support cannot be looked at in isolation when evaluating independent living. Success depends on the quality of the wider environment, including infrastructure and the scope to be part of a local community.

• Good practice can be achieved ‘behind the front door’ with changes in procedures and attitudes, but overall provision depends on the wider influences of government policy changes, regulations and resources.

• Disabled people’s needs and aspirations are not static and vary from one individual to another.

Findings

• Disabled people want to see their rights of occupation maximised.
• Disabled people do not want their housing to stand out as different.
• Disabled people see the management of their homes as separate from support and care and not inter-dependent.
• Disabled people have personal preferences for shared housing and self-contained housing.
• The needs of black disabled people must be met at an individual level with user involvement.
• User involvement is seen as crucial to ensure effective and efficient use of resources.

Comments

• Central to this research are the views of disabled people about what they feel works for them. From this it has become clear that there is no one right kind of housing and support.

• Flexibility is needed in meeting the changing needs and aspirations of disabled people.

• More accessible housing is required within an environment that offers transport, jobs, education and leisure.

• Support should be independent from housing provision.
Outputs

The guide offers a framework for good practice, with case studies and policy recommendations for central government and statutory agencies.

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Overcoming disability discrimination – a guide for housing associations –
Neil Crowther – RNIB

Context

Disabled people experience significant discrimination and disadvantage in the housing sector. The DDA 1995 lays a range of obligations on service providers and landlords about non-discriminatory practice and adjustments to make services accessible to disabled people. The DDA, the proposals of the Disability Rights Task Force, European and International Law and commitment among the social housing sector supply a context in which disability discrimination can be tackled.

Description

This is a good practice guide designed to help social landlords to develop a disability equality policy and an action plan to overcome disability discrimination. Before this publication, no specific guidance had been produced for housing associations about their duties under the act and best practice in meeting them.

To complement the guide, the RNIB has produced comprehensive housing and disability discrimination resource pages on its website at www.rnib.org.uk

Key messages

• The DDA is the most significant outcome of a long campaign to convince government that disabled people experience significant and systematic discrimination.

• It is the restrictions that their home environment places on day-to-day activities, not their impairment or condition, which creates housing need for individuals. In practice this need would be met by accessible general needs housing with inclusive housing services and appropriate support in the community.

• Disabled people should not be assumed to have ‘special needs’. Meeting disabled people’s needs may mean different requirements, but this is an issue of accommodating diversity and ensuring equality, not of meeting special needs.

Comments

• Many measures to tackle potential areas of discrimination are quick and easy to introduce, requiring minimal resources beyond a commitment to equality and to understanding diversity. Examples would include disability awareness training; updating equal opportunities policy to accommodate the DDA; reviewing the layout requirements of tenants with sensory impairments; reviewing letting periods to allow more time for disabled applicants; and minimum accessibility standards for new offices.

Outputs

The guide was the first to offer advice and guidance to social housing agencies on the adjustments they needed to make to accommodate the DDA, with advice on how to approach consultation and how to develop an effective action plan.

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(Neil Crowther, author of the report, no longer works for the RNIB.)
Needs First – applying the social model of disability to assessing tenants’ needs for adaptations: Virginia Shaw – Hodis National Disabled Persons Housing Service

Context

Disabled tenants of housing associations can get funding for adaptations both from their landlord and through Disabled Facilities Grants from their local authority. Until recently, the Housing Corporation had funded housing associations for these adaptations. However, due to rising demand and spending in the first half of the nineties, it has controlled expenditure by applying a minimum grant of £500 and requiring those with surpluses exceeding £500,000 in their Rent Surplus Fund to pay for their own tenants’ adaptations. Local authority resources are limited and vary from area to area and this, with the changes in the Corporation’s funding policy, has led to a shortage of funding compared to need. The local authority funding system is expected to change again from May 2002.

Description

This is a guide about prioritising the need for adaptations for disabled tenants of housing associations. It aims to help housing associations develop sensitive and workable priority systems within an overall strategic framework. It uses the social model of disability to inform guidance on policies and practices.

Key messages

• Housing associations have to review their funding of adaptations because the Corporation’s criteria for supporting adaptations have changed to ration spending in the face of high demand.

• Housing is key to the Government’s community care policy, and appropriate adaptations are critical to the success of independent living.

• Demand is increasing, not least because of the ageing population and its close association with disability.

• The Government’s policy and funding response does not match the scale of demand and unmet need. A comprehensive review of funding of adaptations across all tenures in England and Wales is needed.

Findings

• The guide recommends that a distinction be drawn between major and minor adaptations, and that disabled tenants should be able to apply themselves for minor ones.

• Housing associations spending over £100k a year on adaptations should have a separately designated adaptations budget.

• Housing providers should promote their adaptations policies widely to ensure take-up, and should issue clear information on disabled tenants’ rights to adaptations.

• Self-assessment, consultation and information throughout the adaptations process are critical to its success.

• Providers must set realistic and achievable standards and must evaluate the service using a best value approach.
Outputs

The study includes background information on the need to prioritise adaptations, a description of the social and medical models of disability and a useful good practice guide on how to set about developing policies and practices to deliver a fair and equitable adaptations service. Some useful case studies are included.

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Crossing the divide – housing and care: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Context

The key role housing plays in the delivery of community care has long been acknowledged, but progress in integrating housing and social care has been slow.

Description

The study was jointly sponsored by the Housing Corporation and Anchor and provides a useful summary of policy changes over the last six years, including the effect of a change of government in 1997.

The projects identified for the study were chosen to show the interface between housing and personal care.

Key messages

• Efforts to integrate housing with community care services continue to be undermined by problems of joint working between the relevant agencies.

• Achieving sustained and real dialogue with users is difficult, even though user involvement is central to the delivery of community care services.

• More needs to be done to define, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of services.

Findings

• The deep-rooted problems in joint working have existed for a long time. Individuals can play a crucial role in making joint working effective, particularly where no systems are in place.

• Despite the government drive to ‘modernize’, it has proved very difficult to introduce new IT systems to improve the quality of life of older people.

• Despite a user focus in community care policy, the projects demonstrate the difficulties in maintaining purposeful dialogue with users.

• Management and organisational problems are common amongst the projects, for example staff turnover. They tend to rely too much on the individual worker, rather than the role.

• The sustainability of projects often depends on local markets. Because projects often receive short-term funding, it is difficult to apply innovation more widely.

• The projects demonstrated that there is still much to do to define, monitor and evaluate the quality of care and support.

Comments

• It is difficult to draw general conclusions from the projects because of the influence of individuals and of local politics.

Outputs

This study offers thoughtful reflections on a programme of housing and care projects that demonstrate the problems of joint working and sustainability. It includes national, regional and local good practice recommendations for collaboration between housing, social and health care agencies.
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SPECIFIC IMPAIRMENTS

The housing needs of people with a visual impairment – RNIB report to the Housing Corporation

Context

There is little information on the housing needs of blind and partially sighted people. The RNIB needs survey is the only contemporary and comprehensive source of information on incidence and lifestyles. Visual impairment is known to cause disadvantage in the form of mobility problems, isolation, low income and deprivation.

Description

This is the report of a study of the housing needs of people with a visual impairment, carried out by the RNIB and commissioned by the Housing Corporation. It is directed at housing agencies and studies the incidence of visually impaired people in Britain and their housing needs. It looks at policies and procedures to identify and meet these needs.

Key messages

• Planners and providers should take visual impairment into account when forming local housing strategies.

• Housing organisations should differentiate between sensory impairment and physical disability in their equal opportunities policy and practice.

• Direct measures are needed to tackle the barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people due to inadequate information, low awareness among agencies and low priority.

Findings

• Blind and partially sighted people tend to have a lower income than other groups and experience daily living problems.

• Information on the housing needs of blind and partially sighted people is particularly sparse and information gathering is patchy and variable.

• Housing agencies lack the resources to address these problems, good practice is inconsistent and agencies vary in their understanding of design issues.

• Agencies must address specific housing needs arising from visual impairment, as well as ensuring fair access to housing for visually impaired people.

• There is evidence of poor inter-agency collaboration.

Comments

• The guide contains recommendations to the Corporation, local authorities and housing associations on good practice as well as a set of general recommendations on good housing management practice.
Outputs

- As well as good practice recommendations, the guide contains statistics on the incidence by Corporation region of visual impairment.

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Better housing management for blind and partially sighted people – RNIB Housing Service – Fiona Derbyshire BA (Hons) MCIH

Context

Since the RNIB’s first piece of research for the Housing Corporation in 1995, several housing organisations have begun to address the needs of people who are blind and partially sighted.

Description

This guide is for housing staff and policy-makers. It gives practical guidance and information to improve the service offered to people with a serious sight problem, and includes very useful guidance about what constitutes visual impairment and its implications for lifestyle.

Key messages

• The RNIB recommends that training and other professional development for staff in housing organisations should include how to meet the needs of disabled service users and ensure non-discriminatory practice. It also recommends best practice training on issues arising from the DDA 1995 for housing organisations.

• Most visually impaired people are aged 65+. The guide recommends a multi-disciplinary approach to assessment involving health agencies, housing providers and social services departments, to ensure a co-ordinated approach to care and support and allow older people to live independently.

Findings

• Some typical adaptations for blind and partially sighted people fit the criteria for Disabled Facilities Grants but can be excluded by the way local authorities interpret these criteria.

• There is little understanding or knowledge of adaptations that can help blind and partially sighted people.

• Sight loss as a criterion for priority allocation of housing is rarely mentioned in local and health authority strategies. The Housing Act 1996 places duties on housing authorities and in the Code of Guidance to help people with sight impairments and other disabilities.

• Many people with severe sight problems rely on a third party to read information to them, so they lack the same privacy and confidentiality of sighted people.

Comments

• The guide summarises relevant sections in the DDA 1995 and sets out a best practice checklist for housing associations to help staff identify social, organisational and physical barriers to access for disabled people. It also gives examples of associations already adopting good practice.

• The guide includes a useful section on providing accessible information, so that blind and partially sighted people can gain information independently without third-party help.

• There is a section on access to and design of housing, and the guide sets out a list of adaptations that may help with a serious sight problem and the legal framework for financing adaptations.
• The guide includes practical details about letting a property to a visually impaired person, highlighting some features that would avoid repeated offers of unsuitable accommodation.

• There is a useful section on service provision, identifying barriers for visually impaired tenants.

Outputs

The RNIB worked with associations and local authorities to identify examples of good practice and management skills and to learn from the experience of other voluntary organisations providing special housing.

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Involving people with multiple disability including sensory loss in meaningful participation – a report for New Outlook Housing Association by Rebecca Brown

Context

Traditionally disabled people, residents of sheltered schemes and residents of supported housing have been less likely to become involved in how their housing service is delivered. Housing organisations can encourage them to participate by ensuring that they provide for their needs and that existing structures can adapt to those needs. It is important to ensure that less able people are not discriminated against.

Description

This report describes and assesses methods by which residents are encouraged to participate. The report offers guidance to housing associations that are trying to promote participation in supported housing and especially to clients with multiple disabilities. The project was conducted over two years, and made slow progress due to the nature of the client group.

Key messages

- Housing associations should ensure enough funds are available to support participation.
- Specific staff should be appointed to co-ordinate initiatives.
- Staff should be trained to understand how to work collaboratively.
- Strategies should be reviewed to ensure they continue to meet residents’ needs.

Findings

- Some staff resist collaboration and tenant participation.
- It is difficult for staff to establish a clear focus.
- There are problems communicating with residents.
- Residents must be allowed the option not to participate.
- The sheltered housing tenants now have a sustained interest in accessing information and opportunities for decision-making.

Comments

- Participation is an ongoing process and both residents and staff need support and resources to sustain it.
- It is time consuming and labour intensive to offer information in understandable formats and to assist residents, especially those with learning difficulties, in their understanding.
- Communications with residents with sensory loss is very difficult, so that techniques take a long time to perfect, thus increasing the costs and the need for extra resources.
- Advocacy must reflect the views of residents themselves.
- Participation increases residents’ expectations of improved services, and cost constraints make these difficult to realise.
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Positive about Participation: The Involvement of People with HIV and AIDS in their Housing Services – a report to the Housing Corporation by Health and Housing

Context

The increasing emphasis on tenant participation in housing associations is part of a wider movement towards greater user involvement in public services, and this has embraced the housing, health and social care fields. However, specific consideration of tenant participation and user involvement among people with AIDS or HIV has been neglected.

Description

The report aims to help providers of social housing understand the implications of AIDS and HIV. It highlights the way tenant participation can contribute to health gain for people living with the virus.

Key messages

• It is important to tailor participation strategies to the specific needs and issues affecting different tenant groups and populations.

• Successful participation is about relationships between tenants and housing staff at all levels of the association.

• Staff need to be developed and trained to understand and encourage a participative approach.

• Staff need to understand the importance of confidentiality.

• A range of involvement methods is necessary.

Findings

• HIV-positive tenants want to have a say in the way their housing services are delivered, and most of the tenants in the study are not satisfied with the services provided. There is a link between the range of involvement methods and the extent to which tenants feel they have a say in decisions affecting them. These should be well advertised.

• The effort of participating can affect tenants’ health, and a positive commitment from the landlord is needed to make the effort worthwhile. Poor health and fatigue should not be barriers to participation.

• How tenants can get involved needs to be clearly set out. Tenants need to know what can be negotiated, what cannot and what they have authority to change.

• Staff training is crucial, so that staff who have power as gatekeepers can understand how to cooperate with tenants.

Comments

This report is important in contributing to our understanding of how best to involve tenants in decisions about their housing. It translates the rhetoric of participation into tangible gains for tenants.
Outputs

The study includes a very good section on tenant participation, its history and development and useful general ideas on making participation work for all disabled people.

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The report was written by Nicholas Clarke on behalf of Health and Housing in 1997
Further details about the report may be obtained from the Housing Corporation.
Pathways to Accessible Housing – Policy Context and Research Findings, Part 1 The Papworth Trust and Habinteg Housing Association

Context

The Audit Commission has estimated that there are between 640,000 and 750,000 wheelchair users in the United Kingdom, of whom many are existing or potential tenants of local authorities. Employment rates among disabled people are low (40%) and more severe impairment is generally associated with lower income. Many wheelchair users are likely to need assistance with their housing.

Description

Pathways to Accessible Housing is a guide resulting from a research project commissioned by the Papworth Trust and Habinteg Housing Association and carried out by Pathways Research. The Pathways model was developed during 1999/2000 through exploratory research in three case study areas: Southwark, Kingston upon Hull and seven districts in Suffolk.

Part 1 of this guide contains the findings of the exploratory research carried out in developing the Pathways to Accessible Housing Model. It also considers the statistical and policy context, and the uses and benefits, of the Pathways Model.

Key messages

• Housing to full wheelchair standards is still rare. In 1998, 1.6% of self-contained housing association homes were designed to wheelchair standards and 12.4% were described as accessible general needs housing (Housing Corporation).

• Increased demand for accessible housing has been fuelled by demographic changes and rising expectations among younger disabled people.

• All new housing has to comply with Part M of the Building Regulations by meeting certain accessibility standards that enable disabled people to visit new dwellings and to use ground-level facilities.

• Planning Policy Guidance Note number 3: Housing requires planning authorities to work with housing authorities to assess the range of needs for different housing types across all tenures. It expects local authorities to use their powers to create inclusive and mixed communities.

• Local authorities have to comply with Part 3 of the DDA, which requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, such as providing extra help or changing the way they provide their services.

Findings

• Existing information on the supply and ownership of accessible housing is fragmented and incomplete in most local authorities.

• There is no standard definition of accessible housing across the study areas.

• Respondents from ethnic minorities are more likely to live in housing with no adaptations.

• 40% of wheelchair users aged between 18 and 34 live with their parents or relatives.

The Audit Commission 2000
• Wheelchair users aged under 18 are most likely to do so full-time, and this group are most likely to live in housing with no adaptations to their homes.

• Wheelchair-designed properties are often re-let to non-wheelchair users.

• Some 40% of respondents are not satisfied with their current housing, mainly because the design of their home is not suitable.

Comments

• It is important to wider strategic planning, for example, regeneration and health action initiatives, that the need for related support and accessible housing is understood, quantified and taken into account.

• The Pathways method makes explicit the links between housing, social services and health, so as to develop a more systematic joint approach to assessing the needs of people in their areas.

Outputs

Pathways to Accessible Housing Part 2 Planning Model quantifies the supply and demand for wheelchair housing using an assessment model and a software toolkit described below.
Pathways to Accessible Housing - Planning model, Part 2 – guide to assessing the housing and support needs of wheelchair users. The Papworth Trust and Habinteg Housing Association

Description

Part 2 of the Pathways to Accessible Housing Guide contains the model and method for arriving at estimates of current housing and support needs among wheelchair users. The model offers a practical tool in the form of an interactive CD and step-by-step details for improving local knowledge and information on accessible housing. It highlights local gaps in personal care and support services that wheelchair users may require.

This guide will help local authorities, housing associations, health authorities, voluntary agencies and organisations of disabled people to plan the development of appropriate housing and to make best use of the existing stock of existing homes.

Comments

• The method takes the user through four stages in the planning model:
  • Population estimates;
  • Supply and demand;
  • Need for housing, adaptations and support;
  • Estimates of current and unmet need.

• The guide sets out the method to be used for each stage, indicating alternative sources of information where local information is unavailable or unreliable.

• The local needs assessment should take 4-6 months to complete, depending on the size of the local authority, the number of questionnaires returned by wheelchair users and the availability of data from local housing providers.

Outputs

• The prime motive for the planning model is to increase the provision of more accessible housing. The Papworth/Habinteg/Pathways partnership sees it as a critical step in achieving the delivery of more accessible housing as part of the local housing strategy.

• The guide includes a software analysis programme to take users through the survey process and calculate the figures for the model.

• The guide lays the foundation for a database on the supply of accessible housing and trends in need and demand.

• The partnership has established a website to allow local authority users and others implementing a ‘Pathways’ study to share issues, problems and experiences.
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SERVICES

Housing Information Guide on Housing Associations and Disabled People – RADAR in conjunction with the Housing Corporation

Context

The Housing Corporation has supported several projects designed to help people find the housing they want. Housing associations own much of the accessible housing, so are significant providers for disabled people seeking accommodation. It is important for disabled people to gain access to clear and reliable information about their housing options.

Description

A useful guide, aimed at disabled housing applicants, that steers readers through the various housing options available through associations. It describes the development of new housing and the requirement to comply with prescribed standards laid down by the Corporation and known as Scheme Development Standards. It describes accessible housing, i.e. housing developed to lifetime homes and wheelchair standards. It goes on to cover home ownership schemes within the housing association sector, how to apply for rented housing, the opportunities to participate in decision-making as a tenant/shared owner within an association and a comprehensive section on adaptations.

Key messages

• It is important for disabled people to access information on their housing options. The housing association sector owns a significant proportion of the accessible housing available, and associations need to ensure that they publicise what is available and how disabled people can access it.

• The DDA requires landlords to ensure that disabled tenants do not suffer harassment on account of their disability.

Comments

• The guide includes a helpful section on lifetime homes and wheelchair housing, with useful definitions of each.

• The guide offers a particularly useful section on home ownership in the housing association sector, and specifically accessible shared ownership. It also recommends HOMES (Housing Mobility and Exchange Services), which offers a service that matches tenants to particular housing and specifically concentrates on applicants’ access requirements and especially on lifetime homes.

Outputs

• The guide lists housing associations, each with ten or more accessible properties, in ten regions across the country. It also lists useful contact addresses.

• It gives readable guidance on how tenants should set about seeking adaptations for their homes, drawing information mainly from the Good Practice Guide Carrying Out Adaptations issued by the Corporation.

• The Corporation is supporting a second edition of the guide containing updated information.
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A Perfect Match – a good practice guide to disability housing registers – Virginia Shaw

Context

The Audit Commission is concerned about the lack of information both on the needs of individuals and the level and nature of current provision. There is also a mismatch between housing need and the type of accommodation available. This lack of information is a serious problem for planning purposes and hampers the contribution that housing can make to community care. Disability housing registers are fairly new and few local authorities have them.

Description

Using case studies, the guide looks at types of registers, the problems identified and the lessons drawn from these. The guide is aimed at local authorities and housing associations.

Key messages

• District housing registers must operate within the allocations process, not outside it.
• Medical needs must not take priority over social/access needs.

Findings

• It is important to decide whether the register should be property or people-based.
• Registers should be better integrated with existing allocation and IT systems during the development stage.
• Good internal marketing is required to familiarise staff with the use of the register.
• Forms should be simple and quick to complete.

Comments

• Location is both the most important and most difficult aspect of disabled people’s requirements. People will wait for a better offer.

Outputs

The guide advises on setting up a disability register and covers mechanisms for collecting and recording information.

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The Housing Corporation programme for the funding of adaptations, by Nigel Appleton and Philip Leather

Context

Future public funding for adaptation work from all sources will be constrained, despite higher demand from increasing numbers of older people and vociferous younger disabled people, and despite the impact of technology, which can fuel demand by making information readily accessible on the Internet.

Description

This report presents the findings of a review of the Housing Corporation’s programme for funding adaptations to housing association homes to meet the needs of disabled people. It was commissioned to review the need for associations to invest in adaptations, the current approach to the allocation of resources, and quality of service in the delivery of adaptations.

Key messages

• There is no statutory responsibility for the Corporation to fund adaptations, or for associations to provide adaptations for their tenants.

• The demand for adaptations over the next ten years will increase but future public funding from all current sources will be constrained.

• To deliver quality services more widely, there is a clear need to share knowledge and expertise then disseminate good practice.

• There is a need for more appropriate long-term funding of adaptations, with collaboration between the Corporation, the DETR, the NHF and groups representing disabled people.

Findings

• The Corporation has funded an increasing amount of adaptations work since 1990, peaking at £21m in 1995/6.

• To reduce demand from associations, the Corporation introduced a minimum £500 threshold and excluded associations with £500,000 in their Rent Surplus Fund.

• Rapid and unplanned growth has led to poor working procedures and poor assessment of solutions.

• Tenants of small associations or associations with thinly spread stock received poorer quality service.

• Specialist and larger general needs associations have developed expertise.

• Most adaptation work is reactive in response to individual needs.

• Securing other contributions to meeting the cost of adaptations would increase value for money from the Corporation budget.
Comments

• The justification for many adaptations is financial savings and social benefits, but these often accrue to other agencies’ budgets.

• The longevity of an adaptation should be considered; there is a feeling that tenants tend to remain only for a short time following an adaptation (although there is no firm evidence for this).

• Closer integration of funding sources should be considered, possibly even a single adaptations budget.

• Increased use of Disabled Facilities Grant by local authorities has been at the expense of other capital programmes.

• Funding is currently the responsibility of the DETR but would be better placed with the Department of Health so that funding priorities could be taken within the overall context of care in the community and health policies.

Outputs

Useful good practice recommendations for the Corporation and associations.

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John Grooms – A report into the need for shared ownership accommodation for wheelchair users

Context

Significant numbers of disabled people live in unsuitable housing and many want to move to improve their social and physical circumstances. Choice is limited by their low incomes and the shortage of suitable housing.

Description

This is a report on the housing needs and preferences of wheelchair users, exploring the nature and level of demand for shared ownership. Wheelchair users in six local authorities were consulted via questionnaires distributed by agencies working with disabled people. Findings are based on responses from households that include a wheelchair user aged under 60.

Key messages

• There is little suitable accommodation for wheelchair users to buy outright on the open market.

• Disabled people rely on housing associations, local authorities and health authorities to cater for their needs.

Findings

• Respondents identify the need for more space, concerns about security and neighbour nuisance, and the desire to live closer to friends.

• Households have relatively low incomes, with 50% on less than £100 per week and 70% able to claim income support.

• Physical and care needs are the most important reasons given for wishing to move.

• A third of wheelchair users own their own home compared with nearly three quarters of all households in the under-60 age group.

• The weak economic position of those interested in shared ownership means that only just over 5% could afford to become shared owners with a mortgage.

Comments

• The key shortcoming of the research is the partial scope of the records, as statutory registers only record those who self-identify because they need assistance. Those most suited to shared ownership are unlikely to register. Numbers of wheelchair users are difficult to extract, even from comprehensive lists.

• Income support and insurance settlements can contribute to the costs of shared ownership, the former to repay interest on a mortgage and the latter as a lump sum payment in part-purchase of a property.
Outputs

The study offers a useful summary of housing circumstances and preferences from amongst ‘younger’ disabled people (under 60).

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Finally my thanks go to Virginia Shaw, Director of Hodis, the National Disabled Persons Housing Service, for her pragmatic and considered views on housing services available to disabled people and for her interest in this paper.

Elizabeth Parry
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