



Hastings & Rother Disability Forum

**Housing Open Event
20th September 2006**

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Introduction

After a number of members from Hastings and Rother Disability Forum raised issues relating to their housing situation it was decided to hold a special themed meeting to give disabled people an opportunity to question key people about this subject.

A question and answer event was held by Hastings & Rother Disability Forum (HRDF) on 20th September 2006.

Panel members

The panel, who answered the questions was made up of.

Ian Sier - Manager of Age Concern Hastings – who chaired the meeting

Mark Preston – Housing Renewal Manager – Hastings Borough Council

Cllr Terry Fawthrop – Chair of Hastings Borough Council Planning Board

Mike Thompson – Neighbourhood Director – 1066 Housing Association

Questions and Answers

Grants, Adaptations and suitable accommodation

- 1. Various members have been informed that the Disabled Facilities Grant budget has been cut by £150,000. And grants are currently suspended for the next 6 months. Why has the budget been reduced so dramatically and what is the situation for people who have already made an application?**

The budget remains at £700,000, therefore no reduction has been made. Last year there was an overspend of £144,000, which is where the figure £150,000 reduction figure may have come from. Currently there is a waiting list for adaptation and grants approvals are being deferred for the statutory time limit of 6 months, it is hoped that this will help to prevent an over spend for this year.

OT waiting lists used to be up to two years but this is now reduced. 1066 Housing Association also have improved the speed of their improvements process, which in turn has put higher demand on the adaptations budget.

From Theresa Hodge

When people are approved for a grant after a delayed period is their financial situation reviewed?

Answer from Mark Preston

Not normally unless there is a significant change in circumstances when people can be reassessed.

From Ian Sier

Are steps being taken to reassess how the grant is allocated?

Answer from Mark Preston

There is a priority points system and there is a fast track system which stands outside the 'normal' point system. The current financial situation does not meet the demand demand of applications and Hastings Borough Council are endeavouring to find more money from the government and plan to speak to Michael Forster MP for Hastings and Rye.

2. Do disabled people waiting for adaptations sit longer on waiting lists than others on housing related lists?

Answer from Mike Thompson 1066 Housing Association

It depends on the nature of the adaptation. Smaller jobs (under £1000) can happen quite quickly.

Answer from Mark Preston - Hastings Borough Council

In terms of the Council, property is allocated to match need. If an accessible property is needed this would be allocated as soon as a suitable place became available, however, it would depend on the individuals priority against others also waiting for an accessible property. Where this wait may be indeterminate a property may be offered that could be made accessible by adaptations. Each case is considered on the circumstances and priority (priority does not just relate to disability, for instance if an accessible property became available and we had a disabled person, with children, threatened with eviction, then this person would take priority over a single disabled person, not threatened with eviction) on the Common Housing Register.

Fundamentally, there is not a great deal of adapted property out there, so it can mean that a disabled person may wait longer than others for a suitable property to come up.

Choice Based Lettings may help address this, which is being investigated for implementation. A pilot is running in Brighton. A list is compiled of the property available and persons are invited to bid for a property. Property can be matched far more appropriately to individuals needs. This should result in a more equitable system of allocation.

From Leaster Corrol (HRDF member) highlighted a scheme which has been set up in Reading. Landlords who own adapted properties can register with the local authority for people who are interested in private rental.

This was generally thought to be a good idea and it was suggested that 1066 look in to it further.

It was suggested by Mary Monk (HRDF member) that all properties should be check by the fire service. This was considered to be a good idea, however there may be issues relating to data protection. This could be looked into further.

3. Do you know how many disabled people are currently waiting to have adaptations made to their homes and what is the average waiting time for work to be completed?

There are currently 113 cases on our waiting list - either point scored or waiting to be point scored - the point score range is from -5 (already has partial adaptation) to 74. It is not possible to give an average waiting time because it depends on a number of factors - such as the funding available; level of adaptation i.e. stairlift is faster than an extension. At the moment we are currently receiving between 2 and 5 new referrals per week so the point score waiting list is constantly moving. But on average at the moment with the waiting list as it is, it is estimated that clients wait between 1 to 2 years before they become priority to progress their cases - the speed the adaptation proceeds depends on the type of adaptation, if top up funding is necessary etc

4. How many homes are adapted each year and are they target lead – if so who sets the targets and on what basis?

Last year there were 126 adaptations made and in the previous year there were 99. The Local Performance Plan target for the year 06/07 is for 110 adaptations, but it is likely the actual figure will be higher than this. The average Disability Facilities Grant spend £6,800 per client.

1066 are looking at ways of 'bending' mainstream funding for minor adaptations, which would suit sheltered schemes.

5. Is there enough adaptable accommodation to deal with demand? If not how are disabled people's needs being met?

Anecdotally no. A Stock Condition Survey is being conducted next year, which will give an idea of the extent across the town. As a note, 30% of all Disability Facility Grants across East Sussex are carried out in Hastings, 47% when combined with Rother.

1066 are looking at adopting the Life Time Homes Scheme, where 2% of homes built have to be accessible.

There are possibilities of a 'Recycling' scheme which reuses equipment that is no longer required.

Many people want to remain in their own homes and prefer to have their house adapted rather than move to a property that is already adapted.

6. How many homes are already adapted for disabled people and ready for them to move in to?

Planning does not collect such information.

1066 keep records, but were unable to give the exact figures at the is meeting.

7. I'm a disabled person currently living in a home that suits my needs, but I am aware that my condition is likely to deteriorate. Is there anyway of putting adaptations in my home before this happens so I have peace of mind and can be prepared for the future?

An assessment by an OT in respect of a potential Disability Facilities Grant, should take into account the long term needs of the client, therefore preparing for possible deterioration.

8. What happens if I suddenly need to move to more accessible accommodation and what is the criteria? E.G I have a bad accident and can no longer use stairs and live on the 4th floor and there is no lift.

In terms of a Disability Facilities Grant, officers and OT's will assist in finding more suitable accommodation, if the current home is seen as inadaptible. Hastings can help with a re-location grant.

1066 have a priority scheme for such cases and act as quickly as possible.

9. What criteria would I have to meet to be eligible to move into an accessible property?

Property is allocated to match need. If an accessible property is needed this would be allocated as soon as a suitable accessible property became available, however, it would depend on your priority against others also waiting for accessible property. Where this wait may be indeterminate a property may be offered that could be made accessible by adaptations. Each case is considered on the circumstances and priority on the Common Housing Register.

- 10. Levels of Housing Benefit are set nationally around perceived needs of those claiming, but it does not take into account the additional support needs of disabled people. E.G an extra bedroom that is required for a live-in personal assistant. What does Hastings Borough Council advise disabled people do if faced with this situation?**

Housing Benefit levels for the private sector are set by the Rent Officer Service. Where there is a shortfall between entitlement and Housing Benefit, the claimant may apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP). The Council has a limited 'pot' of money which is specifically to help those in most need. All DHP applications are processed taking into account the income & outgoings of the household. The same rules apply whether the applicant has a disability or not.

Access to information

- 11. Does the Housing Advice Office have a loop system fitted – if it does are all staff trained in how to use it?**

There will be a loop system installed in the new Christchurch offices where the Housing Department will be based next year. A portable loop is set to be installed in the current Housing Advice Centre, along with intercom system and new Braille signs.

1066 have loops in all their offices and has a portable loop for meetings.

It was suggested that loops should be tested by hearing impaired people.

- 12. If a disabled person is unable to come into the housing advice office what alternative provisions can be made?**

Both 1066 and Hastings Borough Council can arrange home/other visits at mutually agreeable times.

- 13. Is it possible to receive information about housing benefit and grants in alternative formats? What are the alternative formats available and how long does it take for clients to receive information in the particular format they require?**

Where requested information can be made available in other formats, large print, audio, translation etc. Time frames depend on the format and size of document, it take approximately 3 weeks for audio.

It was suggested that master copies be available for the most 'popular' and static documents, this would help to reduce the waiting time for alternative formats.

Planning and future housing provision

- 14. We have heard that it is a requirement for a percentage of new build housing to be accessible for residents and visitors. Can you confirm how Hastings Borough Council is meeting this legislation and what the percentage is?**

Part M of the Building Regulations requires all new housing to be built to a minimum mobility standard, which enables persons with restricted mobility to visit and use the principal storey. However, it does not necessarily facilitate housing that is fully adapted for occupation by persons with restricted mobility.

Policy CN3 (page 100) of the Hastings Local Plan 2004 states that:-

“In suitable and accessible locations, residential schemes of 50 or more dwellings must include at least 2% of them to be designed for use by persons with restricted mobility, including wheel chair users.”

There is no national legislation requiring a specified percentage of new housing to be fully accessible for residents.

- 15. We've come across a number of planning applications, which have been passed where appropriate disabled access has not been thought through e.g an accessible toilet, which is down some steps. What is the council doing to ensure these oversights do not occur?**

Planning powers cannot be used to require internal access standards within existing buildings. However, planning will seek to negotiate the best practical arrangement where possible, particularly in respect of achieving access to a building. If the applicant will not or cannot do what would be preferred it may not be possible to achieve an improvement. Without specific cases it cannot be assessed whether the matters are “oversights” or not.

It is possible for a property owner to put in an accessible toilet down some steps. It is not something my colleagues would support but we are not necessarily in a position to resist an internal alteration to an existing building.

Private developers are able to do anything that is within planning law. The Planning Board are able to make recommendations but this cannot be enforced if the developer is not breaking the law.

- 16. In the Central St. Leonards Housing Renewal project what consideration is being given to disabled access to houses of multiple occupation when grants are being considered?**

The majority of grants are for properties already in occupation. The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) does go some way to help assist, where there are identifiable hazards, such as slips, trips and falls, ergonomics etc. Ultimately if found

an occupier was found to have trouble within their home due to a disability, we would refer them through the relevant process, which may well be a Disability Facilities Grant.

17. Why are flats of 3 floors being granted planning permission with no lifts, this means that disabled people can not live in these or be visited by disabled friends/relatives?

There are no planning policies that require the provision of internal lift requirements. We seek to negotiate the inclusion but if the developer decides not to make such provision it is not a matter that planning permission can be refused on.

18. Has Hastings Borough Council signed up to the 'Lifetime Homes Standard' and could you explain how the standard will be implemented in the town?

Hastings Borough Council has not signed up to the Lifetime Homes Standard although as part of the Local Development Framework process (the new planning policy for the Borough), it is being actively considered.

1066 has signed up to the standard.

Miscellaneous

19. I live in a very busy road and parking is difficult. How do I get a Blue Badge Parking bay marked outside my house? And would that bay be just for my use?

An application needs to be made to East Sussex County Council for a Blue Badge Parking Bay. They will then assess the needs of the individual and determine if a bay can be marked out. The bay does not belong to any individual – any Blue Badge holder can use it regardless of who applied for it and where it is located.

20. I'm a disabled person living alone and can feel vulnerable in my home sometimes. Are there any schemes or grants available to make my home more secure?

The Secure Accommodation Scheme, offers either discounted or free (depending on circumstances) security measures, across tenure (excludes Registered Social Landlord properties). This relates to various forms of crime, e.g. burglary, anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, etc. The security standard applied has been set by the police. Contact details - <http://www.hastings.gov.uk/sas/default.aspx>, temp number 01424 721992. Please note these are temporary details whilst we await a full re-launch.

Also the Housing Health & Safety Standard can enforce landlords to provide better security.

21. It sometimes seems that disabled people, who are under the age of 60, are being housed in accommodation that is meant for older people. Does the council consider this to be appropriate?

It mainly depends on the requirements of the person and each case will be treated individually. The person to be re-housed will be involved in the process and will be re-housed with their agreement.

Additional questions from the floor.

1. From Chrys Brookes (parent of HRDF member) – 1066 and Social Services are looking to offer supported accommodation for people with learning disabilities. Chrys highlighted the importance of being able to offer a choice of location and that the accommodation should not be clustered together in one area and Social Services should be encouraged to talk to people with Learning Disabilities and find out their needs and ideas.

Mike Thompson from 1066 agreed to take this back to Social Services.

2. It was pointed out that planning applications need to have the surrounding area taken into account as well.

It was pointed out that if an application complies with the law then nothing can be done. If it is a public building it needs to be accessible and comply with the DDA.

Recommendations

1. In general it was felt that the forum should lobby Development Control in terms of getting suitable amendments/inclusions to the Local Development Framework, which is currently being drafted.
2. When the loop system is installed at Portland Place and at Christchurch it should be tested by someone with a hearing impairment. This could be arranged via the Forum or the Hearing Resource Centre. This suggestion could possibly extend to other areas of the Council?
3. It was suggested as a good idea to notify the Fire & Rescue Service when the borough become aware of persons with a disability, so they can inform their risk assessments. Although a good idea, there would be data protection issues, which would need to be addressed.
4. Where we have leaflets/documents that are unlikely to be adapted for a long time, to get them translated onto audio, large print etc and keep as Masters, to speed up the process with Marketing on getting documents in other formats.

Since the meeting the Marketing Manager (Kevin Boorman) has been approached about this idea. Kevin explained that it is easy to get things printed in large print relatively quickly, although audio versions take longer. Large print and audio versions of publications are rarely asked for, and there is quite a lot of work, and resources involved in producing them. At the moment Hastings Borough Council prefer to carry on with the 'on request' approach, which has been adopted.

5. It was suggested that people contact their local councillor if they have specific issues.
6. It was suggested that Hastings Borough Council should be an advocate of good practice and encouraging 'responsible' developers to the town.
7. Accommodation for people with learning disabilities should be offered a choice of location and that the accommodation should not be clustered together in one area.
8. Social Services should be encouraged to talk to people with Learning Disabilities and find out their needs and ideas.