

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 38

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: Mobility scooter storage
Date of Meeting: 27 September 2010
Report of: Acting Director of Housing
Contact Officer: Name: Robert Keelan Tel: 29-3261
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Key Decision: No
Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 There has been a steady increase in the number of mobility scooters kept in common ways of flats. Brighton and Hove city council is working with East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service to keep communal landings as safe as possible.
- 1.2 The council is obliged under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to carry out risk assessments in our common ways. These assessments have highlighted mobility scooters to be a fire hazard. The fire service and the council are working together to ensure that anything that can catch fire or be a trip hazard in a smoke filled environment is removed. This includes mobility scooters. See appendix three.
- 1.3 Officers and tenant representatives have explored a number of storage options for residents to ensure residents have access to mobility aids whilst ensuring that neighbouring residents are safe in a fire.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 (1) To consult and seek comments from members of the Housing Management Consultative Committee on the proposals to:
 - Build external stores where planning considerations allow and where there is known demand.
 - Convert, where appropriate, miscellaneous rooms for scooter storage in consultation with local residents.
- (2) To note that a policy on the use of mobility scooters for residents of Council housing is being developed. A draft policy will be presented to a future meeting of Housing Management Consultative Committee. See 3.10 below.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS.

3.1 The city of Brighton & Hove has a significant ageing population. 8.6% of residents are age 75 or over, with 2.6% age 85 or over.

3.2 In Brighton and Hove council stock, the age of our tenants indicates we are above the city average. The 2006 tenant census advised

18-24	5%
25-34	10%
35-44	16%
45-54	14%
55-64	16%
65-74	16%
75-84	15%
Over 85	5%

3.3 The aging population, increased independence and easy availability of scooter purchase has seen the number of scooters kept on communal landings increase in recent years. Mobility scooters are not age restricted but the above statistics give an indication of a future requirement.

3.4 Mobility scooters are becoming cheaper in real terms and more people are choosing to purchase them as a means to access their local communities. In turn the council has received increasing requests for provision of suitable charging and storage facilities.

3.5 Problems can occur where residents of existing properties become dependent on mobility scooters but have nowhere to store them. Residents may have differing reliance on mobility scooters varying from those who require them as their only means of getting out, and those who may choose to have one, at least initially, more so as a matter of convenience.

3.6 Fires such as the 2009 Lakanal House fire in Camberwell where six residents died have given an increased emphasis on fire safety. There have been further serious fires in the last year in high rise blocks of flats in Southampton where two fire fighters died and most recently in Kingston, London (no fatalities).

3.7 There have been arson attacks on mobility scooters in Rugby this year where two residents died. In this case, scooters parked outside a block of flats but adjacent to an individual flat door were set fire to.

3.8 There are two basic solutions for scooter storage – internal or external.

3.9 Internal storage can be in the form of

- Allocating small miscellaneous cupboards on estates for individual use
- Allocating larger miscellaneous rooms for communal scooter storage
- Sectioning off areas under stairs adding fire resistant doors (making a cupboard out of an empty space)
- Sectioning off areas of wide corridors

The location of any storage also needs to be looked at very carefully to ensure that it does not obstruct fire escape routes or introduce fire hazards. Where internal storage areas are being considered that form part of a potential escape route, it is not appropriate for scooters to be 'tucked away' or the corridor to be wide enough to pass. We need to remove all potential fire, arson or trip hazards that the scooter may cause.

- 3.10 External storage can be in the form of
- Individual scooter stores, purpose built or manufactured
 - Group scooter stores, purpose built or manufactured
- 3.11 Before building any stores for scooter users, scooter users would be visited by their Housing Officer to look at their needs, whether they would be able to or want to use the store and whether there are any internal spaces within the block of flats that could be adapted. Door widening to enable a scooter to be safely kept in a flat would also be considered. Housing Officers can also explore alternative housing options should the mobility of the tenant be such that there is a wish to consider alternative accommodation. As part of this process the Housing Officer would liaise with the Occupational Therapy team.
- 3.12 The council is developing a policy on the use of mobility scooters for residents of council housing. A draft policy will be presented to a future meeting of Housing Management Consultative Committee. The policy would include guidance for Officers on
- Legal requirements of fire safety
 - The role of the housing team and the occupational therapy and adaptations team
 - Internal and external storage options
 - What to discuss with residents on deciding the best storage options
 - How to progress a storage scheme
 - The management of stores and waiting lists
- 3.13 In the meantime, it is recommended that all tenants who are considering purchasing a mobility scooter should consider the issues of charging and storage prior to purchase and where issues may be present should discuss these with their Housing Officer and/or Occupational Therapist. This is to prevent difficulties arising once a purchase has been made.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 A project working group is established with representatives from the Tenant Disability Network and the Sheltered Housing Action Group. These groups nominated two representatives each to this sub-group but they have not been formally elected through area panels.
- 4.2 Other registered social landlords were researched and have policies as follows

Lewes District Council

"In most circumstances users should ensure they have sufficient space inside their home to store a scooter. If you are unable to walk to your flat from the outside an exception may be made but only with the approval of where it will be stored and subject to any health and safety considerations"

Eastbourne Homes

“We will discourage the use of mobility scooters in communal corridors... Any fine on Eastbourne Homes will be recharged to the perpetrator. Failure to comply will be a breach of tenancy and you will be asked to remove the scooter from the scheme permanently.

A scooter can only be stored or charged in the internal communal area if a specifically designed area has been set aside for this purpose. Where designated internal areas have been provided, residents must comply with all Health and Safety regulations”

Worthing Homes

“We are having purpose built buggy stores built. The residents rent them for £5.00 a week, this covers the cost of electricity and some towards the building costs... If a resident does not want to pay for this we insist that if they want a buggy they must house it in their own flats. “

Leeds and Yorkshire Housing Association

“Mobility scooters within schemes or blocks must not be stored in corridors, staircases, or ideally in communal areas, where they may cause an obstruction or block a fire escape route – they should be stored in residents’ flats”

Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies

“Organisations should provide facilities as mobility scooters provide a means of enabling people with mobility problems remaining independent. One option would be to build a “garage” to provide a dedicated storage area with charging facilities. Options would be to only charge those residents who use the storage facilities or to provide them free of charge and effectively pool the cost by charging all residents”

5 CONSIDERATIONS

5.1.1 Electricity

All scooter stores need an electricity supply. Scooters are currently charged either

- a) Off the common ways without financial contribution
- b) From an extension lead from an individual tenant or leaseholder’s property.

To provide a new individual metered supply to a scooter store, EDF energy advise that this would cost would be between £1000.00 and £2500.00 per store.

Stores could however have a supply run off the common ways for a much smaller cost and could pay for electricity used back to the block of flat’s electricity budget.

A typical scooter would use an expected £5.00 per month in electricity charging. More research with scooter users and manufacturers is required before this figure is confirmed.

5.1.2 Planning

Any structures that are built externally need planning permission.

The planning office have advised that any stores should be discreet and in keeping with the building that they would be placed at; a square block of flats should consider square storage units etc.

All sites will require an individual planning application and when granted, will be valid for 5 years. It is thought that if a site needed one external scooter store, that planning should be obtained for more stores to prevent further planning applications expense within the five year period.

5.1.3 Insurance

Mobility scooters under the council's Royal and Sun Alliance policy are covered as an 'add-on' to a standard insurance policy for additional cost and are then covered for loss or damage if stored either individually or communally.

5.1.4 Quantity

In July 2010, the five area housing offices and the sheltered team were asked for their priority sites that require scooter stores. 84 stores were identified. See appendix one

In August 2010, the list was sent to all resident's association for their comments. Note that many of the sites identified are for one or two stores. There are economies of scale for building more than one store at a time, i.e. building them in a row of four (one concrete base / shared walls / doing electricity supply at once etc) and this would seem sensible to meet future demand.

To build in addition to the known demand would future proof schemes enabling provision to be on site before they were needed. If we only built stores in rows of four, the number required would rise to 128 stores.

5.1.5 Cost

In considering external stores, the working group preferred the style of store as per appendix two feeling that maintenance would be minimised with the product being durable and long lasting. The indicative cost of a scooter store similar to appendix two would be £1027 for a single store and £3460 for a row of four stores (equivalent of £865 each). The cost of a concrete base is approximately £65 per square meter. The cost of an electrical extension will depend on the siting of the store in relation to the building and the planning application would be £170.

Summary for a row of 4

• Build	3460.00
• Planning	170.00
• Electrician estimate	250.00
• Concrete base 12m2	780.00
Total	4660.00

5.1.6 Management

The council's car parks and garages team would rent the scooter stores out and manage the rent accounts.

If a row of scooter stores was built and not fully rented by scooter users, the units would be offered as secure storage to other residents pending a scooter user requiring it (bicycles / motorbikes etc). Any waiting lists would be managed by this team. Stores would be rented on a weekly licence agreement in the same way that council garages are.

As everyone who required a store would have self-identified mobility needs, allocations would be made in date order.

6 FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 6.1 The current indicative cost per scooter store is £1165 or £4660 for four. Assuming a build of 128 stores (with future proofing), this would cost a total of £144,000 capital expenditure and £5,500 from revenue. The 2010/11 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme includes £100,000 for scooter storage solutions with a further £100,000 included for 2011/12. The revenue expenditure will need to be met from existing budgets within the HRA. Capital expenditure would need to be spread over the two year period in order to match the capital resources available.
- 6.2 In order to ensure that these stores are cost neutral to the HRA revenue budget, and to ensure that only users of such stores will pay for them, a service charge will need to be set up for users to ensure recovery of capital building costs, revenue maintenance and electricity. Any service pressures arising as a result of storage units being un-let in the short term, will need to be managed within the current budget constraints of the HRA and reported as part of the regular Targeted Budget Management (TBM) reporting process. If large numbers of these units were left empty, the lack of service charge income could lead to service pressures for the HRA.
- 6.3 Using estimated costs in this report, indications are that the service charge will be in the region of £4.60 per week for an external storage unit including electricity. Where internal spaces are used for storage, service charges would vary, but in general are likely to be much lower. Where a storage unit is used without the need for electricity, the service charge is estimated at £3.30. Advice to date states that this service charge will not be eligible for Housing Benefit.

- 6.4 A detailed costing of individual service charges will need to be undertaken once the design and number of stores is finalised, and the average cost of electricity per unit is confirmed. A further report to this Committee will then be necessary to agree the service charges.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks, Principal Accountant
Date: 31st August 2010*

Legal Implications:

- 6.5 The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 imposes obligations on the Council as the responsible person for the common parts of flats to ensure that emergency routes and exits are clear at all times in order to safeguard the safety of residents. It is an offence for any responsible person to fail to comply with that obligation where that failure places one or more persons at risk of death or serious injury in case of fire. The offence may be tried in the Magistrates' Court or the Crown Court. Upon conviction, the Crown Court can impose an unlimited fine or up to 2 years imprisonment, or both. The measures proposed in the report will assist the council in discharging its obligations under the Order. The acquisition of the stores will need to be in accordance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders.

*Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley
Date: 12th August 2010*

Equalities Implications:

- 6.6 The report seeks to gain a balance between the safety of all residents and those who have age or physical mobility restrictions and their wish to keep a scooter outside of their property in the common ways.

Before building any stores for scooter users, scooter users would be visited by their Housing Officer to look at their needs, whether they would be able to use the store and whether there are any internal rooms in the flats that could be adapted. Door widening to enable a scooter to be kept in a flat would also be looked into. Housing Officers can also discuss Housing Options should the mobility of the tenant be such that they need to consider more supported accommodation.

Sustainability Implications:

- 6.7 The choice of materials will be considered prior to building or tendering for any stores. The possibility of solar panels for the stores to charge the scooters will also be explored and relate to the rental charge.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 6.8 There have been attempted thefts of mobility scooters on our estates. The report follows from arson attacks in Rugby this year where mobility scooters were set on fire. See 3.4 above.

The choice of building materials will need to deter crime and stores will need to be secure.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 6.9 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 6.10 None

7. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 7.1 Residents can keep mobility scooters inside their properties where accessible.

- 7.2 Mobility scooters are not an adaptation recommended by the occupational health service who would recommend a powered wheelchair that can more readily fit inside resident's homes and access public transport.

- 7.3 Many residents need mobility aids close by. Providing suitable storage would allow residents to transfer from crutches or a wheelchair leaving this in the store when taking the mobility scooter out (see 6.6 above).

- 7.4 Some blocks of flats on the attached list are small low rise blocks where the scooter user is likely to live on the ground floor. There will therefore be a number of blocks of flats where a row of four stores wouldn't be appropriate and one or two stores would be considered in these locations.

- 7.5 The council has 2 sheltered schemes that have mobility scooters that are accessible by all residents. The working group did not explore this option further based on

- The physical size of the user varying and the size of the scooter this would require
- The scheme not being easily transferrable for general needs accommodation (demand for scooters is less)
- Promoting choice and independence for individuals
- The management of booking systems, insurance and maintenance

- 7.6 This said, there are no plans to discourage the schemes which operate in this manner.

- 7.7 Scooter storage space outside high rise flats is limited and the area available to place stores needs to be considered. Today the numbers are relatively small but they are likely to grow and it could be that in the longer term, these schemes

become economical and appropriate as the number of scooter users increases in our general needs stock.

8. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 To consult and seek comments from members of the Housing Management Consultative Committee on the proposal to build external stores where planning considerations allow and where there is known demand. To convert miscellaneous rooms for scooter storage in consultation with local residents.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

- A) List of priority sites
- B) Preferred scooter storage style
- C) Fire service guidance

Documents In Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None

