

HOUSING COMMITTEE	Agenda Item 17 Brighton & Hove City Council
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Deputation

Main Speaker – Ms M Binder

Deputies

Ms M Binder

Mr B Kent

Ms L Fitzroyle

Mr C Kift

Ms N Newman

Mr J Burnett

We have brought this deputation to ask the Committee to consider the implementation of essential adaptations, such as access ramps and other adaptations necessary to enable individuals within Brighton & Hove to live independent, self-determining lives.

We feel that a more proactive approach once the original application and resultant assessment has taken place would greatly facilitate a far speedier delivery of the appropriate adaptations where needed. This would also require an awareness and differentiation between long term and deteriorating illnesses and disabilities. End-users are not provided with a clear explanation of the process an application for adaptations undergoes and requests for clarification regarding this process are at best met with partial responses. The process does not appear to be aware of the detrimental effect that an elongated process has on the end users.

Our current experience is that there is no on-going communication between the end users and providers of the various adaptations. This can lead to applications getting caught up in the system.

We would ask that the committee, when considering our deputation, bear in mind that delay in the provision of essential adaptations can have a detrimental effect on the general health and wellbeing of disabled individuals as well as impact negatively on their ability to maintain independence. In addition there can be an increased financial burden on candidates for essential adaptations such as access ramps where equipment such as wheelchairs, both manual and power assisted, may require increased maintenance and repair costs when they are required to operate in a non-adapted and therefore more harmful environment.

Legislation and guide lines

The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) itself does not provide a human right to the provision of an adapted home; the provision of any home at all is not within the HRA. The HRA however does entitle individuals to a respect for their home and for respect for their private lives in the enjoyment of it. A social housing provider may in some circumstances become obliged to address difficulties that arise for particular residents which prevent them from enjoying their homes. The HRA is significant in specific in relation to the length of time it may take for the provision of adaptations to a home where these are statutory or regulatory obligations.

There is provision within the Equality Act 2010 that puts the duty to make reasonable adjustments on, amongst others, the local authority; in specific with regards to adaptations where a physical feature puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled, to take such steps as is reasonable to avoid the disadvantage. Physical impairment makes taking part in normal daily activities difficult. This is greatly exacerbated where disabled individuals find themselves living in a disabling environment. This substantial disadvantage is addressed by the provision of adaptations where applicable via the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

The Department for Communities and Local Government published a good practice guide in June 2006 for the delivery of housing adaptations for Disabled People. This guide addresses an acceptable time frame for provision of adaptations dependent on the varying degrees of case priority. With the assumption of a 5 working day week the guide proposes that high priority cases should be completed in 16 weeks (80 working days) with a maximum target time of 52 weeks (260 working days) for the least urgent cases.

Recommendations:

- Allocating a named individual who will be responsible for overseeing an application and maintaining regular contact with the applicant/end-user would greatly reduce these oversights, thereby reducing the backlog of applications in process.
- Bearing in mind the additional pressures and difficulties disabled individuals face in living independently, a more proactive engagement on the part of statutory service providers, would result in a far more effective process; essential steps in the process becoming less likely to stall as a result of having been overlooked.
- Being clear from the outset what process a given application has to undergo, there being a difference between various adaptations dependant on cost, form and location of the given adaptation would also significantly reduce the opportunity for stalling a process.
Something as simple as a cover sheet attached to every application detailing the process, start and finish time, individual/department responsible in a linear progression schedule.
- A built in alert where an application is stalled could easily be incorporated into a database that charts all the current applications being processed by the various departments responsible.