

Brighton and Hove – local authority/ commercial home improvement agency partnership

Good practice themes

1. Discretionary services provided through adopted Regulatory Reform Order arrangements

Context

Brighton and Hove City Council is a unitary authority with a population of 273,400 (2011) and is the most populous seaside resort in England. It has high property values and demand for accommodation is significant. There is an ambitious 'Caring Together' programme underway to merge with Brighton and Hove Clinical Commissioning Group which will undoubtedly re-shape future local health and care services. The local Housing Strategy 2015 listed home adaptations and satisfactory property condition as key contributors in supporting older people to remain independent and healthy.

1. Discretionary services

Currently the local authority has a dedicated integrated housing adaptations service combining the technical team responsible for major home adaptations and a specialist occupational therapy team within the Housing Directorate and which takes referrals from Adult Social Care and Health.

The housing team is itself relatively small in establishment and whilst retaining the responsibility for overseeing disabled facilities grant administration (including approving all grant applications) it contracts out the technical agency functions to a commercial

organisation (Mears Home Improvement Agency). However it does retain the surveying role in respect of adaptations in the council stock.

The team manages referrals in all housing tenures to ensure equity in access to major housing adaptations and the specialist OT support services. The same contractors are used in all housing tenures to facilitate more consistent quality control. In terms of housing association stock most of the providers do contribute towards the cost of adaptation works which is important as approximately 50% of programme activity relates to this tenure.

The HIA services have been contracted for a number of years. However, since June 2017 the traditional HIA service contract has been expanded to promote housing options in the private sector and to coordinate a number of new initiatives supported by the Better Care Fund targeted at reducing accidents in the home, relieving fuel poverty and assisting with hospital discharge. There are a number of key performance indicators in the contract relating to the person centred outcome measures and capturing data in relation to these indicators is the responsibility of the HIA.

Brighton and Hove Council have recently joined DFG Analytics supported by Foundations as members of a national benchmarking group for this service. The service options available locally have in part been shaped by good practice documents and reviewing information from elsewhere. This has helped to determine their applicability to contribute to a series of locally adopted person centred outcome measures:

- I am enabled to remain independent for as long as possible
- I am supported to have social connections and feel happy
- I am enabled to stay well and maintain a good quality of life for as long as possible
- I am able to access a range of community support to help me maintain my resilience and wellbeing
- I have access to appropriate information and support to enable me to manage my long term health condition(s)
- I have access to appropriate advice and support to help me to avoid harm or injury

The increases in the Better Care Fund DFG allocation in recent years have enabled a more comprehensive suite of assistance to be provided which, from late 2017, consist of the following:

- **Relocation Grants** – up to £20k for fees and adaptations
- **Hospital Discharge Grants** – an arrangement with two local hospitals for assistance up to £2k with no means test for older people (over 65) and disabled people to facilitate a safe and prompt discharge to home. Eligible works are not prescriptive but can include urgent repairs, defective heating systems and cleaning/decluttering. Referrals are accepted from health and care professionals or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
- **Removing the Means Test** – for scheme costs up to £5k involving the most common types of adaptation namely stair lifts and level access showers

- Warm Safe Homes Grant – up to £5k to address fuel poverty and include a wide variety of measures
- Handyperson Services – up to £2500 for small repairs, minor adaptations, safety issues including falls prevention measures identified in a Home Safety check
- Fast track adaptations – up to £5k without any means test for straightforward adaptations identified by private sector housing officers or Trusted Assessors rather than requiring a specialist Occupational Therapist assessment
- Dementia Friendly Homes Assistance – up to £2500 without means test for types of work recommended by health and care professionals plus appropriate individuals from the voluntary and community sectors. Examples include coloured floors, clear signage and kitchen safety modifications
- DFG Fees Grant – up to £2k without means testing in cases where fees are incurred in determining the feasibility of a scheme
- Top Up Grant – up to £20k for the cost of necessary works above the mandatory grant limit

This approach is intended to remain in place until 2020 subject to annual review and funding availability.

Details of eligibility, terms and conditions can be found via

www.present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=115735

Involving service users and promoting the policy

There is a commitment to co-produce policy and receive feedback from service users on their personal experience of receiving support and assistance. 'Possibility People' is an independent specialist disability advice service in Brighton and Hove who help co-write guides for disabled people in the private sector and have a representative on the tender evaluation of framework contractors.

They also promote services available in the adopted Regulatory Reform Order. In addition there is a Tenant Disability Network involved in addressing issues facing disabled tenants and residents living in the council stock.

Self-funders

Despite the wide range of assistance available, some of which do not involve means testing, the service recognise that a proportion of disabled people may still choose to self-fund adaptations. Mears HIA can provide an agency service for this group and, through an agreement with the local authority, can access the local framework contractors operating in the private and public sector capital programme. However, whether or not people choose to use the Mears agency local authority are keen that individuals proceed in an informed way so still offer the usual no cost OT assessment people and an information pack covering a wide range of topics.

New build

There is a good working relationship with local planners through which 10% of new build social housing are immediately suitable for the majority of wheelchair users.

Future services

Attention is now being focused on improving the capture of health and wellbeing outcomes arising from interventions, ways of including self-assessment in the process, reviewing how the current £5k non means test for some forms of assistance operates to avoid the “cliff edge” effects just above that threshold and extending accompanied viewings in all housing tenures if the move on option is being actively considered.

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