

Care & Repair Newcastle In-house local authority home improvement agency

Good Practice Themes

- 1. Involving service users and developing accessible information**
- 2. Speedy provision of specialist equipment outside of the grant system**

Context

Newcastle City Council is a unitary authority with a population of 292,000 (2011). Of its 173 super output areas 53 are in the most deprived 10% in England. The local housing stock is older than the national average, the owner occupation rate is lower at only 49.5% but the council stock is relatively high at 30% of households. In 2016 the percentage of residents over 65 was 14%, lower than the national average of 18%.

1. Involvement of service users and accessible information

Care & Repair Newcastle was formally launched in November 2016. Whilst remaining within the city council, they wanted their own brand to differentiate the new service from the former Grants Team and for their services to be attractive and accessible to potential service users.

A review was undertaken of how the previous city council website featured information on disabled adaptations. This involved service users, including members of the local Elders Council. It concluded that information was difficult to locate and understand and was not user friendly.

Advice was provided by one of the city council's specialist Policy and Communication Business Partners and a marketing company which allowed the development of a service specific logo, strapline and literature. In October 2017 it led to the creation of an externally hosted website for the agency with a high degree of autonomy:

www.careandrepairnewcastle.co.uk.

The new Care & Repair Newcastle website has incorporated the feedback from service users and is very simple to navigate, avoids professional terminology whenever possible and describes available services in a straightforward manner. It also has a 'frequently asked questions' section as well as case studies.

The agency is committed to continue to involve service users in its information provision, adding to the website content and ensuring that future changes remain easy to use.

The new service website remains linked to the city council website as a proportion of enquiries will continue to be routed that way, at least initially. There is also a link to the new service from Information Now, a website providing advice and information for older people in Newcastle upon Tyne (www.informationnow.org.uk) and links to the specialist housing, care and related finance service, EAC FirstStop (see below).

User involvement in research

Care & Repair Newcastle also recognise the importance of service user involvement in research about the importance of the home to older people and the effectiveness of home adaptations to support independent living. As an example, the Centre for Ageing Better in 2017 commissioned qualitative research to understand motivations for, and barriers to, acquiring home adaptations and their impact on quality of life. The research was led by a team from Northumbria University, in partnership with Care & Repair Newcastle, North Tyneside Council (NTC), Newcastle University and the Elders Council of Newcastle.

The research has been running in parallel to the development of Care & Repair Newcastle. Some of the issues identified by service users in Newcastle and North Tyneside have directly influenced how Care & Repair Newcastle are developing services and providing necessary support. They are now introducing a housing options service utilising the **EAC FirstStop 'Housing Options for Older People' (HOOP) tool**. Any web-based information will be available through the new Care & Repair Newcastle website.

In respect of research to validate the efficacy of interventions the agency is also currently working with a local university to design a satisfaction survey form which better captures personal health and wellbeing outcomes rather than the customary approach adopted by most providers nationally which focuses on the customer experience of the assessment process and delivery of the modifications in the home.

2. Provision of specialist equipment

Background

In 2015 analysis of cases involving provision of stair lifts indicated that extremely low numbers involved a means tested contribution. However there were also some cases that did not proceed directly due to the means tested contribution so needs were not actually

addressed. In addition recycling of equipment was not undertaken representing a lost opportunity for other service users who could have benefited from that equipment. It was considered that an alternative approach to provision of equipment should be developed that removed the bureaucracy associated with disabled facilities grant administration and which helped meet assessed need in a quick manner.

The selected option

In 2016 an **Equipment Loan Scheme** was developed which provides stair lifts on a free loan basis for the time period that the individual needs it. This form of assistance is available to eligible households in the owner occupied, private rented and housing association sectors. The equipment is serviced and maintained freely as a component of the scheme, it will be removed if no longer required by the original recipient and recycled into the home of another person who would benefit from it. Consequently the scheme operates outside of the conventional DFG arrangement using a very simple process to ensure service users receive the equipment very close in time to when they were first assessed as needing it. This has the added advantage of maintaining independence, reducing risks of falling in the home and removes the anxiety and uncertainty of being placed on a waiting list and then proceeding (slowly) through the main disabled facilities grant administration process.

As the stair lift remains in the ownership of the local authority, recycling at the appropriate time is facilitated and the chances of being able to re-use items is increased as the equipment is regularly serviced and maintained. Through the selected procurement route a single contractor with a track record of working satisfactorily with the council was appointed to provide all elements of the scheme.

The principle of the scheme has now been extended to ceiling track hoists. As the adaptation is no different than what would have been provided through conventional disabled facilities grant administration the Equipment Loan Scheme is funded by the Better Care Fund.

There was a concern that providing a swift, free service where the agency assumes all servicing and maintenance responsibilities would result in a significant (and potentially unsustainable) increase in demand. Since 2016 there has indeed been an increase in referrals to the scheme. However, over the same period the agency service has experienced an increase in demand for all types of adaptation so it is difficult to attribute categorically the popularity of the loan scheme as directly attributable to being free and straight forward. What is clear is that the increase in adaptations funding through the Better Care Fund allocations since 2016 has given the authority more confidence in being able to manage increased demand for stair lifts and hoists.

The equipment loan scheme is very popular with service users, with at least 99% satisfaction level with the product itself, the process for obtaining it and installer. The scheme has been extensively promoted through the Care & Repair Newcastle website. In addition it has been shared as an example of innovative practice with other members of the North East Adaptations Group.



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