

Onward Homes – Housing Association

Good practice themes

- 1. Social housing provider funds home adaptations up to £10,000**
- 2. Social housing provider aims to future proof all of its new supported and sheltered housing schemes through assistive technology**

Background

Onward Homes is a social housing provider in the North West of England.

Onward Homes is the largest registered provider of social housing based solely in the North West of England with 35,000 homes across Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Merseyside and Lancashire. Formerly known as Symphony Housing Group, it rebranded to Onward in May 2017. In April 2018 the five member organisations - Contour Homes, Liverpool Housing Trust, Ribble Valley Homes, Hyndburn Homes and Peak Valley Housing Association – came together under the Onward brand, and now operate as a single organisation under one common board. Onward Homes is, as a not-for-profit organisation, committed to the regeneration and sustainability of the North West region, with a primary focus on making a positive difference in the communities they serve.

The geography includes areas of significant social and economic deprivation and there is a high demand for home adaptations. Rather than direct tenants to the local area's varying disabled facilities grant system, Onward Homes uses its own resources and aims to meet the need for small/ medium adaptation (up to £10,000) whenever possible.

The tenant profile reveals that 29% are aged over 60 either in general need or specialist accommodation. The organisation is proud of its commitment to supporting disabled people to maintain their independence, security and dignity in their homes. Whilst acknowledging that the circumstances of each disabled person is unique they have adopted a policy which, whilst taking account of asset management issues, strives to ensure a consistent way to identify assessed need and respond to that need irrespective of which local authority area the tenant resides in. To support that ambition one management line is responsible for adaptations, Supported Housing, Sheltered Housing and Social Investment.

1. Adaptations policy which includes provision to fund major adaptations up to £10,000

Onward Homes' annual budget for adaptations to its stock is currently £1 million. It believes that this helps demonstrate to each of the 29 local authorities where its stock is based that Onward Homes are not solely reliant on disabled facilities grant to provide home modifications for its tenants and hence wish to operate in a way that encourages effective partnership relationships. For tenants the existence of a dedicated budget managed entirely by the landlord enables a significant proportion of adaptations each year to be provided quickly and effectively without the necessity of going through the full DFG grant administration system.

Onward Homes sets targets for the time taken to provide each category of home adaptation i.e. minor, major and extensions, that also include differentiation based on urgency associated with the case i.e. critical or standard priority.

The full adaptations policy can be viewed via www.onward.co.uk/app/uploads/2018/03/Adaptations-Policy.pdf.

The main provisions can be summarised as:

- **Minor adaptations (up to £1,000)**

Minor adaptations that cost up to £1,000 are funded in full by Onward Homes. Tenants are encouraged to self-assess where possible but staff are available to provide advice and support or refer to adult social care if appropriate. Works are provided by the specialist minor adaptations contractor procured by Onward Homes. This includes supporting tenants needing to be return home from hospital in a safe and rapid manner.

- **Major adaptations (more than £1,000)**

A Social Investment specialist employed within Onward Homes will carry out an initial home visit to assess an individual's home adaptation requirements and the suitability of the existing home, which may also involve a housing options assessment/ conversation e.g. moving to a more suitable home. Onward Homes do employ an independent occupational therapist on a part time basis for a specific range of services but currently only in the Lancashire area. Outside of Lancashire the current arrangements involve a referral from the local authority OT.

Tenants are means tested in each of the twenty nine local authority areas. However, help is available from Onward Homes in cases of hardship by applications being made to charities and health partners and Onward Homes making a maximum contribution of up to £10,000 within a series of match funding agreements with those authorities.

Onward Homes major adaptation contribution cost thresholds and funding options

- Up to £10,000 – adaptation costs are ordinarily met by the Onward Homes adaptation budget using procured contractors
- Above £10,000 – for Onward Homes to either agree to the adaptations and/ or possibly contributing to the adaptation costs, support is required from the Senior Leadership Team who have regard to a list of criteria. The majority of cases will proceed

with the landlord applying for a disabled facilities grant on the tenant's behalf to the local authority for the costs over £10,000. For jointly funded adaptations (involving contributions from Onward Homes and the DFG) the contractor appointed could be by via Onward Homes or the local authority dependent on locally agreed arrangements. A flexible approach is adopted as cases involving joint funding vary from one local authority to another

- Schemes involving extensions – a similar approach to other major adaptations but having particular regard to one of the criteria which specifies that the scheme cost should not exceed 50% of the value of the property. Tenants can access the complaints policy should their case not be supported.

Stair lifts and other specialist equipment will be maintained and serviced by Onward Homes' own contractor once the initial warranty period has expired.

There is an aim to eventually have one contractor providing all major and minor adaptations across all 29 local authority areas, rather than the current situation of different contractors in each sub-region that reflect legacy arrangements in place prior to April 2018.

Customer satisfaction and outcomes

As is common within many adaptation providers satisfaction surveys are conducted for minor and major adaptations. However more unusually some of the questions Onward Homes ask are designed to identify health and wellbeing outcomes rather than merely process outcomes.

This is a conscious approach within their social value agenda to determine what difference the adaptation intervention makes to tenants' ability to maintain their independence in the home.

The method includes a telephone survey, rather than a posted paper form, as this approach has increased response rates and helps ensure a more representative sample upon which conclusions are based.

The data collection and analysis is undertaken by the Performance and Data Team rather than the Adaptations Team so conferring a degree of independence to the process. The key finding was that 96% of respondents stated that they considered their needs had been fully met by the provision of the home adaptation. Detailed analysis revealed that in terms of outcomes arising from major adaptations

- 90% of respondents considered they were better able to manage in their home
- 78% felt they were at less risk of falling
- 78% felt they were more independent

Similarly positive outcomes were reported following provision of minor adaptations.

2. Future proofing of specialist accommodation for older people

As part of an aim to provide housing options for older people that help maintain their independence and wellbeing there has been a policy in place since 2010 to ensure all

new sheltered and supported housing schemes are future proofed with installation of Assistive Technology. The chosen platform has an ability for add on features and capability subsequent to the initial installation.

Effort is also being given to future proofing as much as possible new general needs accommodation within the development strategy for the organisation.

Contact

Nicola Williams, Head of Wellbeing and Social Investment nicola.williams@onward.co.uk

[Read the full report](#)