

Portsmouth – In house home improvement agency

Good Practice themes

- 1. Streamlining process to improve service user experience and improve efficacy and cost effectiveness of intervention**
- 2. Discretionary services within the adopted Regulatory Reform Order**

Context

Portsmouth City Council is a unitary authority adjoining Hampshire (population 207,000) with an exceptionally high housing density. Much of the private sector stock is over 100 years old and can be difficult to adapt.

In respect of the provision of home adaptations, as is commonly the case, the occupational therapy staff are not located in the same service department as the private sector housing team that manages and delivers disabled facilities grant funded home adaptations. This organisational separation has necessitated good communication between the two services, which is assisted by being physically located in the same building.

Whilst the occupational therapy assessment process is the same for people living in all housing tenures, as are the adaptation funding means testing arrangements, the process of arranging adaptation works in the council owned stock is undertaken by colleagues in the public housing team.

1. Speeding up the adaptations process

The city council undertook a systems thinking intervention using the Vanguard method for Adult Social Care which included occupational therapist (OT) interventions between October 2015 and May 2016. The initiative was initially driven by senior managers who were motivated primarily by eliminating waste as part of a response to the austerity programme. However the review was received positively by the Service Manager for Occupational

Therapy as a mandate for speeding up the assessment process for customers and hence improving the likelihood of generating evidence that confirmed the efficacy of a speedy intervention (rather than just an aim of reducing waste).

It was known that 48% of occupational therapist assessment cases were ultimately leading to a home adaptation using a Disabled Facilities Grant and, as the direct provision of home adaptations was such an important outcome in meeting assessed need, that provision was included in the systems thinking approach. The fundamental question underpinning the approach used to inform the review of practice was "what does the customer need and when do they need it?"

Implementation of Process Review (2017)

The headline output was that on average the end to end home adaptation process time has been significantly reduced with major improvements in particular stages of the occupational therapist process. In addition to reducing overall waiting lists the following changes have been successfully delivered:

- **OT assessment to referral for DFG** – down from 31 days to 1 day (but can be same day)
- **First contact with Adult Care to housing team DFG referral** – down from 125 days to 5 days
- **DFG referral to grants team to start of adaptation works** – down from 137 days to 46 days

There is optimism that this last time period can be further reduced by process refinements.

One of the main contributory factors leading to a speedier OT assessment process has been devolving more responsibility to individual OT's in making home adaptation recommendations by removing as much as possible any requirement for authorisation from a senior professional. In addition joint visits with the housing practitioner are now only undertaken in very complex cases.

Client satisfaction survey forms are used by the occupational therapy service to rate on a scale of 1-10 with a written comment as to how the OT Intervention has met their need. A score of less than 9 results in follow up contact being made with the service user. New systems of working have reduced the waiting times for assessments and speeded up the end to end times for DFGs which tended to be the only area where negative comment was made regarding OT intervention. Satisfaction scores are high, usually 9 or 10.

2. Discretionary home modification and related services

A wide range of housing related supporting services have been available for older and disabled people for a number of years in recognition that achieving positive outcomes, especially for older people, is about more than solely administering mandatory DFG. These include:

- **Disabled Facilities Assistance** – a loan of up to £15,000 to for top up over the mandatory grant limit or to meet a means tested contribution for a mandatory disabled facilities grant.

- **Disabled Persons Equipment Replacement Assistance** – a grant of up to £5,000 to replace obsolete or defective equipment
- **Palliative Care Assistance** – the loan and installation of second hand reconditioned stair lifts
- **Home Repair Assistance** – grant of up to £8,000 to remove Category 1 hazards or significant Category 2 hazards. Necessary costs above £8,000 can be provided by a loan or by the householder self-funding.
- **Vulnerable Persons Assistance** – a grant of up to £15,000 for those on income related benefit(s) and meeting one or more criteria relating to age, receipt of disability benefit, or suffering severe mental health that make work impossible to undertake via usual routes. In respect of the last example the agency will undertake the whole process for the applicant, where they may not be in a position to fully understand the process involved with building work. Arrangements are also made to decant individuals from the property to one owned by Portsmouth City Council to minimise the impact on the persons health.
- **Home Improvement Loans for Owner Occupiers** – loans up to £35,000 for a variety of disrepair and sustainability improvements
- **Downsizing Property Assistance** – a loan of up to £3,000 available to help people over 65 move to a smaller home that better meets their changing needs. The loan helps meet at least some of the fees associated with the move.
- **Relocation (to adapted/ adaptable home) Grant** – to support a move from owner occupation to owner occupation or owner occupation to social housing. A move into owner occupation within the city can be supported with funding up to £30,000 to cover professional fees and the cost of adaptations in the new home which has been deemed suitably adaptable by the occupational therapist.

A grant to support a move to a suitable property for owner occupation outside of the city would only meet the cost of professional fees and there is an expectation that the local authority in the new area would provide a DFG. A move into local social housing would also only involve meeting the cost of professional fees, with the local authority undertaking the adaption works, if the person cannot be allocated a home that has already been adapted.

Proposed changes for discretionary assistance

There is an intention in the very short term to introduce

- A revised maximum grant for mandatory works of up to £40,000
- Funding of adaptations for foster families and shared lives
- Removal of means test for specific work types, mainly over-bath showers and stair lifts

Full details of eligibility, terms and conditions for each current form of assistance can be found via www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/the-council/policies-and-strategies/private-sector-housing-financial-assistance-policy

Whilst not directly part of the adopted assistance policy the generation of housing options are viewed as an integral element of meeting assessed need. To support this way of working an Enabling Officer in Housing, plus an occupational therapist, work with housing associations and mainstream builders to provide whenever possible new build accessible accommodation or incorporate features that facilitate retro-fit adaptations in a cost effective way. A local design guide to support this ambition has been in existence for several years.

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