



City of Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 16th August 2023

To: The Mayor and Cabinet

Report Title: Accessible Housing Register – Review of Policy

Relevant Member(s)	Cabinet	Wards Affected	Key Decision?
Councillor Glyn Jones Councillor Sarah Smith		All	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Accessible Housing Register lists properties that may be allocated to meet the needs of people with disabilities or health issues that could not be met by housing that is appropriate for the majority of the population with general needs.
2. This report sets out the significant issues that Doncaster people face within the current policy that governs usage of the Accessible Housing Register. The report sets out proposed changes and explains how these have been consulted upon.

EXEMPT REPORT

3. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. To approve the amended Accessible Housing Register policy attached as Appendix A, noting prior consultation with Doncaster people who could potentially be affected.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

5. The accessible housing needs of Doncaster people will be met more quickly, whether this is via aids and adaptations that support their existing property or, where this is necessary, to a more suitable property. Satisfaction for Doncaster residents will increase. Doncaster residents will benefit from better use of resources, with less time spent on bureaucracy and more on helping people.

BACKGROUND

6. The Council is legally required to have a policy which sets out how it will allocate its limited housing stock to applicants. The Council has an overarching allocations policy covering the bulk of the housing stock and that policy was reviewed and approved in 2022. The Council also has an Accessible Housing Register Policy that governs the assessment and allocation of significantly adapted properties in the context of the mains allocations policy.
7. The current Accessible Housing Register policy has a number of significant flaws that result in long waits and poor satisfaction for many Doncaster people and also inefficiency in the usage of available housing.
 - Too many properties are contained within the Accessible Housing Register, even those with relatively minor degrees of adaptation.
 - This drags too many people into AHR rehousing applications when actually their needs could either be met by adaptations to existing properties or by a move into appropriate general needs housing.
 - This in turn compounds complication and delays for people who undeniably need to move to a much more significantly adapted and accessible property.
 - Within the process itself there is too much bureaucracy both for Doncaster people and professionals to negotiate
 - Delays are problematic for everybody but especially affect situations with a degree of urgency, for example people waiting to leave hospital
 - There is inconsistency between the approach to allocating properties on the Accessible Housing Register and the Allocations Policy for general needs housing.
8. Assessment from Council occupational therapists has been a key part of the above process. Until recently delays in occupational therapy assessments compounded problems with the Accessible Housing Register. However this has now been addressed via a hugely improved way of working within the occupational therapy service. From a peak of 350 people on a waiting list for occupational therapy assessment, the waiting list as at 31st July 2023 is zero. This provides a strong foundation to make further improvements.
9. Proposals to change the Accessible Housing Register policy will have real implications for local people. Therefore consultation is essential to ensure that the Council understands support for proposed changes, reasons for any opposition and any unforeseen consequences. Consultation has been carried out with people who stood to be affected by any change in policy. This is attached as Appendix B.
10. The following proposed amendments were consulted upon:
 - To change the definition of an adapted property to only include significantly adapted and accessible properties on the register that are wheelchair accessible have specialist equipment in place or have been specifically adapted.

- To reduce the number of applicants on the AHR to those with specialist needs for majorly adapted properties, whilst enabling others to bid for properties sooner without the need in most cases for an Occupational Therapy Assessment
- To simplify the assessment process (we will only use an Occupational Therapist where a more in-depth and functional assessment of medical needs is required; we will clarify the supporting information we require from an applicant to assess their needs to speed up the process; we will give people the opportunity to manage their own risks and problem solve sooner, by accessing clinics, community schemes and in the future online self-assessment)
- To restrict the Accessible Housing Register to those who are unable to resolve their circumstances
- To align the number of offers to the Main Housing Allocations Policy (applicants in the Platinum Band which includes those in hospital unable to return home and needing rehousing receive one timely offer. All other applicants receive two offers)
- To make sure people waiting to leave hospital whose current home cannot be adapted to meet their needs (or who are homeless) are afforded the highest rehousing priority
- To make best use of the significantly adapted properties available to relet. This means that we will be flexible on what type of property different households can have to meet their needs.

11. All of the above proposals received significant majority support, within between 71% and 85% being in favour. Some people were neutral about the proposals with only a relatively small minority (between 4% and 7% depending on the question) either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED









12. Not approving these changes will continue the current situation, with relatively long waits, low degrees of satisfaction and inefficient use of available housing.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

13. Approving these changes in policy will enable us to provide adapted housing in a timelier way to people living with disabilities whose wellbeing will be positively impacted through the provision of an adapted dwelling. With an aging population and the need for an increase in adapted homes in the future this policy will remove barriers that are currently in place under the current policy, reducing unnecessary functional assessments, waiting times and will allow us to have better strategic oversight of the complex housing needs of local people.

14. Approving these changes will not impact upon wider factors, for example availability of properties which may vary by location and availability of tradespeople to provide timely adaptations. However it will enable a significant improvement in current issues independent of these factors.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider	Neutral or No implications
 Tackling Climate Change	✓			
Making best use of existing housing stock and proportionate use of adaptations to reduce carbon footprint				
 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work	✓			
Supporting people to have accessible and stable housing that provides the foundation for further achievement				
 Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs				✓
 Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all	✓			
Ensuring access to accessible housing that supports health and wellbeing				
 Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs	✓			
Helping people live in communities where they feel comfortable				
 Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough	✓			
Helping families support each other in accessible accommodation				
 Building transport and digital connections fit for the future				✓
 Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities				✓
Fair & Inclusive	✓			
Ensuring housing does not act as a barrier to somebody with a disability or health condition feeling welcome and able to make a contribution in their community				

Legal Implications [Officer Initials: NC | Date: 19/6/23]

15. Section 166A of the Housing Act 1996 requires that every Local Housing Authority must have an allocations policy for determining priorities between people who qualify for an allocation of housing and the procedure to be followed. Local Authority Housing Allocations Policies have to be legally compliant with Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, and statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
16. The AHR policy governs the assessment and allocation procedures relating to the Council's accessible housing stock in the context of the Council's main allocation policy.
17. In determining priorities, an allocation policy must secure reasonable preference for the following categories of people:
 - Homeless persons or persons threatened with homelessness
 - Persons occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions
 - Persons who need to move on medical or welfare grounds; and
 - Persons who need to move to a particular locality within the local authority's area and a failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others.
18. A Local Housing Authority must not allocate housing accommodation except in accordance with their allocation policy section (166A (14) Housing Act 1996).
19. In compliance with the duty on the Council to act fairly, an extensive public and stakeholder consultation exercise has been undertaken on the proposed changes to the Policy. The responses received as part of the consultation must be consciously taken into account by elected members, before a final decision is made on the proposals.
20. In considering the proposals contained within this report, elected members are also reminded of their obligations under section 149 Equality Act 2010. This section contains the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which obliges public authorities, when exercising their functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct which the Act prohibits;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share relevant protected characteristics and those who do not; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share relevant protected characteristics and those who do not.
21. Protected characteristics are age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy and maternity. Only the first aim of the PSED set out in paragraph 20 above applies to a further protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership.

22. Having due regard to advancing equality involves:
- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
 - Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where they are different to the needs of other people; and
 - Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
23. Elected members must consciously consider and have due regard to the three aims of the general equality duty when dealing with the recommendations contained within this report. A completed due regard statement has been produced at Appendix C to assist elected members in this regard.

Financial Implications [Officer Initials: EP - AWC/DH - SLHD | Date: 23/06/23]

24. There are no direct or immediate financial implications with the approval and implementation of the Accessible Housing Register policy changes.
25. There is a potential impact on resource requirement within St Leger Housing of Doncaster (SLHD) allocations service on the demand for accompanied viewings involving the SLHD Occupational Therapist, which is a standalone post, as currently all AHR viewings are supported by the Accessible Housing Register Co Ordinator who is an Occupational Therapist within City of Doncaster Council.
26. There will also be a need to review resource implications within the Allocations Team when assessment processes are reviewed and agreed in line with policy changes, as there are currently only two posts within this service including the OT who assess medical housing applications and the implications on these changes are dependent on the alternative assessment processes required.
27. Any future change to resources will need to be subject to further approval processes.

Human Resources Implications [Officer Initials: AT | Date: 22/06/23]

28. There are no HR implications.

Technology Implications [Officer Initials: PW | Date: 19/06/23]

29. An in-house SQL database (Rapid) is used to maintain the AHR and support the associated processes. Where any changes to the database are needed in relation to the proposed policy changes, a 'Request Change to System' form will need to be completed via i-Serve.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

30. There is potential for legal challenge against any aspect of the policy by an individual or organisation. In terms of the recommendations made the extent and robustness of the consultation is mitigation but is not a guarantee that a challenge will not be made. As accommodation becomes scarcer, the potential for challenge

increases. Legal services have provided advice and guidance through the review as further mitigation against a successful challenge.

CONSULTATION

31. Consultation has been carried out and is detailed in Appendix B.

APPENDICES

A Doncaster Council Accessible Housing Register Policy

B Consultation Response Report

C Due regard statement

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AHR – Accessible Housing Register

OT – Occupational Therapist

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