



Housing and disabled people

A toolkit for local authorities
in England: Allocations

Purpose

This toolkit has been designed to provide an overview of and assistance in the allocation of housing.

It is principally aimed at leaders and practitioners in housing, social care, housing strategy, access officers and tenant engagement teams.

Overview

Disabled people are much more likely to live in rented social housing. Factors such as lower rent, security of tenure and potential for support all contribute to this.

For disabled people, having a choice about the location of their home can be critical because of the support networks on which they may rely and the general accessibility of the amenities in a particular area. In this context, it is critical that homes which do offer accessible features are made available to people who can benefit most.

Allocation systems can be complicated and information is not always available in accessible formats. The prevalence of online applications can create a barrier for some disabled people who find it challenging to communicate through digital channels. Additionally, many local authorities hold varying levels of information about the accessibility of social housing in their area.

Furthermore, assessment processes between local authorities can vary significantly. An assessment process which prioritises physical capacity over mental health and learning disabilities can fail to adequately consider other critical factors such as proximity to support networks, accessible transport and local facilities.

It is vital that assessors understand how a disabled person's home can impact on their independence and health and that disabled people are experts on their own requirements.



✓ Good practice example

Bristol City Council 'Accessible Homes: helping you move home'

Bristol City Council provide information online on 'schemes and support for vulnerable, older or disabled adults with housing issues'. Its page on 'Disabled adaptations' contains a series of useful signposts and resources, including the leaflet 'Helping you move home'. This resource sets out clearly what the council can help with, how to get further assistance, and where to start with making either an application for housing or finding out about home adaptations.

The **leaflet** has a simple layout and provides a phone number to call to access a full range of alternative formats, 'for example, Braille, audio CD, large print, electronic, BSL DVD or... community languages'.



Types of allocation systems

Direct allocations

Direct allocations enable local authorities and other housing providers to match people to specific properties when they become available. They may maintain a separate list of individuals with particular needs, such as wheelchair-users, to enable them to better allocate suitable housing.

Choice-based lettings

Choice-based lettings (CBL) schemes allow vacant properties to be advertised on a cyclical basis. Once a person has been accepted onto the council's waiting list, they are expected to bid for available properties online or by telephone or text.

Some councils provide a combination of both direct allocations and choice-based lettings within their allocations policy.

Mutual exchange programmes

via a dedicated coordinator

Mutual exchange programmes allow social housing tenants to 'swap' homes in order to find a property that better meets their needs. For disabled tenants, this option can work more effectively if there is a staff member appointed to coordinate exchanges who can support specific consideration of access requirements.

✓ Good practice example

Southampton adapts property to bring family back together

In a case study written up for the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, Southampton City Council were able to reunite a family cost-effectively by identifying and adapting an empty property.

The individual concerned was the father of the family and a wheelchair-user who had been placed in nursing home care because there was no accessible housing option available to him. The nursing home accommodation was costed at approximately £56,000 per year. The housing specialist occupational therapist identified a vacant property which was adapted at a one-off cost of £22,682.

This approach enabled the family to live together and saved the local authority a significant outlay in meeting his access needs.

Accessible housing registers (AHRs)

AHRs record information about the accessibility of housing stock. They allow local authorities to more easily match individuals with properties and can help ensure that property attributes are appropriately described in CBL schemes.

There are two main routes to developing an AHR:

- by undertaking a full stock survey as a one-off project
- by capturing specific property attributes when they become vacant

Brokerage

A third-party brokerage scheme can enable smaller councils or those who don't operate as landlords to match available properties from multiple tenures with the needs of disabled people awaiting housing.

✓ Good practice example

Brokerage scheme

Braintree Council in Essex work with a third-party brokerage scheme to find suitable homes for people on the housing register. It focuses on moving people from expensive residential care to more independent settings.

The brokerage service provides a range of housing-related information and support to the applicant (including social workers, occupational therapists, benefits advisors and housing managers). They also hold and maintain knowledge of available housing along with contextual factors such as housing law and welfare reform. They provide face-to-face support to applicants as well as training for other professionals and tenants.

The brokers look at all available options including the private rented sector in the area. Most service users move to the private rented sector or a supported housing provider other than the local authority.

Home ownership

The Home Ownership for People with Long-term Disabilities (HOLD) scheme is a government-run initiative in England which offers applicants the opportunity to buy any home for sale on a shared ownership basis (part-rent/part-buy). This scheme is only available to people whose needs can't be met through other shared ownership schemes.

Applicants must have a long-term disability and:

- must have household earnings of £80,000 a year or less outside London (£90,000 or less in London), and
- must be a first-time buyer, or
 - > a person who used to own a home but can't afford to buy one now, or
 - > an existing shared owner looking to move.

More information about the HOLD scheme is available [online](#).

To help disabled people apply for housing, information about options should be clearly signposted and easy to navigate, and alternative formats should be offered. The most common alternative formats include:

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- large print information
 - provision of a support worker or advocate
 - British Sign Language video or interpreter
 - textphone
 - screen reader compatible websites, and
 - easy read information.

Such formats are best complemented if staff involved in the allocation and management of housing receive equality training to ensure they understand the additional barriers that disabled people face.

Tools

1. Review the information and support you offer to disabled housing applicants

The table below is designed to help you assess the level of support provided to disabled housing applicants.

Questions to ask	Yes	No
Do you provide information about accessing accessible housing in non-digital formats, such as posters and leaflets?		
Is information about accessible homes displayed prominently on your website?		
Is information on your website written in plain English?		
Is information provided in screen-readable format to download?		
Is information provided in easy read format to download?		
Do you offer to provide information in a range of alternative formats that disabled people may need?		
Do your information materials provide service users with points of contact?		
Do your information materials provide information about third-party organisations that can offer support?		
Are your staff disability aware and trained to understand what disabled people need in respect of making a housing choice?		
Do your information materials signpost other providers and sectors offering accessible homes?		
Have you sought feedback on our information materials from service users?		

2. Improve the information you hold about housing stock in your area

There are several ways that you can identify and signpost properties that are potentially adaptable or adapted.

Option 1: Establish an AHR

- The London Accessible Housing Register (LAHR) provides a framework for collecting information on the accessibility of properties, which can be categorised and used to inform prospective tenants. The LAHR contains a range of resources including a training manual, an online course, and forms. However, the categorisation of properties needs updating to reflect the new accessible housing categories of Part M4 Category 2 and Category 3.
- A large number of properties in your area can be discounted at the outset based on stepped access. You can therefore focus your data gathering on ground floor and other step free/lift access properties.

Further information about the LAHR is available [online](#).

Option 2: Capture information about the accessibility of properties when they become void

- Ask the registered providers in your area to capture basic data at void inspection (see [appendix i](#) – basic property accessibility questionnaire).
- Provide a survey to housing staff to capture basic information about each property (see example at [appendix i](#)). Ensure property services staff are trained to use the survey and understand why the information is useful.
- Use survey information to identify where a further site visit from a specialist, such as a housing occupational therapist or access professional is required.
- Capture information about the accessibility of individual properties in a uniform manner on a central database.

3. Review the effectiveness of Housing Need Assessments

Actions to take:

- Review the format and location of assessment forms to ensure that they are easily accessible to disabled people.
- Ensure that disabled people have access to trained staff who can assist them in completing their housing application forms.
- Incorporate the findings of occupational therapy assessments into housing allocation decisions

- Ensure that outsourced assessments have clearly defined objectives and that they gather essential information.
- Review and revise internal systems as necessary to ensure that housing applications are categorised according to complexity of need.
- Establish a matching system for accessible properties so that it first identifies bidders for homes in a given category.
- Periodically compare the housing waiting times for disabled applicants and non-disabled applicants in your area.

4. Market new wheelchair-accessible homes

Build in marketing and information obligations to planning permissions on accessible and adaptable homes.

The following are sample wordings for stipulations:

1. To advertise the Wheelchair Adaptable Units in an appropriately targeted way for a period of six months preceding First Fix or preceding Practical Completion, in consultation with the S106 Monitoring Officer and the Council's Senior Occupational Therapist in Housing in accordance with paragraph 3 below.
2. To procure that any freehold, leasehold, option, licence or other disposal of a Wheelchair Adaptable Unit identifies it as wheelchair adaptable and include drawings demonstrating how they can be adapted to become fully accessible.
3. To consult the Council's Senior Occupational Therapist in Housing on the content and wording of the advertisements referred to in paragraph 1 of this Schedule and agree in writing the frequency and publications.

Relevant publications include:

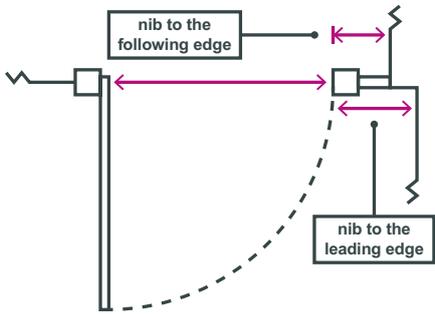
- local newspapers
- [Accessible Property Register](#)
- [The Houseshop](#)
- [First Steps London](#) (if part-rent/part-buy)

Appendix: Basic property accessibility questionnaire

Accessibility assessment – basic level	
Property address:	Name of person undertaking assessment:
Type of dwelling:	Date of assessment:
Flat floor level:	Occupied by a wheelchair user:

Communal areas	Details and dimensions*
Communal approach routes	
Is there step-free* access to the communal front door from the parking?	
Is there step-free* access to the communal front door from the street?	
Is there step-free* access between the communal entrance door and any storage, for example, bin stores or mobility storage?	
How wide is the footpath at its narrowest point?	
Is the approach path level (a gradient not steeper than 1:20)?	
Is the approach path ramped (steeper than 1:20)?	
If there is a ramp:	
How long is the ramp (slope length)?	
What is the gradient? For example, 1:15.*	
How wide is the ramp at its narrowest point?	
Is there a level landing at the top and bottom of the ramp?	
What are the landing dimensions (top landing)?	
What are the landing dimensions (bottom landing)?	

* All dimensions to be given in millimetres and room areas in square metres.

Communal areas	Details and dimensions*
If there are steps:	
How many steps?	
How high are the risers?	
How long are the treads/goings (depth)?	
Communal entrance doors	
What size is the level landing in front of the door (clear of any door swing)?	
How wide is the clear opening width* of the entrance door (or of one door if double doors)?	
How wide is the clear space next to the leading edge (pull side of door)?*	
How wide is the clear space next to the following edge (push side of door)?*	
What is the height change across the door threshold?	
What size is the landing behind the entrance door when closed?	
Communal corridors and doors	
How wide are the corridors to reach the dwelling?	
How wide is the clear opening width* of the corridor doors (or of one door if double doors)?	
How wide is the clear space next to the leading edge (pull side of door)?*	
How wide is the clear space next to the following edge (push side of door)?*	
What is the height change across the door threshold?	
What size is the landing behind the entrance door when closed?	

* All dimensions to be given in millimetres and room areas in square metres.

Communal areas	Details and dimensions*
Communal lifts and stairs	
What is the number of lifts available to reach the dwelling?	
What size is the lift?	
How wide are the lift doors?	
How high are the lift controls internally and on the landings?	
What size is the lift landing on each floor?	
How high are the stair risers?	
How long are the stair treads/goings (depth)?	
Are there handrails to both sides?	
How high are the handrails?	
How far do handrails extend past the top and bottom risers?	
Communal gardens	
How large is the level area (paved)?	
Are the paths level? If not please specify the gradient, for example, 1:15.	
How wide are the paths?	

* All dimensions to be given in millimetres and room areas in square meters.

Individual dwellings	
Approach to the front door	If no, please provide details or size.
Is there step-free* access to the front door from the nearest parking?	
Is there step-free* access to the front door from the street?	
Is there step-free access* to the front door from any storage, for example, bin stores or mobility storage?	
How wide is the footpath at its narrowest point?	
Is the approach path level with a gradient shallower than 1:20?	
If there is a ramp:	
How long is it (slope length)?	
What is the gradient? For example, 1:15.*	
Is there a level landing at the top and bottom?	
What are the landing dimensions (top landing)?	
What are the landing dimensions (bottom landing)?	
What are the landing dimensions (bottom landing)?	
If there are steps:	
How many steps are there?	
How high are the risers?	
How long are the treads/goings (depth)?	
Entrance doors	
What size is the level landing in front of the door (clear of any door swing)?	
How wide is the clear opening width of the entrance door?*	
How wide is the clear space next to the leading edge (pull side of door)?*	
How wide is the clear space next to the following edge (push side of door)?*	
What is the height change across the door threshold?	
What size is the landing behind the entrance door when closed?	

* All dimensions to be given in millimetres and room areas in square meters.

Contacts

This publication and related equality and human rights resources are available from our website: equalityhumanrights.com

Questions, comments or feedback on this toolkit are welcome, and should be addressed to: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com

Alternative formats

For information on accessing one of our publications in an alternative format, please contact: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com

EASS

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Textphone	0808 800 0084
Hours	09:00 to 19:00 (Monday to Friday) 10:00 to 14:00 (Saturday)
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