

Waverley Borough Council

Report to: Landlord Services Advisory Board
Date: 19 October 2023
Ward(s) affected: All wards affected
Report of Director: Community Wellbeing
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Report Status: Open

Housing Service:

Aids and Adaptations Service Review

1. Executive Summary

Following a complaint against the Aids and Adaptations (A&A) Service provided to a tenant and their household, and a subsequent Housing Ombudsman determination dated 29 March 2023, work has commenced to carry out a comprehensive review of the Aids and Adaptations policy, procedure and the service as a whole.

Waverley accepts that:

- There were significant and unreasonable delays in dealing with an application made by one of our residents for adaptations to meet the needs of his disabled son, and
- Our communication with our resident was very poor.

This report and action plan details all the specific actions necessary for driving service improvement. This includes actions that have been completed and actions still to be taken.

2. Recommendation to LSAB

It is recommended that the LSAB:

- reviews, supports and provides comments to Co-Portfolio Holder of Housing and Executive Head of Housing,
- on the actions taken and those actions to be implemented, in order to have fully reviewed the Council's aids and adaptations service.

3. Reason(s) for Recommendation:

3.1 To ensure all stakeholders are satisfied that the Council is providing the best possible aids and adaptations service for tenants and their families.

3.2 To prevent further maladministration or service failures from occurring in the future, as by the Housing Ombudsman.

4. Purpose of Report

4.1 To detail the actions that Waverley Borough Council have taken and are in the process of implementing to review and improve the way in which we manage and deliver the aids and adaptations service to our tenants.

4.2 To reassure the Housing Ombudsman, the Executive, tenants, and all other stakeholders that Waverley acknowledges that failures were made previously with regards to a specific recent complaint and Housing

Ombudsman report and has actively taken actions to review and improve processes and ways of working to prevent these same failures from reoccurring.

5. Strategic Priorities

- 5.1. The report supports the Council's Corporate commitment to promote *"Good quality housing for all income levels and age groups"* and aim to *"be the best council landlord in the South East and to be acknowledged so by our tenants."*

6. Background

6.1 Following the Housing Ombudsman Service findings, a holding response was sent in May 2023 and this report, along with the attached action plan, further details the specific actions the Council has taken so far and those outstanding.

6.2 It has been found that in general, the current Aids and Adaptions (A&A) Policy (introduced in 2021) is fit for purpose and must be adhered to. It must be noted that the particular complaint / Housing Ombudsman case determination, which led to this review, dates back many months prior to the development and implementation of this policy.

6.3 It has been recommended that the current A&A Policy is sent externally for third-party expert legal advice and verification. This has been requested to ensure the policy meets all legal, legislative, and statutory obligations of the Council.

6.4 The A&A Procedure document has been reviewed by the Adaptations team, including tenants feedback, and only minor amendments have been made. These amendments include changes to titles of responsible officers, now to include administrative support from the recently formed 'Housing Operations Support Team (HOST)', changes to wording where 'Case management system' was referenced to 'Tracker'. In addition, a few specified timescales have been revised to be more realistic and achievable, reflecting current resource availability/ capacity.

6.5 The main addition to the procedure document has been the introduction of a formalised and structured communications plan providing regular correspondence with the tenant throughout a case, from start to finish. This will be greatly improved as a direct impact of having the additional support from the HOST.

7. Consultations

7.1 Consultation of the current policy and procedure will take place, over the autumn, with a sample of tenant volunteers as well as carrying out 'service user surveys' to gauge customer experience and satisfaction of the A&A service. In addition, previous complaints will be reviewed to identify trends/ themes and lessons to be learned.

7.2 Consultation in the form of refresher training will also be undertaken to re-roll out the A&A Policy and Procedure to both internal and external stakeholders to ensure there is clarity across all relevant departments, teams and services (including Social Services). This will be undertaken September / October 2023 in preparation for winter months.

8. Key Risks

8.1 If the policy and procedure are not adhered to, then the Council is at risk of non-compliance with regulatory standards and statutory obligations as a social housing landlord.

In addition, risks include:

- Failing tenants most in need of support
- The provision of a poor service
- Damaged reputation and compensation costs

9. Financial Implications

9.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. Any costs as a result of any subsequent changes to policy/procedure will be funded from within existing budgets.

10. Legal Implications

10.1 There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report. Request made to Legal Team to arrange review of Policy.

11. Human Resource Implications

11.1 There are no HR implications from this report.

12. Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 An equality impact assessment on the A&A Policy was completed in 2021. The Aids and Adaptations policy aims to ensure tenants live comfortably, and independently in their homes for as long as possible.

12.2 There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implication in this report.

13. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

13.1 There are no direct negative Climate change / sustainability implication in this report.

14. Summary of Options

14.1 To follow and complete the action plan as detailed

15.2 To do nothing, which would be inappropriate as we need to respond to the Housing Ombudsman.

15. Conclusion

15.1 Waverley accepts that:

- There were significant and unreasonable delays in dealing with an application made by one of our residents for adaptations to meet the needs of his disabled son, and
- Our communication with our resident was very poor.

15.2 By completing all actions on this action plan, Waverley is confident that a good quality aids and adaptations service will be provided, ultimately benefiting tenants and residents.

16. Appendices

16.1 Annexe one - Aids and Adaptations review Action Plan.

Please ensure the following service areas have signed off your report.
Please complete this box, and do not delete.

Service	Sign off date
Finance / S.151 Officer	11/10/23 CK
Legal / Governance	No response
HR	n/a
Equalities	n/a
Lead Councillor	Sept 2023
CMB	19 Sept 2023
Executive Briefing/Liaison	19 Sept 2023
Committee Services	