



LEEDS
CITY COUNCIL

**Final Report of Scrutiny Board
Social Care**

Adaptations

SESSIONAL EVIDENCE

Reports and Publications Submitted

- Adaptations Services for Disabled People
- Written answers to questions posed by the Scrutiny Board
- Notes from site visit to Department of Housing Services Offices at South Point
- Adaptations for Disabled People – performance against targets
- Written submission from the Ridings Housing Association

Witnesses Heard

- Keith Murray – Director of Social Services
- Robin Lawler – Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Health Services (Renewal and Property Services)
- Tony Pugh – Community Services Manager
- Graham Rees – Chief Environmental Health Officer
- Jill Lockwood – Principal Environmental Health Officer
- Liz Ward – Disability Services Manager
- Graham Simpson – Principal Officer (Property Services)
- Mike Evans Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Health Services

Dates of Scrutiny

- 9th July 2002
- 10th September 2002

SITE VISITS

- 7th August 2002

SCRUTINY BOARD (SOCIAL CARE)**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

We completed an inquiry into adaptations in October 2002. The focus of our investigation was how the enquiry to completion time could be reduced for adaptations made to disabled peoples homes.

We received evidence over two sessions from officers within the Housing and Environmental Services and Social Services Departments, a Registered Social Landlord, case histories from Service Users and comments from ward councillors. We sought advice from the relevant Chief Officers prior to agreeing our recommendations. This is attached at Appendix 1. Having considered this, and the other evidence we received, we made the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

That the Executive Board instructs officers to establish a new and much more rigorous and challenging cross tenure target for the completion of major adaptations.

Recommendation 2

That the Executive Board approve the creation of a new post of Adaptations Manager and that consideration could be given to this being a joint appointment between the City Council (Social Services and Housing and Environmental Health Services) and Primary Care.

Recommendation 3

That the Executive Board instructs officers to develop plans for a pilot scheme, within the boundaries of a Primary Care Trust area, to fast track the installation of adaptations across all tenures. The Scrutiny Board is of the view that the pilot should examine the practicalities of introducing an Agency type arrangement where staff work solely on processing and progressing installation Of adaptations.

It is our view that the implementation of these recommendations should be pursued with urgency; ideally being completed before the beginning of the next financial year and running in tandem with the wider restructuring being proposed for the Council.

SCRUTINY BOARD (SOCIAL CARE)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Board (Social Care) received a request for Scrutiny from Councillor Graham Hyde concerning the length of time taken for the installation of adaptations to peoples homes.
- 1.2 Early indications were that 40% of adaptations to private properties achieve a target enquiry to completion time of 14 months and only 11% of local authority properties achieve the target of 9 months. In light of these figures the Board agreed that further scrutiny of the issue was warranted.

2.0 SCOPE OF THE INQUIRY

- 2.1 The purpose of the review was to consider, and where appropriate, make recommendations on, how the enquiry to completion time could be reduced for adaptations made to disabled peoples homes. In particular the inquiry considered;
- The sources from which referrals for adaptations are received and the resulting outcomes for these referrals
 - The process by which a need for adaptations to Council properties, Housing Association properties and private dwellings is assessed and the time taken for completion of this assessment
 - The process for determining eligibility for financial support for adaptations to Council Housing, Housing Association properties and private dwellings and the time taken for completion of this part of the process
 - The role of the Care and Repair Handy person service
 - The range of adaptations provided to homes and the contractual arrangements for installation
 - The Council's record in setting and achieving performance management targets for installing adaptations.
 - Comments from Service Users on the existing process

3.0 EVIDENCE CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD

- 3.1 We would like to record our gratitude to all those who have contributed to the Board's Inquiry into Adaptations. In undertaking this inquiry we received evidence from Social Services, the Department of Housing and Environmental Health Services, a Registered Social Landlord and comments from Elected Members based upon feedback from constituents. The Board would also like to extend its thanks to three users of the Adaptations Service who allowed sight of their case notes. This greatly informed our understanding of the adaptations process.
- 3.2 The Inquiry encompassed two specific evidence gathering sessions and a visit to a Housing and Environmental Health Services office where we were able to discuss the process with staff involved in the administration of adaptation requests.
- 3.3 We have learnt that, at its simplest, the provision of an adaptation has two stages; the **assessment** of need and the **installation** of the necessary adaptation. As needs become more complex - the assessment process and the provision of the adaptation becomes more involved. It is in these areas where delays are at their greatest. The following paragraphs outline the evidence we heard during the course of our Inquiry.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- 3.4 We were informed that assessments, leading to provision of equipment and adaptations are carried out by Occupational Therapists (OT's) and Occupational Therapy Assistants (OTA's) in Social Services. We were also told that staff in the Health Service, including Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, and Community Nurses are able to make recommendations for simple adaptations. We were told that major adaptations to property are provided on recommendation by Social Service Occupational Therapists.
- 3.5 We were also informed that a range of minor adaptations are now provided by self assessment and that this facility is available for council tenants, housing association tenants and owner occupiers. Where a request is received directly from a disabled person this is routed through a call centre operated by the Department of Community Planning and Regeneration. A call centre operator will complete a simple initial contact questionnaire and gather details of the difficulties being experienced. In essence this provides the necessary information for a 'self assessment' to take place. These details are forwarded to the relevant Disability Team Managers. These managers review the information on the self assessment/initial contact questionnaire. Where a simple adaptation will alleviate the difficulties being experienced the necessary work is ordered without an assessment visit having to take place.
- 3.6 Where a case requires an assessment visit the Disability Team Managers allocate a priority to the referral depending on the level of risk indicated. The table below indicates the time between receipt of a referral and starting the assessment for assessments started in the first quarter of 2002/3.

Time between first contact and start of assessment	% of assessments	Cumulative
Less than 7 days	24%	24%
Between 7 days and 3 months	28%	52%
Between 3 and 6 months	24%	76%
More than 6 months	24%	100%

- 3.7 During this waiting period the referral is, in essence, located in a Disability Team Managers in-tray. The 24% of assessments that started within 7 days represent the high priority referrals where people may be in the end stages of an illness, or where the care situation is at imminent risk of breakdown. The table also illustrates that **nearly half** of all requests for **assessment wait over three months** before any form of assessment takes place. During this waiting time we were told that the Disability Team Managers check, on a weekly basis, whether these lower priority assessments have moved up the priority ladder. Once OT's and their assistants have sufficient capacity these cases will become allocated to them. In a quarter of cases, no action takes place for over six months.
- 3.8 The following table provides details of the performance from the first quarter of this year in relation to the time taken by the OT service to complete an assessment once it has commenced. 55% were completed in 7 days, and 80% within 1 month.

Time between start and end of assessment	% of assessments	Cumulative
Less than 7 days	55%	55%
Between 7 days and 1 month	25%	80%

Between 1 month and 2 months	14%	94%
More than 3 months	6%	100%

- 3.9 Examination of the overall performance in assessment from the time of first contact to the completion of the assessment for the first quarter of 2002/3 is shown below. This shows that 44% (43% for full year 2201/2) of the referrals had been dealt with within 3 months, and 69% (70%) within 6 months.

Time between first contact and completion of assessment by OT service	% assessments	cumulative
Less than 1 month	15%	15%
Between 1 month and 3 months	29%	44%
Between 3 months and 6 months	25%	69%
More than 6 months	31%	100%

- 3.10 We were keen to learn what the average maximum waiting time was for a non urgent referral from first contact to completion of the assessment. We were advised that at present this period was 26 weeks – ½ a calendar year.
- 3.11 Where it appears that a major scheme of adaptation will be required we were told that an OT will discuss with the disabled person (involving Housing & Environmental Health Services where necessary) the range of options open to them. This could include moving to a more suitable, or better located property as an alternative to adaptations where the existing property is considered unsuitable and/or adaptations impractical.
- 3.12 We were informed that recommendations for adaptations are made in line with local and legislative guidance. Minor adaptations to private properties are funded and arranged by the Department of Social Services. In addition Housing Associations now fund minor adaptations in their own properties. All other recommendations for adaptations are forwarded from the Social Services Department to the Department of Housing and Environmental Health Services. Here an assessment of eligibility for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is made (Private properties and Housing Association properties) or alterations to the property funded from the Housing Capital Programme (Council properties) drawn up.

Staffing

- 3.13 In total the Occupational Therapy Service received 11,060 referrals for assessment during 2001/2. It was emphasised to us that OT's work does not solely relate to assessment of need for adaptations. OT's work is more complex and in one visit a range of solutions to aid daily living will be considered. These might involve training for carers in lifting or handling or recommending items of equipment.
- 3.14 Clearly a key element in considering how to reduce the time taken in the assessment process are the resources available to actually undertake assessments. We sought details of the number of staff that undertake this work and were advised that 25 qualified Occupational Therapists, and 18 Occupational Therapy Assistants are employed by Social Services. The cost of the these staff we learnt is £721,000 per annum.

- 3.15 The Director of Social Services told us that an additional ten Occupational Therapists would be required to drastically improve the current delays. He also advised us that there is a current shortage of qualified Occupational Therapists nationally. In Leeds this shortage is being addressed by appointing staff as Occupational Therapy Assistants. These staff undertake less technical or complex cases.

Volume Of Service

- 3.16 In 2001/2 843 major adaptations were completed to properties, across all tenures. In 2001/2 2038 minor adaptations, plus 70 ceiling hoists were provided by Social Services to people in private and Housing Association properties. Additionally 4,600 minor adaptations were carried out by Housing and Environmental Health Services for their tenants.

FINANCING AND PROGRESSING ADAPTATIONS

- 3.17 Much of the information presented to us was based on the differing processes that are followed depending on the tenure of the disabled person that has made an approach for the Council's help. We found this a difficult concept to accept. Our view from the outset was to look at the experience from a disabled persons point of view. We make further comment about this in the conclusions and recommendations that follow in section four.
- 3.18 It seems odd to us that adaptations are managed not according to an individuals need but by whose name is on the title deeds. Unfortunately the information we have been presented with has been based on the ownership of the property and we have had to report similarly.

Council Tenants

- 3.19 Tenants in Local Authority housing do not make any contribution to the cost of adaptations which are recommended as being "necessary and appropriate" and "reasonable and practicable" to meet their needs.
- 3.20 Once the assessment (whether a self assessment or one undertaken by an Occupational Therapist) is completed details of the adaptations required are passed across departments to Housing & Environmental Health Services to authorise the work. Housing & Environmental Health Services has a total of 18 staff dealing with processing work once it has been ordered.
- 3.21 For major adaptations completed to Council Properties a performance target for completion of 75% of requests within 274 days (9 months) from initial enquiry has been set by the Council. Performance in the first quarter of 2002/3 was as follows;

	Calendar days from 1st contact to completion	Number	% of completions	Cumulative
Within Target ↓	183 days or less (6 months)	1	1.2%	1.2%
	184 – 274 days (6 to 9 months)	8	9.5%	10.7%
Outside Target ↓	275 – 365 days (9 to 12 months)	15	17.9%	28.6%
	366 – 548 days (12 to 18 months)	25	29.8%	58.4%
	More than 548 days (18 months)	35	41.6%	100%

3.22 Performance results for 1st quarter 2002/03 show the target of nine months is only being achieved in 10.7% of cases. We do not know how far beyond 18 months the delays can stretch.

Minor adaptations in non Council Properties

3.23 We were informed that minor adaptations for Housing Association tenants are funded by each Association, and the Department of Social Service funds minor adaptations under £500 in owner occupied and private rented accommodation. These may include, for example, fixed ceiling hoist systems, which are not eligible for Disabled Facilities Grants. Currently these adaptations are provided through a contract tendered by the Department of Housing and Environmental Health Services.

Major Adaptations in non Council Properties

3.24 Major adaptations to owner occupied and privately rented properties are generally funded via Disabled Facilities Grants. The Housing Grants Construction & Regeneration Act 1996 requires Local Authorities to undertake a “Test of Resources” (means test) to determine the disabled persons financial contribution towards an adaptation. The disabled person must provide the Authority with details in respect of benefits, income and savings: To reiterate there are no means tests for local authority tenants.

3.25 The Table below shows the time taken to undertake means testing in respect of a sample of 50 Disabled Facilities Grants.

	No of cases (initial means test)	No of cases (final verification)
7 days or less	3(6%)	19(38%)
8 to 14 days	9(18%)	24(48%)
15 to 28 days	24(48%)	3(6%)
1 to 2 months	12(24%)	4(8%)
2 months +	2(4%)	0

- 3.26 We were advised that the means test is undertaken twice, firstly to provide the applicant with an idea of the likely contributions they may have to make and then *again* once quotes for work have been obtained and the *actual application for grant aid is submitted*.
- 3.27 Home visits are undertaken by Housing Renewal and Environmental Health staff to assist applicants in providing the required information. Six full time equivalent officers administer the Disabled Facilities Grant.
- 3.28 We were told that links have been established with the Benefits Agency to enable details to be checked quickly. However, details are often required from employers which can result in delays in the necessary information being provided. Self employed applicants need to obtain details via their accountant which often leads to delays.
- 3.29 Only 14% of Disabled Facilities Grant applicants were assessed as having a contribution to make towards their adaptations in 2001/02. The level of contribution is shown in the table below.

<u>Amount of contribution</u>	<u>Percentage of applicants</u>
Less than £500	49%
£500 to £1000	23%
£1000 to £5000	23%
£5000 to £10,000	0
£10,000 +	5%

- 3.30 We were told that families are able to apply to the Department of Social Service for assistance with their assessed contribution, or with eligible costs above the grant maximum of £25,000. In effect a 'top up'. The Department is able to consider additional expenditure not included in the Test of Resources carried out by the Department of Housing Services and Environmental Health, (for example the full cost of mortgage repayments), and re considers the amount the family are able to contribute to the works.
- 3.31 The Council have a statutory responsibility to consider providing this assistance. We were told that assessment for assistance from Social Services is **in addition** to that for the Disabled Facilities Grant. The Social Services Department have a budget of approximately £400,000 for supporting adaptations including minor adaptations to private properties, equipment such as hoists which are not covered by DFG's and assistance to applicants with their assessed contribution. In 2001/2, £37,000 was (allocated) used for 'top up'.
- 3.32 We were told that prior to April 2001 major adaptations to Housing Association properties were generally funded by individual Registered Social Landlords (RSL's). Agreement has now been reached to process Disabled Facilities Grants for these adaptations on a shared funding basis. 60% of the cost of the adaptations is now grant aided, with a 40% contribution being provided by the RSL. 14 Housing Associations with properties in Leeds are currently participating in this arrangement. This has resulted in 26 adaptations to Housing Association properties being undertaken with Disabled Facilities Grant aid during 2001/02 resulting in grant expenditure to a value of £37,724.

3.33 248 adaptations were undertaken to owner occupied and privately rented properties during 2001/02 resulting in grant expenditure of £1.22m. We were informed that the allocation for Disabled Facilities Grants for 2002/03 is £1.3m which will meet the current demand for adaptations. Additional resources would be sought to meet any increase in demand.

Getting Work Done

3.34 We were told that during the period in between the initial assessment of resources and the final application for Disabled Facilities Grant owner occupiers and private tenants are required to seek estimates from a number of contractors to undertake the major adaptations to their home. In addition in certain complex cases applicants will need to commission architects to prepare plans and make the necessary applications to the local planning authority. We were told that this area was often a factor in the overall delays. We were advised that applicants are informed that Care and Repair are able to assist in these areas.

3.35 A performance target for completion of 75% of major adaptations within 487 days (14 months) has been set by the Council. This means that an applicant starting the process on October 1st 2002 has a 3 in 4 chance of seeing the job done by December 2003.

	Calendar days from 1st contact to completion	Number	% of completions	Cumulative
Within Target ↓	183 days or less (6 months)	2	3.2%	3.2%
	184 – 274 days (6 to 9 months)	3	5%	8.2%
	275 – 365 days (9 to 12 months)	10	16.4%	24.6%
	366 – 426 days (12 to 14 months)	10	16.4%	41%
Outside Target ↓	427 – 548 days (14 to 18 months)	14	23%	64%
	More than 548 days (18 months)	22	36%	100%

3.36 The table above illustrates the performance in delivering adaptations of the 1st quarter of 2002/03. The target was only achieved in 41% of cases. In practice the same hypothetical October 1st applicant has a less than 2 in 3 chance of the job being done by April 1st 2004.

Customer Dissatisfaction

- 3.37 We were told that data is gathered in respect of satisfaction levels with the service the Council provides for both local authority major adaptations schemes (LADs) and schemes for private owners (DFG's). Customer perceptions are tested on issues such as the ease of accessing the service, speed with which the service was provided, the standard of work completed by the contractor and if the adaptations enabled the user to lead an easier life.
- 3.38 Whilst only covering a relatively small number of Disabled Facilities Grant applicants the data concerning customer satisfaction for private owners is particularly disappointing. Four out of 5 clients say the process takes too long.

	LADs	DFG's
Customers who felt there were unreasonable delays		
a. When making the initial enquiry.	44%	60%
b. Before being visited by Social Services.	35%	60%
c. Before the property was inspected by a surveyor.	43%	80%
d. Before contractors started work.	51%	80%
That the time taken for the whole process was too long	49%	80%

FUTURE PLANS

- 3.39 We heard from the Disability Services Manager that the NHS Plan has set out to modernise community equipment services. Guidance on Integrating Community Equipment Services was issued in March 2001 and states that health authorities, primary care trusts, NHS trusts and councils should work together in providing an integrated equipment and **minor adaptations** service by April 2004.
- 3.40 This development clearly impacted on our inquiry and we were told that one option being considered is for minor adaptations to operate within the same unit as equipment. These services would be based around the 5 PCT areas, possibly with a Care & Repair type service in each of the five areas and provide minor adaptations across all tenures. In this scenario the Local Authority would have the lead responsibility, and host the pooled budget.
- 3.41 In addition we were told that the Departments of Housing and Environmental Health Services and Social Services have been evaluating the current working arrangements for the provision of adaptations to examine, in detail, the process of providing major adaptations **in local authority property** (only) and to identify system improvements.
- 3.42 Officers informed us that work has already been undertaken to improve service delivery and that the following changes have been implemented;

Already Done

- Self assessment for very small adaptations e.g. handrails
- Extra contractors recruited to reduce delays in commencement of works
- Lifts separated from the main contract and procured directly from lift manufacturers
- Standardised adaptations on some types of work e.g. level access showers

3.43 We were told that in addition other changes are in the process of being implemented. These are listed below.

Ongoing

- Increase awareness of partners e.g. health, Care & Repair to discuss pressures in respect of the increasing demand for adaptations
- Joint training for Social Services and Housing & Environmental Health Staff delivering adaptations
- A - Z of contacts to improve communication between staff dealing with adaptations
- Disability co-ordination group – bi-monthly meeting with all partners delivering adaptations
- Review of number of contractors, workload and quality of work
- Review sessions following difficult/unusual cases
- Develop flexible policies for difficult/unusual cases

3.44 We were also told about future proposals that have recently been approved by Social Services and Housing & Environmental Health Senior Management Teams

SHORT TERM

- Use of a dedicated staff team in one location (This will include an OT seconded from Social Service to support the delivery of the adaptation following completion of assessment, Adaptations Officers and Admin Officers)
- Customer information pack / describing the process, service standards/photos of “real life” improvements
- Central database across the authority and possibly beyond with unique common number for disabled applicant, to enable improved tracking and information to be provided regarding progress of adaptations

MEDIUM TERM

- Improve access to other housing options e.g. alternative accommodation
- Improved customer access to call centres [dedicated lines]

MEDIUM - LONG TERM

- Adaptations group across all tenures in one location
- Computer aided design [cad] [to show customers how adaptation will look] on laptops in their own homes
- Examine other methods of procurement, possibly partnering with contractors.

Comment from Ridings Housing Association

- 3.45 We sought comment from a number of Registered Social Landlords in the City and received written comment from the Ridings Housing Association. The Association commented that the Disabled Facilities Grant pack is designed for individual households where the owner of the property approached at least two builders to provide a competitive quote. The Association told us that for them this is excessive, requiring an officer to arrange a single tender procedure for every grant application. The Association would rather enter into a partnership arrangement where a competent contracting partner could be appointed that could act as soon as a need is identified – in reality a similar arrangement that prevails for Council tenants.

4.0 BOARD CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Our primary focus in undertaking this review was to identifying why there are lengthy delays in the provision of Adaptations in peoples homes and offer some thoughts on how these delays might be reduced. These adaptations are vital to help people with daily living.
- 4.2 Any wait for anything can often be frustrating for us all. But a wait for an individual needing help with day to day tasks soon becomes a battle to preserve independence and leads to frustration and often increased pain and suffering.
- 4.3 When we began our Inquiry the early indications were that 40% of private properties achieve an enquiry to completion time of 14 months and only one in nine local authority applicants achieve the target of 9 months. The situation reported to us for the 1st quarter of this year shows no improvement.

Targets

- 4.4 The concept of having different targets for Council Tenants and private properties we found to be potentially inequitable. A perception could well form that the type and quality of service people might expect was dependent upon whether the applicant is in possession of a Council rent book or regularly made a mortgage payment.
- 4.5 We actually found no truth in this. Council Tenants received Adaptations within 9 months in 10.7% of cases and owner occupiers slightly less in 8.2% of cases, slightly in favour of Leeds City Council tenants. However 64% of owner occupiers received an adaptation within 18 months and only 58% of Council tenants had their adaptations installed within the same period.
- 4.6 We do however feel that a single target for major adaptations, which is tenure blind, is needed as soon as possible to remove any perception that a two tier service is in operation.

Recommendation 1

That the Executive Board instructs officers to establish a new and much more rigorous and challenging cross tenure target for the completion of major adaptations.

An Adaptations Manager for Leeds

- 4.7 Our Inquiry received evidence from a wide range of people. The Director of Social Services, the Assistant Director from Housing and Environmental Health Services, the Community Services Manager, the Disability Services Manager, a Principal Environmental Health Officer and the Chief Environmental Health Officer. Not one could lay claim to being answerable for the performance of the adaptations service or responsible for driving change in the future.
- 4.8 We are of the view that identifying a lead for the adaptations service is an urgent necessity. We therefore propose that an Adaptations Manager be appointed. This senior manager's sole responsibility would be to oversee the various components of the adaptations process, drive improvement and see the world from a users perspective to ensure the service meets users needs.
- 4.9 Consideration could be given to this being a joint appointment between the City Council (Social Services and Housing and Environmental Health Services) and Primary Care Trusts. We feel that the post should be managerially responsible to an assistant director in Social Services and fall within the portfolio of the Executive Member for Health and Social Care.

Recommendation 2

That the Executive Board approve the creation of a new post of Adaptations Manager and that consideration could be given to this being a joint appointment between the City Council (Social Services and Housing and Environmental Health Services) and Primary Care Trusts.

A Leeds Adaptations Agency

- 4.10 At present we feel arrangements are too disjointed. We are of the view that matters will not improve unless a realignment of resources and clarification of structures occurs. As we have indicated officers from a range of departments are involved in part of the process but few (if any) solely work on getting adaptations through the system. For example at the start of the process the Council's Call Centre will be taking calls on all sorts of issues; adaptations will be one of many and the operators will not be 'adaptations experts'. Disability Team Managers also manage a number of different services and Occupational Therapists and their assistants undertake a wide range of assessments on any given visit to a persons home.
- 4.11 Within the Department of Housing and Environmental Health Services there is a similar picture. Officers processing Disabled Facilities Grants do other grant determination work and those arranging contracts for tendered work do other non adaptations contracts as well. We feel that opportunities exist for drawing staff together from these departments into one Adaptations Team. We suggest the lead department should be Social Services.
- 4.12 It appears to us that the area that performs most efficiently in relation to adaptations is the service provide by Care and Repair – the 'man in the van'. In this arrangement the role and responsibility for installing simple adaptations is clear and unambiguous. The person in need is as close to the agency commissioning the work as possible. Whilst we accept that this model oversimplifies instances where more complex adaptations are needed, we are firmly of the view that organising the adaptations process on this agency type basis is needed to bring about the fundamental improvement in the current waiting times.
- 4.13 We were pleased to learn of proposals for a combined equipment and minor adaptations service – this goes some way to addressing our concerns. The new service has the potential to vastly reduce the waiting time for many people in the City. Our view is that the new arrangements need to be in place as much in advance of April 2004 as possible.
- 4.14 Major Adaptations and those requiring a visit by an OT currently fall outside these new arrangements. During our evidence gathering we also learned of work that had been undertaken to examine the process of providing major adaptations in local authority dwellings and identify areas for improvement. We were told that a number of areas for improvement had been identified and that work was ongoing to improve the process for Council Tenants. Only Council tenants.
- 4.15 We welcome any initiatives to improve the current circumstances but feel that focusing solely on Council Tenants reinforces the perception that a two tier system is in existence. We suggest that introducing a cross tenure pilot study should be the first task of the newly appointed Adaptations Manager. The pilot should examine opportunities for integrating all equipment and adaptations services in the City.

Recommendation 3

That the Executive Board instructs officers to develop plans for a pilot scheme, within the boundaries of a Primary Care Trust area, to fast track the installation of adaptations across all tenures. The Scrutiny Board is of the view that the pilot should examine the practicalities of introducing an Agency type arrangement where staff work solely on processing and progressing installation of adaptations.

Other Observations

- 4.16 In addition to making specific recommendations we would like to record a number of observations. These have been made during the course of our inquiry and we are of the view that they should be considered during the development of the proposed agency pilot.
- 4.17 We noted that one of the most appreciable delays in the process is waiting for a referral to be allocated by an Area Disability Team Manager to an Occupational Therapist. In almost 50% of cases a waiting time of over three months is experienced. 24% of cases wait for more than 6 months. We were told that these cases were a 'lower priority'. However amongst these cases we found people who require help in personal bathing. These people could have considerable improvement to their quality of life by the installation of a simple adaptation such as an overhead shower.
- 4.18 **We are of the view that a widening of the eligibility criteria for 'Self Assessment' should be considered together with a simplification of the assessment form.** Removing a proportion of these lower priority cases from OT's workloads and allocation straight to the proposed Equipment and Minor Adaptations Service would streamline the process for these people and free up OT time for progressing more complex cases. We would suggest that further training of Call Centre Staff (possibly nominating expert adaptations operators to whom calls could be referred) would also help. We were unable to identify what proportion of an OT's time was spent purely on assessing people's needs. This information is not collected. For future planning purposes we feel that consideration should be given to identifying this data.
- 4.19 We welcome the proposals for the review of occupational therapy services that are provided by Health Bodies and the City Council. We suggest that opportunities might exist for a more streamlined service. We fully support current arrangements for assessment of minor adaptations and equipment by other health care professionals. We suggest that this could be extended so that assessments could be undertaken within General Practitioners surgeries.
- 4.20 We found the financing of adaptations complex, probably unnecessarily complex. Owner occupiers, Registered Social Landlords and private sector tenants make applications to the Department of Housing and Environmental Health for Disabled Facilities Grant. Registered Social Landlords have an agreement that 60% of their costs are covered by grant with associations meeting the difference. Owner Occupiers and private tenants must undergo a means test to determine the level of grant and must make up any shortfall themselves. The Social Services Department does have discretion to provide further help in meeting an applicants assessed contribution. Council tenants who might conceivably be assessed as having a contribution to pay, are not subjected to the means test and pay nothing. This seems unfair.
- 4.21 Guidance issued by government states that;
- “ there are no restrictions on who may apply for DFG or the type of tenure of the occupier. Homeowners, private renters, local authority and housing association tenants are equally eligible”

- 4.22 We are aware that proposals are being considered for providing greater flexibility in the allocation of the DFG. We felt that this provides an opportunity for simplifying the financing of Adaptations across the board, possibly by pooling available resources into a single 'Adaptations Budget'. We also feel **that a level playing field is needed where all applicants, irrespective of tenure, can be assessed to determine if a financial contribution is needed.**
- 4.23 An anomaly with the current arrangements is the additional pressure placed on disabled people and their families in having to arrange estimates from a number of contractors to undertake the major adaptations to their home. In addition these applicants also may need to commission architects to prepare plans and make the necessary applications to the local planning authority.
- 4.24 For some people these arrangements may be satisfactory and in part, help in retaining independence. For others however the pressure is an unwanted burden. Tenants in Local Authority homes and those of Registered Social Landlords do not have these pressures as the housing provider carries out these tasks on their behalf.
- 4.25 **We feel that within the proposed agency arrangements consideration should be given to offering a service to owner occupiers and private sector tenants which is as least as good as the service provided for local authority tenants.** We envisage that the cost of providing this service could be included in a overall scheme cost and therefore covered by the Disabled Facilities Grant.
- 4.26 We found the amount of information available to people seeking adaptations to be limited. In very few instances is information provided on the length of time people could expect to wait for allocation of a OT or for how long determination of an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant would take.
- 4.27 Finally the Ridings Housing Association offered us a number of useful suggestions. The primary one being in relation to entering into a partnership arrangement with a contractor so that delays in this part of the process can be alleviated. We would fully support this suggestion and again propose that this area be evaluated as part of a new Adaptations Agency.

Report Agreed by the Board on.....

.....**Date**.....

Signed by the Chair of Scrutiny Board (Social Care)

