

Housing needs of people with physical disability

The Disabled Persons Accommodation Agency (DPAA) researched the mismatch between the housing aspirations of people with a physical disability and suitable available property across all forms of housing tenure in Kent. Having analysed the problems experienced by both housing providers and people with a physical disability who wanted more suitable accommodation the DPAA has developed a database that matches people to property.

- f** **The lack of choice over housing options for people with a physical disability was due primarily to a lack of information on their housing needs.**
- f** **Many people with a physical disability were reluctant to register their housing need with a local authority. This reluctance was due to a variety of reasons, one being the stigma attached to the notion of registration in any form.**
- f** **Information held by the various agencies on the needs of people with a physical disability was incomplete and incompatible and therefore ineffective as a planning tool.**
- f** **Many people with a physical disability wanted to remain or become owner-occupiers but low income, lack of financial advice and limited information on what was available limited their options.**
- f** **Inflexible allocation systems tended to exclude occasional wheelchair users; two-thirds of the respondents in the survey were occasional wheelchair users.**
- f** **Lack of information on people wanting property meant that adapted property was difficult to let or was inappropriately let.**
- f** **Publicly funded adaptations were often removed prior to sale as their existence was felt to prejudice a sale.**
- f** **The willingness of all the relevant agencies to participate in the project indicated the level of support a multi-agency approach to meeting the housing needs of people with a physical disability had.**

There were two parts to the project. The first looked into the housing needs and aspirations of people with a physical disability in Kent and examined the problems experienced by housing providers in letting adapted property and in identifying the need for new build adapted property. It also looked at the problems experienced by people with a physical disability who were seeking suitable adapted property.

Building on this research, the second part of the project developed a classification system matching people to property across all forms of housing tenure.

Difficulties faced by housing providers

In-depth interviews with 13 of the 14 local authorities in Kent and the main housing associations with stock in Kent found that 6% of the public sector stock was suitable for a person with a physical disability and 2% of people on the various waiting lists were looking for suitable adapted property.

However, further investigation revealed that these low figures did not accurately reflect supply and demand as very few local authorities had information on properties that had been adapted as opposed to purpose-built. Information on adaptations funded by way of a grant was held under the individual property file and was not collated in any way that would assist in the 'recycling' of the adaptation should the property become available. On the other hand, information held by other agencies was based on individuals and it was difficult to identify properties that had benefited from an adaptation.

Interviews with people seeking accommodation revealed that most wanted to sort out their housing

Figure 1: Type of current accommodation of people permanently in a wheelchair

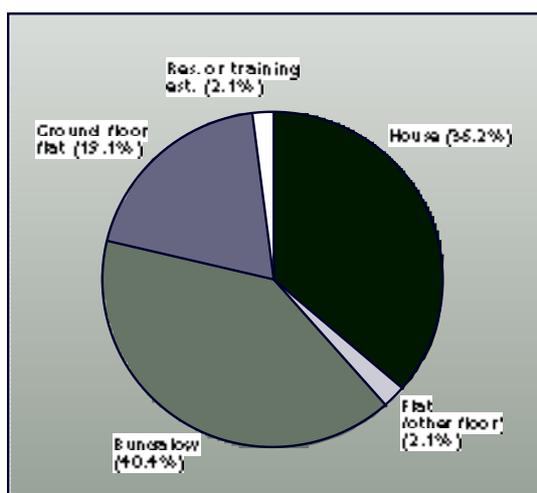
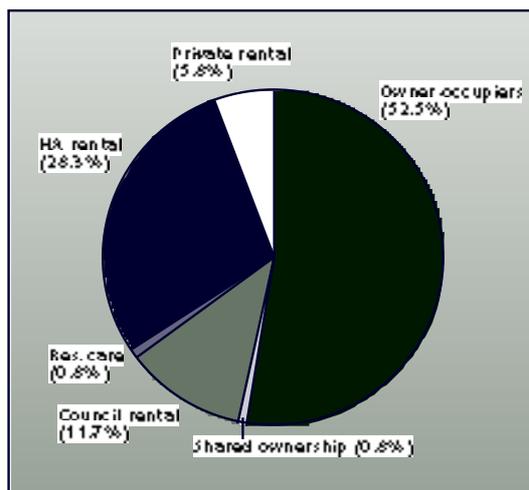


Figure 2: Tenure of present accommodation



problems themselves and did not automatically register their housing need with a local authority. They were not aware of the options available to them.

The inflexibility of some allocation policies often excluded occasional wheelchair users and this further distorted the figures on housing need.

Lack of information both on adapted property and on people seeking adapted property meant that these homes sometimes proved difficult to let and occasionally adaptations were removed from homes which were then let for general needs housing.

Difficulties faced by people with a disability

Disabled people's views were sought through a seminar, where people with a physical disability could discuss the problems they had experienced in finding suitable adapted accommodation, and through an independent survey on the housing needs of people with a physical disability.

Almost two-thirds of the survey respondents were unlikely to be accepted onto special needs waiting list, despite having a physical disability, because they were not permanent wheelchair users. As wheelchair accommodation is scarce there is a reluctance to allocate it to occasional wheelchair users. However, this does not help the applicant whose mobility may vary depending on the treatment they are receiving and the nature of their disability.

Over two-thirds of the people currently living with their parents wanted to live independently. Given current trends in the housing world away from the provision of sheltered accommodation, a surprising number of people wanted some form of sheltered accommodation. All these respondents were women who were currently living alone. All those

respondents wanting residential care were men. The desire for such accommodation may be more a reflection of age and social aspirations of the respondents rather than housing need.

A high number of permanent wheelchair users, 36.2%, were living in houses (see Figure 1). Of this number, 65% did not want to move but preferred to have adaptations carried out to the property. This desire to remain within the existing home reflects comments made at the seminar about the need to consider the housing needs of the whole family and social and community links with an area as well as the specific housing needs of the applicant.

Over half the respondents were owner-occupiers, 38% of these were permanently in a wheelchair (see Figure 2). The high percentage of owner-occupiers is surprising when 68% of respondents have a weekly income of under £150 (see Figure 3). Pressures on the housing market, such as sluggish sales and negative equity, may make it difficult for owner-occupiers to move to more suitable accommodation.

10% of all respondents indicated that they had been taken off waiting lists because they had refused accommodation that they had considered unsuitable for their needs.

44% of the respondents in the survey, when asked, said they were seeking more suitable accommodation. If this is an accurate measure of housing need of the estimated 160,000 people in Kent with a physical disability, 70,720 are looking to move.

Issues raised by the research

The research project identified a number of issues that require further research, including:

- The limited choice that owner-occupiers have if they or a member of their family has a disability and they wish to move to more suitable accommodation, especially those with negative equity.
- The inability of some people with a physical disability to raise finance due to the requirements placed by the financial institutions on the individual to provide some form of health guarantee.
- How to use public funds to assist people with a physical disability to remain or become owner-occupiers, thus reducing the need to move to rented accommodation.
- The responsiveness of housing providers to the needs of people with a physical disability so as to

allow them more choices over their accommodation. Each person's disability is unique and they may also have to balance their needs with those of their family.

- Improvements in the way information on services available for people with a physical disability are publicised.

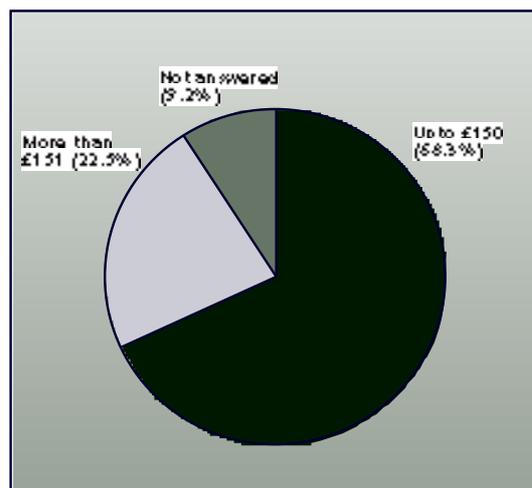
The DPAA

Various statutory agencies require information on the needs of people with a physical disability but at present, the information available is incomplete and incompatible. Different definitions are used by each agency to describe the level of disability.

The DPAA provides a simple classification system that can be used to cover all forms of housing tenure, speed up the allocation process and recycle existing resources. As it expands it will be able to supply information on the housing needs of people with a physical disability that can be used on a multi-agency basis for strategic planning purposes.

The DPAA adopts an amended version of a system used by the London Borough of Waltham Forest for over eight years. The applicant carries out a self-assessment according to a set list of categories of need. Housing providers assess their property according to the same categories of use, so that housing providers with a type B property would ask the DPAA to provide them with a list of suitable applicants requiring type B accommodation. The DPAA has developed an operation manual to assist housing providers classifying property and the Occupational Therapist Bureau has offered help to both applicants and providers (subject to resources being available).

Figure 3: Weekly Income of respondents



As over half the respondents in the survey were owner-occupiers there was a need to develop a marketing system that covers all forms of housing tenures. Estate agents can register with the DPAA and request nominees when a suitable property becomes available. Encouraging people with adapted properties for sale to use registered estate agents will assist in the recycling of resources.

It is anticipated that the DPAA will be self-financing in three years' time as housing providers pay an annual subscription fee to the DPAA. (Until sufficient funds have been generated, all the relevant housing providers have been asked to make a donation to the DPAA. Kent County Council Social Services Department are also considering making a three-year financial contribution to the DPAA, ensuring the service is available to everyone in Kent.)

About the study

The in-depth interviews with all the relevant housing providers were conducted by the DPAA Research Project Officer. The same questions were asked of potential users of the DPAA at a seminar held in Gravesend. Alba Associates were commissioned to carry out a sample survey of the housing needs of people with a physical disability. 120 postal questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 23%. Although this is a high response rate for a postal survey, the reluctance of disabled people to participate in research that should ultimately improve the range of services available to them requires further investigation.

People with a physical disability were involved in all stages of the project. Terminology used, the design of forms and the classification system have all been approved by the ultimate beneficiaries of the DPAA. Ultimately, the DPAA will create employment opportunities for people with a physical disability.

Further information

For more information on the DPAA, contact: Alison Breese, Assistant City Environment Manager (Residential Services), Chair of the DPAA on 01634 727777, extension 2006.

Related Findings

The following Findings look at related issues:

Housing

- 86** Housing provision for people with health problems and mobility difficulties (Apr 93)
- 99** Shared living in supported housing (Nov 93)
- 123** Adaptations for disability (Sept 94)

Social Care

- 23** Resettlement of people with learning difficulties from long-stay institutions (Jun 92)
- 30** Community care and independent living (Feb 93)
- 31** Involving disabled people in assessment (Mar 93)
- 36** Housing need and community care (Jul 93)
- 37** The effectiveness of an Independent Living Advocate (Sept 93)
- 41** Community living for people with learning difficulties (Oct 93)
- 43** Community care plans and supported housing (Dec 93)

Housing Summary 6, 'Financing user choice in housing and community care', is also relevant.



Published by the
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
The Homestead, 40 Water End
York YO3 6LP
Tel: 01904 629241 Fax: 01904 620072
ISSN 0958-3084

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is an independent, non-political body which funds programmes of research and innovative development in the fields of housing, social care and social policy. It supports projects of potential value to policy-makers, decision-takers and practitioners. It publishes the findings rapidly and widely so that they can inform current debate and practice.