



**How to...**

*make effective use of  
adapted properties*



# How to make effective use of adapted properties

1 Disabled adaptations, such as level access showers and stair lifts, can support both elderly and disabled tenants to live independently within their homes. Most organisations will have adapted properties within their stock, and tenants who have requested adaptations to their homes to address their current needs.

In order to make the best use of your stock, while meeting the needs of your tenants, you need to operate strategically to ensure that you are not:

- removing adaptations in properties which have become available for reletting because you have been unable to find a suitable tenant to move into them
- removing adaptations in properties because you do not have the expertise to determine if they are suitable for tenants who require them
- completing adaptations for tenants in properties which will not be suitable for their longer term needs
- creating lengthy void times for adapted properties.

This 'How to...' guide provides advice and tips to support you to:

- free up stock where the tenant or household member no longer requires the adaptation
- match your adapted stock with households who require the adaptations
- explore the longer term viability of, and alternatives to, adapting your existing stock.

## Free up existing stock where adaptations are no longer required

Where you have tenants living in homes with adaptations that are no longer required, there are a number of actions you can take to free up this existing adapted stock so it can be allocated to a tenant in need of it.

You may consider:

- incentivising tenants in adapted properties to move
- giving priority in your allocation scheme to tenants who are releasing an adapted property because their household no longer requires it
- supporting tenants in adapted properties to find a mutual exchange.

In addition, changes to the regulatory framework and new powers introduced in the Localism Act 2011, now provide the legal and regulatory freedom for local authorities and registered providers to offer tenancies on a fixed term. You may want to consider letting properties which have been specifically designed or adapted on a fixed term tenancy. This will enable you to review whether the household still require the adaptations at the end of the fixed term tenancy, ensuring adapted properties remain occupied by tenants who need them.

## Learning from others

**North Lincolnshire Homes** uses fixed term tenancies as a tool for making best use of stock that is needed for households requiring adapted properties. To achieve this, they issue five year fixed term tenancies to those moving into properties specifically adapted for disabled people.

**Contact:** Steve Hapworth [steve.hepworth@nlhomes.org.uk](mailto:steve.hepworth@nlhomes.org.uk)

## Matching adapted properties to people

When adapted properties become available for re-letting, some organisations report the need to convert the property to general needs because they are unable to find suitable tenants. Removing adaptations is costly and a considerable waste of a scarce resource. Therefore it is really important to ensure that you can match your adapted properties to people who need them.

This can be done through a waiting list, a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme, or a separate accessible housing register; whatever system you use the key is that there is one central place for applicants and adapted properties to be matched. Ideally all the landlords in the area should be using the same system to ensure greater choice for people requiring adaptations.

### Things to consider:

- advertise adapted stock by categorising the characteristics of the adaptations or its accessibility on your waiting list, CBL scheme or accessible housing register. Train staff to identify and categorise adaptations to ensure this is being undertaken consistently
- categorise the medical need of residents who apply to your waiting list, CBL scheme or accessible housing register. Ideally an occupational therapist should be involved in this
- if your adapted properties are normally allocated through a CBL scheme, consider directly allocating them to tenants requiring them, without the need for applicants to place a bid. This is particularly beneficial for people with complex needs for whom accommodation may be more difficult to find
- ensure tenants requiring adaptations are given a high priority in your allocation scheme, and restrict the allocation of adapted properties to those people who need them
- ensure there is flexibility within your allocation scheme to offer adapted properties to the most suitable applicant for the property and not the applicant who has waited the longest. Use health occupational therapists
- ensure your systems maximise the opportunity for local moves by working collaboratively with local partners
- consider using an adapted property as temporary accommodation, for a household who does not need the adaptations, until a suitable tenant can be found.

If you are unable to find a suitable tenant for an adapted property there may be creative ways to prevent returning it to general needs. Consider making enquiries with local partners, who are not involved in your CBL scheme or accessible housing register, to see if they are aware of a suitable person for the property.

## Learning from others

**Salford City Council** has integrated the matching of disabled applicants to adapted properties within its' CBL scheme 'Salford Home Search'. When applicants with a medical need apply to the CBL scheme they complete an online self assessment medical form. All the medical forms are assessed by a panel which includes the adaptations manager and an occupational therapist team lead. The panel decide what 'medical' banding the applicant should be awarded based on their level of need. To ensure people can be easily matched to adapted properties the properties advertised on CBL are also given a 'medical' band.

**Contact:** Ian Hilton [ian.hilton@salford.gov.uk](mailto:ian.hilton@salford.gov.uk)

## Exploring alternatives to adaptations

Adapting an existing property may not always be the best solution, either for your stock or for the household who requires the adaptation. When a tenant applies for a major adaptation to their home this is an opportunity for you to explore whether the tenant would consider a move to a suitably adapted property.

Exploring the potential for moving into a suitably adapted property is about finding a long term solution to their needs which will benefit their health and wellbeing. So choice and location (connected to their own support networks) should be part of the discussions about alternatives. In addition, thousands of pounds can be saved if you facilitate your tenant to move to an adapted property.

To initiate a move, firstly you need to allow time to explore your tenant's housing options with them so you can provide them with a realistic expectation of all the opportunities that are available to them locally; whether this is a transfer, supported accommodation, privately rented accommodation, or new build developments.

Secondly, you need to decide who will have this conversation with your tenant and when it will take place. It needs to happen before the property has been assessed by a health professional for adaptations, because once this has happened your tenants are less likely to be receptive to the other housing options available to them.

Your own staff may have this conversation with your tenants, or you may enlist the support of your community occupational therapy service.

Traditionally, occupational therapists assess whether adaptations are necessary and appropriate to the needs of your tenant, they are not required to go beyond this and undertake an assessment of the long-term suitability of their current home.

Consider working with your community occupational therapy (OT) service to support them to discuss the alternative housing solutions available to your tenants. Occupational therapists are well placed to have these conversations as they understand the long term prognosis of your tenants' illness and the impact this will have on their future housing needs. To assess your tenants' housing options, occupational therapists will need extra time during their assessments and they will need to understand the housing opportunities available in your area. You could assist by training occupational therapists on the housing options available locally including processes for transfers and mutual exchanges. You may also offer job shadowing opportunities within housing options/advice or adaptations teams.

### **Supporting a move**

Many organisations have schemes which support under-occupying tenants to downsize, but fewer have schemes specifically aimed at tenants who require disabled adaptations and have chosen to move to accommodation more suitable for their needs.

A dedicated officer who can provide personalised one-to-one support during the move is essential, this officer can:

- provide one point of contact throughout the process
- explore the housing options available to your tenant and support them to find a new home
- undertake initial viewings on the tenants' behalf to establish whether the property is suitable for them
- undertake accompanied viewings with tenants

- work in partnership with health and social care professionals during the move
- offer practical support with the move itself including reconnection of white goods and informing relevant companies of the change of address
- arrange respite care for your tenant during the move.

For further ideas on supporting your tenants to move, download [How to...reduce under occupation](#) from the [CIH website](#).

## Learning from others

**Kettering Borough Council** has introduced a housing options assessment for their tenants who request a major adaptation. Prior to the new service, all requests for adaptations were sent straight to the community OT service for a needs assessment. Tenants who request an adaptation are now visited by the Council's HomeMove Advisor who will discuss the housing options available to them. If a tenant says they would like to remain in their home then a referral to the OT service is made; if they decide to move then their HomeMove Advisor can provide support to find a new home and assistance with the move. The new service has increased the number of people choosing to move to accommodation more suitable for their needs, reduced the number of referrals sent to the OT service, and reduced expenditure on major adaptations.

**Contact:** [homemove@kettering.gov.uk](mailto:homemove@kettering.gov.uk)

**FirstStop** has an online toolkit called 'How well does your home suit you'.

**Visit:** <http://hoop.eac.org.uk/hoop/questions.aspx?topicid=0>

**Test Valley Borough Council** has a multi-agency aids and adaptations panel to find housing solutions for people with physical disabilities requiring adaptations. The panel meets regularly and has representation from local occupational therapists, local registered housing providers, and council officers from private sector housing, supported housing, allocations and development teams. Along with the feasibility of adapting their current homes the panel look at the following options for clients:

- forthcoming vacancies in the existing stock that will meet the needs of those who require adapted dwellings; or vacancies which will require fewer or less costly adaptations than those required to their current home
- adapted dwellings in the pipeline of the new build affordable homes programme.

The multi-agency approach to providing housing solutions for people who need adapted properties is improving outcomes for local people while ensuring the best use of finite resources.

**Contact:** Donna Wagers [DWagers@testvalley.gov.uk](mailto:DWagers@testvalley.gov.uk)

### Partnership with occupational therapy

An increasing number of housing organisations have looked at creative ways to work with their OT service by employing occupational therapists in-house, either seconded by the local authority or funded directly by their organisation. Organisations who have taken this step are reporting significant improvements in making best use of their disabled adapted stock, and in their strategic planning for improvement or development schemes.



In-house occupational therapists can reduce costs through preventing unnecessary adaptations and ensuring adapted properties are allocated appropriately. They are able to:

- undertake adaptation assessments which consider the holistic, long term needs of your tenants and assess whether re-housing should be considered
- assess adapted stock which become available for reletting and identify people who would be suitable for the adaptations
- assist in appropriately allocating adapted properties to ensure they meet the long term needs of the tenant and minimise the need for future re-housing
- get involved in the development programme to ensure the needs of individual households are met within accessible new build properties
- get involved in planned property modernisation programmes to ensure the needs of disabled people are appropriately considered
- work in partnership with maintenance surveyors to ensure adaptations are completed correctly
- develop a knowledge of your housing stock and understand the constraints different construction types will have on the ability to install adaptations.

**Top tip:** The Housing Association Forum for Occupational Therapists (HAFFOT) provides professional support and advice to occupational therapists working for housing organisations. For further information visit [www.haffot.org.uk](http://www.haffot.org.uk)

## Learning from others

**Nottingham City Council's** Adaptations Agency employs two occupational therapists on secondment from the mainstream community OT team. They work closely with the CBL officers at their ALMO, and housing associations, to ensure adapted properties are advertised appropriately. They complete viewings of properties matched to disabled tenants within a target time of two working days and are able to provide a timely and accurate decision on the suitability of the property. By utilising holistic occupational therapy assessments, and their knowledge of housing and adaptations, they are able to ensure the most suitable tenant is rehoused into the most suitable property thereby maximising the use of their adapted stock.

**Contact:** Tony Dawson [tony.dawson@nottinghamcity.gov.uk](mailto:tony.dawson@nottinghamcity.gov.uk)

As part of the stock transfer settlement, **South Northants Homes** employed an in-house occupational therapist. Their occupational therapist assesses all tenants who require adaptations and establishes whether re-housing is an option. The occupational therapist is also informed of all adapted and accessible properties which become void so they can be allocated to someone in need. The in-house service has brought about positive outcomes for their vulnerable tenants, improved the use of adapted stock, and led to significant savings on adaptations.

**Contact:** Helen Hall [helen.hall@southnorthantshomes.co.uk](mailto:helen.hall@southnorthantshomes.co.uk)

### Mutual Exchange

Mutual exchanges can provide a useful alternative for your tenants requiring adaptations. An exchange could also potentially provide a solution to tenants who need to downsize to a smaller suitable adapted property as a result of the social sector size criteria (also known as the bedroom tax).

Give some thought to how you can initiate and enable swaps for people with disabilities. To utilise the opportunity of adapted or accessible properties through the exchange register, you may need to be pragmatic in the decisions you make: would you agree to a tenant exchanging into a property not suitable for their needs, that required additional adaptations, if this led to an overall savings on your adaptations budget?



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## Useful resources and information

CIH's Making Best Use of Stock Team (MBUS) offers advice, guidance and practice examples to help social housing providers in England get the most out of their stock. If you would like free support to improve your approach to making best use of disabled adapted stock contact the team

[www.cih.org/mbus](http://www.cih.org/mbus)

Home Adaptations for Disabled People: A detailed guide to related legislation and good practice (Home Adaptations Consortium, 2013)

[www.careandrepair-england.org.uk/pdf/dfg\\_good\\_practice\\_guide\\_2013.pdf](http://www.careandrepair-england.org.uk/pdf/dfg_good_practice_guide_2013.pdf)

The website of the British Association of Occupational Therapists and College of Occupational Therapists has an Electronic Repository of law and policy in the field of adaptations

[www.cot.co.uk/cotss-housing/england](http://www.cot.co.uk/cotss-housing/england)

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### **Chartered Institute of Housing**

Octavia House

Westwood Way

Coventry CV4 8JP

Tel: 024 7685 1700

[www.cih.org](http://www.cih.org)