

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Tenants Strategic Group – 27th September 2021

Housing Service approach to equalities and equalities data held

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing

Report Author: Simon Lewis, Assistant Director, Housing and Communities

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to provide members of the Tenants Strategic Group with an overview of how the Housing Service collects and uses equalities data to make the services we provide better for disabled tenants.

2. Recommendations

The Tenants Strategic Group is asked to note the findings and next steps from this report and are invited to ask questions.

3. Background and Full details of the Report

Housing Data on disabilities

Equalities data is collected as part of the process of a prospective tenant applying for social housing. We hold relatively detailed information on disabilities, collected during the Homefinder application process. This includes information on any physical and mental disabilities, learning difficulties and any related support needs that they have. Relevant questions from the Homefinder application form have been extracted and are shown in Appendix A. Far more detailed assessments are undertaken for any placements made into Extra Care Housing Schemes, in partnership with Somerset County Council.

During the Homefinder application process, where a disabled adapted property is required by an applicant, the Homefinder Officer would usually require an assessment from an Occupational Therapist as part of the evidence required for banding.

All of the information provided is passed to the Housing Provider (in this case ourselves as a landlord) when making offers of properties. However, before we accept the tenancy, there is a verification process where a Lettings Officer meets

with the tenant (during Covid this has been done by phone call) to verify and check the information that was included on the Homefinder application (this is especially important if the application was done a while ago and needs might have changed). This also includes a check of income such as disability living allowance and other benefits which form part of the affordability checks.

How we use the information

Information is held on the Academy Housing System and Tenancy Officers, Supported Housing Officers, Rent Recovery Officers and Lettings Officers access this prior to a visit. The officer reviews the case notes on Academy and identifies any disabilities or additional needs and then tailors their support and approach to reflect this.

We also offer enhanced accessibility options for tenants such as making publications available in large print and corporately we place a lot of emphasis on ensuring our website is disability friendly (it was recently assessed as 4th best in terms of accessibility out of 413 public sector websites), so that information is easily accessible for example for visually impaired tenants using screen-reader software.

We always carefully consider providing a range of options for tenants to engage with services, so for example although we encourage people to engage with us online where possible, we always offer the option of phone calls and visits where more appropriate.

An area where we are looking to improve is on the Property Services side of the business where the link to the Open Contractor system (where repairs appointments are made) does not make disability information easily ready for repairs schedulers and staff. This is being addressed through configuration of the new Open Housing System which will be in place by April 2022 and will ensure that flags are clearer and interface across to Open Contractor for Repairs schedulers to see whether a tenant has a disability when making repairs appointments which will allow conversations to take place about reasonable adjustments.

We also provide comprehensive support to tenants for adaptations to properties. We have recently shared the Adaptations Policy and Procedures for TSG to review and some of the key points from this were:

- We have a clear policy and procedure that shows how we support tenants who require adaptations to their homes. Responses to this can include major adaptations ranging from wet floor shower rooms to extensions; as well as minor adaptations for which we have staff trained as 'trusted assessors' to be able to support tenants in getting the right minor adaptations (ramps, grab rails etc) for their circumstances and property.
- We are targeting certain property types so that when they become void and require bathroom replacements that they automatically get upgraded to a wet floor shower room, thus increasing our stock of adapted properties. These

homes are then targeted at letting for disabled applicants on Homefinder or for internal transfers for tenants requiring adapted homes.

- In some circumstances where a property is not appropriate for a major adaptation, we support the household to find and move to an alternative suitable property within our stock.

In the 2021/22 financial year, the HRA will spend nearly £500k on this area of the business, setting a budget of £300k for major adaptations and £70k for minor adaptations. Additionally, we pay £60k contribution towards the costs of the Somerset Independence Plus service and the Independence Advice Centre (management, technical officers, running costs etc) and a further £30k contribution toward the cost of an Adults Occupational Therapist and Children's Occupational Therapist, to work alongside us.

A review of our Academy data shows that we have 1540 households with tenants that have notified us they have some form of disability. This equates to around 27% of our households. A breakdown is provided in Appendix 2.

This data is really helpful and we utilised this during the pandemic so that we could make welfare calls to people who were deemed as clinically vulnerable. We had data provided to us from the NHS and County Council Social Care team to help target individuals to call but we also used our own Housing data to make phone calls to people who were elderly, living alone or with disabilities to ensure that during lockdown they had support networks in place. This resulted in us making many hundreds of calls and then led to personalised interventions and support visits when required.

Keeping data up to date

Keeping our data up to date is a challenge and we rely on tenants telling us when their circumstances change. However, as part of our new Open Housing suite we are including a Tenants Portal which will allow tenants to go online and update their own personal information and we will be encouraging them to use this to ensure that information such as their contact details and any disabilities or additional needs are kept up to date.

How we adapt our Policies and processes to take account of disabilities

The Council has legal requirements to comply with the Equalities Act 2010 and to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Council has set a number of equality objectives under this duty. A corporate report was taken to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on the 13th September outlining our progress against this and this can be viewed here: [Agenda for SWT Audit and Governance Committee on Monday, 13th September, 2021, 6.15 pm - Modern Council \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/agenda-for-swt-audit-and-governance-committee-on-monday-13th-september-2021-6.15-pm-modern-council)

Key messages from this report are:

- Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) has been shortlisted as a finalist for this year's Municipal Journal Achievement Awards in recognition for its work to support neurodiversity in the workplace.
- The SWT website has been independently assessed as the 4th best in terms of accessibility out of 413 public sector websites (Q2 2021 Sitemorse Index)
- SWT Achieved Level 2 (Disability Confident) of the Disability Confident Scheme
- A joint officer and member equality group is now in place and meeting regularly.
- We have commenced the rollout of Equality Impact Assessment refresher workshops for officers within SWT,
- A Consultation Toolkit has been created and launched within SWT (which highlights the importance of engaging with people with Protected Characteristics).

There is also an action plan for 2021/22 included as part of this report.

In Housing we ensure that all housing policies have an Equalities Impact Assessment to assess how new policies will negatively impact (or enhance) services for those with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act (which includes disabilities).

The Equality Act provides a duty to make reasonable adjustments for a person placed at a **substantial disadvantage** because of their disability compared with non-disabled people or people who don't share that disability. (Substantial meaning more than minor or trivial.) All staff undertake mandatory annual training to ensure that they understand their legal duties with respect to this Act. However we are currently making enquiries of managers to ascertain where we feel gaps are and further training should be provided to make this support better.

Next steps

The Housing Service is commissioning work on our Housing policy and procedures to address gaps and ensure these are fit for purpose for a modern housing organisation. The commission includes a requirement for a review of our main services that interface with tenants to ensure they are disability friendly and that reasonable adjustments are being made. We will review the findings of this work to improve how our services support tenants with disabilities and will also consider as part of this what further training is required for our staff.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Communities is engaging with the Corporate Equalities Lead to determine how our Housing equalities work can better link into the Member Equalities Champions and wider equalities groups to help add value and challenge to our own approach.

4. Risk Assessment (if appropriate)

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

5. Are there any Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?

There will be a financial cost for the commissioned review of our approach to equalities in our day to day service provision, however this will be incorporated within the cost of the wider policy review work. Any resultant future improvements to service offers or approach could have further financial implications

6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?

The purpose of this report is to focus on our approach to equalities and ultimately improve it and therefore this should lead to an enhanced service provision for groups with protected equalities characteristics, particularly those with disabilities.

7. Are there any Data Protection Implications?

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Extracted Questions from Homefinder Application form asking questions related to disabilities

Appendix 2: Current disability profile of SWT Tenants

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Appendix 1: Extracted Questions from Homefinder Application form asks questions about the applicant and all other household members:

- Do you use a wheelchair?
- If Yes, please describe any difficulties you have using, storing or charging it.
- Do you have learning disabilities?
- If Yes, please provide details of how this impacts on your daily life?

The Income Section then asks for details of all income which includes:

DLA Care Rate High/Medium/Low (Monthly) £

DLA Mobility Rate High/Medium/Low (Monthly) £

PIP Daily Living Standard/Enhanced (Monthly) £

PIP Mobility Standard/Enhanced (Monthly) £

Carers Allowance (Monthly) £

Section 5 enquires about what support household members currently receive:

Is anyone you have listed on your application getting support from Social Services, the probation service or any other organisation at the moment?

If yes please list anyone who gets support and who they get it from:

Please tell us about the personal circumstances that you or they need support for: -

- Mental health problems/dementia
- Alcohol problems
- Domestic abuse
- Learning disabilities
- Physical or sensory disability
- Drug problems
- Other support needs
- HIV/AIDS

Please use the space below to tell us about the support you need and why?

Has your property been adapted for your households needs?

If yes please tell us what has been done

If no, do you need your property to be adapted for your household's needs?

If yes, has an Occupational Therapist visited your property to assess your housing needs?

If yes, please provide the name of the Occupational Therapist

If yes, what date did the Occupational Therapist visit?

Does living in your home affect the health of you or any household member?

If yes please complete the Housing & Your Health section of this form on page 21.

Do you wish to be considered for any of the following accommodation?

- Housing adapted for physical disability
- Housing adapted for wheelchair use
- Housing with visiting support
- Housing with support worker
- Housing for people with Learning Disabilities

Guidance Notes

Housing Adapted for physical disability may include adaptations such as grab rails, electrical sockets at a higher level, and taps with levers etc.

Housing Adapted for wheelchair use means that doorways will be wider, there will be ramps and no stairs, showers are likely to be of level access design etc.

Sheltered Housing - Sheltered housing residents have their own flat or bungalow. These are linked to a community alarm system to enable residents to call for help in an emergency.

Extra Care Housing For customers in need of additional support often provided 24 hours a day. Extra care housing is not currently advertised through the choice based lettings system. If you apply for extra care housing your needs will be assessed by the relevant agency.

Housing with Support worker this is available for people with a range of support needs including, for example, people with learning difficulties, young people, young mothers, ex-offenders or people with a mental health problem. Referrals to such schemes are usually made through social services.

I provide or receive essential and critical medical or other support or care within the Homefinder Somerset area where significant harm would result if this was not provided - Please state where:

What is your reason for needing to be rehoused?

Options include:

- Reasons of poor health / disability
- Require sheltered accommodation

Please use this space to give us any further information about why you need to be re-housed, any reasons why you need special assistance or other help and any further contact details...

Section 11 – Housing and your health – to be completed by those where their current housing is affecting their health...

This section asks for contact details of GP or consultant

Asks whether person is in hospital waiting to leave, and details

Please describe the disability or illness you have (including any mental health issues) and the problem that it causes for you in your current accommodation...

Tell us changing how you will live will improve your health...

Please tell us about any treatments / medications you are receiving or taking...

Have any adaptations been made in your home to help you cope (e.g. stair-lift, walk-in shower, grab rails)? Please provide details...

Have you applied for any adaptations?

	No difficulty	Some difficulty	I need some help	I rely on someone else
Getting around coping with stairs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting around using the toilet and bathroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting around leaving and arriving home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Getting around – walking and moving around:

- I am fully mobile
- I can walk to the nearest bus stop or shop without too much difficulty
- I use walking aids or manage with help
- I use a motorised scooter
- I use a wheelchair
- I rely totally on a wheelchair and help

Getting around – Daily life activities:

- I collect my own pension or benefits
 - Someone collects my pension or benefits for me
 - I do all my own shopping
 - I can do light shopping
 - Someone helps me to do light shopping
 - I am unable to do any shopping
 - I do my own house cleaning
 - I have help with my house cleaning
-

Appendix 2 – Current Disability profile data of SWT Housing Tenants

We have 1540 households either with Tenant 1 or Tenant 2 with some kind of disability, from hearing to mobility scooter.

Below are a count of tenants with any of these disabilities, a tenant can have more than one of these ticked in our system.

Row Labels	Count
DEMENTIA	25
DISABLED	868
DISABLED HEARING IMP	227
DISABLED LEARN DIFF	67
DISABLED MENTAL HEAL	393
DISABLED MOBILITY	713
DISABLED OTHER	879
DISABLED OTHER 2	490
DISABLED PREFER NOT TO SAY	21
DISABLED SPEECH IMPAIRMENT	8
DISABLED VISUAL IMP	143
DRUG RELATED PROBLEM	2
MOBILITY SCOOTER	73
REGISTERED DISABLED	86
TERMINALLY ILL	2
VULNERABLE	272
WHEELCHAIR USER	70
Grand Total	4339