

REPORT TO: Health Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 6 November 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities

PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Housing Adaptation Policy (Major & Minor Procedures and Practice Manual)

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consult with members of the Health Policy and Performance Board on the proposed amended section of the Housing Adaptations Policy relating to **Ramps**

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board:

- i) Note the contents of the report; and**
- ii) Provide comment on the proposed amendments.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 This policy was originally introduced in 2010 to:

- To ensure a fair and consistent response when considering the provision of adaptations to a person's home; and
- To assist Occupational Therapists, Community Care Workers and technical staff in recommending adaptations that are necessary, appropriate, reasonable, practical and cost effective.

3.2 In addition to the policy being reviewed in early 2013, a further review of the ramps section of the policy has taken place during August 2013. This was in response to an increase in ramp requests raised with the Contact Centre, by residents who have independently purchased mobility scooters, where an Initial Assessment Team assessment of access to the residential property had not been undertaken.

3.3 Eligibility for a ramp is primarily based around being a wheelchair user. The Wheel Chair Assessment Team do not currently assess for scooters. Scooters can be purchased outright or via lease agreements buy individuals who have had no assessment of mobility or assessment of access to their property.

3.4 The revised ramp section of the policy has clarified the criteria for ramp installation to make it easier for initial decisions made by Contact Centre staff to be made equitably.

Amendments to the Ramp section of the Housing Adaptations Policy

- 3.5 Generally the principals behind assessment of access to a property and suitability of ramp installation remain unchanged. However, the following proposed change to the policy guidelines was approved, in principal, by Communities SMT in August 2013:
- ‘A ramp will not be provided for a person who has privately purchased a mobility scooter, unless that person has been assessed by the Wheelchair Service as being in need of an outdoor wheelchair and the person has chosen to use a scooter as a means of outdoor mobility instead.’***
- 3.6 The policy references that where enquiries are about an individual who is palliative consideration must be given to their current mobility and access needs. Alternatives to permanent ramps could be considered (i.e. grab rails, portable ramps).
- 3.7 The review takes into account that where eligibility for ramp installation is not met, individuals who have already independently purchased mobility scooters may benefit from signposting and information should they wish to make their own arrangements for ramp installations and/or storage of the scooter.
- 3.8 It is clear in the policy that by providing this information it is not an acceptance by Halton Borough Council that the use of a mobility scooter is warranted and that ramp access is required. It serves simply to provide information on options available to the individual should they wish to purchase ramp or storage equipment themselves. Providing signposting to information may enhance the customer experience when contacting the Council
- 3.9 Signposting will primarily be done via the Independent Living Centre (ILC). Information will be provided on ramps and outdoor scooter storage equipment.
- 3.10 The policy emphasises the public liability consequences for ramp installation and usage. The responsibility for appropriate use of a ramp lies with the individual, not the Council, i.e. where a ramp is installed for wheelchair use (a lesser specification ramp) and is then used for a mobility scooter, the liability for injury or damage as a result lies with the individual. The Council’s Legal department have confirmed that there is no recourse under Public Liability, for the Council, for condoning the use of a privately purchased scooter by approving or installing a ramp or providing information on such.
- 3.11 The policy emphasises that the individual must satisfy themselves that any ramp or storage equipment they purchase independently is fit for purpose.
- 3.12 The Ramp revised section of the Housing Adaptations Policy can be found in ***Appendix 1***

Consultation

- 3.13 In addition to this consultation with members of the Health PPB, the proposed amendments to the policy will be consulted on through the Halton Disability

Partnership. Consultation via a group brought together specifically to look at this policy amendment will take place in November 2013.

3.14 Feedback from the consultations shall be considered and, if requested, the finished policy can be presented to Health PPB in January 2014.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The reviewed ramp section of the policy supports the delivery of a responsive, appropriate, practicable and cost effective adaptations service in Halton in line with statutory responsibilities and recognised good practice.

4.2 The procedures and practice guidance documents relating to ramps provides practical support to staff within the IAT and Complex Care Teams who are responsible for making complex decisions around service users' needs and the provision of appropriate and cost effective adaptations.

4.3 In 2010 the Department for Transport undertook a public consultation on proposed changes to the laws governing mobility scooters and powered wheelchairs. As a result of the consultation, the Minister, Norman Baker, provided a Written Statement which set out that the Department would:

- “review the unladen weight limit for powered wheelchairs”
- “consider the case for mandatory eyesight testing”
- “review matters relating to insurance and the use of specialist training providers”
- “work with transport operators and the industry to enable a disabled person to have more confidence that they can travel with a mobility scooter”

4.4 The Department of Transport, in considering the above, want policies to balance carefully the mobility needs of disabled people with the safety of pedestrians and road users.

4.5 It is not mandatory to have either insurance or training to use a mobility vehicle and the Department of Transport lacks reliable information on whether or not users voluntarily utilise products that are available. They similarly have limited information on how users purchase their vehicles.

4.6 The Age Action Alliance is assisting the Department of Transport try to obtain reliable information on these subjects through the use of its networks. A survey has been designed to be completed by users (or their relatives) and is currently being distributed.

4.7 The findings of this survey and subsequent policy recommendations will be considered in due course.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 It is possible that an increase in requests for assessments may be made should Health PPB ratify the proposed additional eligibility criteria relating to outdoor

wheel chair users. AS a result, demand for the Disables Facilities Grant (DFG) may increase.

5.2 Funding for ramp installation for Owner Occupiers is via the Council held DFG, and is means tested.

5.3 Fifty per cent of the funding for ramp installations for tenants of registered housing providers is met by Halton Borough Council, with the remainder being met by the Housing Provider.

5.4 On spend from the DFG budget, the Council completed 9 wheelchair access ramps via DFG last financial year (2012/13) with an estimated total cost of £32.3K. It's difficult to cost the ramp element specifically as the work is usually done in conjunction with other adaptation work (i.e. bathroom adaptations). In 6 cases, we also had to alter or replaced the external door, usually because the threshold needed to be lowered, or the door widened. And in 2 cases it was to provide ramp access to a new extension.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

None identified at this time

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

None identified at this time

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The Housing Adaptations Policy enables people with a disability to live as independently as possible and promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None identified at this time

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified at this time

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There is a risk that if the guidance is not clear the needs of service users and their families and carers may not be met, thus compromising their health, wellbeing and independence

7.2 Changes to the eligibility criteria may have implications on the Council's ability to meet the demands of any increase in eligible applications for ramps.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The policy aims to enable decisions about eligibility for housing adaptations in an equitable way and aims to support the independence of those with physical disability within their own homes.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act

Ramps Section of the Housing Adaptations Policy

1.3 Ramps

Description: This is a platform and sloped pathway, with handrails and up stands that provide access for wheelchairs from door to path / pavement level at the most appropriate entrance to the property.

Permanent ramps are usually made of concrete and will replace any existing access provision such as steps.

Semi-permanent ramps are usually made of metal, fibreglass or plastic. They are usually installed over the existing arrangement i.e. steps and are left in place until no longer required. They can be removed and reused. N.B be aware of the problems associated with placing metal ramps on grass. Provision of a wooden ramp is not appropriate, as there is no BS standard to check against.

Guidelines

The disabled person meets the Fair Access to Care eligibility criteria for adaptations AND the assessor has applied the stepped approach taking account of cost effectiveness issues.

An assessment of the disabled person's access to the property will be undertaken by the Initial Assessment Team Occupational Therapist

Ramps may only be constructed where it is possible to construct a ramp to the current building regulations and no steeper than 1:12

Ramps are provided for disabled people who are a permanent wheelchair user, and the wheelchair was prescribed by the Wheelchair Service, and meet at least one of the criteria below:

- The disabled person is reliant on wheel chair and they have stepped access to their home and are unable to manage steps safely or independently, as assessed by an Occupational Therapist, which is having a detrimental impact on their ability to be independent.
- A ramp will not be provided for a person who has privately purchased a mobility scooter, unless that person has been assessed by the Wheelchair Service as being in need of an outdoor wheelchair and the person has chosen to use a scooter as a means of outdoor mobility instead.

Considerations

- The disabled person with a mobility difficulty may find it easier to negotiate a couple of steps rather than walk on a sloping surface.

- Where the disabled person is able to walk short distances and negotiate steps with the assistance of helpers, a ramp may not be necessary. However frequency of use should be taken into account.
- An environmental home visit is required to check which is the most appropriate entrance to be ramped. Assess the width of door, the overall height of steps to door, which way the door opens, length of available space (allow an additional 1200 mm for a level platform outside the door). A joint visit or discussion with a technically competent person is recommended.
- Particular care needs to be taken concerning structure, design and location of the ramp to ensure its safe use, not only by the disabled person, but also by other members of the public. NB the platform and ramp cannot impinge on public pavements.
- Misuse of the ramp is at the individual's own risk, for example, using a ramp specified for wheelchair use by a mobility scooter. The Council would not be liable for any damage or injury sustained.
- In some circumstances provision of a ramp may be contraindicated e.g. where the gradient would be too steep. An individual risk assessment of the situation must be completed.
- Note the tenure of the property, as consent for the ramp to be constructed may be required from the landlord.
- Where the Council approves and installs a ramp it will be fit for purpose, If it is not suitable for a scooter (because it is designed to a lesser specification) the user should be informed and the ramp marked accordingly.
- A follow up visit must be completed when the ramp is in place to check that it is safe and suitable for the disabled person's needs.
- Where an individual is palliative consideration should be given as to the suitability/benefits of installing a ramp, dependant on the individual's mobility and access needs at the time of assessment. Alternatives to permanent ramp installations could be considered ie portable ramps or handrails.
- If a disabled person buys their own powered scooter to allow independent leisure activities, shopping etc. it will be expected that they make their own arrangements for access / storage of this equipment within, or outside, the property at the time they buy the scooter.
- Where an individual does not meet assessment or eligibility criteria for ramp installation then they should be signposted to the Independent Living Centre for information and advice and further sign posting, should the individual wish to make their own arrangements for ramp installation or purchase of scooter storage equipment. By signposting to the Independent Living Centre it is not an acceptance by Halton Borough Council that the use of a mobility a scooter is warranted and that ramp access is required, it serves simply to support the individual in making an informed decision about options available to them should they wish to purchase a ramp or storage equipment themselves.
- Where an individual purchases a ramp or storage equipment themselves, they responsibility lies with the individual to satisfy themselves that the equipment is fit for purpose.

Design Considerations

- Steps may need to be provided adjacent to the ramp for other users who are ambulant, and who do not find a ramp easy to climb. It is essential to

retain steps if the access is communal; this is in accordance with Part "M" of the building regulations.

- The provision of a ramp may necessitate looking at gate opening, direction of opening and threshold adaptations.
- Ramps should be constructed to The Building Regulations 2000 Part M (Access and facilities for Disabled People) or BS 8300: 2001 standard.
- A dropped kerb in the area may be needed, therefore refer to the Highways Department
- Fire regulations may need to be considered and fire exits and ramps being positioned appropriately e.g. in sheltered housing blocks.