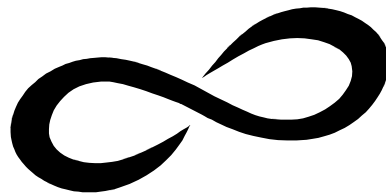


**Northamptonshire Community  
Housing & Support Network**



**HOUSING  
ALLOCATIONS PROJECT  
For People with Learning Disabilities**



**Reviewing Keyways Choice Based Letting Scheme  
and Allocations Policy  
with Kettering Borough Council**

**Marion Turner**

5<sup>th</sup> April 2011

## **Purpose of the Sessions**

People with a Learning Disability, family carers and other community members came together over two sessions to review Keyways Choice Based Lettings Scheme and the Housing Allocations Policy of Kettering Borough Council.

The two sessions on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011, supported people to explore how choice based lettings work and provided an opportunity to assess the fairness, for people with Learning Disabilities, of the Council's Housing Allocation Policy.

Both sessions have been very enlightening for all taking part, members of the public and staff included.

## **People Attending**

The people attending sessions & contributing were:-

Ashley Tansley, Alan Meakins, Stewart Murry, John Welsh, Karon Hawes, Marion Turner, Tom Bain, Simon Bisgrove, Gary Forman, Christine Davies, Charlotte Smith (KBC), Leanne Hunt (KBC) and Sue Hottinger (KBC).

## **Background Information**

The process of assessing the fairness of this approach and the housing allocation policy has also been informed by

- ❖ work done to create the Learning Disability Housing Plan for Northamptonshire 2011
- ❖ research undertaken by Housing Options on behalf of The National Valuing People Team in 2008. (Housing Options are a national organisation who supports people with Learning Disabilities to have a greater range of Housing choice)
- ❖ consideration of the duties of the Equality Act 2010

### **(1) The Learning Disability Housing Plan (2011)**

In making the plan we heard from many people with learning disabilities, and their families, about their experience of approaching District / Borough Council Housing Offices for help. We found that:-

- ❖ people were generally confused about where to seek help on housing matters and available information is difficult to find, often not relevant & in accessible for people with Learning Disability
- ❖ few people had sought any form of housing advice or were registered with District/ Borough Council's to access social housing
- ❖ Most Councils' did not record or collate information about the numbers of tenants with a Learning Disability or about their housing needs
- ❖ Where people have approached District/Borough Council concerns were raised about their experiences, such as:-
  - a. Staff not understanding or having the skills to be able to communicate with the a person with a Learning Disability
  - b. People found it hard to communicate their desires
  - c. More time to advise people & their supporters was needed
  - d. Forms & processes were in a format which people with a learning disability could not read or understand
  - e. Housing allocations processes were confusing for people & their supporters, particularly Choice Based Lettings systems, people were unclear how to access & use the systems
  - f. People were also very unclear about their housing rights
- ❖ Where people had been able to apply there were accounts of people waiting for months or years to hear back from the Council, and
- ❖ Where people have been housed, some concerns were raised about the housing people insensitively, as examples of people experiencing bullying or neighbour problems in their new home were frequently mentioned

## **(2) Housing Options - Review of Choice Based Lettings Systems**

In 2008 Housing Options carried out an assessment of 20 choice based lettings schemes across the Country, to find out how fair the policies are and how easy it is for people with Learning Disabilities to use choice based letting systems to access local housing.

Colleagues used various approaches to assess schemes, these included looking at:-

- (a) Websites
- (b) Application forms
- (c) And Information packs

They also

1. carried mystery shopping activities with people with learning disabilities & families
2. Spoke with key professionals from housing and social services teams and
3. Held focus group sessions & discussions

They assessed choice based lettings schemes in 3 ways:-

- (1) Accessibility of information against common good practice examples
- (2) Assistance offered to people with applying, bidding, viewing properties, and moving in
- (3) Fairness of policies and procedures for people with learning disabilities

### **Their Findings**

- (1) many schemes lacked an understanding about accessible information, and problems people faced accessing or using websites
- (2) discriminatory practice which excluded people from the scheme was common
- (3) in some cases people were refused access to the scheme and told to go the Social Services for help
- (4) schemes often missed the Disability Equality duty to offer more time, more privacy and more support to people with learning disabilities at each stage of the process – particularly time to weigh up information, make choices, access and arrange care support packages

- (5) They also reported that many people with learning disabilities do not get to access this process at all because of a lack of awareness by social care staff, support providers, and families

### **(3) The Implications of the Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act strengthens the requirements on all organisations, and particularly public bodies, to help tackle discrimination and inequality in our society. It seeks to outlaw unlawful discrimination against a person or group of people because of:-

- ❖ Age
- ❖ Disability
- ❖ Gender re-assignment
- ❖ Marriage and civil partnership
- ❖ Pregnancy and maternity
- ❖ Race
- ❖ Religion
- ❖ Sex and
- ❖ Sexual orientation

These are known as ‘protected characteristics’.

There is a considerable amount within the Act which is relevant to supporting people with disabilities (including learning disabilities) to ‘maximise their potential in all aspects of their lives’, which also links with the Valuing People Now objective of enabling;

*“all people with learning disabilities to have the opportunity to make an informed choice about where and with whom they live”*  
(Valuing People Now 2009)

The parts of the Act which have particular relevance include:-

#### **(A) Disability related duties**

These require organisations to make ‘reasonable adjustments to (a) policy and practice, (b) the physical fabric of buildings or (c) auxiliary aids and services, where it could be shown that disabled people may be experiencing disadvantage.

## **(B) The Public Sector Equality Duty**

This is a duty on public bodies, and others carrying out public functions, to contribute to tackling discrimination and advance equal opportunities across the local community. The duty will embed equality considerations into the day to day work of public authorities and encourage them to effectively plan to meet the needs and fairly engage with people with 'protected characteristics'.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves considering the need to:-

- (i) remove or minimize disadvantages suffered by people due to their 'protected characteristics
- (ii) meet the needs of people with protected characteristics, and
- (iii) encourage people with 'protected characteristics to participate in public life or other areas where their participation is low

The duty explicitly recognises that disabled people's needs are different from those who are non-disabled, and as such in considering the requirement to meet their needs, public bodies should take their disabilities into account. This might mean making reasonable adjustments (to systems and processes) for them or treating them better than others. (Equality Act 2010: Public Sector Equality Duty, Jan 2011 – EHRC, p5)

## **Implications for Housing Allocations policy & Lettings Schemes**

With the enhanced disability duties and the Equality duty to advance equality of opportunity, Local Housing Authorities and Choice based lettings schemes will need to do much more to support and enable people with learning disabilities to access their services and the housing on offer.

Also, any aspect of Housing Allocations Policy which can be shown to 'disadvantage' people with learning disabilities, such as the low banding for those living with their families, will need to be adjusted to more fairly reflect the overall context of life experience for people with learning disabilities as opposed others in our communities.

For details of how the Keyways Choice Based Lettings Scheme works please either see the attached notes in the 'appendix', visit the scheme's website at [www.keyways.org.uk](http://www.keyways.org.uk) or contact Kettering, Corby or Wellingborough Councils' for a copy of the Keyways Guide.



### EXAMINING KEYWAYS CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME

**Having our say about its Fairness  
for People with Learning  
Disabilities**

We have had a variety of feedback from the contributors to share with colleagues. It has been collated and the general themes are presented below. In addition one parent said:-

'I wish I'd seen this document earlier (referring to the Hall & Wood et al 2008 report), I had no idea my borough council was expected to help us'

Clearly there is still much work needed by Council's to let people with Learning Disabilities, and their supporters, know how they can receive help and the services that are on offer.

The feedback we wish to share is as follows:-

#### **(1) Banding**

At present people with a Learning Disability living at home with their parents would be placed in band D which means they would be unlikely to ever be offered a home via the scheme. This does not encourage the kind of 'planned approach to rehousing' which people with learning

disabilities, their families, supporters, and many housing authorities themselves would prefer.

Equally It also works against many Government policy objectives particularly in respect of homelessness prevention and 'Valuing People Now', which requires Local Authorities to work offer a board range of housing options & promote the right of people with Learning Disabilities to live independently in the Community.

Finally, as the Keyways already allocates 'Band A' to people applying who are leaving supported housing to 'live independently', it appears discriminatory to exclude those living with their families from doing the same where they have been deemed 'ready to do so'.

## **(2) Property Size**

There is no mention on the Keyways Scheme property chart about single people with care needs being able to access a larger home, including a garden, when they need a carer to live with them.

## **(3) Making an Application**

All of the documents and tools used to tell people about the Keyways scheme need to be adjusted to be more accessible for people with Learning and other disabilities. There are no easy read forms or website pages, nor are any available in a format for those with a visual impairment. There are also very few accessibility tools which make it easier for people to read documents and understand a lot of complex information.

Additionally, the application form has not really been designed to collect even the most basic of information from people about their care and support requirements. So its very hard for people to convey this to Keyways colleagues so they can more appropriately help. Perhaps person centred planning tools used by care and support providers could provide additional information or could be adopted within the application process.

#### **(4) Support Throughout the Whole process**

People with learning disabilities will generally need additional support throughout the whole process, from registering, to viewing a property, accepting it, signing a tenancy agreement and moving in. At present, although the scheme offers more 'hands on help' at certain stages, this kind of detailed support across the whole process is not yet available

#### **(5) Help Describing People's Housing Needs**

People will also need help to appropriately describe their housing needs and to understand that they have a right to do this.

In the two sessions we held to do this work, people living at home, or their parents, took one look at the banding rules and thought 'we'll never get any where its not even worth us even applying'.

Extra work needs to be done to explain to people, how the housing allocation schemes work and how, if people are supported to complete the application forms accurately, they could be banded higher and therefore the process would be worth while. Without this additional work we wont get past people taking a quick look and not bothering to apply.

With such a disproportionately low number of people with a learning disability actually living in social housing, there is a considerable need for all local council's to provide better support to people and families to use their Housing Allocation systems. This could be carried out under the Equality Act 2010 'Equality Duty' as mentioned above.

#### **(6) Having more time at all stages of the process**

Many people with disabilities will need more time at each key stage of the allocations process including :-

- (a) Thinking things out before bidding, such as
  - i. What sort of home do I actually need
  - ii. What home can I afford
  - iii. Where should it be
  - iv. Do I need or want to share
  - v. Where can I find money to help me pay my housing costs
  - vi. Should I buy or rent

- vii. How much housing benefit might I get
- (b) time to arrange support to view a home,
- (c) time after viewings to weigh up all the points about a home and make a decision
- (d) time before signing a tenancy to arrange
  - i. care and support services,
  - ii. think about any physical modifications that may need to be arranged,
  - iii. establish housing benefit eligibility if required and ensure money is available to pay their housing cost
  - iv. think about safety, links to transport and avoiding isolation
- (e) time & support to understand and sign a tenancy agreement
- (f) time to prepare and move in

At present, the Keyways scheme does not provide this level of detailed support for people with learning disabilities. It is also unclear whether more time has been built in at each stage for people with disabilities when using the scheme, as the Equality Act 2010, Disability Duty requires (see above).

## **(7) Specialist Accommodation**

The Council, as well as encouraging people to apply for housing via the Keyways scheme, from time to time also offers housing specifically for certain groups. This is to be commended as long as this is an 'as well as' approach rather than this being the only route to housing for people with Learning disabilities. Unfortunately at present, even though people have access to the Choice based lettings system, poor accessibility and a lack of understanding mean in reality specialist housing is likely to be the main route to social housing for people with a learning disability in this area.

Moreover, in most cases where this has happened this housing has been arranged through the joint working of local councils, Social Services and local housing developers. Thus people with Learning Disabilities not known to Social Services or a recognised housing or support provider, have not had the same opportunity to access this kind of purpose built accommodation as others have. And rarely are people involved in designing such schemes.

Furthermore, many people housed in this way come primarily from referrals by Social Services and are often not even on the local Council's Housing waiting list. This reliance on Social Care colleagues understanding the housing needs of the people they refer has on occasions resulted in some inappropriate referrals and delays to housing developments.

It is important in the future that local council's, Social care staff & colleagues working for housing and support providers, all encourage people with Learning Disabilities to register with their Local Council for housing and that this 'pool' of people is drawn on by Local Councils' when supporting the development of new purpose built accommodation.

### **(8) Offering Other Housing via Keyways – Broadening the options**

People at the sessions we held very much welcomed the opportunity, via the scheme, to apply for other types of housing, in this case private rented and low cost home ownership. However, after visiting the Keyways website over 2 weeks, it became clear few properties are, at present, actually being offered through these additional routes, (only 1 shared ownership and no private rent property was available). So work is required to make this a realistic option.

In addition to these options, It is suggested that Keyways colleagues look to offer access to further types of housing such as:-

- (g) Supported housing of many types including; supported living, supported accommodation, adult family placement (Shared Lives), Home share schemes, Peer support housing
- (h) Available Residential care accommodation for all people
- (i) A sharing home matching scheme for those needing or wanting to share a home with others
- (j) Intentional Community Housing, etc

Housing Options (National Learning Disability Housing Advice body) provide a comprehensive list of possible housing option models. Few of these options actually appear on Choice based lettings schemes lists. If these were included many more local residents could use the system and

local housing suppliers would have one place to promote their homes to many more people, thus making it easier and accessible for everyone.

One of the main complaints of people and families we heard when making the Housing Plan, was the confusion they feel about where to find information about housing and who can help. This combined approach would go along to re-dressing this experience.

### **(9) Accessing Sheltered Housing**

Comments were made about the age barrier to access sheltered housing schemes which many people with learning disabilities, under 55 yrs, have often sought to access with out success. If sheltered housing can't be made accessible other forms of community based housing option should be created locally.

Also there were complaints about 'pet' restrictions in some housing including sheltered housing. The point was made that many vulnerable people often rely on a pet as their main source of companionship, and having to make a choice between a home and a loved 'friend' was felt to be unfair. Indeed, some people with disabilities use their 'pet' as a further form of support, such as people with guide dogs, or those with 'Canine partners'.

It was felt that the removal of a blanket ban on pets and the adjustment of the allocations policy to allow for more discretion and discussion about the nature of the proposed pet & any additional purpose they have, would be helpful and welcomed by disabled people generally.

### **(10) Collating Information for People with a Learning Disability**

Presently, although the Keyways Scheme does ask people to record on their application that they have a Learning Disability this information is often not completed by people perhaps not understanding its significance or is not being collated by Local Councils.

For what ever reason invaluable information which would enable councils' to build a more robust picture of the housing requirements of people with Learning Disabilities is being lost. The lack of this information was

highlighted in the Housing Plan and is something that Council's themselves have been critical of the Plan for not including. The reality is that most Council's, whether Local Council's or the County Council, are not recording or using this information.

More also needs to be done to encourage people to accurately log their circumstances when applying for Housing. This becomes even more significant as Local Council's adjust their approach so they are drawing from their own housing register for suitable applicants when developing specialist schemes, instead of relying on referrals from others.

### **(11) Linking Allocations with Care Pathways & providing an opportunity to try-out various ways of Living**

In the report produced by Appleton & Molyneux (2009), they highlighted the need for Choice based lettings schemes to more effectively link with care pathway planning for vulnerable people using the scheme.

The 'Care Pathways Approach' assumes that for many people with significant care needs they will need to take a number of steps over a period of time to be able to arrive at their most independent form of living. Within this is the belief that to enable this process of personal development people should have the opportunity, between steps, to 'try out' a possible next step before actually taking it.

At present, they point out, choice based lettings schemes are not effectively integrating with this 'care pathway approach' and also do not provide opportunities to try out other forms of living. The development of a programme by a lettings scheme, to better dovetail with care pathways and offer 'trail' housing experiences would be welcomed by many potential new customers to the scheme, not just those with a Learning Disability or with high care needs.



## **HELPING ORGANISATIONS TO BETTER HELP PEOPLE**

### **The Role of The Community Housing and Support Network**

The Housing and Support Network could play a significant role in supporting organisations to better assist vulnerable people in housing need to access and use their services. In many of the areas highlighted above the Network would play a pivotal role in supporting people through their housing journey and provide particular assistance to help people consider their options & make decisions.

The Network could help organisations:-

1. promote their services and the need for people with disabilities to register for housing with the local council
2. make their information and services more accessible
3. modify their banding approach to more fairly reflect the disadvantage that people with learning disabilities experience as well as promoting Government requirements for greater independence
4. assist people to appropriately describe their needs & circumstances when applying for housing
5. support people to consider their options, explore their needs and weigh up their choices
6. support people to work out the cost and feasibility of options, consider linked care and support requirements and access funding for housing & care
7. help people make a decision and support them through tenancy sign up processes, paying due regard to the requirements of the Mental Capacity Act (2005)
8. Help people settle in to their new home, connect with their neighbours and their new community

9. Help speed up allocations processes where designated housing is being developed by offering a direct point of contact to people in housing need, and regularly encouraging people to register with the local housing authority
10. Support organisations to consider the needs of people with learning disabilities when reviewing policy approaches or developing new services
11. Provide information about the housing needs of people with learning disabilities to help enhance the local housing needs picture, and
12. work with partners to provide 'try out' housing experiences for vulnerable people

With this input Local Housing Authorities would significantly improve the accessibility of their housing service, and therefore access to social housing, for people with Learning disabilities and disability generally (in line with Equality Act 2010 requirements). They would also enhance their understanding of people's housing needs and improve the efficiency of housing development programmes.

### **Assessing the Fairness & Accessibility of Lettings Schemes**

From the Hall & Wood et al (2008) study, and our work creating the Learning Disability Housing Plan, we have created a Choice Based Lettings Assessment tool which can be used by schemes to assess their performance against good practice and legal requirements.

The Assessment tool is now being tested and it is hoped local councils will choose to use this mechanism as a self assessment tool, along with feedback on people's experiences, to assess their service performance and improve their housing allocation processes. Enabling them to improve access and enhance fairness for people with learning disabilities in all areas of Northamptonshire. (see appendix 2)

### **Scope of This Report**

This work has been undertaken with the needs of people with a learning Disability in mind. However, many of the points we have made could also

apply to other vulnerable people, such as those with physical disability, older people and people from a black or ethnic minority groups.

### **Moving Forward Together – Next Steps**

Given these findings it is hoped all Local Housing Authorities across Northamptonshire will take on board the important points highlighted and choose to join with the Community Housing and Support Network to begin improving the information available and the experience of people with Learning Disability using their services.

Recommended Actions following this work are:-

<b>No</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1	Assess Keyways scheme using the Assessment tool to clarify all remedial actions required	KBC & Keyways	CHSN to support this
2	Produce easy read forms and information to support people with Learning Disabilities through the choice based lettings process	All local Councils & Lettings Schemes	CHSN has easy read CBL guidance
2b	Create effective systems to provide more detailed support for people through the whole process	All local Councils & Lettings Schemes	CHSN offers the required support
3	Work with partner housing providers to (i) create easy read tenancy agreements (ii) information leaflets and (iii) ensure compliance with Mental Capacity Act & Equality Act compliance	All local Councils & Lettings Schemes	CHSN can provide training to orgs in each area
4	Produce a range of lettings 'service standards' for people with Learning Disabilities & seek to adopt these with all local partners	All Councils, Schemes, LDPB, & hsg Providers	Work with sub regional housing groups and LDPB
5	Share and promote information about accessing Local Council Housing services with people with Learning Disability, Supporters across Northants	LDPB & Social Services	CHSN will support this
6	Support Local Housing partners to implement the new approach across Northants	CHSN	

7	Local Authorities to improve collection & collation of housing needs data for people with Learning Disability and build local picture	All Local Housing Authorities	CHSN to work to support this
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### **Guides to Help People and Housing Authorities**

The Network has produced a number of documents to help colleagues make their services more accessible, these are attached. It is hoped you will good use of the guides & easy read information produced in conjunction with the Hall & Wood et al information (2008).

### **Settings New Standards**

Given our experience in this work the Network may choose to develop a scheme assessment award to which Choice based lettings schemes and Local Council's could aspire. This would be developed with our friends at Housing Options and could be rolled out across the Country.

### **Acknowledgements & Supporting Information**

The work done by Hall C & Wood A, et al in 2008 has provided a robust framework through which local Housing Authorities can assess their Housing Allocations policies & Lettings schemes.

We wish to thank them for sharing their findings and guides to support this work in Northamptonshire.

We also wish to thank colleagues at Kettering Borough Council for working with us on this pilot study. And we hope colleagues from other authorities across the County & the Country will be inspired by this work to more fairly support people with Learning Disabilities to access their housing services.

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**Learning Disability Housing Project Coordinator**  
**01933 381467**

## References

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix 1** – A Guide to Keyways Choice Based Lettings Scheme for People with Learning Disabilities, Northamptonshire Community Housing and Support Network

**Appendix 2** – Choice Based Lettings Scheme Assessment Questionnaire, Northamptonshire Community Housing and Support Network

**Appendix 3** – Choice Based Lettings Easy Read Guide, Hall & Wood et al (2008), for the Valuing People Team

**Appendix 4** – Making Choice Based Lettings work for People with Learning Disabilities – A Guide for Choice Based Lettings Schemes and Landlords, Hall & Wood et al (2008) – Valuing People Team

**Appendix 5** – Choice Based Lettings and People with Learning Disabilities:- Report for the Valuing People Team, Care Services Improvement Partnership (2008), by Hall C, Hooks W, Perez W & Wood



This work has been funded by Northamptonshire Learning Disability Partnership Board and supported by Kettering Borough Council, and Housing Options