

Aids and adaptations toolkit

FEBRUARY 2010

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Aids and adaptations toolkit – second edition

Introduction

This is the second version of HQN's aids and adaptations toolkit. The initial version was produced in 2008. Positive feedback on the toolkit confirmed that it provided essential advice in a crucial area and so we have produced this revised edition to take account of new good practice.

A housing provider's work to promote and install aids and adaptations (A&A) is highlighted in the current Diversity key lines of enquiry. This notes that an excellent housing provider is one that:

- Actively promotes the manner in which A&A are assessed to other organisations and acts as an exemplar in this area. Recycles A&A according to need and changing circumstances, and actively promotes the adapted property register
- Has assessed and developed the most appropriate way of delivering this service, which is resulting in the minimum waiting times for customers from the time the need is identified to the completion of the work.

HQN has reviewed the Audit Commission's comments on A&A in ten inspection reports, all published between December 2008 and December 2009. We also reviewed examples of good practice on the Audit Commission's website and examples of good practice which we have identified in HQN's work with clients.

The inspection reports reviewed covered local authority housing departments, ALMOs and housing associations. Their overall ratings varied from excellent to poor. The Audit Commission's assessment of their A&A work also varied considerably from 'strengths considerably outweighing weaknesses' to 'weaknesses considerably outweighing strengths'.

We have summarised the key points on which the Audit Commission focused in inspection reports under the following headings below:

- Promotion and publicity
- Response and assessment
- Installation
- Monitoring performance
- Other matters.

Many of the points highlighted by the Audit Commission were covered in the original HQN toolkit. The revised version reiterates them and has added the additional points made in the inspection reports and in the examples of good practice identified by HQN in the

course of its work with clients. These additional points include, for example, securing good value for money and making effective use of customer profile data in setting budgets and estimating future demand.

Promotion and publicity

Key points:

- Having up-to-date and accurate information available for residents on the A&A service. Examples included specific leaflets, information in handbooks, newsletters, at GPs' surgeries and on websites. The information should set out:
 - What an aid or adaptation is
 - Who is eligible for assistance
 - How to apply for one
 - Any costs involved
 - Relevant service and time standards.
- Promoting the A&A service. Examples included at tenants' conferences, at festivals and other major community events
- Targeting potential customers by using customer profiling data.

Response and assessment

Key points:

- Having a single team or point of contact that handles all A&A inquiries and acts as advocates if necessary. They should also be able to advise on other possible options available, eg, transferring to already adapted property. There should be assistance available (both financial and practical) to help people to make such a transfer
- Clear definition of what is a minor, and what is a major, aid or adaptation. This is usually by value (eg, up to £500 or £1,000) or by type (eg, using guidance from the College of Occupational Therapists)
- Setting out how assessments will be carried out. This could be by self-assessment for specified minor aids or adaptations, by trained in-house staff, by an outside body (eg, Home Improvement Agency) or by an occupational therapist (OT) as appropriate
- Employing their own OT or bringing in a private OT to help cope with increased demand

- Having time standards and other protocols in place to ensure that assessments are carried out quickly.

Installation

Key points:

- Having an adequate budget to meet demand
- Setting time and other service standards for installing different types of A&A, eg, minor ones within ten working days. Where possible, residents should be involved in setting these standards
- Keeping residents informed of progress of their application and when installation will take place
- Seeking to maximise opportunities for value for money. This could be done through joint procurement exercises with neighbouring organisations, agreeing fixed rates for major contracts, eg, installing walk-in showers as part of a Decent Homes or major repairs programme
- Storing and recycling A&A, for example stair lifts
- Identifying and meeting the need for A&A when undertaking Decent Homes or major repairs work
- Logging all A&A installed on, for example, property files.

Monitoring performance

Key points:

- Assessing satisfaction with A&A work. This should cover all aspects of A&A work from initial inquiry to final installation
- Monitoring performance to ensure that relevant time and service standards were being consistently met
- Involving residents in monitoring performance, for example a disabled tenants' forum
- Evaluating the longer-term benefits of installing A&A, for example, in promoting independent living

- Holding regular meetings with key outside agencies to review performance. These would include meeting OTs, contractors and, where appropriate, local authority staff who set and manage Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)
- Benchmarking A&A performance against that of similar organisations.

Other key points

- Ensuring choice-based lettings adverts highlighted that A&A had been installed in a vacant property
- Seeking to re-let already adapted properties to households with similar needs
- Using customer profiling and other relevant data to assess future demand and so set realistic budgets
- Quickly identifying and tackling backlogs that might arise, for example, bringing in a private OT because the local authority OT is unable to carry out an assessment within the agreed timescale
- Advising on other matters when assessing an application for an aid or adaptation. This might include advice on insulation or on maximising income from benefits and other sources.

This revised edition of the toolkit has been produced by Joanna Jeffery and Richard Seager, Associates, who lead on Equality and Diversity for HQN. The original edition was produced by Joanna and Richard with input from Wayne Hughes, HQN's Executive Director for Asset Management and Procurement.

Advertising the aids and adaptations service

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Is the A&A service promoted through a separate leaflet?		
Is the A&A service mentioned in the tenants' handbook?		
Is the A&A service highlighted in the tenants' newsletter?		
Is the A&A service advertised on your website?		
Is the A&A service included as part of the sign-up checklist?		
Is the A&A service promoted at open days, exhibitions, eg, at a festival, as part of a Decent Homes show home?		
Is the A&A service promoted through leaflets/posters, etc, at local GPs' surgeries, libraries, pharmacies etc?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Have customer service advisers been briefed on the A&A service – not just if asked about it, but how to introduce the idea of the service to elderly or disabled service users who may not have heard of it?		
Have all frontline staff, including repairs operatives, been briefed on how to refer people to the scheme?		
Have you used customer profiling information to target information about the A&A service to elderly and disabled residents and/or their carers?		
Is information on the A&A service available in a range of formats including large print, pictorial language, and community languages?		
Does your advertising material tell people who to contact and how?		
Does your advertising material tell people what the financial implications of applying for an A&A are likely to be for them?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Does your advertising material tell people what your service and time standards are for delivering A&A?		
Does the promotion of A&A provide relevant information for leaseholders as appropriate?		
If relevant, does promotion of A&A include information for private tenants and owner-occupiers?		

Responding to initial inquiries

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Are all initial inquiries about A&A logged?		
Are they logged in one place? Or at least all collated together?		
Does one team or person oversee all aspects of your A&A-related work from the initial inquiry onwards?		
Are all initial inquiries about A&A acknowledged within a set time limit?		
Is the inquirer given information about what will happen next?		
Is the inquirer given the contact details of someone who will be able to give them information on the progress of their request?		
Is an appointment made so that an initial assessment can be made of what might be required?		
Is it clear who takes the lead on following up initial inquiries?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Are all A&A inquiries handed over to an external agency to deal with, eg, local care and repair agency? If so, is there a Service Level Agreement in place to cover all aspects of the A&A process?		
Are communication needs and contact details of inquirers noted and then always acted upon, eg, prefer information in large print?		
Is the applicant provided with an advocate to assist them with their application if necessary?		
Is the applicant advised of other options, eg, moving to an already adapted property?		

Carrying out assessments

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Are all A&A assessments carried out by OT (see also questions below about scope for approving minor A&A without OT involvement)?		
Is there an in-house OT; or are the council's OTs used; or are private OTs used?		
Have other staff been trained to carry out an initial assessment?		
Do you have separate processes for handling minor and major A&A?		
Do you clearly define what is a minor and what is a major aid or adaptation, eg, by financial value; by type of aid or adaptation?		
Can minor aids or adaptations be assessed and approved by staff other than an OT?		
Have key staff been trained to make these assessments and approvals?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Have staff who carry out the initial assessment been trained to cover the range of options available, eg, move to an already adapted property?		
Is there a package of support for people who might be encouraged to move to already adapted properties, eg, help with packing up and moving; help with viewing properties; financial inducements?		
Are staff who carry out the initial assessments able to say how long the A&A might take to install and how extensive the work might be?		
Has a specialist A&A team been set up to carry out initial assessments, eg, comprising an in-house OT, surveyor and housing officer?		
Is the inquirer given a clear indication of what will happen next?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Are there time limits within which an assessment will be made? Will alternative provision be made if these are not met, eg, hire own OT if council unable to assess within three months?		
If appropriate, are applicants given help to complete DFG applications?		
Is there clear guidance on when it will not be possible to carry out an adaptation, eg, through cost; design; loss of unadapted family accommodation?		
Does the initial assessment cover other matters, eg, advice on insulation, maximising benefits?		
Do you provide a handyperson service which can help install minor A&A for residents who might qualify for A&A in line with your policy?		

How aids and adaptations work is approved and commissioned

Key question	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Is it clear who approves A&A requests?		
Does this differ depending on whether it is a major or minor A&A?		
Do residents receive written confirmation of the work that is to be undertaken, together with information on anticipated start and finish dates?		
Are residents kept up to date on how it is progressing?		
Is it clear who draws up the technical specifications for any work required?		
Are some A&A installed by the main repairs contractors? If so, is it clear which A&A?		
Are residents involved in the selection and performance monitoring of contractors and consultants?		

Key question	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Are some A&A installed by specialist external contractors? If so, is this tendered on a job-by-job basis or is there a longer-term contract in place?		
Are small A&A fast-tracked through the responsive repairs service?		
Are A&A contractors assessed on the 'customer care' as well as their technical expertise?		
Are contractors required to comply with a Code of Conduct and, if so, are residents given a copy?		
Has this Code of Conduct been communicated to operatives?		
Have the contracting arrangements for installing A&A been reviewed to ensure they provide good VfM, eg, joint procurement with neighbouring organisations?		
Is there a system for storing and recycling A&A where possible, eg, stair lifts?		

Key question	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Is there a system for prioritising A&A work? Has it been agreed by OTs and other partners? Is it explained to applicants and monitored to ensure it is observed?		

Aids and adaptations in Decent Homes and major improvements work

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Are A&A promoted at open days, etc, used to inform residents about Decent Homes or major improvements work?		
Does Decent Homes work take A&A into account, ie, are Lifetime Homes standards part of the general brief?		
Are A&A raised with all residents when discussing the work that will be done to their homes?		
Are Decent Homes or major works contractors given details of households which include a disabled person and so might need A&A installed using customer profiling or other available data?		
Are checks made to see if any household affected by Decent Homes or major improvements works has already submitted an A&A application or has had an application approved?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Are systems in place to carry out an A&A assessment quickly so as not to disrupt the overall Decent Homes or major improvements work, eg, OT part of Decent Homes team; bringing in private OT if necessary?		
Can standard kitchen and bathroom packages be adapted to meet the needs of disabled residents, eg, wheelchair accessible units, walk-in shower?		
Is it clear which budget pays for A&A installed as part of a Decent Homes or major repairs programme?		
If funding comes from the A&A budget, does this results in possibly unfair ‘fast tracking’ of Decent Homes programme applicants?		

Monitoring performance

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Have time limits been set for each stage of the A&A process, beginning when an initial inquiry is received and covering time waited for initial assessment; time waited for specification to be produced and approved; time waited for DFG approval if relevant; time waited for works to begin and to be completed?		
Are checks made to ensure these time limits are met for each A&A request?		
Have performance indicators been set for the A&A process as a whole – for example, covering the time limits mentioned above; satisfaction levels; successful re-letting of vacant adapted properties, etc?		
Are your A&A-related time limits and standards in line with advice from central government and the College of Occupational Therapists?		
Are your specific service standards for A&A regularly monitored and reported on?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Were your specific service standards for A&A drawn up in conjunction with residents, eg, a disabled tenants' forum?		
Are residents involved in monitoring your performance on A&A-related work?		
Is the performance of outside organisations involved in the A&A process monitored either as part of a service level agreement or in other ways?		
Do you benchmark your A&A performance with similar organisations?		
Is all major A&A work post- inspected?		
Are A&A (including those installed at resident's own expense) serviced and/or maintained in accordance with statutory requirements/manufacturers' recommendations?		
How are these servicing/maintenance arrangements monitored?		
Are there arrangements in place for dealing with defective A&A?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Do these arrangements ensure a speedy resolution for dealing with defective A&A post-installation?		
Is the A&A budget regularly checked to ensure there is sufficient to meet demand?		
If a backlog has developed, have measures been put in place to reduce this within a given timescale?		
Are regular reports made to the board setting out A&A-related performance?		
Is contractors' performance reviewed regularly and used to improve performance?		
Do you separately monitor residents' satisfaction with the A&A that have been installed?		
Do you collect this information in ways that encourage a high response rate, eg, by a telephone survey?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Are residents asked for their views on all aspects of the A&A process – not just if they are satisfied once the A&A has been installed?		
Are the satisfaction levels for all aspects of the A&A process in the high 90 percents?		
Do you monitor satisfaction with A&A a year or more after installation to assess their longer- term impact on residents?		
Is the A&A process monitored by equality and diversity strands throughout the process, ie, from application to satisfaction with completed work; to ensure that there is no under-representation of particular sections of the community?		
Are the results of the monitoring of the A&A process regularly scrutinised by senior management; board; residents' forums?		

Other matters

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Has a policy and procedures been adopted covering the A&A process?		
Does your policy cover possible 'faith-based' adaptations?		
Have all relevant staff been trained on their respective roles in implementing the A&A policy and procedures?		
Has a realistic budget been set to cater for the estimated demand for A&A?		
Is the A&A budget based on relevant data, eg, tenant profiling data?		
Is there a record kept of all properties in which A&A have been installed?		
Are relevant housing management staff kept informed about progress on A&A for applicants?		
Is the integrated housing management system updated with relevant information (stair lift vertical lift installed)?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Do choice-based lettings adverts make reference to any A&A already installed in the vacant property?		
Is the A&A team involved in re-letting adapted properties?		
Have protocols been set up with local PCTs covering A&A required for a tenant leaving hospital?		
Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out of the A&A process?		
Is there joint working with other social landlords both to identify suitable adapted properties for a resident who needs to move and to identify suitable applicants for a property that has already been let ?		
Are there regular liaison meetings with OTs; contractors; residents; groups representing disabled/elderly people, to identify any problems and improve the service?		

Key questions	Yes – evidence	No – action required
Does the development programme aim to meet very specific needs of some disabled residents whose current homes cannot be suitably adapted?		

HQN is the largest independent housing training and consultancy company in the UK. Over 750 housing organisations nationwide subscribe to The Housing Quality Network which provides high quality briefings and workshops on a wide range of issues affecting the sector. We also run a number of specialist networks, provide bespoke consultancy and research, in-house training, interim management (The Pool) and executive recruitment (The Source) services and host a comprehensive programme of conferences and seminars.

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