

## LEARNING DISABILITY PARTNERSHIP BOARD

### MEETING OF 5 NOVEMBER 2007

#### RESPONSES TO “HOUSING QUESTIONS” FROM THE BOARD:-

1. Why is it hard work to find a flat? What could make it easier?

There are lots of flats to buy or rent privately in Southampton, but you need the income to be able to afford one. If you want a flat in social housing, there aren't so many of these and you will have to wait.

Finding a flat becomes easier when there is more awareness of housing options among those who work with people with learning disabilities. It also helps to plan ahead so you can work out which option is best for you, and save-up for a deposit (which you need for a private flat) and for the furniture and household equipment that you will need.

You can find out about renting with a private landlord by talking to our Housing Advice Service (ph. 023 – 8083 2254), who can also refer you to the Roof4all website to help you in your search for a flat.

To join the council's housing list you (or a carer or advocate) need to fill in a housing application form. Our Allocations team's help-line on 023 – 8083 2777 can help with any enquiries about this form.

For information about shared ownership you need to contact Swaythling Housing Society Ltd who act for all the shared ownership schemes by housing associations in Hampshire. They are based in Eastleigh and their phone number is 023 – 8062 8004. They also have a website, which is [www.homesinhants.org.uk](http://www.homesinhants.org.uk)

2. Is there a way of getting help to find a deposit for a flat?

Schemes to help people with a tenancy deposit tend to be for those who are actually homeless on the day – and even then they cannot afford to provide many deposits. Your best plan is to think about your future housing in advance and to save up for a deposit.

3. Can council houses be put in a window display so people can see what they look like?

We produce a fortnightly Homebid magazine which shows all the empty council and housing association properties. You can pick this up at many places in the city, including Gateway in the Civic Centre, our housing offices, libraries, and leisure centres, and you can subscribe to have it sent in the post to you. The same information is also on the Homebid website [www.homebid.org.uk](http://www.homebid.org.uk)

4. Can we talk to people who live in the house before we get it to see if they liked it, and to check it is OK?

We do not give out the actual address of empty properties for security reasons.

You can only look around a property after it is empty. We also do accompanied viewings for some properties, where you go round with a housing officer, block warden, or scheme manager who can tell you more about the property and the area. If you are buying a property on the open market you look round while the owner is still living there.

There are some things you can do to find out if you would like to live there. It is a good plan to go round the local area at different times of day to get a feel of what it would be like to live there, and to find out where the local shops, etc are.

5. Why is it difficult to get houses with a spare room for a support worker?

Social housing is scarce, so we have to find ways of rationing it as fairly as we can. In social housing a single person is eligible to bid for a studio flat (a self-contained bedsit with its own bathroom and kitchen) or a 1 bed flat. However for a 1 bed flat you will be competing against couples. If you have a proven, assessed need for a carer to stay overnight all the time, due to your exceptional needs, then you would be eligible for an extra bedroom for them to use.

In privately rented housing, housing benefit will only be paid on what size of housing you are judged as needing. So you would have to prove that you needed the extra room for a carer before you could get housing benefit for a larger place. With shared ownership housing it would depend on whether you could afford to buy a 1 bed or a 2 bed flat.

6. Is there anyone with a learning disability working with the accommodation panel? (“Learning Disabilities Accommodation Panel”)

This panel discusses who will get supported housing or floating support. It has representatives from social services, the PCT, Supporting People, Allocations section, support providers, and Choices Advocacy.

It would be difficult for a service user to sit on the panel because of the issue of client confidentiality. The panel has to discuss people’s personal circumstances to reach its decisions, and this information needs to be kept confidential.

However, the Accommodation Panel is committed to reviewing how it works and what it does. As part of this review, the panel will consult with the Learning Disabilities Tenants’ Group about the guidelines the panel uses to prioritise applications.

7. Who decides if someone is a priority?

The above panel (Q6) has a protocol which sets out its priorities, and decisions are made on that basis. Choices Advocacy has input into these decisions.

8. We are advised to put young people with learning disabilities on the housing list at age 16. If accommodation is offered but the timing is not right, how long can they stay at the top of the list?

As a general rule, we do not let council properties to people under-18.

Under the Homebid system you only bid for properties that you are eligible for and that you think you might like to live in. If you do not want to move for a while you can either just not bid, or ask the Allocations to defer your application until you feel you are ready to move (depending on how long you want to wait).

9. *Why are there not enough houses for everyone?*

As at 16/11/06 there were 12,000 households on our housing list. Of these we had 8859 LIVE applicants (LIVE = have passed all the tests and provided all the information needed to get on to the list). This compares to 6595 LIVE applicants on 31/12/05. As our housing stock is just over 17,000 we now have 1 LIVE housing applicant for every 2 council properties. (These figures do not include RSL, i.e. housing association, properties).

Changes in society nationally mean there are more households as more families split up, and as people live longer. House price rises mean that it is harder to get on the property ladder. It also takes time to build new housing, especially big developments (finding land, designing the scheme, getting planning permission, etc).

The Right to Buy (of council properties) has taken over 7000 properties out of our housing stock. The RSL's have been trying to replace them, but have not been able to keep up with this level of loss.

10. *Why is it so difficult to get a council place in a nice area? People with learning disabilities are vulnerable and sometimes the only available places are in rough places or tower blocks. If we refuse one of these because we feel scared do we get a mark against us?*

Under Homebid you only bid for properties that you think you might live in. You are not penalised for refusing the offer of a property.

Our housing stock was mainly built when the done thing was to "system build", i.e. concentrate it together on large estates. RSL's are trying to address this, but can only build where they can find land, and can afford to do so.

11. *How do people with learning disabilities and their carers find out about housing?*

You can find out about renting with a private landlord by talking to our Housing Advice Service (ph. 023 – 8083 2254), who can also refer you to the Roof4all website to help you in your search for a flat. You can also contact lettings agencies.

To join the council's housing list you (or a carer or advocate) need to fill in a housing application form; our Allocations team's help-line on 023 – 8083 2777 can help with any enquiries.

To get information about shared ownership you need to contact Swaythling Housing Society Ltd who act for all the shared ownership schemes by housing

associations in Hampshire. Their head office is in Eastleigh and their phone number is 023 – 8062 8004. They also have a website, which is [www.homesinhants.org.uk](http://www.homesinhants.org.uk)

For buying a property that is not under shared ownership you will need to contact reputable local estate agents.

Mencap provides information on a variety of housing topics on its national website. Their website is [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk). You can also contact their national helpline on 0808 – 8081111 (0808 is a freephone number).

Housing Options is a national, independent advice and information service for people with learning disabilities. They give advice on a variety of housing options and also have lots of factsheets. Their website is [www.housingoptions.org.uk](http://www.housingoptions.org.uk). You can also contact them by phone on 0845 – 4561497 (0845 is a local-rate number).

Your support worker/advocate/social worker should be able to point you in the right direction for help and advice.

12. *What housing options are available in Southampton for a young person with learning disabilities?*

If you are under 18 you are better off either staying with your family (if possible), or learning independent living skills in supported housing.

For those aged 18+ the options are:-

- Staying with family whilst saving up money for your own place.
- Renting from a private landlord (however housing benefit usually only pays for a single room in a shared house if you are under 25).
- Putting your name on the council's housing list.
- Buying a property – shared ownership may help you to afford this.
- Supported housing and group homes.

13. *What on-line or hard copy housing advice for carers of young people with learning disabilities is available from Southampton City Council?*

We do not provide anything specific to carers of people with learning disabilities, beyond what social services provide for carers in general.

14. *People have said that they have told their son/daughter's care manager that they are looking for a residential placement, but feel they are just floundering and need more help than they "require". Who helps carers?*

When a care manager is asked to help someone to move out of home, and to access their own housing with support, there is a process that will be followed.

The person will have a series of assessments. Firstly the person will be assessed to see if they are eligible to get a service from the Care Management Team. If they are, then the care manager will probably complete a care management assessment, and a housing and support needs assessment. They

may refer the person to other professionals, such as the healthcare team, for other specialist assessments. During all these assessments there would usually be full consultation with the person's family, carers, and other people who know them.

After the assessment(s), a careplan will be agreed between the care manager and the client, with other parties involved as appropriate. This careplan will say what level of support is needed, be it residential care, supported living, day care, etc. The careplan will also include how many hours of support a day are needed, and what tasks need supporting.

Once the careplan has been agreed, services need to be found to support the person, and sometimes this can be difficult as staff or vacancies may not be immediately available, or not available in the local area.

As well as involvement in the consultation and assessment process, family members may be able to have a carers assessment in their own right, which they can request from the Carers Assessment Team in social services.

15. *What support can carers realistically expect if they want their family member with a learning disability to stay with them in their own home (i.e. help with altering the family house)?*

Adaptations can be done to physically alter the building, e.g. install a ramp or grab-rails. What is done depends on what you are assessed as needing. This assessment will be done by an Occupational Therapist.

There is a waiting list for the work to be done, and if you live in private sector housing (i.e. not with the council) you will be means-tested to see whether what, or if, you will pay towards the work. Your first step in this process is to ask for a referral by phoning the Health and Community Care (i.e. social services) contact centre on tel. 023 – 8083 4567.

If you want to do any other alterations you will need to use your own funds, by getting a loan, using savings or, if you own it, by remortgaging your home. You will need to apply for any necessary planning or building control permissions and, if you live in a rented property, get permission from your landlord.

16. *If someone with a learning disability lives with their parents in a council flat, can you make sure they take over the tenancy if the carers die?*

Succession to a council tenancy on the death of a tenant is governed by the Housing Act 1985, section 87. The son/daughter can succeed to the tenancy provided that they lived there for at least 12 months, as their only or principal home, before their parent died. Succession can only create a sole tenancy (i.e. it can only be to one person).

If the son/daughter is left in accommodation that is too large for their needs (e.g. a single person living in family sized housing), the council will ask them to move into something that is smaller but still suitable for their needs. We would try to get agreement on this, but if necessary we do have the right to go to court to

enforce this move under the Housing Act 1985 (ground 16 of the Grounds for Possession under this Act).

However the son/daughter cannot succeed to the tenancy if the parent themselves was a successor to that tenancy. In this case the housing manager of the area the property is in can give special approval for that person to stay there, or to move to smaller council accommodation if necessary.

The son/daughter can be referred to Choices Advocacy if they need advocacy support to clarify or voice their needs and wishes on this matter.

17. *What is the connection between the council points system used to ensure fair housing allocation, and the provision of appropriate housing for people with learning disabilities?*

The points you get for your housing application reflect your assessed housing need (including any needs related to physical or learning disability, long-term ill health, etc) and the length of time you have been waiting. Every applicant is assessed and given points using the same Lettings Policy and in accordance with the requirements of the law (mainly the Homelessness Act 2002).

When you are filling in the housing application form you need to be sure to fill in the section that asks you to tell us about any health, disability, social and welfare issues. The Additional Assessment Team will then send you a special form, called a “health and support need assessment form”, to fill in to see if you need extra points, and what type of housing and support services are closest to meeting your needs.

This housing application form is only for people who want, and can manage, their own council or housing association tenancy. It is not for specialist supported housing, or for residential accommodation, as social services deal with assessments for this. However, if you apply for housing, and then find that you need specialist supported accommodation instead, then you can be referred to the Learning Disabilities Accommodation Panel who will try and match your needs and wishes to the supported housing available.

If you have been assessed for the option of your own council or housing association tenancy then, under Homebid, you will need to bid for what accommodation you are eligible for and what is available to be let at that time. Within those constraints you can choose what you bid for, and you can bid for 3 properties per fortnight. (See Q.5 about room for a support worker, and Q.10 for issues around location).

18. *Is there a strategic plan for the provision of housing for people with learning disability and, if so, what data is being collected to inform it?*

The strategy is called “Housing and Support Options: A Housing Strategy for Learning Disability” and is available on the council’s website. However it is waiting to be updated.

The data comes mainly from national statistics (e.g. the census), NHS and social services statistics, and feedback from the Supported Housing Accommodation Panel. Local numbers are being collected from Housing and Support Needs Assessments with people who are asking for housing with support.

19. Who pays for the accommodation? What is the effect on benefits such as DLA, Incapacity Benefit, and the grants from the Independent Living Fund? Are funds in a Discretionary Trust taken into account?

If you are a tenant you will need to pay the rent from your income or from housing benefits, depending on your circumstances. In privately rented housing you will need to pay a deposit, and your best plan there is to save up for it over a period of time. Housing benefit does not pay for deposits.

For housing benefits purposes:-

- DLA is disregarded.
- Incapacity Benefit is treated as income.
- Grants from the Independent Living Fund are disregarded.
- With discretionary trusts, if you have access to the capital then it is taken into account as capital; if you only have access to the income from it then it is taken into account as income.

If you buy a property, including by shared ownership, you will need to pay the mortgage out of your income, this may include income support. The more money you can put down as a deposit, the less you will have to fund by a mortgage.

If you move into registered residential accommodation, such as a care home or an adult placement, the cost of your housing there is paid as part of a fee, along with the cost of your care and board.

In registered residential care you pay a contribution towards the cost from your income/benefits, leaving you with a personal allowance. When working out this contribution, all your income is taken into account except any Disability Living Allowance (DLA) mobility component. If you move into residential care you will lose your entitlement to DLA care component and to the Independent Living Fund (ILF), because that is only paid to people living in their own homes.

20. How could you provide somewhere to try out living alone?

At the moment social services do not have any specific places where you can try out living alone for a short time. You could have a short term tenancy on a private flat (called an assured shorthold tenancy), but this would usually be for six months. Some people go to respite services, such as Kentish Road, to try out living away from their families.

In reality, most people do not go straight from living with families and being cared for by them, to living alone in their own flat. Most people move through a range of accommodation, having reduced levels of support and company as this suits them.

People can chose to live in:-

- Residential care/adult placement.
- 24 hour supported living.
- Shared supported living, or cluster flats.
- Sheltered housing (N.B. Council sheltered housing is for those aged 60+).
- Individual flats, with varying amounts of support, as assessed at that time.

A gradual transition, through several of the types of housing mentioned, allows people to develop skills and to get an idea of what living alone will be like before they have to take the plunge. Not everyone will wish to progress to living alone, and may remain living in shared housing, where they will be supported to become as independent as they can be.

21. How could someone with a learning disability find out about buying a house or flat?

You could talk to:-

- Members of your family who own their own property.
- Swaythling Housing Society about shared ownership options (see Q.11)
- Housing Options (see Q.11), whose website is [www.housingoptions.org.uk](http://www.housingoptions.org.uk)
- A care manager, who may not know all the answers, but will help you to find out.
- Local estate agents to find out what is available, prices, etc.
- A reputable financial institution/adviser about how much you can borrow (and how much it is wise to borrow).

22. How many people live in residential care? How many live in supported housing? How many are helped to live at home? How does that compare to what is happening nationally?

The following figures are for people aged 18 or over:-

- Numbers of people in residential care = 131
- Numbers of people in supported housing = 186
- Numbers of people who are helped to live at home = 328

There are no national figures that we can use to compare Southampton on the use of residential care or supported housing. However, with people helped to live at home, Southampton scored 3 out of a rating that goes up to 5 in the national PAF (Performance Assessment Framework) returns. This national measure places Southampton 124<sup>th</sup> out of 150 councils, and 40<sup>th</sup> out of 46 unitary councils, for helping people with learning disabilities to live at home.

23. The "Housing Green Paper" talks about more homes, more affordable homes, and greener homes. How are you making sure that people with learning disabilities are included, and what are your plans for Southampton?

The Green Paper is only the first stage of a new Act of Parliament, it is not law yet. The council has sent its comments on the Green Paper to the government but it is up to the government what it does with them and how much notice it

takes. We will find that out when it reaches the next stage, and becomes a White Paper.

In this response the council took into account how the Green Paper proposals fitted in with all its housing strategies, including the one for learning disability (see Q 18), as well as its policies and local plans for town planning.