



Scrutiny Topic:	Aids and Adaptations
Start Date:	April 2016
Board:	Thursday 13th October 2016
Judgement:	Good

1. Introduction

We are an interested and committed group of volunteer customers who want to improve services delivered by Great Places Housing Group (GPHG). We came together as a working group in July 2014. We currently comprise of four full-time and two part-time members. We scrutinise specific services in detail and act as a critical friend reporting our findings and recommendations to Group Board.

2. Review Service Area

We selected 'Aids and Adaptations' as the focus of our fourth scrutiny review in conjunction with Building Greatness. This service area was selected as a topic to scrutinise for the following reasons:

- The offer of an effective Aids and Adaptations service is crucial to customers' who find themselves in need of this level of support to allow them to remain and live independently in their homes.
- Building Greatness is shortly to commence data collection in 'general needs housing', during discussions it was agreed scrutiny of this service area would assist this work

3. Overview of the service

The Aids and Adaptation function at Great Places Housing Group (GPHG) has been developed to ensure customers are able to live safely and independently within their homes. A procedure is in place to support the implementation of the policy and the provision of a quality service, which is split into two categories; minor and major adaptations. The distinction between minor and major adaptations is based on the nature of work required to install the adaptation and not the impact the adaptation will have for the customer.

Minor adaptations are defined as works up to a value of £1000, where a customer may require small changes such as grab rails, lever arch taps and extra stair bannisters. These works are mainly installed by GPHG in-house repair team unless specialist equipment is required when an approved contractor will be commissioned. An approved external contractor is used, if resources aren't available to allow the fitting of the minor adaptation within the target date of 28 days.

Major adaptations consist of works costing more than £1000 and involve structural changes to the property for example stair lifts, hoists, through floor lifts, adapted kitchens, property extensions and

externally sited ramps. GPHG have committed to working closely with Local Authority partners, who have a statutory duty to deliver major adaptation; as outlined in the HCAs regulatory framework. Customers' requests for major adaptation are referred to relevant Local Authorities through a number of different sources such as general practitioners and social services. The LA will allocate an Occupational Therapist (OT) to carry out an assessment of the customers' needs to identify suitable adaptations and assist to make an application for funding of the adaptation.

GPHG fully fund minor adaptations and major adaptations are funded by LAs via application of funding, a Disabilities Funding Grant, which is means tested. Funding arrangements vary between the 30+ LA areas, the group owns stock in and these range from 100% funded through DFG to a contribution of 40 or 50% of the cost by GPHG up to a value of £2000. Funding will only be contributed if a protocol between the LA and GPHG has been agreed and signed. Not all LAs have signed a formal protocol; some have agreed informal working arrangements and a number have no arrangements in place at all. GPHG can apply discretion to fund a major adaptation based on circumstances so long as a protocol is in place and an OT report has been received.

a. How the service is managed and monitored internally

The service is managed internally through a two tiered approach, which comprises a strategic and a core (operational) group. A representative member of the core group attends the strategic group meetings to provide continuity and a flow of information between the two forums:

- **Strategic Group** - The role of the Strategic Group is to drive forward the continuous improvement of policy and procedure relating to aids and adaptations and to give direction to the Core Group in terms of operational changes, which need to be implemented to deliver an effective service. The group ensures the service is legally compliant and 'fit for purpose' by applying any legislative change.
- **Core Group** - The role of the Core Group is to implement any operational changes, to oversee the performance of the service, to act as a liaison with relevant LAs and to feedback operational issues to the Strategic Group. Group membership consists of six RCs, all existing Neighborhood Managers who manage the service budget, provide approval for work and support for frontline staff. RCs also act as independent reviewers if an adaptation is declined, based on policy 'exemption criteria' and a customer requests to appeal the decision.

b. How the service is financed

GPHG has a group wide budget for the Aids and Adaptation service, which is reviewed annually based on historic spend, stock within regions, customer profiling information and existing LA protocols. The budget is split between Manchester, Oldham, Salford, Blackburn, Fylde, Sheffield, Supported Housing, Agency Managed and Elderly Services. The budget isn't fixed so regions can request funding from another region if the budget is not likely to be fully spent.

4. Aims and Objectives of our review

The aim of our review of the Aids and Adaptations service is to gain understanding of customers' experience of the service and the impact on customers' quality of life. We hope to achieve this by concentrating on the following objectives:

- Review customers' awareness and understanding of the Aids and Adaptations service
- Assess that customer requests for adaptation are treated fairly and consistently
- Investigate GPHG delivers an effective service that meets customers' needs, in accordance with policy and procedure

- Review record keeping, monitoring mechanisms and the reporting systems in place

5. Our Approach

We conducted our scrutiny of this service area by completing the following:

a. Desktop Review

Our review started with us completing a desktop review to familiarise ourselves with the basic functionality, purpose and scope of the service outlined in GPHG's policy and procedure. We also reviewed performance statistics and other relevant documentation such as customer communication and the GPHG website.

b. Presentation by Service Lead

We invited the service lead manager to meet the group and present an overview of the service and establish points of contact for the different areas of the review.

c. Analysed Performance Information

We reviewed performance information for the last two financial years allowing us to compare service trends.

d. Surveyed Staff

We conducted an anonymous staff survey to understand staffs' perception of the way this service functions.

e. Presentation by a Regional Champion (RC)

We invited a RC to present an overview of their role to help us gain further understanding of the significance of this function and the support it offers to service delivery.

f. Job shadowed a Neighbourhood Co-ordinator (NC)

A member of 'insight' shadowed a NC to three separate home visits to customers living in older persons' accommodation. Two visits were arranged to complete Feasibility Assessments and the third visit was to meet with a customer following an installation of an adaptation.

g. Interviewed staff

We invited the following staff to interview to enquire about their experiences of delivering the service to customers;

- Strategic service leads – to understand the function of their roles and how they contribute to this service
- Representation from CAT and the Communication team – to understand communication with customers and how the service is promoted
- 2 x Regional Champions (general needs and supported housing) – to understand their role on an operational level and how they support staff and the service
- 2 x NCs from housing services (general needs) – to understand how the frontline service is delivered to customers from a housing service context
- RAM team (stock condition surveyor and frontline repair team) - to understand how the frontline service is delivered to customers from a repair context
- Assistant Director of Repairs and Asset Management – to understand the contribution of RAM from a strategic level

h. Consulted with customers

We feel customer consultation is an integral part of our reviews; we identified three different customer groups we wanted to engage customers;

- who had an adaptation completed,
- who had been declined an adaptation and
- from GPHG's wider customer base.

We then commissioned the Customer Involvement Team to conduct three different surveys via telephone and email.

6. Findings

a. Desktop review of policy, procedure, performance and other relevant documentation

- Great Places have a comprehensive policy, procedures and other documentation which set out clear practical guidance for staff to follow, whilst informing of responsibilities
- No reliable or accurate performance information available pre 2014-15

	2014-15	2015-16
A&A's requested	371	479
A&A's completed	71%	76%
A&A's declined	9%	4%
A&A's cancelled	5%	5%
A&A's approved & awaiting	15%	16%
Minor A&A's requested	71%	76%
Major A&A's requested	29%	24%
Average time taken to complete minor adaptation.	51.7 days	20.8 days
Average time taken to complete major adaptation	107 days	136.0 days
Combined Average	60.4 days	28.6 days

- There has been a significant increase in adaptation requests (+29%) , particularly for minor adaptations
- There has been significant improvement (31 day reduction) in the time taken to complete a minor adaptation
- Time taken to complete major adaptations has increased by 19 days in the last year
- The number of declined adaptation requests dropped 5% to only 4% at the end of 2015/16
- There is no available customer satisfaction data collected by Great Places
- There was no examples of Aids & Adaptations articles in MGP or Springboard for the last 18 months

b. Staff Survey

- Staff felt the service isn't promoted well and that customers aren't fully aware of the service offer
- The decision to allow RAM staff to approve minor adaptations has resulted in reduced completion times for customers

- The introduction of the RC role has helped co-ordinate service delivery of major adaptations, whilst offering support to staff and maintaining a local connection through LA.
- The core group provides a useful opportunity to identify and discuss barriers and other issues
- The joint Feasibility Assessment visit between Housing Services and Repairs has improved and simplified the internal approval process for major adaptations
- Our partnership working with Local Authorities helps maximise funding and deliver good quality installations
- Supported Housing staff were less clear of the Aids and Adaptations procedure
- The different approaches taken by LA's creates inconsistency and variation across and within regions
- GPHG sometimes aren't aware of customers' major adaptation request until after the Occupational Therapist has agreed a specific adaptation. This can then be difficult if the adaptation requested cannot be installed
- There are no clear, consistent arrangements regarding responsibility for maintenance and servicing of major adaptations, this varies significantly between the 30+ LAs
- IT business systems do not support efficient working for staff;
 - share-point is overly complicated; information isn't kept up to date and this doesn't support monitoring of performance
 - records of adapted properties aren't accurate or easily accessible to support allocations, too reliant on staff knowledge
 - staff have to input information in several different systems, which isn't an effective use of time and increases the chance for human error

c. Presentation by Regional Champion

- The introduction of the RC role has helped co-ordinate service delivery of major adaptations, whilst offering support to staff and maintaining a local connection through LA
- Working with 30+ LAs with different service approaches can be challenging; a mix of working arrangements are in place such as protocols, informal working agreements or no arrangement
- GPHG sometimes aren't aware of a customer's major adaptation request until after the Occupational Therapist has agreed a specific adaptation. If we are unable to install the adaptation at the property this can then be difficult to identify a suitable alternative solution with the customer as they are frustrated with GPHG
- There is no clear guidance on how to exercise the use of discretion, which is provided in the 'exemption criteria'
- GPHG post inspections of major adaptations are sometimes delayed due to the LA not sending information on completed adaptation works on time

d. Job Shadowing of NC

- The NC adhered to policy and procedure; tailoring the approach to the individual needs of the customer whilst managing the expectations
- Customers felt supported and informed throughout the process
- Customers expressed increased feelings of safety in their home following completion of their adaptation

e. Staff Interviews

- Frontline Housing Services staff have received training to identify customers who may benefit from an adaptation so they can inform them of the correct process

- The service is advertised on the website however the policy is not available
- Staff were unaware of other methods used to promote the service other than 'word of mouth'
- There were no examples of the service and communication team working jointly to plan promotion of the service
- Minor adaptations process is improving, it is more flexible and delivering customer satisfaction
- Minor adaptation information is held on Axis and is easily accessible by staff however are not post-inspected by RAM or Housing Services to review quality of works or success of adaptation
- It can be difficult to accommodate a short notice minor adaptation request when customers are about to be discharged from hospital
- The adaptation process considers each customer's specific needs, including support networks and their need to remain in an area
- The RC role is pivotal to co-ordination of service delivery; liaising with LAs, monitoring performance and providing hands on support to frontline staff
- Oldham Occupational Team inform our customers to contact Great Places once a request has been made, this allows a Feasibility Assessment to be completed much earlier in the process and if required, alternatives to be discussed before an adaptation has been approved
- The joint Feasibility Assessment between Repairs & Housing Services enables a detailed discussion to be had with the customer including alternative options to installation of an adaptation, if necessary
- The compliance team take responsibility for servicing and/or maintenance of an adaptation if responsibility is not clear and then agree future arrangements
- It is a challenge working across 30+ Local Authorities and this makes it difficult to communicate a clear process to customers
- Not all Local Authorities have signed a protocol with Great Places and some are less than willing to create working partnerships
- Long waits for major adaptation to be completed and large variance in regions. Blackpool 2+ years, Salford 12 months
- No timescales for completion of a Feasibility Assessment once requested
- The procedure is overly complicated attempting to accommodate 30+ Local Authorities procedures and the same procedure is used whether the adaptation is funded 100% by Local Authority or partially funded by GPHG
- Customers' expectations are often raised if an Occupational Therapist has already assessed need and approved an adaptation, this can make it challenging for staff to discuss alternative options during the Feasibility Assessment
- Local Authorities do not provide timely notification when a major adaptation is completed causing delays to the post-inspection and do not provide documentation to confirm the adaptation has been inspected and signed off
- The strategic group and the core group effectively monitor performance ensuring teams deliver an efficient service
- Adaptations are included in discussions with customers during planned investment works and implemented if required
- The Senior Team have oversight of the service through the regular reporting of a number of Key Performance Indicators
- Share-point the platform used to record and monitor aids and adaptations information is over complicated and not always kept up-to-date

- No customer satisfaction information is collected to monitor performance or assess if the service meets customer needs
- The SCS updates detail direct into PIMMS using an iPad when completing a post inspection
- Share-point is held in Flo but is complex containing some 70+ columns, which aren't kept up to date, specifically completion dates, which LA fail to forward to NC
- GPHG doesn't hold a complete set of records of all adapted properties GPHG own
- The number of different IT systems requires reliance on staff knowledge and understanding of properties

f. Customer Consultation

We received feedback from 91 customers, which is a response rate of 21% of customers who had made an adaptation request. This overall figure is made up of 75 customers whose adaptation request was agreed and 16 which were declined by Great Places.

- Customers found the minor adaptation application process easier (8.27/10) than the major adaption process (6.14/10), this score dropped further for those customers who had a major adaptation declined (4.86/10)
- A majority of customers felt listened to and able to ask questions during the process (77%)
- A majority of customers felt involved in decisions about their adaptation (86%)
- Only 44% of customers having a minor adaptation where informed about who to contact if they had a query during the works
- Despite the long waiting times for a major adaption, customers overall where satisfied with the time taken to have their adaption fitted (7.5/10)
- Customers reported significant improvement in quality of life once their adaption had been installed:
 - Major Adaptation 9.75/10
 - Minor Adaptation 8.42/10
- The majority of customers who had an adaptation declined were not satisfied with the reason given (3.4/10)
- Customers who had an adaptation declined were not satisfied with the information provided to help identify an alternative home that would better suit their needs (4.4/10)

7. Recommendations

Based on our findings from the review investigation, we propose the following recommendations to improve this service for customers:

- Develop an Aids & Adaptations communications plan, which details how Great Places will advertise and promote the service, including; what is an adaptation, the difference between minor and major adaptations, how to request an adaptation and case studies of the impact made to customers quality of life
- Provide written information to customers once GPHG are aware of their request for adaptation to provide a clear overview of; the major adaptation process, who is responsible for different aspects and who to contact with specific queries
- Publish the Aids & Adaptations policy on the GPHG website
- Conduct training with Supported Housing staff on the A&A policy and procedures
- Develop a method to collect customer feedback to measure the success of minor adaptations

- Review approach to accommodating short notice requests from OTs for fitting minor adaptations when customers are being discharged from hospital
- Agree a target timescale for completion of a Feasibility Assessment upon notification of a major adaptation request
- Review the major adaptation procedure to identify ways it can be simplified and allow flexibility when working with different LAs
- Develop guidance criteria for RCs to apply discretion at Right to Review and the Six Monthly Review, to ensure a more consistent exercising of discretion across the group
- Prioritise surveying adapted properties where information is incomplete or out-of-date
- Review the information provided when a customer's request for adaptation has been declined and how this is communicated, ensuring reasons for reaching the decision are clearly outlined and the different ways customers can find an alternative property
- Work with LAs to develop consistent working agreements, which include common practices such as a target timescale for LAs to notify GPHG of a request for major adaptation, a completion date of installation and agree responsibility for maintenance and servicing of major adaptations, endeavouring to sign as many of the 30+ LAs up to the agreement
- Work with the Customer Involvement Team to identify suitable customer feedback methods to monitor the performance of the service and customer satisfaction
- Review the Flo site (share-point) to improve efficiency and ease of use when recording details about major adaptations
- Identify approaches to minimise the requirement for staff to input duplicate information into multiple systems

8. Overall Judgement

In order to provide context, we used evidence gathered to score 6 customer focussed measures as 'strength or weakness' then give an overall judgement using a scale range of 'poor, fair, good and excellent'

Criteria	Score
Customer awareness of service	Weakness
Ease of access to service	Strength
Customer service	Strength
Overall communication	Strength
Outcome of service	Strength
Customer satisfaction of experience	Strength
Overall Judgement	GOOD

9. Acknowledgements

Insight would like to thank all the GPHG management and staff who gave their time to support our scrutiny activity, including the support and guidance of Tracy Gregory, involvement co-ordinator.