

## Report for Housing Management Board

### Accessible Homes and TEC Hub

#### Service Update

#### Overview of team

Accessible Homes and TEC Hub is a team in Homes and Landlord Services focussed on assisting people to remain independent in their own homes. The team carry out a range of interventions to support residents to remain living independently in their own home from equipment to bedroom and bathroom extensions. The team arrange and oversee the repair of bathing adaptations and servicing and maintenance of lifts in council properties. In January 2020 the new TEC Hub joined the team and is responsible for assessing for and provide Technology Enable Care to support adult care in providing innovative solutions to care in people's homes.

The team is made up of Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Occupational Therapy Aids (OTAs) who carry out assessments of people's needs around access the home environment. On completion of the assessment if it is not obvious how the identified need can be met then a surveyor will be allocated to work with the OT/OTA and the family to see how needs can be met. This can involve many technical designs to reach a workable solution. The Caseworkers will be the point of contact for the customer throughout the process and oversee the administrative process. The Technicians complete minor adaptations quickly where these are identified such as grab rails, half steps, raise and lower chairs. We have recently appointed a clerk of works who will visit whilst contractors are on sight to ensure everything is going to plan and they also check repairs when these are ordered.

#### What has been delivered since March 2020

##### Cross tenure completions April to Dec 2020

|                                  | Number |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Assessments                      | 308    |
| Minor adaptations completed Work | 741    |
| Major Adaptations Completed      | 421*   |

\*Budgets are 100% committed with full spend expected at year end

Since last March the team has had to adapt to new ways of working to continue to provide a level of service to our customers.

The first lockdown did not allow for us to visit people in their homes to carry out an assessment, it also prevented the opening of the assessment centre. We quickly adopted a new way of carrying out virtual assessments using WhatsApp. This enabled us to continue to carry out some assessments. We continue to use this as an option especially for staff and customers who are still shielding.

The technicians team continued to carry out minor adaptations in peoples in homes to prevent hospital admission. The TEC Hub was only just fully staffed and ready to start when lockdown came in. The new team had to come together remotely, including all training. The team have worked closely with hospital discharge teams to aid discharge safely and quickly.

The Caseworker and the OTs/OTAs team carried out 100's of welfare checks for all of those customers involved in our service. Telephone calls were made to advise of delays and to check if people needed access to other services – many were referred to other agencies for further support.

Through out the year we have continued to release works that can be completed in a Covid secure way including stairlifts and external works. As consequence we have no stairlifts and very little external work on our waiting list.

### **Work backlog**

The current backlog of work is unacceptable, and we have been working to reduce this backlog. However, there are multiple factors influencing waiting times these include;

- **Covid**
- **Staff**
- **Contractors**

### **Covid**

Has had a significant impact on the ability of the team to carry out their work at every stage from not being able to visit people in their homes or to hold assessment centre consultations and with two out of our three contractors furloughing their entire work force from March to August during 2020. Many of our customers have been shielding as have some of the team. The need to social distance and wear PPE has also significantly reduced the way in which the team and our contractors can work. These will be ongoing issues until such time all restrictions can be lifted.

### **Staff shortages**

The OT team has not been at full capacity for at least 18 months. Long term sickness, maternity leave, unfilled vacancies and an increase in referrals have all impacted waiting times.

A national shortage of OTs and higher pay in health sector both impact on our ability to recruit. The issue around this is recognised by Bristol City Council and new OTs now start higher up the salary scale. However, we have had a post advertised for the third time for three weeks and we have had no applications.

Locum OTs have been recruited to fill vacancies however, the first left due to lockdown and being unable to visit homes. We have had two locums since July 2020 however, both have left after being approached by other local authorities and being offered permanent roles. We had aimed to have two locum OTs working to help clear the waiting list, but this has not been successful. We continue to look for locum OTs but have also started to explore the option of using a private agency.

Since the first lockdown referrals for assessment have continued to come through from Care Direct with five hundred and ninety-five received between March and January. Our ability to carry out assessments however has been impacted. Not least because our client group were predominantly shielding, and many were reluctant to allow home visits for a significant proportion on 2020.

It is important to highlight that referrals come to the team as either high or standard priority cases. High priorities are released as quickly as possible and it would seem we have had a high proportion of high priority referrals this inevitably impacts on the waiting time for standard cases.

Four of our surveyors have retired in the past eighteen months which not only impacts on the experience in the team (all had been in the team for many years) but their cases need to be reallocated to the remaining team.

It is also worth noting that when new OTs and surveyors are appointed it takes considerable time to train them due to the specialist nature of the work.

## **Contractors**

Our current framework contract which is due to expire 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 has not delivered as we had planned. The contractors have been unable to meet the demands of the service throughout the contract. This has had an impact on the amount of work they have been able to complete on time to the quality we expect. Staff time is then taken up having to chase and supervise contractors more than we should have to.

In addition, Covid had a big impact with two out of three of our contractors unwilling to work in people homes for four to five months of 2020. The contractors that did continue had to focus on urgent work that could be completed quickly. They continue to be restricted in how they can work with work generally taking much longer.

We have also had difficulties with the element of the framework for larger schemes of work. With 4 of the 5 contractors not submitting quotes. We have only one contractor left on the framework who is tendering for the work. These quotes are often not competitive and therefore we have had to look and bring forward an alternative route to market. Whilst work is delayed we also still need to evidence value for money in all the work we do.

## **Resolution/ Actions**

- Continue to look to appoint two agency OTs/ Recruit an OT agency.
- Recruit to permanent OT vacancy – ongoing
- Appointed two new contractors to compete thirty level access showers - to BCC properties, this is nearly completed and has been really successful.
- Agents from an external framework being used to design and tender larger complex schemes of work this helps with surveyor capacity. This has also provided access to more contractors, experienced in building extensions, providing more competitive quotes.
- Appointing additional contractors from an alternative framework (South West Procurement Alliance) to continue to reduce waiting list over the next six months. We are aiming to give the design and build element to contractors and bring the new contract on-line very quickly in the next four to six weeks. This could quickly have a significant impact on the surveyor and contractor waiting list.
- Have appointed a Clerk of Works to check contractors on site and oversee repairs – this will hopefully free up surveyor time to focus on the more complex work and not have to get involved in these less complex jobs and chasing snagging works.
- Continual review of waiting list identifying quickest way forward on individual cases to prevent waiting unnecessarily.
- For DFG work encouraging people to organise the work or to employ an agent to do this for them. This will not only free up surveyor time but also mean customers can choose their own contractors reducing reliance on the contractors on our framework.

### **In conclusion**

Undoubtedly, Accessible Homes has not delivered on our normally high standards and quick processing of home adaptation referrals over the last twelve to eighteen months. As outlined we have plans, which we will continually review, in place to reduce these waiting times over the coming six to eight months to considerably reduce waiting times and improve our services.