

Minutes of Forum Meeting 21st May 2010

Present: 25 people attended

1. Introductions

The group introduced themselves and told everyone their birthday

2. Brenda Anderson Medical Advisor Special Needs Housing Team

Brenda is the medical advisor for people applying for re housing relating to their health issues.

She reads through the medical health questionnaire that applicants complete and uses her knowledge to assess their eligibility.

There are three priority stages for eligibility:

E: No grade-not eligible

B: Substantial improvement to lifetime or enduring condition, for example needs level access

A: 'Housebound' unable to leave the house/wheelchair users unable to access due to steps/narrow doorways.

There is also an urgent non discharge priority for those who are in hospital and unable to be discharged home because of the unsuitability of their home.

Choice Based Lettings

Once you have been assessed and given a banding, you are able to bid for properties using the choice based letting system.

There is a weekly magazine with properties. This has a key code to show which are wheelchair accessible; the key is currently being upgraded to represent level access, steps and other access needs.

Action

Disability Backup was not pleased with the types of images that are being suggested for the new key, people reported that they are confusing. Members want to know who was consulted about this design and why Disability Backup was not involved. Catherine to contact the Housing department about this.

Many forum members gave their feedback on the current system. Brenda took the details of the individual concerns so she could look into them in more detail.

Member #1

I am a wheelchair user and live in the first floor of a block where the lift is regularly breaking down. I was informed that my application to be rehoused was stopped in October but no reason was given.

Member #2

There is no accountability for the process, you are not kept informed and you have to constantly pester to get anything done. All of the emphasis is placed on the applicant and not on the team to do its job.

Member #3

The process is really bad, I was told that my form was lost a number of times and had to repeat it. I am in band B but when I bid on a property I am told I am 40th on any property I bid for. I feel like I am encouraged to gamble on this process every week. Every week I feel encouraged and every week it seems impossible to get a property.

With regards to accessibility, it's not enough for the house to be accessible, where is the nearest bus stop? GP surgery? Shops? I have to visit every property to see if it's suitable for my needs, why am I encouraged to bid when I will never get a property?

The yellow form should be 1 to 1, many disabilities cannot be described on paper and you cannot get your needs across. Barbara suggested that all forms for those seeking medical priority be submitted with an access team OT report if the applicant feels unable to present their case adequately on the yellow Health Questionnaire. In most cases I would ask for an OT report if mobility issues were mentioned on the form. Anyone can ask the Access Team (0208 356 5619) for a home OT assessment.

Member #4

I filled in the forms, told that I should bid and when I apply I am told I am number 1, but I still don't get the property.

There is no wheelchair access in the property I live in, I use a wheelchair and cannot get around my house. Barbara replied that this person needs to submit a completed yellow Health Questionnaire with evidence of their wheelchair use (OT report for instance) and their application for assessment will be placed in the urgent queue. Most wheelchair users get an A medical priority if their current home is unsuitable which places them in the Urgent Band for rehousing.

I asked for a review but no one came to assess me. My housing officer says they will come but they never do.

Brenda emphasised that lift and maintenance of buildings do not come under health assessment, neither do local surroundings. She also pointed out that the yellow form is only referred to her if the housing team feel they want a medical opinion.

Member #5

I live in temporary accommodation and am leaving this month; I have been given nowhere else to live. I did a medical assessment but nothing has changed. I went to Hillman Street and they told me there was nothing that they could do. Where will I live when I have to leave this place?

Barbara advised that this person needs to contact Options and Advice team at Hillman Street

Special needs housing team

There are 2 queues for assessment in the special needs housing team, urgent and non urgent. There is only one special needs medical advisor working in Hackney. Currently there is a waiting list for assessment; the urgent will usually get assessed within one week.

Brenda emphasised that she doesn't automatically receive the medical assessment form; it is only referred to her if the housing team want her opinion.

Action

Disability Backup members wanted to know how a housing officer with no medical experience can assess their needs fairly. Some members were also concerned that there is only one medical advisor in hackney. Catherine to ask for more clarification on this matter.

The special needs housing team refer applicants on to the occupational therapy department who can assess your property. The OT can authorise and order adaptations or equipment to make your current property more accessible. This may be rails, bath seats, chair raisers or larger pieces such as walk in showers.

Disability Backup members reported that many people have had an occupational therapy assessment and were very happy with the outcome.

If you feel that you need adaptations to make living in your property easier, you can self refer to the occupational therapy team by calling 020 8356 6262.

Housing Waiting list

There are currently:

21 people waiting for a 1 bed wheelchair accessible flat

26 people waiting for a 1 bed level access to front door flat

25 people waiting for a level or 1 step flat with a level access shower

Currently 70% of wheelchair accessible homes have been allocated to non wheelchair users.

Action

Disability Backup to ask the housing team what measures are in place to reduce the amount of wheelchair accessible homes being let to non wheelchair users. Disability Backup also to ask about the situation with reported lack of suitable accommodation for disabled people.

Meeting ends