**Learning from others: developing an effective aids and adaptations service**

**In 2011 livin launched a new aids and adaptations service to drive efficiencies, reduce costs and ensure the effective use of its adapted stock.**

Livin was established in March 2009 following a stock transfer from Sedgefield Borough Council. Livin owns and manages in excess of 8,500 properties and primarily operates in the South of County Durham, in North East England.

Livin is a homes and communities business and its mission is ‘working with the community at heart.’ It works to improve lives and communities through social innovation and supports people to improve their employment prospects, health and wellbeing, financial confidence and to live greener lives.

**Drivers for change**

At stock transfer, livin’s adaptations service suffered from a lack of funding to cater for the increasing demand; it was common to have spent the annual budget by the third quarter, resulting in a backlog of adaptations year-on-year. The service was not sustainable and did not offer value for money; adaptations were often a ‘stop gap’ measure before the home eventually became unsuitable for its tenants’ long-term medical needs.

Furthermore, the adaptations assessments undertaken by occupational therapists were not considering the feasibility of carrying out the adaptation to the particular property. This often led to:

- Adaptations being carried out that did not represent value for money
- Tenants expectations being raised when the property could not be physically adapted
- Adaptations being carried out when there were suitably adapted properties available elsewhere
- Difficulty in letting adapted properties when they became available for re-letting.

**A new service**

It was apparent that the service needed to change and in February 2011, as part of a full service redesign, a new aids and adaptations team was launched. Livin’s new adaptations service comprises a team leader and surveyor. An in-house Occupational Therapist (OT) was also recruited to ensure appropriate adaptations were being recommended. All construction work is carried out by livin’s construction partner, Mears.

The service provides aids and adaptations including stair lifts, wet rooms, ramps, handrails and grab rails up to the value of £15,000; thereafter any adaptations are funded by Durham County Council.

Livin’s ‘transfer promise’ requires the adaptations service to receive £550,000 per annum for a ten year period, any underspend is rolled forward until the £5.5M is fully expended.
Key learning points

livin’s key learning points from the development of the new aids and adaptations service are:

- Ensure a fair and clear policy is in place defining what will be provided, where and in what circumstances. Ensure buy in and acceptance from key stakeholders;
- Ensure the policy is flexible to cater for extreme cases;
- Ensure the policy is regularly reviewed. livin’s scrutiny group scrutinised this service in November 2013 resulting in the Aids and Adaptations Policy being reviewed and updated;
- Be prepared for some criticism of the policy, especially from pressure groups;
- Remember the policy isn’t about saving money it is about spending your budget wisely to develop solutions to meet needs, resulting in ‘more for less’;
- Reinvest savings into the service. This clearly demonstrates a long-term commitment to the service.

Outcomes of new service

- Satisfaction rates are currently 100 per cent for client services and 100 per cent for work undertaken;
- The backlog of the number of adaptations due for completion has reduced from 273 to nil;
- Waiting times for major adaptations have reduced from up to two years to a maximum of 12 weeks;
- Cost savings have been generated through negotiating favourable fixed prices and the use of alternative products, such as reconditioned stairlifts;
- The Council’s OT, who carries out the assessments, now has clear guidelines to follow which has reduced the number of referrals for adaptations from tenants that livin are unable to accept – leading to a reduction in the number of complaints received due to inappropriately raised customer expectations;
- Disruption to customers having adaptations completed in their properties has been minimised as all works are carried out in one phase;
- When a home with existing adaptations becomes void it is proactively allocated to the customer who is most suitable for the property; livin’s in-house OT makes a joint visit with prospective tenants to adapted properties to ensure the property is suitable for their long-term needs;
- Adaptations are now integrated within the Home Improvement Programme - vulnerable tenants are highlighted before works commence and any adaptations required are put in place during the works phase.

For the last two financial years, the service has been delivered at approximately 70 per cent of the budget. These savings will enable livin to extend the 10 year transfer promise of funding the adaptations to an estimated 12 years at no additional cost.

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