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**HOW CAN NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL IMPROVE THE
ALLOCATION OF ADAPTED AND WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE
HOUSING TO DISABLED APPLICANTS ON THE HOUSING
WAITING LIST?**

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**Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MSc in Housing
Studies**

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Abstract

As a major Scottish social landlord, North Lanarkshire Council (NLC) allocates a wide range of house sizes and types, including properties which are wheelchair accessible and/or adapted to suit an individual with a physical disability. I have worked in housing for NLC for 35 years and am currently employed as a full-time Housing Co-ordinator within a locally based Allocations Team. It is my belief that the way in which NLC allocates adapted and wheelchair accessible housing could be improved, to the benefit of waiting list applicants, staff and the Council itself, and I have chosen to use NLC as a case study for this reason.

Following one-to-one interviews with a number of waiting list applicants, recent new tenants, allocations staff and Occupational Therapists from within North Lanarkshire, I have made a number of recommendations based upon their responses and opinions. The interview questions were largely based around themes identified in previous research, including the application paperwork and process, information available to housing applicants and liaison with other local authority staff. I have also drawn upon my own experience as well as considering other research and resources from various housing-related and disability-related authors and organisations.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One – Introduction	Page 3
Chapter Two – Literature Review	Page 7
Chapter Three – Methodology	Page 17
Chapter Four – Research Results and Analysis	Page 26
Chapter Five – Summary and Conclusions	Page 44
Table 1 – Research Participants	Page 19
Table 2 – Freeing Up Existing Stock	Page 41
References	Page 46
Appendices: 1 - Participant Information Sheet	Page 52
2 - Participant Consent Form	Page 55
3 - Interview Questions	Page 57

Chapter One – Introduction

Context and background issues

The issue of effectively allocating limited numbers of wheelchair accessible and adapted social housing properties is not a challenge which is unique to North Lanarkshire Council (NLC). Finding suitable housing can be a problem for many individuals in society but there can be particular issues which affect those whose physical disabilities limit their choices more than most.

I undertook my research in order to answer the question “how can NLC improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing to disabled applicants on the housing waiting list?” I asked various stakeholders questions regarding the housing application paperwork, NLC’s allocation policy and points system, the choices and information available to housing applicants, the allocation/matching process, liaison with Technical Officers and Occupational Therapists and how to free up existing stock where adaptations are no longer required.

A number of organisations which support disabled people recognise that housing is a major issue for many. Three quarters of respondents to a survey by Capability Scotland in 2014 “advised that a lack of suitable housing was one of the main barriers facing disabled Scots in society today and is a human rights issue” (Capability Scotland, 2014).

The problem is widespread throughout the country, as “a total of 1.8 million disabled people in the UK have an accessible housing need, according to research by housing association Habinteg – at least 78,000 of whom are wheelchair users” (Graham, 2018, p22).

There can be negative consequences of not having a suitable home. A report by Shelter (England), published in April 2017, found that 1 in 5 (21%) of the 3509 adults interviewed said that “housing had negatively impacted upon their mental health in the last 5 years” (Shelter, 2017, p4). Disabled people can also feel “marginalised and excluded from mainstream society” and are often “pushed into poor housing” (Kitchin, 1998, p343). Living in a home which is not suitably adapted or accessible has more obvious disadvantages such as not being able to bathe/shower (for example,

if the occupant needs a wet room and the property has a bath which the person is unable to get into) or not being able to freely move around if there is a lack of turning space for the occupant's wheelchair. Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living (GCIL) acknowledges that "housing is the cornerstone of independent living" and that "without an accessible home disabled people have greater difficulty in accessing education, employment, social and recreational activities" (GCIL website).

The provision of suitable accessible housing is therefore an important and significant matter for disabled individuals and their families and, for the many whom are not in a position to buy a property and wish a secure tenancy, local authorities and registered social landlords are often their only options.

A problem in North Lanarkshire?

North Lanarkshire Council is a suitable example of local authorities in Scotland that are committed to tackle the issue of unmet need for adapted and wheelchair accessible housing. The Council is due to implement a revised allocation policy to make best use of older people's housing (many of whom have a disability or mobility difficulties) and is reviewing the adaptations process to ensure that best use is made of adapted properties (NLC *Local Housing Strategy*, 2016, p53). It has also set a minimum target of 5% of all new build social rented housing to be built to wheelchair standard (*ibid*, p48).

The *Particular Needs Evidence Paper for the Development of the Local Housing Strategy 2016 – 2021* (NLC, 2015) acknowledges that people with a disability can experience various constraints when trying to access appropriate housing (NLC, 2015, p3) and notes that 7.7% of people in North Lanarkshire consider themselves to have a physical disability (*ibid*, p9, from the 2011 Census). The paper also reports that there were 387 applicants on the Common Housing Register in 2014 who were requesting wheelchair housing (*ibid*, p14) but the information regarding the number of wheelchair accessible properties is incomplete as these properties are not properly categorised or recorded by NLC. There is also a recognition that the current housing allocation system does not differentiate between mental and physical health when awarding points in accordance with NLC's allocation policy (*ibid*, p33) and this causes difficulties for staff who allocate adapted and wheelchair accessible properties as well as some confusion amongst waiting list applicants, regarding their position or

priority on the list for these types of properties. From 2011/12 until 2014/15 there was also a 20.7% increase in the number of adaptations provided (*ibid*, p19) which is partly attributed to the increase in the number of older people living for longer and NLC's policy of supporting people to live at home rather than in residential or care homes. It is my view that all these factors are having an impact on the efficiency of the process of allocating adapted and wheelchair accessible housing in North Lanarkshire. If properties which are already adapted could be offered to people who actually need the adaptations, and the availability of these properties could be increased, this could result in financial savings for NLC as well as improving the lives of disabled applicants on the housing waiting list.

There are also a number of historical issues which have impacted upon the availability of desirable, accessible homes. Many of NLC's remaining stock of 36,700 social housing properties (NLC website, 2016) were built shortly after the end of WWII, in 1945, and are not wheelchair accessible or suitable to adapt. Urban planners have caused difficulties for disabled people by designing open spaces and buildings, including houses, which are inaccessible to people with a physical disability (Kitchin, 1998, p347) and this can be seen throughout many areas of North Lanarkshire. It is only in more recent years that the situation has improved and new build housing developments have included a number of wheelchair accessible properties.

The Right to Buy scheme also resulted in many adapted properties being sold to sitting tenants. Since the abolition of the scheme in Scotland, in 2016, and the recent acceleration of NLC's new build programme, the number of wheelchair accessible and adaptable properties is slowly increasing.

Recent research such as *Space to Move: Making Efficient Use of Homes for Wheelchair Users* (Joseph et al, 2011) and *Matching Up? A Pilot Study of Effectiveness in Letting Adapted Social Housing* (Anderson et al, 2017) found that there are many issues surrounding the allocation of accessible and adapted housing which need to be addressed and that further research is required.

Tackling the problem

In my role as Housing Co-ordinator, I have direct experience of allocating social housing in North Lanarkshire as well as access to current and historical information regarding housing stock and waiting list applicants. It was my view that the people who were best placed to talk about the problems within the allocations process in NLC, and hopefully come up with practical solutions to some of them, were those who have experienced the system themselves, from various different perspectives. I therefore decided to interview NLC allocations staff, waiting list applicants, recent new tenants and NLC Occupational therapists, to discuss their personal accounts and opinions of the process.

I conducted individual, face-to-face interviews with 10 participants and asked questions concerning the housing application paperwork and health assessment process, NLC's allocation policy, the choices and information available to housing applicants and staff, the allocation/matching process, liaison with Technical Officers and Occupational Therapists, suitability of properties for adaptations, and suggestions for increasing the availability of accessible housing. Participants were encouraged to talk of their own experiences and make their own suggestions for improving NLC's allocation process.

My research revealed that, whilst there are examples of good practice and successful matching of wheelchair accessible and adapted housing to suitable waiting list applicants, there is more that could be done to improve the system and the outcomes for the various stakeholders.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Overview

In this chapter, I will review existing literature concerning some of issues around adapted and wheelchair accessible housing, including equality and the legal rights of disabled people; design, accessibility and housing adaptations; and allocation policies and practices. These issues can influence how well, or poorly, adapted and wheelchair accessible housing is provided to those who require it and have an impact on various stakeholders, including housing, health and social care practitioners but, most importantly, on people with disabilities and their families, as the report *Housing and Disabled People: Britain's Hidden Crisis*, published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in May 2018, found (EHRC, 2018, p85-86).

There is a considerable amount of literature around these topics, some of which provides background information and sets the context of my research, and some which illustrate the gap in existing knowledge and understanding which influenced my decision to carry out new research in this field. Academic literature includes *Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction* (Barnes et al, 1999) and *Disabled People and Housing: Choices, Opportunities and Barriers* (Hemingway, 2011). Research reports from charities and other agencies include *Matching Up? A Pilot Study of Effectiveness in Letting Adapted Social Housing* (Anderson et al, 2017) and *Mind the Step: An Estimation of Housing Need Among Wheelchair Users in Scotland* (Watson et al, 2012).

Equality and the legal rights of disabled people

Some authors, such as Abberley (1987) and Barnes et al. (1999), have noted that whilst disabled people may be disadvantaged by their individual impairment, society and institutions can systematically disadvantage them. Paul Abberley considered that “disabled people can be regarded as a group whose members are in an inferior position to other members of society because they are disabled people” (Abberley, 1987, p7) and that “such disadvantages and their supporting ideologies are neither natural nor inevitable” (*ibid*, p7). He concluded that whilst disabled people were being

oppressed by “economic, social and psychological disadvantage” (*ibid*, p17), a wider understanding of the material basis of these disadvantages was required. Barnes et al (1999) further developed this theory by arguing that family circumstances, income, education, employment, housing, transport and the built environment can all cause problems for disabled people and that this “social model” of disability highlights the barriers which society presents for disabled people in contrast to the more traditional “medical model” which focusses on how people can be limited by their individual impairments. The social model of disability is seen by many as having helped disabled people to challenge discrimination and has helped shape rights and policies for disabled people in the UK. Whilst the social model was “developed by disabled people and is supported by organisations led by disabled people” (Wilder, 2017, online), it has also been criticised by some academics. Three central criticisms, in terms of the issue of impairment; the impairment/disability dualism (two socially generated concepts which impact upon disabled people); and the issue of identity, were presented by Shakespeare and Watson (2001) and the model “has been labelled as an outdated ideology in need of further development” (Owens, 2015) which has “simultaneously created conflict and tensions within disability studies” (*ibid*). Regardless of which “model” is considered, or the perceived benefits or drawbacks of that model, it is the fact that having – or not having - a physically accessible home impacts on the lives of disabled people which has instigated my research.

In terms of legislation, disability is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 which requires consideration by individuals and organisations and imposes a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. However, the Human Rights Act 1998 does not confer the right to accommodation on any individual, and the Homelessness (Abolition of Priority Need Test) (Scotland) Order 2012 removed the priority for housing previously awarded to vulnerable homeless individuals, including those with a disability. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires local authorities to give “reasonable preference” to persons who are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions. Whilst the law does not define “unsatisfactory housing conditions”, the term is sufficiently wide to cover circumstances where a person’s housing is unsuitable due to their medical condition or disability (Scottish Government, 2010) and many local authorities, including North Lanarkshire Council, award points under their allocation policies to applicants who require rehousing due to medical reasons.

My research considered whether this system of allocating points for health and housing needs to applicants on some of the five waiting lists is effective or if changes could be made to the allocation policy in order to improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, not yet fully in force, makes changes to the categories of people who are to be given reasonable preference in the allocation process but there is no specific mention of people with disabilities.

The *Scottish Social Housing Charter April 2017* (Scottish Government, 2017, p6) requires Scottish social landlords to comply with equalities legislation, including a “responsibility for finding ways of understanding the rights and needs of different customers (including those with a disability) and delivering services that recognise and meet these”. However, there is no Charter outcome or standard relating to the allocation of housing to people with a disability.

A key message from public consultation for North Lanarkshire Council’s *Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2016 – 2021* (NLC, 2016, p15) was to “make homes and wider environments more accessible for people with disabilities” and Priority 4 of the LHS Strategy is to “ensure there is a range of housing solutions and appropriate support to meet the needs of older households and those with other specific needs” (*ibid*, p44). The Co-production group for people with disabilities also highlighted priorities concerning adaptations, accessibility and housing options for people with disabilities (NLC, 2016, p15). North Lanarkshire Council shows commitment to meeting the unmet housing need of people with disabilities and improvements to its allocation policy and procedures can contribute to this aspiration.

Organisations such as Inclusion Scotland, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living and Capability Scotland promote the rights of disabled people and provide comprehensive and invaluable advice on a range of matters which affect their lives. They have also conducted some research concerning relevant issues, including housing:- a poll of disabled people conducted by Capability Scotland in 2014 found that “one third of respondents were concerned about the ability of a disabled person to easily move home” (Capability Scotland, 2014). If North Lanarkshire Council can make improvements which help disabled people move to more suitable accommodation as a result of my research, this will be a worthwhile outcome. Inclusion Scotland has

conducted and commissioned several research projects and runs the Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning (DRILL) project in Scotland, which is “the world’s first major research programme led by disabled people” (Inclusion Scotland, 2018). DRILL recently funded a pilot study of effectiveness in letting adapted social housing (Anderson et al, 2017). Researchers for this study conducted interviews with applicants, recent tenants and staff within a local authority and registered social landlord about their experience of the lettings process for adapted social housing, and recommended that further research was required. This report, as well as the fact that I currently work in housing allocations and have direct experience of allocating adapted housing, influenced my decision to carry out research within North Lanarkshire.

Housing design, accessibility and adaptations

Studies including *Accessible Housing Survey: Public Perceptions of Accessible Housing* (Ipsos MORI, 2016) and *The Effectiveness of Housing Adaptations* (Heywood, 2001) have shown that disabled people often have difficulties getting into, out of, or moving around inside their homes and it is this struggle with aspects of the built environment which can limit the independence of people with disabilities. Aspects of housing design that can present difficulties for disabled people include steps into the building, use of outside space, raised thresholds, narrow doorways, space and layout of the rooms, small bathrooms and high worktops and cupboards in kitchens (Hemingway, 2011, p68). Many houses, both in the public and private sectors, present access difficulties and although “since 1974 the United Nations has recommended the building of homes to an adaptable standard, (but) in Europe most countries, including the UK, failed to implement it” (Stewart, J in Swain et al, 2004). It was not until 1999 that amendments to Part M of the Building Regulations were made which ensured better access to domestic dwellings, but this only applied to new build properties.

Many of NLC’s remaining stock of approximately 36,700 social housing properties (North Lanarkshire Council website, 2016) were built shortly after the end of WWII, in 1945, and the vast majority were built before the Right to Buy was introduced in 1980 so a large number are inaccessible to disabled people and unsuitable for

adaptation. There are no accurate figures regarding the number of properties which are adapted but The Scottish House Condition Survey (2012 – 2014) estimated that 19% of all local authority dwellings are adapted (North Lanarkshire Council LHS, 2016, p48). However, some of these adaptations are in properties which are not suitable for the long term needs of disabled people, such as wet rooms being installed upstairs in a two storey house.

In common with many other housing providers, NLC also built most of its older wheelchair dwellings as single bedroom homes, “whereas the demand from households with a disabled member is often for two or three bedroom properties” (Morris, 1988, p4). Stewart et al (1999, p17) concluded that “the origins of ‘special needs’ housing can be traced through the response of governments over the years to the ‘problem’ of the provision of accessible homes for disabled people” and that “the innovation of Lifetime Homes”, developed in the 1990s by a group of housing experts including Habinteg Housing Association and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), was a vast improvement. The JRF also published a book by Christopher Cobbold (1997) - *Cost-Benefit Analysis of Lifetime Homes* - which concluded that the benefits of building this type of property outweighed the costs, as it often lessened the need for additional, expensive adaptations as well as allowing the disabled resident to use and enjoy their home without the disruption of work to install adaptations. This could have significant cost benefits for a large local authority, such as North Lanarkshire Council.

The Lifetime Homes Standard, applicable in England, incorporates 16 design criteria which can be applied to new homes at a minimal cost, in order to make them more accessible and easily adapted to suit the needs of different occupants, or of the same occupant at different stages in their life such as when they become elderly and/or disabled (Lifetime Homes website). In Scotland, the equivalent standard is Housing for Varying Needs (HFVN) which was first published in 1998 following a recommendation by the Ewing enquiry that the Scottish Office should have barrier free standards in all homes, to suit elderly and disabled people. The HFVN Design Guide (Pickles, 1998) gives detailed advice and instruction on subjects including the location of housing, access to dwellings, circulation spaces, external doors, internal doors and bathrooms and includes specific guidance for properties to suit wheelchair users. In May 2012, the report *Assessing the Health Benefits of Lifetime Homes* (Roys, 2012) was published and this concluded that building homes to these standards gives

direct health benefits to the occupants and a resultant cost saving to health services. Given the high number of council houses in North Lanarkshire, the benefits of building new houses to HFVN standards and allocating these, as well as existing adapted and wheelchair accessible housing, appropriately could result in considerable benefits in terms of financial savings to authorities and health benefits to residents. Many of NLC's new build developments, including one in New Stevenston which was completed in July 2018, are a mix of fully wheelchair accessible bungalows and houses which meet the HFVN standard (North Lanarkshire Council, 2018).

For those properties which have not been built to HFVN or Lifetime Homes standards, adaptations – permanent or fixed alterations to make homes more suitable for a disabled person – often have to be considered. These can be minor fixtures, such as handrails at external steps, or major works such as bathroom conversions or ramps, which are recommended by the disabled person's Occupational Therapist. A large-scale study on the effectiveness of adaptations by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Heywood, 2001) in England and Wales found that 62% of respondents felt safer as a result of a minor adaptation, 77% "perceived a positive effect on their health", and that major adaptations had "transformed people's lives" in most cases (Heywood, 2001, p7). The findings suggest that "money properly spent on adaptations is money well spent" (*ibid*, p10) and that housing adaptations delivered many of the government's key objectives, including keeping people out of hospital, improving health and reducing social exclusion (*ibid*, p45).

More recent research also found that elderly people who had adaptations – or "home modifications" – installed "were likely to stay longer at their existing housing than those who did not" modify their homes (Hwang et al, 2011, p255). The researchers also noted that an older person's physical environment affects their overall independence and health and that installing adaptations may be an inexpensive way of delaying a move into expensive long-term care homes. Given the findings of both these research, it seems extremely important that properties which have been adapted and become available for re-let are allocated to applicants who need those adaptations, where possible, as this is likely to have benefits for service users, North Lanarkshire Council and public spending.

Allocation policies and practices

The physical design of houses with existing adaptations, or suitability for modification, are important considerations for applicants on the housing waiting list who require barrier free or fully wheelchair accessible properties, as well as the location of individual properties. However, the allocation of these properties can be a complex and problematic process for both applicants and housing staff, in my experience. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission also noted that “disabled people report that allocation processes are complex” and that “allocation policies and practices frequently disadvantage disabled people” (EHRC, 2018, p54).

NLC operates a points based allocation policy and a Common Housing Register. The Council has five different waiting lists – Homeless, General, Transfer, Aspirational Transfer and Aspirational Shared Access – but there is no separate list for applicants who require adapted or wheelchair accessible housing.

The Chartered Institute of Housing issued guidance entitled *How to Make Effective Use of Adapted Properties* (CIH, 2014, p2) which acknowledged that “some organisations report the need to convert the (adapted) property to general needs because they are unable to find suitable tenants”. I have observed this being the case in my role as Housing Co-ordinator within a local housing allocations team in NLC, and anticipate that this may be an important feature of my research. The CIH guidance gives a number of suggestions regarding actions to consider which may improve the way these properties are allocated. NLC already employs some of these suggestions, such as restricting the allocation of adapted properties to those people who require the adaptations, and using occupational therapists to assess whether a property is suitable for a specific disabled person.

The CIH guidance also makes suggestions for practices which are not currently used in North Lanarkshire, such as using fixed term tenancies for properties that are specifically adapted for disabled people and using adapted properties as temporary accommodation for a household which does not need the adaptations until a suitable tenant can be found. The gaps in the CIH framework helped inform the questions which I asked participants during my research.

There have been two recent studies in Scotland which have looked at the subject of allocating accessible and adapted housing: *Mind the Step: An Estimation of Housing Need Among Wheelchair Users in Scotland* (Watson et al, 2012) and *Matching Up? A Pilot Study of Effectiveness in Letting Adapted Social Housing* (Anderson et al, 2017). In *Mind the Step (Scotland)* (Watson et al, 2012, p25), which followed a similar study in England conducted by Habinteg Housing Association (Joseph et al, 2010), the authors reported some of the issues regarding effectively allocating adapted housing, but noted that “objective data on these topics is not gathered so it is difficult to determine the real extent of any mismatch, or the underlying reasons for this”. One of the recommendations was that local authorities should review their allocation policies to “extend choice and meet unmet needs of wheelchair users in their area” (*ibid*, p39). NLC has not made any significant changes to its policies or procedures in this field since this publication; therefore there is a need to further understand this process within North Lanarkshire.

Habinteg commissioned further research focussing on the issue of social housing allocations, following the publication of *Mind the Step (England)* (Joseph et al, 2010). This follow-on study, entitled *Space to Move: Making Efficient Use of Homes for Wheelchair Users* (Joseph et al, 2011), was based on in-depth interviews with representatives of twelve London borough councils, six housing associations and seven housing applicants or tenants. The findings showed that there was limited (or no) training for staff on how to recognise, categorise and allocate wheelchair accessible properties; properties being wrongly categorised as wheelchair accessible (or not accessible); and lack of inter-agency working aimed at identifying households with specific needs. These findings made it particularly important to address these issues within my research and I included questions regarding these matters within my interviews of NLC housing allocations staff and Occupational Therapists. The study also found that applicants were not provided with enough information such as property details and location and sometimes refused properties that met their needs but did not match their hopes or standards. I discussed this with the waiting list applicants and recent new tenants to establish if these are issues within North Lanarkshire.

The authors of the more recent scoping study *Matching Up?* (Anderson et al, 2017, p16), funded by the DRILL project, concluded that “comprehensive and systematic searches of the research literature identified very little work relating to the specific

area of lettings practice for adapted social housing”. Furthermore, one of the conclusions of this pilot study was that, “at case study level”, further research was required (*ibid*, p48). Follow-on research is currently being done, which includes a comparison across three local authorities in Scotland with different allocation systems and will examine the progress of applicants who apply for accessible housing within these localities, over an 18 month period. Although North Lanarkshire is one of the areas being studied, the scope of the research is much wider than my own and will still be ongoing when my dissertation has been completed. My dissertation provides new evidence to this topical area of research and contributes to this wider body of work.

The *Matching Up?* researchers (Anderson et al, 2017) interviewed a small number of housing applicants, recent tenants, housing staff and one occupational therapist from NLC and four Registered Social Landlords. They concluded that “a more substantive investigation of the effectiveness of the lettings practice was potentially valuable” (*ibid*, p6) as “more data on the experiences of disabled applicants on housing registers and moving into adapted or accessible housing was needed to better understand current practice” (*ibid*, p6). The researchers did not look at the logistics of the matching process – how NLC allocations staff select an applicant from one of the five waiting lists to match to a particular property, and the difficulties within this process (of which I have personal experience) – and noted that, due to the complex experiences of individual housing applicants, there was a need for more in-depth personal accounts from disabled housing applicants. I was able to focus on these issues within my own research.

Conclusions

In my review of academic literature, national and local government documents, and reports from charities and other agencies, I have determined that, among the many issues which disabled people in our society face, a major concern is how to access suitable, affordable housing.

Previous research in this field has identified many issues concerning the effective allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible social housing. These include lack of appropriate staff training (Joseph et al, 2011, p5), lack of information available to

applicants regarding available accessible properties (*ibid*, p4), incorrect classification/mislabelling of properties (*ibid*, p3), lack of capacity to record up-to-date property information related to accessibility (Anderson et al, 2017, p33) and more proactive effort being required to identify suitable applicants (Joseph et al, 2011, p5).

Whilst some of the findings and recommendations may be relevant and useful to North Lanarkshire Council, it was by conducting a case study and speaking to the participants within this local authority that I hoped to discover whether there are particular aspects of the way this type of housing is allocated in North Lanarkshire that are problematic or can be improved in some way. The results of my research are presented in chapter four.

The subject is important to many people including disabled housing applicants, housing allocations staff and occupational therapists but may also have wider implications for other local authorities and housing providers, as will be considered in the conclusion of the dissertation.

Chapter Three - Methodology

In order to find out more about my investigation that the way in which North Lanarkshire Council allocates accessible housing does not always result in a positive outcome for disabled housing applicants, I used the Council as a case study. This method of research can be useful for evaluating a particular programme or policy (Simons, 2009, p6), such as NLC's allocation policy with regards to adapted housing.

Robert Yin (1994) asserts that case studies are also useful in answering "how" research questions, such as my own, and John Creswell (1998, Table 7.1) describes a case study as a "bounded system" which includes a process or activity (i.e. the allocations process) or multiple individuals which are accessed through a gatekeeper (in this case, myself, as an employee of NLC).

There is some debate regarding whether case study research is a methodology or simply a choice of what is to be studied (Creswell et al, 2007), however I would argue that it can be both. I chose NLC as the most appropriate and important case to study how the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing can be improved as I have worked in one of NLC's housing allocations teams for a number of years and was able to use my own experience to gather and understand the views of other stakeholders in order to make recommendations for improving the process. North Lanarkshire is also one of the largest social landlords in Scotland and there are around 12,000 applicants on the housing waiting list (North Lanarkshire Council, 2017, p14), many of whom may benefit from improvements in the way adapted and wheelchair accessible housing is allocated.

I chose the question of "how can NLC improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing" as there is no prior research which looks exclusively at NLC. I interviewed human subjects to elicit information on their experiences. By interviewing individuals who have direct experience of the allocation process within NLC, rather than issuing a questionnaire, I had the flexibility to change direction to pursue emergent issues, as well as the opportunity to encourage respondents to reveal more information than they may have done in a postal questionnaire (Simons, 2009). I was interested in the experiences of housing applicants and staff, their perceptions of the way in which NLC allocates adapted housing, and how the process has affected

them personally, in order to discover gaps or failings within the system which may be addressed. I conducted semi-structured interviews, with several open-ended questions. This gave me control over the topics being discussed and the freedom to ask additional, probing questions depending on the individual participant's responses. I tried to avoid asking leading questions in order to ensure interpretive validity (Ayres, 2008, p2).

There are conflicting views on the generalizability of case study research. Tsang (2014) found a prevailing view amongst academics that case studies are "weak in generalizability" (*ibid*, p369) but also notes that others are of the opinion that generalizability is not relevant to case studies. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that "generalization is overvalued" and that the "context-dependent knowledge" acquired by conducting a case study is more valuable than searching for universally applicable theories. Although I have generalized to some extent, according to the results of my research, my main aim was to improve how adapted housing is allocated within North Lanarkshire in particular, due to my working relationship as an employee of NLC and the fact that, as a major social landlord, many applicants may still benefit from my findings regardless of whether these findings are relevant to other social housing providers. Many other social landlords use different allocation policies and may have different issues within their process which I was unable to address as I only interviewed NLC applicants, tenants and staff. However there is hopefully a benefit to the wider disabled community in terms of social justice.

My research may also benefit NLC financially as well as improving outcomes for its disabled housing applicants. From my own experience of allocating void properties for NLC, I am aware that adapted properties are sometimes allocated to non-disabled applicants who then ask for the adaptations to be removed, at a cost to NLC. Also, disabled applicants are often allocated properties which are not already adapted and NLC has to fund the installation of new adaptations to suit the needs of the new tenant. By reducing the number of "inappropriate" matches (and increasing the number of appropriate matches), there could potentially be a financial saving to the Council.

Ten participants were chosen and all agreed to be interviewed, after my initial contact, at their preferred location; for the new tenants and housing applicants this was at their

homes and the staff chose to be interviewed in various different Council offices. The recent new tenants and waiting list applicants were chosen using North Lanarkshire Council’s computerised Common Housing Register (CHR); the allocations staff were the officers who had “matched” the properties which were allocated to the new tenants, on the CHR system; and the Occupational Therapists were chosen from two different localities within North Lanarkshire. The participants lived in, or worked in, five different areas across North Lanarkshire. Pseudonyms have been used to protect their anonymity.

Table 1: Research Participants

Participant category	Gender	Pseudonym	North Lanarkshire geographical area
Recent new tenant, with disability	Male	TEN1	A
Recent new tenant, with disability	Female	TEN2	D
Recent new tenant, with disabled child	Female	TEN3	E
Waiting list applicant, with a disability	Male	WL1	B
Waiting list applicant, with a disability	Male	WL2	C
NLC Allocations officer	Female	AL1	E
NLC Allocations officer	Female	AL2	D
NLC Allocations officer	Female	AL3	A
NLC Occupational Therapist	Female	OT1	A
NLC Occupational Therapist	Male	OT2	C

The participants were asked questions around a number of themes, which I based on my own experience and previous research, including *Space to Move* (Joseph et al, 2011) and *Matching Up?* (Anderson et al, 2017). These themes were concerning the housing application process/paperwork, NLC's allocation policy and points system, the choices and information available to housing applicants, the allocation/matching process, liaison with Technical Officers and Occupational Therapists regarding the suitability of properties for adaptation, and suggestions for increasing the availability of accessible housing. The core questions for each category of participant are included in Appendix 3, although it should be noted that additional questions were asked of each participant, depending on their responses to the core questions, and participants were encouraged to discuss any and all issues which had arisen throughout their experience of being involved with the allocations process.

The *Space to Move* research had made seven key national recommendations for local authorities and other housing providers, which helped inform the *Matching Up?* pilot study. These recommendations were focussed on making the efficient allocation of accessible properties a priority, knowing their housing stock in detail, gathering sufficient and relevant information about their housing applicants and communicating better with applicants and other stakeholders such as health and social care providers. Many of the questions I asked were linked to these points.

I chose to interview NLC allocations staff, Occupational Therapists and waiting list applicants (current and former) in order to identify the problems within NLC's allocations process from the perspective of the different stakeholders involved. These are all people who have a working knowledge, or personal experience, of NLC's allocations process. People can have different perspectives of a situation depending on their own experiences. Gathering data from multiple sources "is recommended for enhancing the quality of case studies" (Bhatnagar, 2012, p4) as "the corroboration of findings from more than one data source addresses the issue of construct validity as more than one measure is used in assessing issues of interest" (*ibid*, p4). My own knowledge of the subject also contributed to providing an insight into the problem and the personal contacts I have acquired during my working life helped with various aspects of the study, such as being able to identify appropriate subjects to interview and having an established rapport with most of the members of staff.

I interviewed 3 disabled people (or tenants who have a disabled family member, such as a child, within their household) who have been housed by NLC in adapted or wheelchair accessible houses within the last 12 months, to check how satisfied they were with their new homes and discuss their experience of the allocation process. I identified subjects using NLC's computerised housing systems, for which I obtained formal permission from the Business Intelligence Manager within my department and exercised careful considerations of anonymity and confidentiality of potential participants in the process. I also obtained approval from the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences' Ethics Committee before contacting any potential participants.

I also interviewed 3 NLC housing staff who allocated adapted and/or wheelchair accessible housing in the last 12 months, in order to find out what process they used to identify the applicant who was selected, and what difficulties they encountered in the process. These were the staff that used the computerised allocations system to "match" the properties allocated to the 3 new tenants already interviewed. The computer system identifies which staff member has allocated a particular property.

In order to obtain a fuller understanding of the way in which the allocation process is working (or not) in practice, I also interviewed 2 applicants who have a disability, and are currently on NLC's waiting list for adapted or wheelchair accessible housing. These applicants were also identified from NLC's computerised Common Housing Register system.

Finally, I interviewed 2 Occupational Therapists who work for NLC's Health and Social Care Services. Whilst the individual applicants and tenants spoke of their own personal experiences, the O.T.s were able to speak in more general terms about various (anonymous) clients with whom they have worked, and any issues the O.T.s have encountered whilst supporting clients through the allocations process. As the O.T.s are not employed within my own department, are not in a dependent relationship with myself, and are committed to improving the lives of their service users, they could be seen to increase the validity of my findings by giving unbiased and independent views of the allocation process.

I tried to select applicants of different gender, ages and ethnicity and from different areas within North Lanarkshire in order to have a varied sample of people, but this

was difficult due to the very short timeframe available to me (after approval was granted by the university Ethics committee) in which to identify potential participants, contact them, send out Participant Information sheets, obtain their agreement to be interviewed, arrange interview times, conduct the interviews then transcribe the interviews. Having a more diverse range of participants may have increased the reliability of the findings, however given the small number of interviewees and factors such as only 2.1% of the population in North Lanarkshire identifying as being black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) (source: 2011 Census) and there being very few male Housing Advisors within NLC's allocations teams, it was difficult to identify a wider range of interviewees.

All interviews with staff members were conducted individually and it would have been good to have been able to interview a group of staff afterwards, in order to clarify some of the issues which were identified, confirm the credibility of the information and discuss some of the suggestions the staff had for improving the process in more detail. However, this was not possible within the time I had available.

I conducted the interviews face-to-face and recorded them so I could transcribe the answers afterwards. By recording what was actually said, rather than what I thought may have been, reduces experimenter bias: audio recording improves the reliability of data collection as data are not dependent on the researcher's recall or selective attention (Bloor and Wood, 2006, p18). I was also conscious of possible experimenter bias as I already had my own ideas about some of the issues which may be affecting the effectiveness of NLC's allocation of adapted properties, and had prior beliefs about the topic, so I gave the respondents the opportunity to tell me of their own thoughts and ideas as well as answering my questions on specific topics. Recording and accurately transcribing responses also increases the descriptive validity by ensuring factual accuracy (Johnson, 1997, p282). My own knowledge of the topic helped me to accurately understand all "the participants' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences" (Johnson, 1997) and thus increase the interpretative validity. It took a considerable time to transcribe the 10 interviews afterwards and I am confident that my transcripts are an accurate record of each meeting; however it would have increased the internal validity if I had been able to return the transcripts to the participants to allow them to check that I had correctly represented what they had

told me. This is called “member checking” or “validation” (Vogt, 2005, p191) but I had insufficient time to do this.

The staff interviews were conducted within various Council offices and I interviewed the new tenants and waiting list applicants at their homes, as this was their preference. I am experienced in conducting lone interviews in people’s homes and am aware of how to minimise and deal with potential risks. No such issues arose during any of the interviews.

I worked alone so this also restricted the number of people I could interview within the timescale. This restriction in the number of people being interviewed is not unusual in qualitative research. Given that the number of respondents was small (small-N research), comparative case studies may be an option for other researchers to discover whether the findings may be replicated elsewhere, however it may be difficult to find a case with enough similarities to NLC to make a credible comparison.

My research is qualitative and the responses are based on the opinions and perceptions of the subjects interviewed. I explained to all the participants that the aim of my research was to improve the way in which NLC allocates adapted housing in order to benefit all stakeholders but particularly the service users, and that the results would be more valid if they answered the questions as honestly and fully as possible. I used many open-ended questions, to allow participants to express their own thoughts and opinions although I am aware of possible participant effects, such as interviewees not being completely open or honest, or giving false information, and that this can affect the reliability of the findings. An example of this would be new tenants may not have remembered certain details of their experience of the allocation process so may have given some inaccurate or incomplete answers. Another possibility is that waiting list applicants may not wish to jeopardise their chances of being allocated a property of their choice so may have been afraid to give completely honest answers; in order to minimise the risk of this happening, I advised these participants that the interview would in no way affect their housing application and would not be recorded on the CHR system. Housing and occupational therapy staff may also not wish to be seen to criticize the Council’s policy and procedures although they all seemed keen to help improve them, but this could have influenced their responses; I assured them that their

responses would be completely anonymous and would in no way affect their relationship with myself or other more senior members of staff, and that their progress or general experience at work would not be affected. I also explained that, by telling me details of their actual experiences, rather than what they think I may want to hear, this helps to minimise participant bias and give more genuine results. All participants were also advised that they did not require answering every question, if they preferred not to.

Interviews ranged from 14 minutes to 77 minutes in length, and all participants were encouraged to answer questions as fully as possible. The interviewee who participated in the shortest interview was very happy with the allocations process and the outcome for themselves, in contrast to the interviewee whose interview lasted longest and had encountered a number of issues throughout the allocations process.

I also gave assurances that participants' responses would be anonymised within my dissertation, to make them feel less anxious about some, or all, of their answers. Respondents' identifiers have been replaced by a code, to which I have securely retained the key along with the rest of the research data. All data concerning the research questions and responses have been stored securely within my home and shall only be accessed by myself, my dissertation supervisor and, if requested, the university examiners. All data shall be destroyed by 31/12/18.

Although I assured all participants that their responses would be anonymised, I was concerned that the participant effect may have arisen in some form. Subjects may have been anxious or nervous about speaking to me regarding their personal circumstances or been reluctant to divulge sensitive information about themselves. I reassured respondents that, having 35 years' experience of working in the housing department, I am trustworthy and used to dealing with personal information in a confidential and professional manner. Although a counter-measure to participant effects would have been to interview people I did not know, this was not possible with all subjects as I knew all of the housing staff. In some respects, it was advantageous to interview colleagues who knew me, as they seemed to be more willing to participate in the research and more relaxed about speaking to me.

Throughout the course of my research, I discussed all aspects of the study with my appointed university supervisor. This person was chosen because of their knowledge

of the field and has helped me to increase the validity of my research and to minimise any experimenter bias on my part.

In terms of the type of research I conducted, Guthrie (2010) would describe it as “action” research, i.e. concerned with working on particular practices (the allocation of adapted housing) in order to improve them. Anderson et al (2017, page 6) concluded that more data was required on the experiences of disabled applicants who applied for, and moved into, adapted housing. I was aware of some of the variables which impact on the effectiveness of the allocation process, such as the lack of accurate information which is recorded concerning applicants and properties. By interviewing applicants and new tenants about their individual experiences, I had hoped to uncover variables which may not be obvious to myself or other staff and this proved to be the case.

My ontological position is that of systemism as I believe that within the social world, individuals influence collectives and that collectives, or organisations, affect and influence individuals and their behaviour. My epistemology in relation to this research project is to consider how individual waiting list applicants, previous applicants, NLC allocations staff and Occupational Therapists are affecting, or should affect, the way in which NLC allocates adapted housing and how the Council should allow individuals to shape its practices. Bunge (1996, page 266) describes this as “every system must be studied on its own level, as well as analysed into its interacting components”.

My participants were asked questions regarding the housing application paperwork and process, NLC’s allocation policy and points system, the choices and information available to applicants, the allocation/matching process, liaison with Technical Officers and Occupational Therapists and freeing up existing adapted stock. I was interested to see whether the findings would confirm those of previous research such as whether NLC had issues regarding staff training (Joseph et al, 2011, p5), lack of information being available to applicants regarding available accessible properties (*ibid*, p4), incorrect classification/mislabelling of properties (*ibid*, p3), lack of capacity to record up-to-date property information related to accessibility (Anderson et al, 2017, p33) and more proactive effort being required to identify suitable applicants (Joseph et al, 2011, p5). My research results are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four – Research Results and Analysis

Findings from participant interviews

Housing application paperwork, including health assessment process

Participants were asked if they had any difficulties with the application process and associated paperwork. All of the new tenants and waiting list applicants found the CHR and Health & Housing Need (HHN) application forms “quite” or “fairly straightforward” to complete, although one had help from a friend who worked for the Citizens Advice Bureau as she was unsure how to answer some of the questions due to filling the form in on a relative’s behalf. All felt that they were able to provide enough information about their disability (or their child’s or relative’s disability) and how this affected the type of housing they required. Occupational Therapist OT1 also found the forms to be “user friendly” and “fairly straightforward”, however OT2 thought that the forms were “quite long” and that there was a “duplication” of questions. Both OTs agreed that there was enough opportunity for service users to make clear their specific needs and both had provided supporting information for clients.

One of the new tenants did have an issue with the CHR form as there is no mandate on the form for the tenant to sign in order to give another person authority to deal with their application on their behalf (where Power of Attorney or guardianship is not already in place).

“We ran into one person that was a bit sticky. They wanted more signatures although it said on the form already that (my relative) was speaking on behalf of myself. As soon as the third party mandate was signed we didn’t have any problems” (New Tenant TEN2).

TEN2 was seriously ill in hospital when the application forms were completed and a family member had to deal with the application process until TEN2 was well enough to be able to deal with matters herself. It would have been beneficial if an appropriate section was included on the CHR form for the applicant to sign, rather than this being requested separately, as this situation can be common, particularly when an applicant is in hospital or has other difficulties in dealing with their own affairs.

It is encouraging that these respondents all felt that there was no constraint on being able to give full details of their or their clients' disability and specific housing needs.

However, all of the allocations staff felt that changes needed to be made to the application forms. Suggestions included reducing the size of the CHR form; having two types of CHR form (one for applicants who wish to apply for health points and one for those who do not); and having different Health & Housing Need forms for applicants with mental health issues, physical health issues and for children.

Comments included:

“I think the form could definitely be made smaller, you've got 32 pages”
(Allocations Officer AL2)

“I think there's changes need to be made to the Health and Housing Need form for children, I don't think they make sense for children with disabilities”
(Allocations Officer AL1)

Since all of the allocations officers felt that changes were required, this is something that is worth investigating further. Both the CHR and HHN application forms were identified as requiring to be reviewed a number of years ago but, to date, no changes have been made. I consider it to be imperative that staff, tenants and waiting list applicants be consulted re any proposed changes, particularly since tenants and housing applicants appear to have no, or limited, issues with the current forms but staff have identified a range of concerns: any amendments would need to be acceptable to all users.

With regards to the health assessment process, i.e. housing staff using the information regarding how an applicant's current housing situation is impacting upon their health issues to award points under the terms of NLC's allocation policy, waiting list applicant WL1 felt strongly that all assessments should be conducted face-to-face with applicants (where possible) to allow housing staff to observe the person's disability:

“I'm under the illusion that there's people applying for houses and they're feigning disability in order to get a jump (on the housing list), and that's why I would've thought face-to-face assessments... would be a priority, and a necessity even” (Waiting list applicant WL1)

WL1 also felt that staff should be able to verify an applicant's health condition by being allowed access to their health records or DWP record (if they were in receipt of any disability benefits). This would be difficult to arrange, particularly given the recent tightening of the law concerning access to information, in terms of the Data Protection Act 2018. Housing staff are currently able to request information from an applicant's GP, with the applicant's written consent, but rarely do so as this incurs a financial cost to the Council, so assessments are mostly based on information provided by the applicants themselves and, where applicable, their Occupational Therapist.

The two OT participants had differing viewings regarding their involvement in the pointing process: one felt that the current system of housing officials completing the assessments and awarding points with advice from an OT was appropriate whilst the other thought that it would be beneficial for an OT to be more directly involved as they have more expertise in assessing the abilities of persons with a disability.

Comments included:

“The best person to give you that information (for the health and housing need assessment) would be the service user” (Occupational Therapist OT1)

“I feel it would be beneficial because it would give us a good look at the person so we can see exactly...what their abilities are” (Occupational Therapist OT2)

The allocations officers reported that they consulted with an applicant's OT in cases where the applicant was an open case but that response times were sometimes slow. The main issue raised by staff was that both the physical and mental health assessment forms were poor and required to be improved. They also highlighted that it was difficult to know the details of every applicant on the list who had health points, as a number of different Housing Advisors, in their own and different offices, were carrying out the health assessments and the lists were changing all the time. If not enough information was noted in the Customer Contact/Housing Options section on the applicant's CHR record, it is time consuming to access all the relevant information elsewhere on the system.

Recommendations:

- The Common Housing Register application form and Health & Housing Need application form require to be updated, in consultation with staff and service users, in order to make it easier to differentiate between applicants who require rehousing due to mental health issues and those who require adapted or wheelchair accessible housing due to a physical disability.
- A section should be added to the CHR form to allow the applicant to authorise another person to deal with the application on their behalf.
- Housing allocations staff should always contact an applicant's Occupational Therapist, when the person is working with an OT, when assessing health points and the OT should provide a full report within an agreed timescale.
- The health assessment forms require to be amended and the relevant information regarding the specific needs of the applicant, for example a ramp or wet room, should be more visible and easily accessible on the CHR system.

NLC's allocation policy and points system

NLC have a points based allocations policy and five different waiting lists – General, Homeless, Transfer, Aspirational Transfer and Aspirational Shared Access. Priority is given to applicants with physical health points when wheelchair accessible or adapted properties are being allocated, however applicants may have a physical disability but not have any health points. Examples of this would be an applicant on the Homeless list as these applicants have no points and are listed according to the date of their homeless application, or applicants on one of the Aspirational lists who have been advised to remain on that list as they have a good “qualifying date” (date of entry at their current tenancy). The process can be further complicated by applicants who request accessible or ground floor housing due to mobility issues but also wish to be considered for two storey “cottage type” properties, particularly in desirable letting areas. If health points are awarded, these apply to ground floor accessible properties only, regardless of whether the applicant has also requested other house types.

Only one of the new tenants and waiting list applicants found the policy and points system easy to understand, and he had been housed very quickly after his application was submitted so did not encounter any issues which resulted in him questioning how the process worked. All of the other respondents in these categories had difficulty understanding the system and three of the five participants thought that they had been placed on a separate list for applicants with physical disabilities. Waiting list applicant WL2 felt that there **should** be a separate list although there was mixed feeling regarding this amongst the other participants: allocations officer AL2 felt that this was the one single change which would improve the allocation of adapted and accessible properties in North Lanarkshire but AL3 felt that adding another waiting list could complicate the system further. All three staff members agreed that the current system was not easy for applicants to understand and they often had to explain the policy to them. Neither of the OTs had a good understanding of the policy or points system and both felt that OTs would benefit from training, to allow them to be better informed when dealing with service users.

Waiting list applicant WL2 highlighted that one of the problems with the current system is that applicants do not know where they are placed on the list so have no idea whether they are close to being considered for an offer of housing. He commented:

“You never actually get to see where you are on the housing list” (Waiting list applicant WL2)

This was one of the reasons he felt that a separate list would simplify the system and make it easier for housing applicants to understand.

Recommendations:

- Consideration to be given to having a separate waiting list for disabled applicants who require accessible or adapted housing as this may make it easier for allocations staff to select applicants when matching void properties of this type, and clearer for applicants to understand.
- Briefing sessions to be given to NLC Occupational Therapists regarding the allocation policy and points system to improve their knowledge and allow them to offer more detailed advice to service users.

Choices and information available to applicants

Waiting list applicants often request housing within a limited number of letting areas, for reasons such as wanting or needing to remain close to family support and/or essential services such as hospitals, GPs or schools. Applicants who live within a particular area are not necessarily aware of the availability within that area of the size and type of accessible property they require and this is even more likely for applicants who live outwith the area(s) they have requested. Applicants were asked about the information which they were aware of and/or had accessed regarding the availability of accessible and adapted properties and whether they felt that their housing choices had been more restricted than able-bodied applicants.

Allocations officers also rely on information regarding adapted and accessible properties being readily available when they are matching these types of property to a disabled housing applicant; this will be discussed in the next section, concerning the allocation/matching process.

With regards to the information available to applicants concerning the availability of accessible or adapted housing, although NLC provides information on its website regarding the stock profile (sizes and types of property) and turnover (number of houses which become available for re-let) in individual letting areas, there is no specific information regarding properties which have been, or could be, adapted and many properties are incorrectly classified. An example of this are the bungalows within the Council's stock which are classified as semi-detached, end terraced or mid terraced properties but, as there is no distinction made between one and two storey houses, applicants (and sometimes staff) are unaware of which properties are actually bungalows. The incorrect classification of properties has already been recognised and plans are being made to re-designate certain properties as part of the Older Persons Project but there is no definite timescale for this large exercise to be completed.

One of the allocations officers expressed that there was not enough information available to applicants regarding stock availability and that there should be better information provided online. Another officer felt that the information **was** available but that applicants rarely made use of it, whilst the third officer agreed that applicants did not appear to access the information line and pointed out that the online

information was not complete or fully accurate concerning accessible or adapted properties.

These impressions were largely confirmed by the new tenants and waiting list applicants. All five of these participants had access to the internet and four were aware that there was information available on the Council's website regarding stock availability but only two had accessed this information. Both of these respondents found the website was not user friendly. Comments included:

“It wasn't easy to understand” (New Tenant TEN3) and

(It was) “difficult to negotiate” despite him being “quite computer literate” (Waiting list applicant WL1).

Participant WL1 also found that although he had accessed the website in 2017, the information had last been updated in 2014.

Neither of the Occupational Therapists was aware that there was information regarding stock availability on the Council's website but OT1 expressed that both she and her service users got good advice from Housing staff with regards to this.

Participants were asked what type of information, and in what format, would be useful. Of those who expressed an opinion, it was suggested that better online information regarding the availability of accessible and adapted or adaptable properties and separate leaflets would be useful. One of the OTs expressed that there was usually publicity around new build housing sites but there was no information available regarding older stock which became available for re-let. He felt that having access to a spreadsheet, or the information on housing systems, regarding available properties (those which were available for re-let at any given time) would be beneficial as OTs may be aware of a client who would be suitable for the property and could contact the allocations officer regarding the possibility of the service user being offered the house. This joint working could benefit housing applicants and allocations staff as the OT may know of an applicant who they believe would be interested in a particular property but, because they were not currently listed for that particular letting area, would not have been identified on the CHR system as a potential match for the house. The allocations officer may have been struggling to find a suitable applicant on the waiting list who required the adapted or wheelchair accessible house and could

have been considering offering the property to a person without a disability if a more appropriate applicant was not identified.

Given that the information available appears to be incomplete and not fully accurate, participants were also asked if they believed there was a shortage of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing in North Lanarkshire. Four respondents believed that there was a shortage, particularly those larger than one bedroom. New tenant TEN2 would have preferred a two bedroom property, to allow a family member to stay overnights, but had to settle for a one bedroom property as there was little availability of suitable two bedroom properties within her chosen areas. The property which she was allocated was not built to wheelchair accessible standards and had to be extensively adapted with a ramp, wet room, widened door openings and lowered kitchen units, however TEN2 is unable to access her back garden as there is no ramp at the back door so the property is not entirely suitable. This is typical within many older properties within the Council's stock.

Three of the respondents felt that suitable levels of stock did exist but were not always within desired areas or the types of properties which applicants wanted. One of the allocations officers noted the following:

“There are lots of ground floor blocks of flats but people don't want that type, they want bungalow style houses which we don't have” (Officer AL3)

Occupational Therapist OT1 reported, however, that the situation appears to be much better within North Lanarkshire compared to another large local authority area where she previously worked. She also believed that more effort was made to adapt properties within North Lanarkshire, to make them accessible to housing applicants.

The other three participants said that they didn't know whether there was a shortage although new tenant TEN3 thought that there might be as her family had to wait a number of years before being housed in a suitable property, despite being listed for a wide range of areas.

Four of the five waiting list applicants and new tenants had made changes to the size, type or letting areas they had requested in order to get an offer of housing, although subsequent offers did not always turn out to be suitable. These changes were made following advice given by housing staff, however participants did not feel pressured

into making changes which they were unhappy with. Waiting list applicant WL1 stated that communication with housing staff was “brilliant” and new tenant TEN2 said that the suggestion that she consider her present house was an “excellent choice” and that “it definitely wasn’t pushed on us”. It would therefore appear that, despite the information available to applicants regarding the availability of accessible housing being inadequate, waiting list applicants tend to seek advice from housing staff who can assist in maximising their housing options.

Recommendations

- NLC’s website requires to be updated to be easier to navigate for staff and applicants wishing to find information regarding the availability of accessible housing, and waiting list applicants to be encouraged to access the site.
- Information on the website to be updated on a regular basis, to remain up-to-date.
- Properties urgently need to be properly classified, particularly in relation to bungalow type houses, to allow applicants to make more informed choices regarding their selection of letting areas which contain appropriate house types.
- Consideration to be given to providing more detailed information regarding whether properties are actually accessible, or not, as many ground floor properties are unsuitable for adaptation due to external stairs, garden layout or lack of internal space.
- Consideration to be given to allowing NLC Occupational Therapists access to information on the housing system (HSMS) regarding vacant properties.

The allocation/matching process

North Lanarkshire social rented properties which become available for re-let are “matched” to a suitable waiting list applicant by staff in the locally based allocation teams using the Common Housing Register (CHR) system and in accordance with NLC’s allocation policy and procedures. Applicants who have been awarded health points for ground floor accessible or adapted properties are given priority over applicants who do not have this assessed need. There are three levels of health points: 90 points are awarded where the applicant has an urgent need to be rehoused (for example, are unable to be discharged from hospital as their current home is unsuitable to be adapted), 40 points are awarded where there is a serious need to move and 10 points are awarded where there is only some need to move to more suitable housing. Applicants with 90 health points will be considered before applicants with 40 or 10 health points, regardless of an applicant’s overall points’ level.

Only the three allocations officers were asked questions about the actual process of matching adapted and accessible properties to suitable applicants on the CHR system. The officers all had considerable experience of this, ranging from approximately 8 years to over 20 years. With regards to the level of training they had received, two officers reported that they had no formal training other than on-the-job learning, although neither officer felt that they required further training; they believed that the main barrier to them effectively matching accessible properties was issues with the way the CHR and HSMS systems. The third officer responded that she had received more formal training when the CHR system and new allocation policy was first introduced (in 2008) but had not received any training afterwards. She felt that annual training sessions, with staff from the other allocation teams, would be beneficial.

All of the respondents reported that they always checked whether a vacant property was suitable for a disabled applicant but that this was not always straightforward as although there are fields on the HSMS system to record whether a property has been adapted, these are very rarely used. The officers relied on information from outgoing tenants or their family, or from Technical Officers who visited the properties after keys were handed in, to learn whether a property was adapted or not. Officer AL2 explained that she often drew on her experience and extensive knowledge of the stock

in her area to determine whether a property was properly accessible as some ground floor properties had lots of external stairs, for example.

All officers agreed that they often had to allocate properties which were adapted but were not accessible to disabled applicants, for example if the property had a wet room but was a top floor flat. In many cases, these adaptations were later removed as the new tenant did not want the adaptation, particularly if they had young children. Two storey cottage type houses sometimes have a stairlift in situ and there were different responses to this. One officer reported that they would leave the stairlift in place and allocate the house to an applicant who they believed would benefit from this adaptation. However, the officer did not check with an Occupational Therapist whether the stairlift was suitable for that individual (there are often medical reasons why somebody cannot safely use a stairlift). The other two officers both reported that stairlifts were normally removed from void properties.

The main issue for all three officers was the fact that there is no indication on the CHR system regarding whether health points have been awarded for a mental or physical condition and that it is extremely time consuming to check individual applications on the system in order to determine this. Although experienced allocations officers become familiar with many of the applications on the CHR system, new applications are constantly being added and may not have been assessed by the allocations officer who is matching a particular property so the officer requires looking up the details of the person's health assessment on the system. For two of the allocations officers, the one single change which would improve how adapted and accessible properties are allocated in NLC would be if a distinction was made on the CHR system, perhaps using an icon or some other visible indicator, to show whether health points were for a mental or physical condition. A typical comment which illustrates the frustration felt by staff was:

“It's very very time consuming to go through your waiting list to try and find somebody suitable for the (adapted/accessible) property cause you've to go in and out of every health and housing needs application and read up on it”
(Allocations Officer AL1)

All officers also felt that an indicator of the adaptations required by each applicant would be helpful as, although this information may be contained within the person's

health and housing need form or within recorded housing options/customer contact information, it can be time consuming to check this.

The incorrect classification of properties, discussed in the previous section, also causes problems on the CHR system. Properties such as amenity houses are not classified as such so staff are unable to produce a waiting list for these properties and have to keep manual records of applicants who are interested in such properties. Similarly, allocations officers are unable to produce a list of applicants who have requested wheelchair accessible properties, although a report can be produced by the Business Solutions team. This has to be specially requested, however, and it is time consuming to produce the report.

Given all the difficulties with the matching process, the participants were asked whether they felt under pressure to match adapted properties within normal timescales despite the process of identifying a suitable applicant taking longer for these properties. Two of the officers reported that they did feel a bit pressured sometimes but all three officers said that they would usually take the time to find a suitable applicant in order to make best use of the accessible property.

Recommendations:

- Regular staff training to be held for all staff involved in the process of matching adapted and accessible properties, to reiterate the importance of properly recording adaptations on the housing systems and to show the Council's commitment to making the effective allocation of adapted and accessible properties a priority.
- Procedures to be agreed regarding the process to be followed when a void property has a stairlift as this could help increase the number of applicants being offered properties not normally considered as accessible as well as reducing the cost of removing these adaptations.
- The CHR system to be updated to allow staff to easily distinguish between applicants who have points for mental health or physical health issues and to identify which adaptations an applicant requires.

Liaison with Technical Officers and Occupational Therapists

Allocations officers often rely on information from Technical Officers regarding whether a property is already adapted, or could be adapted, and from Occupational Therapists regarding whether a particular property is suitable for a named individual. Although a property may already be adapted, it may be unsuitable for another person if, for example, they have a larger wheelchair and require more turning space or wider door openings.

All three allocations officers confirmed that the Technical Officers who inspected the void properties in their areas were good at notifying them of any adaptations and whether these were in good condition or were being removed. One officer commented that it would be beneficial if the Technical Officers recorded this information on the HSMS system.

Technical Officers also play an important role in assessing the suitability of a property for a disabled applicant as they often require to give the Occupational Therapists advice on whether a wall is load bearing (and can be removed or altered) or if it is possible to install a ramp of the required gradient within the available garden ground.

The liaison between the allocations officers and the Occupational Therapists varied across the three geographical areas. Allocations officer AL1 reported that she had difficulty getting an OT to respond to requests to assess the suitability of properties and often had to wait at least two weeks before they returned her telephone call. There were no regular meetings with the OTs in this area and she sometimes phoned a particular worker who would assess houses outwith their own area as they already had a good working relationship.

Officer AL2 attended 4-weekly meetings with OTs in her area and found this invaluable as it “builds up a wee rapport” and improved their working relationship to the benefit of service users although it could still take two weeks for an OT to assess a property due to their workload. There was a list of clients who required accessible housing and both the housing and OT staff found it rewarding to observe this list be reduced over time, as applicants were housed.

Allocations officer AL3 reported that she had good liaison with the local OTs and that they usually assessed houses very quickly; however there were no regular meetings

and no “list” of applicants awaiting accessible housing. AL3 was aware that this was the case in other areas and felt that the list would be beneficial as she could check that these people had submitted housing applications, however AL3 commented that it would be difficult to attend meetings every few weeks so felt that less regular meetings, perhaps every quarter, would be better.

Occupational Therapist OT1 reported that there is much better liaison between housing and OT staff than in her previous job with another large local authority, and that the system works very well in North Lanarkshire despite there being no regular meetings held within her area. OT2 did attend regular meetings (6-weekly) and reported that these were convened after a property was “inappropriately allocated”. The OTs in his area also had a list of disabled applicants and found this very useful. He agreed with AL2 that “face-to-face” meetings helped improve the relationship between OT and housing staff.

One suggestion for improvement was to have named contacts within housing offices, particularly for new OT staff to know who to contact re any enquiries. Since OTs attend regular meetings with housing staff, they should be able to provide newer colleagues with contact details.

There was a difference of opinion between the two OTs regarding whether it was better to have one or two OTs who were responsible for assessing the suitability of properties for disabled applicants, or if all OTs should be involved. They also had differing opinions on whether it was beneficial to have an applicant’s own allocated OT assess a property for that person. A positive finding, however, is that both OTs agreed that housing staff seemed knowledgeable regarding what constituted a suitable property in terms of accessibility, and that there was effective communication – at least within their two areas – between housing and OT staff which benefitted their clients.

Recommendations:

- Technical Officers to record information on housing systems regarding adaptations in vacant properties as this information is crucial when properties are being matched to an applicant on the waiting list.
- Face-to-face meetings between allocations officers and OTs to be considered in areas where these are not presently held as this improves the working relationship between staff.
- Timescales for responding to requests by housing staff for an OT to assess the suitability of a vacant property for a disabled applicant to be agreed by senior management from both services.

Freeing up existing stock where adaptations are no longer required

The Chartered Institute of Housing, in its publication *How to Make Effective Use of Adapted Properties* (CIH, 2014) lists a number of actions for freeing up existing stock. Participants were asked their opinions regarding whether they agreed or disagreed with these propositions. The results were as follows:

Table 2: Freeing Up Existing Stock (adaptations no longer required)

Action	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
Participate in a shared register of accessible housing, such as Home2Fit	7	3	0
Let adapted properties on a fixed term tenancy	6	2	2
Give priority in the allocations policy to tenants who wish to move as they no longer require the adaptations in their home	9	0	1
Give incentives to tenants in adapted properties if they move, e.g. a disturbance payment	6	1	3
Use vacant adapted properties as temporary accommodation until a suitable tenant (who requires the adaptations) is found	9	1	0

The two most supported suggestions were to give priority in the allocations policy to tenants who wished to move as they no longer required the adaptations in their home and to use vacant adapted properties as temporary accommodation (for homeless applicants) until a suitable tenant who required the adaptations is found.

Whilst there was a fair level of support for the other suggestions, more reservations were expressed by the respondents regarding these actions. Comments regarding the shared housing register included:

“I think it might get messy” (Allocations Officer AL2);

“That would impact on the people who live in this area and who are waiting to be housed in this area, if outside applicants were able to apply as well” (Occupational Therapist OT1);

“I don’t think that housing that’s available here should be available to people in Glasgow or something like that” (New Tenant TEN2); and

“The negatives would outweigh the positives for me” (Waiting list applicant WL2).

Some of the concerns which were raised regarding fixed term tenancies included:

“I don’t think it’d go down well with politicians (councillors) or the applicants” (Allocations Officer AL1);

“I can see the pros and cons to that. The people who are living there, that’s their home. I could see a few issues with that (particularly if the disabled person has died)” (Occupational Therapist OT1);

“It wouldn’t really be fair to move someone on” (Occupational Therapist OT2); and

“I think that would cause a lot of problems, I think, a lot of unhappy tenants” (Waiting list applicant WL1).

Regarding giving incentives to tenants in adapted properties to encourage them to move, comments included:

“I think any sensible person shouldn’t need an incentive to move to let another person who needs it (be allocated the house)” (New Tenant TEN3);

“You shouldn’t pay people to do the right thing, to me that’s bribing” (Waiting list applicant WL1);

“I can’t see a financial incentive being a good thing, but possibly the type of area would be a better incentive (i.e. offer the tenant a house in a more desirable area that they are currently living in” (New Tenant TEN2); and

“I think an incentive would be good, but just not to the point where it would become cost ineffective against the cost of the adaptations” (Occupational Therapist OT2).

Recommendation:

- Given the ongoing demand for adapted and accessible properties, and the many benefits of ensuring that disabled people are housed in suitable accommodation, which have been discussed throughout this paper, it is recommended that all of the above suggested actions are given some consideration.

Chapter Five – Summary and Conclusions

Having worked in housing for North Lanarkshire Council for 35 years, acquiring considerable experience of allocating vacant properties, it was my belief that the way in which NLC allocates adapted and wheelchair accessible housing could be improved, to the benefit of waiting list applicants, staff and the Council itself.

This conviction has been confirmed following my interviews with other NLC allocations staff, waiting list applicants, recent new tenants and NLC Occupational therapists, all of whom had direct experience of the allocations process within North Lanarkshire.

Much of the research results presented in the previous chapter, and my subsequent recommendations for improving the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing to disabled applicants on NLC's housing waiting list, link to the seven national recommendations for local authorities and other housing providers within the *Space to Move* (Joseph et al, 2011) report, which also influenced later research projects including *Matching Up?* (Anderson et al, 2017).

NLC has already shown commitment to the first recommendation within *Space to Move* by making the effective allocation of homes to wheelchair users a strategic priority, as stated in the Council's *Local Housing Strategy* (NLC, 2016) and is adhering to some of the other suggestions including gathering specific information on applicants' circumstances and housing requirements.

However, my research has suggested that there are deficiencies in a number of important areas previously highlighted by earlier research. These include: more information needs to be recorded regarding accessibility, such as property design and layout (Anderson et al, 2017, p33); properties need to be properly categorised and re-checked for accessibility when they become vacant, with the level of accessibility logged for future reference (*ibid*, p33 and Joseph et al, 2011, p3); regular staff training requires to be conducted so that allocations staff are confident about categories of accessibility and how information regarding this is held and used (Joseph et al, 2011, p5); more proactive effort is required to identify suitable applicants for accessible and adapted properties (Joseph et al, 2011, p5); the extent to which accessible properties are being misallocated needs to be fully investigated, including identifying the main

causes (Joseph et al, 2011, p5); and improvement being required to NLC's website to make it easier to navigate and more relevant (Joseph et al, 2011, p4). All of these recommendations would improve how NLC allocates adapted and wheelchair accessible housing to applicants on the waiting list, and have benefits for staff and the Council.

Some issues raised by the participants in my study are specific to North Lanarkshire and have already been acknowledged by the Council. These include the Common Housing Register (CHR) and Health and Housing Need (HHN) paperwork needing to be updated and improved and an upgrade being required to the CHR system to allow easier identification of physically disabled applicants in order to improve the allocations matching process. These issues are impacting upon the service currently being provided to disabled housing applicants and also need to be addressed by NLC.

Other issues raised by my participants were more unexpected. These include adding a third party mandate to the CHR application form; information regarding an applicant's specific requirements for adaptations to be more visible on the CHR system; giving Occupational Therapists access to information on the housing system regarding vacant accessible properties; and agreeing a procedure to be followed when a void property has a stairlift. These recommendations are specific to NLC, although it would be beneficial for other housing providers to consult with their service users to identify specific issues within their own policies, procedures and processes.

All of the respondents in my study also had many positive things to say about the allocations process in North Lanarkshire. Comments including "good communication from housing staff", "the housing staff were excellent" and "(the housing advisor) was very supportive" show that there is a real commitment by housing staff to impart a responsive and caring service towards our customers.

Further, more in-depth, research which goes beyond what I was able to carry out alone in the short timescale available would be beneficial. This would build upon my recommendations and confirm whether the data gathered from the 10 participants would be replicated across a wider study. The benefits to disabled housing applicants in terms of improving their chances of being allocated a suitable accessible home, and to North Lanarkshire Council in terms of increasing the effectiveness of its allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing could be considerable.

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Appendix 1



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Study title: “How can North Lanarkshire Council improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing to disabled applicants on the housing waiting list?”

Researcher/student: Fiona Cameron, email xxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

Dissertation supervisor: Dr Mark Wong, email Mark.Wong@glasgow.ac.uk

Degree: MSc Housing Studies

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully, which answers some frequently asked questions, and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study is being done by Fiona Cameron in order to complete the dissertation requirements of the MSc Housing Studies degree. Fiona also works for North Lanarkshire Council as a Housing Co-ordinator in Bellshill First Stop Shop. She is interested in speaking to people who have experience of the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing in North Lanarkshire, in order to find out any difficulties within the process and make recommendations on how the process could be improved. The study will be done between May and August 2018.

Why have I been chosen?

Fiona shall be interviewing a minimum of 3 tenants who have been housed by North Lanarkshire Council in an adapted or wheelchair accessible property within the last 12 months. The tenants have been chosen at random from information held on the Council’s housing systems. She is also interviewing a minimum of 3 applicants on the housing waiting list, identified from North Lanarkshire Council’s Common Housing Register, who are listed for adapted or wheelchair accessible properties, and a minimum of 3 staff who have allocated these properties within the last 12 months.

Two Occupational Therapists shall also be interviewed. You have been chosen as you belong to one of these groups.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and to withdraw any data previously supplied, without giving a reason. If you work for North Lanarkshire Council and decide not to take part, or later withdraw from the study, this will not jeopardise your relationship with Fiona Cameron or affect your progress or general experience at work in any way.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You shall be interviewed by Fiona Cameron. If you are a tenant or waiting list applicant, you shall be interviewed only once and the interview shall take place in your home or nearest First Stop Shop, whichever you prefer. If you are a member of NLC staff, you shall be interviewed once at your own office or at Bellshill First Stop Shop, whichever you prefer, and may be asked to take part in a further group interview with the other staff participants, if this is deemed necessary to clarify any issues.

It is anticipated that each interview will last around 30 to 40 minutes. You shall be asked questions regarding your experience of North Lanarkshire Council's allocation of adapted or wheelchair accessible housing and all interviews shall be audio-recorded. The audio-recording shall be transcribed by Fiona and a copy of the transcript shall be returned to you for verification, if you request this.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by an ID number and any information about you will have your name and address or workplace removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

All data, including the audio-recordings and transcripts, shall be securely stored in a locked cabinet and shall only be accessed by Fiona Cameron, Dr Mark Wong and examiners from the University of Glasgow.

Please note that any assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Fiona's completed dissertation, including the results of the research, shall be submitted to the University for assessment. A written summary of the results or a full copy of the dissertation shall be provided to you, if requested. Please contact Fiona

Cameron by email should you wish this information, which should be available after 28 November 2018.

All research data, including audio-recordings and written transcripts of these recordings, shall be destroyed by 31 December 2018.

Who is organising and funding the research?

Fiona's Master's degree is being funded by North Lanarkshire Council.

Who has reviewed the study?

The project has been reviewed by the School of Social and Political Sciences' Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

Why should I take part?

In order to identify any issues within the application and allocation processes, it is essential that people who have experienced these processes themselves are interviewed. Your participation will hopefully help improve the way North Lanarkshire Council allocates adapted and wheelchair accessible housing in the future and could have direct benefits for yourself and/or other applicants/staff by making the allocation process more effective and efficient.

Contact for Further Information: Any queries should be made by emailing Fiona Cameron in the first instance, or Dr Mark Wong.

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Officer, Ms Jakki Walsh, on email: socpol-pgt-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 2



University
of Glasgow

College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: How can North Lanarkshire Council improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing to disabled applicants on the housing waiting list?

Name of Researcher: Fiona Cameron

Name of supervisor Dr Mark Wong

Consent clauses

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded.

I acknowledge that participants will be directly quoted and will be referred to by pseudonym.

I acknowledge that participants will not be identified by name in any publications arising from the research.

I acknowledge that the information I provide shall be accessed by Fiona Cameron, Dr Mark Wong and examiners from the University of Glasgow only, and shall be destroyed by 31/12/18.

NLC staff only: I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

NLC tenants and waiting list applicants only: I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my tenancy and/or waiting list application arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Signature section

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Name of Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix 3

Questions – recently housed NLC tenants (disabled member of household)

Background

- Can you confirm that you, or a member of your household, have a disability which affects the type of house you require? In what way (e.g. wheelchair access required, adaptations required)?
- Why did you apply to North Lanarkshire Council for accessible housing? What other housing options did you have?

Application paperwork and process

- How easy did you find the application process (i.e. completing the housing application & Health and Housing Need form)? Did you encounter any problems?
- If you encountered problems, were these easily resolved?
- Did you feel that you were able to give all the relevant information about yourself and your/your family member's disability and how this affected the type of house you required?
- Did you feel that the information you gave was used appropriately, to offer you a house suitable to your needs? Did staff fully understand your needs?
- Did you feel fully involved and consulted during the process of applying for a house, waiting for an offer and moving in to this house?
- Is there anything you think could have been done better?
- If you were to apply to move house again, do you think you would find the process easier since you have already experienced it?
- Or do you think there would still be problems? If so, why?
- Is there anything about the process you found works particularly well?

NLC Allocations policy and points system

- How easy was NLC's housing allocations policy to understand?
- How easy was the points system to understand?
- Do you think there is anything about the allocations policy or points system that should be changed? If so, what and why?
- Do you think there should be a separate list for applicants who require adapted properties? If yes, why?

Choices/Information

- Did the house you were allocated (your current house) meet your original requests or did you have to change the size/type/area in order to get an offer of housing?
- Were you able/willing to consider a number of areas or are there reasons why you wished/required to be housed in only particular areas?
- Do you feel there is a shortage of suitable housing that meets your requirements? If yes, what makes you think this?
- How did you know, or find out, about the types of ground floor accessible houses available in your desired areas?
- Do you feel there is enough information available on where to find suitable houses for people with a disability?
- If not, what type of information would have helped?
- Did you seek advice from staff in any of the First Stop Shops? If so, how helpful was this?
- Did you seek advice from any other source? (e.g. family, friends, Social Work, health professionals, other agencies)

Adaptations/OT involvement

- Did you have an allocated Occupational Therapist at any time during the application process?
- If yes, what assistance did he/she provide?
- If no, do you think it would have been helpful to have had an OT? In what way?
- Were any additional adaptations carried out to your house before or shortly after you moved in? If so, what were these?
- Does the property fully meet your current needs? If not, what issues have you experienced?
- Do you think this property will meet your long term needs? If not, why not?

Other issues, including freeing up existing adapted properties

- Do you think that a shared housing register of accessible homes – such as Home2Fit would be beneficial to NLC and to disabled applicants?
- Have you ever lived in, or been offered, a property owned by another local authority or housing association? If so, how did your experience of dealing with that organisation compare to your experience with NLC?
- What do you think of giving disabled tenants a fixed term tenancy (i.e. if at the end of the term, the household no longer requires the adapted property then they would require to move out and be rehoused)?

- Do you think that there are other ways to increase the availability of accessible housing (apart from new build, which NLC is currently doing)? For example, giving priority in the allocation policy to tenants who no longer need their adapted property and apply to move to another house?
- Do you think that tenants who no longer require adapted properties should be given incentives to move, e.g. disturbance allowance?
- If a suitable tenant cannot be found for an adapted property, do you think that consideration should be given to using the property as temporary (homeless) accommodation until a suitable tenant can be found?
- If NLC was to make only one change to improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing, what do you think this should be?

Questions – NLC Occupational Therapists

Background

- How long have you worked for NLC as an O.T. and how much experience do you have of assessing wheelchair accessible and adapted properties for disabled service users?

Application paperwork and process

- Have you helped service users complete a housing application form or Health & Housing Need form?
- If so, what did you think about these forms? Were the questions appropriate? Was there sufficient opportunity to make clear the specific needs of the service user?

NLC Allocations policy and matching process

- How much do you know about NLC's housing allocations policy and the points system?
- Are you aware of the difference between how a mainstream property is matched to an applicant on the housing waiting list and how an adapted, GFA (ground floor accessible) or wheelchair accessible property is matched?
- Do you think that NLC's policy on matching these types of properties is easy for staff and applicants to understand?
- Do you think there is anything about the allocations policy or points system that should be changed to improve the way these types of property are allocated? If so, what and why?
- Do you feel you would benefit from training regarding the allocations policy or the O.T.'s role in the matching process?
- Do you think that an O.T. should be involved when housing staff assess a housing applicant's Health & Housing Need application (and award housing points)? If yes, in what circumstances (not all applicants will have, or require, an O.T.)?
- Is there anything about the allocations and matching process you find works particularly well?

Assessment of suitability of potential housing offers (Adaptations/liaison with housing and property staff)

- What problems have you encountered with the process of assessing a property for a service user?
- How would you normally be contacted to assess a property?
- Do you think that there is appropriate inter-agency working (Health, Social Work, Housing) regarding households with a disability who require adapted or accessible housing?
- What could be changed regarding liaison with housing staff or health professionals to improve outcomes for disabled applicants?
- Do you feel that housing allocations staff always fully understand the housing needs of service users in terms of required adaptations or other practical issues?
- Do you think that if housing staff had better information regarding property layout, door widths, whether a property is rampable etc. that this would help them match a more suitable applicant when a property becomes void?
- What role do you think the Technical Officers should have in the process of allocating an adapted or accessible property to a service user?
- Do you think that it would be useful to have one or two individual O.T.s in the area to deal specifically with assessing void properties for disabled housing applicants?

Choices/Information

- Do you think you have access to enough information about the availability of adapted or accessible properties within NLC's housing stock?
- If not, what type of information and in what format would be useful?
- Do you think there is a lack of availability of suitable houses for disabled applicants?
- Do you feel there are any other reasons why it can be difficult to find suitable offers of adapted or accessible housing for disabled service users?

Other issues, including freeing up existing adapted properties

- Have you ever worked as an O.T. for another local authority? If so, how did your allocations experience with that organisation compare to your experience with NLC?
- Do you think that a shared housing register of accessible homes – such as Home2Fit would be beneficial to NLC and to disabled applicants?
- If a suitable tenant cannot be found for an adapted or accessible property, do you think that consideration should be given to using the property as temporary (dispersed) accommodation until a suitable tenant could be found?

- What do you think of giving disabled tenants a fixed term tenancy (i.e. if at the end of the term, the household no longer requires the adapted property then they would require to move out and be rehoused)?
- Do you think that there are other ways to increase the availability of accessible housing (apart from new build, which NLC is currently doing)? For example, giving priority in the allocation policy to tenants who no longer need their adapted property and apply to move to another house?
- Do you think that tenants who no longer require adapted properties should be given incentives to move, e.g. disturbance allowance?
- If NLC was to make only one change to improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing, what do you think this should be?

Questions – NLC allocations staff

Matching/allocations process and housing application paperwork

- How long have you worked in allocations and how much experience do you have of matching wheelchair accessible and adapted properties?
- Do you think that NLC's policy on matching Ground Floor Accessible (GFA) and wheelchair accessible properties is easy for staff and applicants to understand?
- What training have you been given on identifying, categorising and matching GFA and wheelchair accessible properties?
- Do you feel you require further training? If so, why and on what aspects of the process?
- How easy is it to identify a suitable applicant from the waiting lists when you are matching an adapted or accessible property?
- Do you think there is anything about the allocations policy or points system that should be changed to improve the way these types of property are allocated? If so, what and why?
- Do you think there should be a separate list for applicants who require adapted properties? If yes, why? **(added after this was suggested by a participant)**
- What do you do if a property has an adaptation but is not accessible to a disabled person, e.g. a 2 storey house with a wet room upstairs?
- Do you come across this scenario often?
- Do you feel that the information we gather regarding disabled applicants allows staff to fully understand their housing needs in terms of required adaptations or other practical issues?
- Do you think that the CHR (Common Housing Register) form or HHN (Health & Housing Need) form could be changed to make it easier to match adapted or accessible properties? If so, how?
- When a property becomes available to match, do you always check whether it would be suitable for a disabled applicant?
- How easy is it to identify from HSMS and the CHR (the housing computer systems) that a property is wheelchair accessible?
- Is there enough information recorded regarding property layout, door widths, whether it's rampable etc? If no, do you think this would help you match a more suitable applicant?
- How could the computer systems be improved to make it easier to match these properties to a suitable applicant?
- Do you feel pressured by the timescales for re-letting void properties or do you think that it would be better to be able to spend more time looking for a suitable disabled applicant when a property is adapted or accessible?
- Do you feel there are any other reasons why it can be difficult to find suitable applicants for adapted or accessible properties?

- Do you think there is a lack of availability of suitable houses for people with a disability?
- Do you feel there is enough information available to housing applicants on the stock availability of adapted and accessible houses for people with a disability?
- If not, what type of information would help?
- Is there anything about the allocations and matching process you find works particularly well?
- You allocated the property at (state address of the new tenant being interviewed). Did you encounter any problems matching this property and do you think that the new tenant is satisfied with their new home and with the allocations process?

Liaison with Technical Officers and OT's

- What liaison do you have with the void Technical Officers regarding identifying adapted or accessible properties?
- How do you think information sharing with the Technical Officers could be improved?
- Do you liaise with Occupational Therapists or other health professionals when matching adapted or accessible properties?
- How helpful is this?
- What could be changed regarding liaison with O.T.s or health professionals to improve outcomes for disabled applicants?

Other issues, including freeing up existing adapted properties

- Have you ever allocated adapted or accessible properties for another local authority or housing association? If so, how did your allocations experience with that organisation compare to your experience with NLC?
- Do you think that a shared housing register of accessible homes – such as Home2Fit would be beneficial to NLC and to disabled applicants?
- If a suitable tenant cannot be found for an adapted or accessible property, do you think that consideration should be given to using the property as temporary (dispersed) accommodation until a suitable tenant could be found?
- What do you think of giving disabled tenants a fixed term tenancy (i.e. if at the end of the term, the household no longer requires the adapted property then they would require to move out and be rehoused)?
- Do you think that there are other ways to increase the availability of accessible housing (apart from new build, which NLC is currently doing)? For example, giving priority in the allocation policy to tenants who no longer need their adapted property and apply to move to another house?
- Do you think that tenants who no longer require adapted properties should be given incentives to move, e.g. disturbance allowance?

- If NLC was to make only one change to improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing, what do you think this should be?

Questions – applicants on NLC’s waiting list (disabled member of household)

Background

- Can you confirm that you, or a member of your household, have a disability which affects the type of house you require? In what way (e.g. wheelchair access required, adaptations required)?
- Why did you apply to North Lanarkshire Council for accessible housing? What other housing options do you have?

Application paperwork and process

- How easy have you found the application process (i.e. completing the housing application & Health and Housing Need form)? Have you encountered any problems?
- If you have encountered problems, have these been easily resolved?
- Have you felt that you were able to give all the relevant information about yourself and your/your family member’s disability and how this affects the type of house you required?
- Do you feel that the information you have given allows staff to fully understand your housing needs?
- Have you felt fully involved and consulted during the process of applying for a house and waiting for an offer?
- Is there anything you think should be done better?
- Is there anything about the process you find works particularly well?
- There are thousands more applicants on the waiting list than available houses so not everyone will get an offer of housing. Do you think that there are particular issues or problems for disabled applicants which further limits their chance of an offer?

NLC Allocations policy and points system

- How easy is NLC’s housing allocations policy to understand?
- How easy is the points system to understand?
- Do you think there is anything about the allocations policy or points system that should be changed? If so, what and why?
- Do you think there should be a separate list for applicants who require adapted properties? If yes, why?

Choices/Information

- How likely do you think you are to be allocated a house which meets your original requests or do you think you will have to change the size/type/area in order to get an offer of housing?
- Are you able/willing to consider a number of areas or are there reasons why you wish/require to be housed in only particular areas?

- Do you feel there is a shortage of suitable housing that meets your requirements? If yes, what makes you think this?
- How did you know, or find out, about the types of ground floor accessible houses available in your desired areas?
- Do you feel there is enough information available on where to find suitable houses for people with a disability?
- If not, what type of information would help?
- Have you sought advice from staff in any of the First Stop Shops? If so, how helpful was this?
- Have you sought advice from any other source? (e.g. family, friends, Social Work, health professionals, other agencies)
- Have you been offered any properties?
- If yes, why did you refuse these offers?

Adaptations/OT involvement

- Do you have an allocated Occupational Therapist?
- If yes, what assistance has he/she provided?
- If no, do you think it would be helpful to have an OT? In what way?
- Are you looking for a property which will meet your long term needs? If not, why not?

Other issues, including freeing up existing adapted properties

- Do you think that a shared housing register of accessible homes – such as Home2Fit would be beneficial to NLC and to disabled applicants?
- Have you ever lived in, or been offered, a property owned by another local authority or housing association? If so, how did your experience of dealing with that organisation compare to your experience with NLC?
- What do you think of giving disabled tenants a fixed term tenancy (i.e. if at the end of the term, the household no longer requires the adapted property then they would require to move out and be rehoused)?
- Do you think that there are other ways to increase the availability of accessible housing (apart from new build, which NLC is currently doing)? For example, giving priority in the allocation policy to tenants who no longer need their adapted property and apply to move to another house?
- Do you think that tenants who no longer require adapted properties should be given incentives to move, e.g. disturbance allowance?
- If a suitable tenant cannot be found for an adapted property, do you think that consideration should be given to using the property as temporary (homeless) accommodation until a suitable tenant can be found?
- If NLC was to make only one change to improve the allocation of adapted and wheelchair accessible housing, what do you think this should be?

