
Redbridge Disability Consortium

Redbridge Draft Housing Strategy 2014 - 2019

Contact Details

jon@redbridgeconcern.org

www.rcmh.org.uk

27th March 2014



Registered Charity No. 1065770

Company Limited by Guarantee No. 3115971

Introduction

“I am a disabled person from a Muslim background. I have physical difficulties as well as mental health problems. In the past 16 months, I have moved into three different private accommodations within the borough.

As a consequence, I have experienced a number of housing issues, for example: harassment, isolation, unaffordable rent, intolerable living conditions (damp), unsecure tenancy etc. This has further exacerbated my physical and mental health, and as a result I have been left feeling very insecure - I am worried about my future.

I have been informed by the Housing that I have no priority to housing, having lived in the area for less than 2 years. What is someone in my position expected to do?”

Redbridge Resident, March 2014

Redbridge Disability Consortium welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Redbridge Housing Strategy.

A range of formal and informal discussions with hundreds of disabled people across Redbridge has informed our response. This includes focus groups with people with physical and sensory impairments; talking and listening to people with lived experience of mental health problems; engaging with communities at the Redbridge Advice Forum; listening to residents at our regular peer support meetings at the Centre for Independent and Inclusive Living – Redbridge and via people who access our services such as the Disability Related Advice project.

It is abundantly clear that housing is extremely important to disabled people. People we spoke to highlighted a lack of information, fear of homelessness, or simply helplessness when it came to housing. Many were unsure where to go to get the best information. Younger people spoke of being trapped in the homes of their parents. While many older disabled people are in inadequate private accommodation that did not suit their needs.

For some, the recent change to the qualifying criteria for housing in Redbridge was the last straw, and they felt abandoned by their local authority. It is their views that have informed our response to the draft Strategy.

Why Housing is Important

I'm nearly 30 years old, I have cerebral palsy and I have been living with my parents all my life. I have been on the waiting list for housing since I reached 25 years old. I do not have a job, but I volunteer as much as possible.

I have just been informed that I had been removed from the housing waiting list because I no longer meet the criteria for public housing. The letter was so complicated I had to go to my local disability organisation to have it explained to me. My parents were unable to understand it either.

This means I have to live with my parents for the foreseeable future will be overcrowding and frustration that comes with this. I am very very angry.

Redbridge Resident, March 2014

Housing is of fundamental importance to the health and well being of all disabled groups. Indeed, Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities states that disabled people have the right to '*choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others and are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement*'.

A settled home is vital for good mental health. Research clearly demonstrates that support with housing can improve the health of individuals and that good quality, affordable, safe housing underpins our mental and physical well being and also help reduce overall demand for health and social care services¹. Good housing is fundamental to a good start in life, giving children a place to study, play and feel safe. In fact, a connection has been found between children living in poor, insecure, overcrowded housing and low educational attainment with associated knock-on effects on life chances.

This is clearly reflected in the Coalition Government's mental health strategy for England, *No health without mental health*, which stresses the importance of housing for everyone's mental health and particularly for those recovering from mental health problems.

We recognise the challenges Redbridge faces. It is in many ways a victim of its own success. The boroughs desirability means that demand will quickly absorb new supply and maintain pressure on prices. This is exacerbated by proximity to the 'city region'. So we recognise that Redbridge cannot rely on new build alone to solve the Borough's housing problems. A sustainable approach must include improving, maintaining and making best use of the existing housing stock, including 'retrofitting' properties to improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty.

But it remains the case that there are simply not enough homes.

¹ Bolton J(2009) The use of resources in adult social care: a guide for local authorities. Department of Health
3 of 11

A bold, positive, and imaginative approach is required to win hearts and minds and resolve a housing situation that is stifling the vibrancy and economic well being of Redbridge now and for generations to come.



Good housing is crucial for good mental and physical health

“I’m in my late 50s and over the years my vision has slowly deteriorated to a point where I am now severely visually impaired. I live in private accommodation and I have been on the housing list for 20 years, but getting secure council run housing has been impossible.

Currently I’m forced to move from landlord to landlord and this is traumatic for someone who has a visual impairment. Also, finding the right information is very hard.

Recently, Redbridge wrote to me to tell me that I have been removed the housing waiting list because they changed the criteria. I am no longer in need of housing, in their view. I feel desperate, I do not know where to turn to get the best advice.”

Redbridge Resident, Focus Group, March 2014

- ✓ All too often severe mental ill-health can lead to homelessness
- ✓ People with mental health problems, can sometimes find it difficult to secure and maintain good quality accommodation
- ✓ Only just over a quarter of households with disabled adults in London report having adapted accommodation and a quarter of these say this adapted accommodation is unsuitable.²
- ✓ One in three households with a disabled person live in non-decent accommodation³
- ✓ 52% of people with impairments in the UK have difficulties with accessing rooms within the home, because of stairs or a lack of ramps or stair lifts in the home
- ✓ Approximately 41% of people with impairments have difficulty getting out of their homes because of the same barriers⁴.
- ✓ There are only 533,000 specialist houses for older people in England and most older and most disabled people will continue to live in mainstream housing⁵

² Annual Population Survey 2009

³<http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/disability-statistics-and-research/disability-facts-and-figures.php#ho>

⁴ Life Opportunities Survey 2010 , Office for National Statistics

⁵ Later Life in the United Kingdom, Ageuk, April 2013, based on Shelter analysis.

- ✓ Housing problems are often given as a reason for a person being admitted or readmitted to inpatient care.⁶



6 Johnson, R et al (2006) At home? Mental health issues arising in social housing. National

Housing and Welfare Reforms

Many of our members and people we have talked to are concerned about welfare reform including changes to unemployment, disability and housing benefits.

National Research shows that 9 in 10 (90%) disabled people are cutting back on food or bills to pay the bedroom tax if they are refused a safety-net housing payment⁷ and it is likely that once PIP and Universal Credit is rolled out on a national basis that more disabled people may well find it impossible to stay in their home and will have to move to a cheaper area with the possible loss of care packages and support networks

'I'm worried about being split up through changes to housing benefits. It's a very tight knit community, family group. It's culturally insensitive.'

Impact of overcrowding on physical and mental health

Living in overcrowded accommodation has significant social and health risks and these can be long-term, with many studies concluding that overcrowding experienced in childhood negatively affects adult health.

Evidence suggests that rates of respiratory disease, tuberculosis, meningitis and gastric conditions are significantly associated with overcrowding.⁸ There is evidence that overcrowding can negatively impact children's education, future prospects, family relationships, and physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Redbridge BAME Community

Overcrowding is more common among particular minority ethnic groups, with the highest rates among Bangladeshi and Black African households.⁹

The housing strategy needs to be inclusive to reflect the diversity of disabled BME communities residing in the borough, so that even the most marginalised individuals (who may have little or no engagement with service providers), are not placed at a disadvantage.

Therefore the Equality Impact Assessment should not be seen as merely a 'paper' exercise - rather, it should put in place measures, which

⁷<http://www.housing.org.uk/media/press-releases/disabled-people-cutting-back-on-food-and-bills-to-pay-bedroom-tax>
<http://www.housing.org.uk/media/press-releases/disabled-people-cutting-back-on-food-and-bills-to-pay-bedroom-tax#sthash.vaP5mJMX.dpuf>

⁸ Chance of a lifetime, *The Impact of bad housing on children's lives*, Shelter

⁹ Tackling Homelessness Amongst Ethnic Minority Households, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005

minimise the risk. For example; through resources and support which could help to reduce inequalities such as; language barriers, cultural stigma, mental health, physical impairments, learning difficulties.

Furthermore, a culturally and religiously sensitive approach should be adopted in terms of assisting women from BME communities who are fleeing domestic violence, experiencing harassment or homeless / at risk of homelessness (as well as resources such as; supported accommodation, tenancy sustainment, befriending and outreach support, be made available to them).

Redbridge Resident, March 2014



Recommendations

- Many of the people we work with have need for specialist advice about Housing. Because they have a disability, their needs are rarely met by mainstream housing advice organisations. Redbridge Council to provide increased resources and support for organisations that provide this expert information within the Borough.
- Proper research in partnership with the local authority to identify the housing needs of disabled people to enable more appropriate allocations
- Thinking beyond 'bricks and mortar' and giving greater consideration to the wider need of disabled people for public transport links, dedicated car-parking spaces, better environmental design and community facilities
- Participating in a shared 'Disability/Accessible Housing Register' so that details of accessible and adapted properties are made available to disabled applicants, enabling allocations to be more appropriate
- Building new homes to Lifetime Homes Standards, with a proportion fully wheelchair-accessible. When carrying out refurbishments and housing upgrades, considering the needs of existing tenants and seeking funding where available to meet accessibility standards including Lifetime Homes Standards;
- Operating a maintenance and repair system that identifies residents who are vulnerable and prioritises repair and response times according to their needs
- Ensuring that all staff receive 'disability equality' training and ensuring that temporary staff and contractors are equally aware. Specifically monitoring the satisfaction of disabled tenants to ensure equality of service
- Redbridge Council to issue clear guidance making it clear that DLA and PIP is not intended to cover housing or other general living costs when calculating Discretionary Housing Payment.
- London Borough of Redbridge to identifying and release land to bring forward new sites, including through the release of public sector owned land.
- Setting and delivering stretching yet realistic targets for affordable housing that do not deter private developers and bringing forward the provision of more social housing.
- Planning for how existing housing stock can be better utilised, including by addressing under-occupancy and improving poor conditions in parts of the private rented sector
- Using detailed analysis of the housing/accommodation needs of specific groups to inform housing and planning policy (including young, older and disabled people and

those with complex needs, refugees, asylum seekers and BAME communities)

- Ensuring that new house building and improvements to existing stock meets very high energy and environmental standards that will reduce living costs and fuel poverty



About Us

Redbridge Disability Consortium

www.redbridgedisabilityconsortium.org

Our work is driven by the goal of a society in which disabled people are treated with dignity, fairness, respect and understanding.

We are passionate about developing high quality, accessible services for disabled groups, working in partnership to influence policy and outcomes affecting disabled groups; and challenging the stigma and discrimination that disabled people encounter in their day-to-day lives

Redbridge Concern for Mental Health

www.rcmh.org.uk

Redbridge Concern for Mental Health - established over 15 years ago – is a service user led organisation based in the London Borough of Redbridge dedicated to promoting, improving and protecting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of the wider community. We offer high quality services to local residents seeking mental health support. We also provide information and signposting as well as challenging the stigma and discrimination that people experience in their everyday lives.

Redbridge Forum

www.redbridgeforum.co.uk

Our aim is to help improve the quality of life for people with a learning disability and their carers, including those on the autistic spectrum. A lot of our work at present is based around children's services. We also support people with a learning disability to speak up for themselves and we also engage with local carers to find out what they think about services in Redbridge

Centre for Independent and Inclusive Living –Redbridge

www.redbridgeciil.org

We are run and controlled by local people and we are passionate about promoting independence, inclusive living and a meaningful and credible voice for everyone who uses services in Redbridge.