

Adapting homes for ageing well in London

*Older Londoners' experiences of home
adaptations and opportunities to improve
provision*



Credits

Thanks are due to all of the older people who took part in the focus groups, the Hackney Afro Caribbean Social Club, and to Positive Ageing in London (PAiL) for their work to set up and facilitate these discussions with older people who had experience of home adaptations.

We are very grateful to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for making possible this work to reflect the voices of older people whose experiences and views are too often ignored and marginalised.

Contact details

Positive Ageing in London

Email: positiveageinginlondon@gmail.com

Website: <http://pailondon.org.uk/>

Positive Ageing in London is The London Regional Forum for Older Londoners (50+).

Positive Ageing in London brings together London-wide and local organisations from both the voluntary and statutory sectors – as well as individuals – to give a voice to older Londoners and to consider age issues in London and agree common solutions.

Care & Repair England

info@careandrepair-england.org.uk www.careandrepair-england.org.uk [twitter@cr_england](https://twitter.com/cr_england)

Care & Repair England (Charitable Society Reg. No. 25121R) aims to improve older people's housing. It innovates, develops, promotes and supports practical housing initiatives & related policy and practice which enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as they choose.

Disclaimers

Care & Repair England has made every effort to ensure that the information in this publication was accurate when published, but can take no responsibility for the subsequent use of this information, nor for any errors or omissions it may contain. To the extent permitted by law, Care & Repair England shall not be liable for any loss, damage or expense incurred by reliance on the information or any statement contained herein. Any references or third-party URLs are given for information and reference purposes only. Care & Repair England does not control or warrant the accuracy, relevance, availability, timeliness or completeness of the information contained on any third-party website. Inclusion of any third-party details or website is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, products or services offered, nor the companies or organisations in question.

Published 2019

Contents

1. Summary at a glance	page 4
2. Context	page 5
London - Population, Ageing, Health & Diversity	
London's Housing Strategy	
Hackney Housing Strategy - an opportunity to engage with older people	
London and the Borough of Hackney - demographics and housing	
Current housing adaptation services for older people in Hackney	
3. Home adaptations for older Londoners - voices of experience	page 11
Focus groups	
4. Headline messages	page 13
5. What next?	page 17
Appendix 1	page 18
Overview of the Disabled Facilities Grant and other help with home adaptations	
Appendix 2	page 21
Group discussions - detailed description	

1. Summary at a Glance

What?

This report highlights the views and experiences of older Londoners who have had home adaptations carried out to their homes, highlighting what worked well for them as well as possible improvements.

They are based on the feedback from older people who took part in two focus groups which took place during April & May 2019.

Why?

The London Housing Strategy and the Hackney Housing Strategy pledged to make homes more accessible and adaptable to meet the diverse needs of ageing populations across London.

Well adapted homes can improve the health and wellbeing of older and disabled people, as well as increasing their independence. Current health and care integration offers an opportunity to include improved provision of home adaptations as a way of reducing risks to health.

However, there is currently something of a 'postcode' lottery with regard to access to help with home adaptations in different London Boroughs. It would be therefore be timely to review provision with a view to adoption of best practice and actively involving older and disabled people.

It is hoped that some of the findings about older people's housing wider experiences and views concerning housing in later life will also be of use to the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Hackney Council as they refine and shape housing policy for older people, and in particular supporting further participation by older residents in connection with a new Housing Strategy for Older People living in Hackney.

Headline messages

There was an overriding agreement that home adaptations had a **positive impact** on older people's lives, enabling them to live with increased independence, well-being and a greater sense of dignity.

Access to a handyperson service to help with minor adaptations, maintenance and repairs in the home was important to enable older people to be able to continue living in their own homes. Small changes in the home can have big impacts on everyday life.

Access to information and advice about home adaptations, as well support to install, was important to all participants.

Going forward it was clear that the participants felt that good practice around adaptation delivery is achieved when health, social and housing providers work in an integrated way, with accessible, fast, responsive and transparent systems, including keeping the recipient well informed and ensuring a person-centred approach.

2. Context

London - Population, Ageing, Health & Diversity

In London there are just over 1 million people aged over 65 and that number is expected to grow to 1.2 million by 2024 – an increase of 22% in 10 years. There are 140,000 people aged over 85 in London, and that is expected to increase to 180,000 over 85 by 2024, a 38% increase in 10 years.¹

Having homes that are safe, suitable, adaptable and accessible is a crucial step towards enabling people to live independently and well in a home of their choosing as they age.

Health

The link between housing and health is well documented, with estimated costs of poor housing to the NHS in excess of £1.4 billion per annum² in first year treatment costs alone. The main housing factors which result in these additional health costs are cold homes and falls hazards. As people live longer, there is increased incidence of the long-term health conditions (e.g. respiratory, joint, heart disease etc) that can be exacerbated, or even caused, by sub-standard housing.

With an increasing ageing population, and a growing number of older people experiencing multiple co-morbidities and frailty, it is fundamental to address poor or unsuitable housing as part of a coherent approach to public health and the wider health prevention agenda (e.g. the new NHS 10 year Plan).

The need for home adaptations, as well as access to more accessible and adaptable alternative housing, will undoubtedly increase as London's population ages.

Households³

According to the 2015 based household interim projections, in 2019 there are 719,000 older person households in London [aged 65 yrs and over] of whom 386,000 are 75 yrs and over. By 2029 the number of older person households will have increased by 37%, with households aged 75 and over increasing by 42% to over 500,000. There are 56,418 units of specialist housing for older people, i.e. just under 8% of older households are living in specialist housing, and 92% live in the mainstream housing stock.

Most older (65yrs+) households in London are owner occupied (just over 60%) rising to an estimated 65% in 2029. There is considerable variation between London boroughs in home ownership among older households, ranging from less than 30% in Hackney and Tower Hamlets to more than 80% in Bexley, Bromley and Redbridge.

A number of studies⁴ indicate that around 80% of older people say that they want to stay living in their current homes. Furthermore, at current rates of home building, around 80% of the homes people will be living in by 2050 are already built⁵. Consequently the adaptation, maintenance and repair of existing homes is a crucial part of any policy to ensure that the housing requirements of an ageing population can be met.

¹ Age UK London, *Facts and Figures*, Accessed on 10/06/2019

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/london/about-us/media-centre/facts-and-figures/>

² Garrett H & Burris S, (2015) *Homes and ageing in England*, Building Research Establishment, Bracknell, IHS BRE Press

³ Three Dragons (2017), *GLA Older Persons Housing Needs Assessment Report 2017*, Accessed on 10/06/2019 via:

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_older_persons_housing_benchmarks_report_november_2017_0.pdf

⁴ Lloyd J (2015) *Older Owners Research London*, Strategic Society Centre

⁵ 6 Boardman, B et al (2005) '40% House', Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, UK

Diversity

According to the 2011 Census, London is the most ethnically diverse region in England and Wales with 40.2% of residents identifying with the Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic group⁶.

Recent analysis by the Race Equality Foundation⁷ concluded that older BME populations are likely to grow in future years, albeit subject to differences in life expectancy and migration patterns. It noted that existing research evidence suggests that most minority groups will experience poor health earlier than white British, and that most minority ethnic groups experience higher levels of housing deprivation than white British, with Bangladeshi and black African people the most likely to be housing deprived.

It was noted that BME older people are concentrated in urban areas in and around London and major cities and, concluding that the complex demography of ethnic ageing needed to be understood by local authorities in order to develop housing and related policy and interventions to meet their local older population needs.

London's Housing Strategy

The London Housing Strategy (the Strategy) sets out the Mayor's plans *'to tackle the capital's housing crisis and his vision to provide all Londoners with a good quality home they can afford'*.⁸

The main focus of this strategy is to tackle London's housing shortage but it sets five key areas for action:

1. building more homes for Londoners
2. delivering genuinely affordable homes
3. high-quality homes and inclusive neighbourhoods
4. a fairer deal for private renters and leaseholders
5. tackling homelessness and helping rough sleepers

With regard to adaptations of existing homes there are three key references in the final Strategy:

2.29 In addition to ensuring the safety of our homes, improving the quality of our housing through the adaptation of existing stock or the provision of new homes is also necessary in the face of two looming long-term challenges. First, with the number of people aged 80 or above projected to double over the next 25 years, an ageing population is likely to require more adaptable and accessible homes. Second, it is vital that we ensure that the design of new buildings fully addresses the need to reduce greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions, while also adapting to the climate changes that are already inevitable, such as higher summer temperatures.

5.8 It is important that London's housing enables older and disabled Londoners to lead independent and fulfilling lives. There needs to be a range of options available, particularly as more older people are choosing to remain in their own homes rather than move into residential institutions. These include adaptations to existing homes, the provision of new homes built to meet people's changing circumstances over a lifetime.....

⁶ National Office of Statistic (2018), *Regional Ethnic Diversity*, Accessed on 10/06/2019 via:

<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest>

⁷ De Noronha N (2019) *Housing and the older ethnic minority population in England*, Race Equality Foundation, Housing LIN

⁸ Greater London Authority (2018), *London Housing Strategy*. Accessed on 10/06/2019 via https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2018_lhs_london_housing_strategy.pdf

5.39 Many of London's existing homes need to be adapted and improved so that they are more accessible to Londoners. Government investment in Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) – the main funding stream available for councils to support these improvements – has increased in recent years. However, the cap on individual grants (of £30,000) has not changed since 2008. In addition, there is scope for some housing associations to invest more of their own funds in adaptations and improvements, so that more funding for DFGs is available for other homes. The Mayor will work with councils and housing associations to agree a protocol to ensure that housing associations contribute to the cost of adaptations, and he will urge Government to increase the maximum individual grant to £45,000. The Mayor expects social landlords to be well-informed about the accessibility of their stock, including through tools such as the London Accessible Housing Register. There is also scope to consider how loans and equity release could be used more effectively to fund adaptations, as well as repairs, to enable more older owner occupiers to continue to live independently in their own homes.

The legal duty to provide help with home adaptations, including Disabled Facilities Grants, lies with individual London Boroughs, and so it is understandable that the Mayor's London Housing Strategy has limited scope for driving improvement in provision. Nevertheless it is helpful that the Strategy makes these important points about the importance of adapting the current stock, as well as making sure that all new homes are built to standards that make them accessible and adaptable.

Older People's Engagement in Shaping the London Housing Strategy

In 2017 the Draft London Housing Strategy was published and a widespread consultation exercise undertaken. Care & Repair England worked in partnership with Age UK London to engage with older people, including in supporting a series of consultations and events, and using the information gathered from older Londoners to produce a response to the Draft Strategy focussed on housing and ageing.

One of the main issues that the consultations with older people highlighted was the importance of tackling the condition of the current housing stock, where most Londoners will continue to live for many decades to come. As part of the consultation an online survey was carried out and most respondents (82%) either strongly agreed or agreed (52% /30%) with the Draft Strategy's statement that it wanted to maximise use of Disabled Facilities Grant to support low income people adapt their homes, whilst 91% said addressing repairs to current homes was important (31%) or very important (54 %)⁹.

Given the increased references in the final Strategy to the importance of home adaptations, combined with topicality of the subject following a national review of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) commissioned by national government¹⁰ and a review of home adaptations good practice by the Centre for Ageing Better¹¹, it was judged to be timely to carry out fresh engagement with older people who had had experience of adapting their homes and/or accessed support to carry out home adaptations. The findings of the focus groups could then potentially support older people's groups and forums to take action to improve local adaptation provision where there were shortcomings.

This report describes the experiences that older people in different parts of London have had when carrying out home adaptations, the impacts of the adaptations (and the process of accessing and installing the adaptations) on their lives, with recommendations for possible changes and improvements.

⁹ Care and Repair England (2018), *Older Londoners Influencing the Mayors Housing Strategy*. Accessed on 10/06/2019 via <https://housingactionblog.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/ideas-for-action-age-uk-london-july-18.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-facilities-grant-and-other-adaptations-external-review>

¹¹ Centre for Ageing Better (2018) *Adapting for Ageing London* Centre for Ageing Better. Accessed on 11/06/19 <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/adapting-for-ageing>

Hackney's Housing Strategy - an opportunity to engage with older people

As noted above, most housing policy decisions, including provision of home adaptations assistance and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), are the responsibility of individual London Boroughs. Hackney is currently reviewing its Housing Strategy, including its strategy specifically concerned with housing for older people.

The Hackney Housing Strategy 2017-2022 key themes include “*making best use of new and existing homes and meeting people’s housing needs*” and “*help tackle housing-related health and support needs*”¹².

In line with these priority areas, it is clear that adaptations are an effective way of adapting existing housing stock to meet the needs of older and disabled people. Research highlighted in the *Adapting for Ageing*¹³ report reflected the positive and life-changing impact home adaptations can have on improved outcomes and quality of life for those in later life, particularly in combination with necessary repairs and home improvements. Home adaptations play a key role in supporting people to live independently for longer and impact on health needs e.g. prevent avoidable hospital admissions resulting from falls and accidents in the home.

Under the key themes noted above, the Hackney Housing Strategy commits to: *promoting affordable warmth, and targeting older and more vulnerable residents for support in both the public and private sectors; reviewing supported living and prevention services to target those most in need, including older people; building closer links between housing, health and adult social care providers; and importantly, to the implementation of a Hackney Older People’s Housing Strategy.*¹⁴

The current work by the local authority on its Older People’s Housing Strategy provides an opportunity for older residents in Hackney to influence the content with regard to housing for ageing, including adaptation and repair of the existing housing stock.

Hackney context - demographics and housing

Population, Age, Health & Diversity

Whilst the London Borough of Hackney currently has one of the lowest proportions of older people, the projected growth of the older population is higher than the London wide trend. According to the 2011 Census, there were 28,200 people over 55yrs in Hackney, 14% of the Borough's population, but by 2025 it is expected that there will be 24,154 residents aged 65 and over (an increase of 27% from 2015 compared to a citywide average increase of 20%).¹⁵ The shift to growth in this age group after 2011 can be attributed to the falling mortality rates, increasing life expectancy, and the 50+ population reaching retirement age.

Life expectancy in Hackney has been increasing steadily over the past decade for both males and females, but Hackney faces key challenges with regards to health inequalities. There are still large pockets of deprivation across the borough and people who live in more socially deprived circumstances tend to experience more health problems¹⁶.

¹² Hackney Council, *Hackney Housing Strategy 2017- 2022*, p5. Accessed on 10/06/2019 via <https://hackney.gov.uk/housing-strategy>

¹³ Adams S, Hodges M (2018), *Adapting for Ageing*, London The Centre for Ageing Better

¹⁴ *Hackney Housing Strategy 2017- 2022*, p15. Accessed on 10/06/2019 <https://hackney.gov.uk/housing-strategy>

¹⁵ Great London Authority (2015), *The Propensity for Social Exclusion of Older People in London* (Greater London Authority, p.23. Accessed 16/06/2019, via: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/propensity-for-social-exclusion-of-older-people-in-london--report->

¹⁶ Hackney Council, *Single Equality Scheme for Hackney 2018-2022*, Accessed on 10/06/2019 via:

Home ownership levels in Hackney are around the same for older people as the population overall, 27.4%, compared with 26%. Over three quarters of older home owners own their properties outright. Nearly two thirds of households headed by an older person in Hackney live in social rented accommodation 64.7%, compared with 43.7% of households overall. Considerably fewer households headed by a person aged over 65 rent from a private landlord, 7.6% compared with 30.2% of Hackney households overall. Of the 50-64 year-old age group, a third are home owners, with 56% living in social housing and 11% in the private rented sector¹⁷. Given this, and that the size of the private rented sector in Hackney (population overall) more than doubled between 2001 and 2011 rising from 14,760 to 29,449 households, it can be expected that future older generations in Hackney will increasingly live in private sector accommodation.¹⁸

Hackney is the sixth most ethnically diverse borough in London. In Hackney 56% of older residents (65yrs+) are from minority ethnic groups, 44% are white British (white British all ages 36%). Some 6% of residents aged 65 and over are from a white Irish background. Proportionally fewer Hackney elders describe themselves as 'other white', 9% compared with 16% of residents of all ages.

There is a significantly higher proportion of older residents from the black Caribbean community, 18% (compared with 8% for all ages), 6% from black African communities (11% for all ages). There are proportionally fewer older people from Asian communities in Hackney, 8% (11% all ages).¹⁹

https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk/policy-partnerships/copy-of-consultation-on-hackneys-draft-single-equa/supporting_documents/Hackneys%20Draft%20Single%20Equality%20Scheme%20201822.pdf

¹⁷ Hackney Council (2019), *Considering the wider social and economic needs of older people*. Accessed on 10/06/2019 via:

<https://www.hackney.gov.uk/media/7990/profiling-the-needs-of-older-people-in-Hackney/pdf/profiling-the-needs-of-older-people-in-hackney>

¹⁸ Hackney Council (2019), *Hackney Profile*, Accessed on 10/06/2019 via <https://hackney.gov.uk/article/3622/Population>

¹⁹ Hackney Council, *Considering the wider social and economic needs of older people*, Accessed on 10/06/2019 via:

<https://www.hackney.gov.uk/media/7990/profiling-the-needs-of-older-people-in-Hackney/pdf/profiling-the-needs-of-older-people-in-hackney>

Current housing adaptation & related services for older people in Hackney

As part of this project a short survey [*internet search based only*] was carried out to find out what housing related practical services are currently listed as being available to older people in Hackney, the results of which are summarised in the following table.

Name of service	Type of service offered (based on website)
<p>Hackney Accessible Homes Service - Home Improvement Agency Provided by the private company, Millbrook Healthcare Website: https://www.millbrook-healthcare.co.uk/contact-us/service-centre-locations/home-improvement-agency-services/london-borough-of-hackney-hia/</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Info and advice on repairs and adaptations and on keeping your home safe, secure and suitable based on needs. The information and advice service is free and is confidential. They provide home visits to discuss any problems and advise on the condition of a home. • Major Adaptations through DFG • Minor Adaptations – request an Occupational Therapist Visit. • Handy Person Service - The service is charged at £15 per hour and may include: putting up curtain rails, shelves and pictures, fitting key safes, smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and grab rails, fitting door and window locks, door chains and door viewers, installing draught excluders, radiator heat reflectors and energy efficient lightbulbs • Additional Grants: General Repairs Grants and External Works Grant
<p>Hackney Council https://www.hackney.gov.uk/article/3382/Help-at-home</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational Therapist Housing Assessment for adaptations • Disabled Facilities Grants • Community Equipment • Renovation and minor works grants, including Home from Hospital Grants https://www.hackney.gov.uk/renovation-grants

3. Home adaptations for older Londoners - voices of experience

Why home adaptations?

As noted in the report, *Adapting for Ageing*, for a relatively low expenditure, the potential gains resulting from home adaptations in older people's homes are significant, but the profile and priority of home adaptation provision in general, and the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) specifically, is limited²⁰.

Given the housing, health and ageing context described above, plus the growing interest in improving provision of home adaptations for older and disabled people, Positive Ageing in London (PAiL) decided that gaining a greater understanding of the realities of adapting your home in later life, and possible diversity of experience across London Boroughs, would be a useful indicator of the implementation of the London Housing Strategy's aim to ... *improving the quality of our housing through the adaptation of existing stock...*

Care & Repair England was keen to follow up its work to identify good practice in provision of home adaptations and also help to pave the way for disadvantaged older people to have a greater influence over housing strategies, policies and wider decision making.

Based on these shared objectives PAiL and Care & Repair England agreed a plan to run two focus groups involving older people who had experience of home adaptations in order to gain greater insight into what works and where there were possible shortcomings that action groups might seek to improve.

One group was London wide, the other was specifically for older residents of Hackney, where there may be an opportunity to influence the local authority's future plans for housing and ageing, including help with home adaptations.

Focus Group 1- London Wide

The focus groups explored older Londoners' experiences of home adaptations, including;

- the impacts of home adaptations on the lives of individual older people
- how they felt about the process of carrying out the adaptation work
- if they were happy with the end results
- how they had found out about possible home adaptations (including access information, advice and help with funding and/ or installation)
- what could be improved about the processes
- any other suggestions around what other housing help could help to support living and ageing well at home

The focus groups aimed to be inclusive and reflect London's highly diverse older population, including engaging more marginalised groups. Care & Repair England provided a question/ discussion framework which had previously been used in other focus groups across England which PAiL adapted and used with the London groups.

²⁰ Adam S, Hodges M (2018), *Adapting for Ageing*, Care and Repair England and The Centre for Ageing Better

Home adaptation focus group 1 - London-wide

After widespread publicity of the event 11 older Londoners participated in the focus group held at the Metropolitan University in Islington. The participants were aged between 69 and 87. There were four males and seven females from a range of ethnic backgrounds, tenure types and from across 9 boroughs - details Appendix 2.

Home adaptations focus group 2 - Hackney

Ten older Hackney residents participated in the focus group held at the Lawrence Buildings in Stoke Newington. They were aged between 65 and 84, there was one male and nine females, predominantly Black/Black British ethnicity (8) and White/White British ethnicity (2), and 9 out of 10 from Social Rented tenures.

Focus group discussion format

Participants started out by describing the adaptations they had carried out in their homes including how it had been funded. They were then asked to rate the importance of various aspects of the process of installation, including the importance of:

- *being able to get impartial, independent information and advice about which adaptations would be best for me;*
- *practical help available to get my home adapted (e.g. financial/ grants / loans / help to organise building work, etc);*
- *a straight forward process - professionals listen to what my priorities are and clearly communicate with me about what is happening and when;*
- *a fast system -so I get the adaptations when I need them and the delivery /installation is efficient;*
- *a trustworthy system - a good value job done well by a reputable contractor at a reasonable price*

There was also an open discussion which provided an informal environment for participants to feel comfortable about sharing their experiences of how adaptations had impacted on their everyday life. The discussion was guided around the following questions:

- *What difference have the adaptations made to your life?*
- *What's been a particularly good result of having your home adapted?*
- *Is there anything that is not so good?*
- *Anything you are not happy about/dislike?*
- *What was your experience of the process of installing home adaptations?*
- *Do you have any examples of good practice relating to the adaptations in your Borough?*
- *What would be useful for your Borough to consider to improve your experience of adaptations?*
- *Did you ever think about moving instead of having your home adapted? What influenced your decision?*
- *What would you say to anyone facing similar issues who could be helped by home adaptations?*

The participant's comments were recorded by the facilitators. These comments, as well as the results from the importance rating activity and participant information are documented in Appendix 2. Further details about the practicalities of running a similar discussion group and reflections on what worked best are documented at the end of Appendix 2.

4. Headline Messages

Key findings from the London wide group

Even though the participants of the group lived in nine different London Boroughs, the focus group discussion revealed similar shared experiences and recommendations. These included:

Impact of home adaptations

- All participants reported that they were happy with the adaptations they had made to their homes and felt that their lives had improved as a result.

What makes a good adaptations service?

- **The timeliness** of adaptations delivery is crucial in order to support people's needs when required and to avoid health/ capacity deterioration. Group members described examples of incidents where an older person waited so long they died before the necessary adaptation. One participant reported waiting 18 months for necessary adaptations and had had several falls in the interim.
- The process of finding out about and obtaining the home adaptation was reported as being initiated by a hospital Occupational Therapist in a number of cases. This indicated that people had reached a **point of health crisis** (with admission to hospital) before their need for a home adaptation had been addressed.
- Some people thought that integration of health and social services would **speed up the process** and deliver more of a person-centred approach. Examples were given where local GP practices had a 'Care Navigator' who supported people through the process of obtaining home adaptations. Another positive example given was a new 'My Care, My Way' integrated system in West London.
- Participants felt that there was a lack of **clarity and consistency** across the different Boroughs over who qualifies for home adaptations financial support. One disabled participant shared her experience of despite being exempt from care charges under the Care Act 2014, her council had advised her that she must self-fund any adaptations in her home, but she didn't understand why this was the case, as no-one had explained this.
- **Accessing adaptations** was an issue. It was felt that a better service was received when there was an Adult Social Services Department to visit. It was reported that in some boroughs the first request can only be made online and therefore was not accessible to many older and disabled people.
- Participants felt as though **more information** about how to initiate the process for getting help with home adaptations was needed.

Choice and control

- Participants said they would like **more choice** when considering home adaptations, especially if these were being processed through social services and grant aided (i.e. not self-funded). A reported example of this was that older people who cannot afford to pay for the adaptation that they want themselves do not get a choice over whether a walk-in shower or adapted bath is installed.

- In some London Boroughs it emerged that it was harder for owner occupiers to get financial support for adaptations than in others. Whilst in some places the older person would get a free assessment to tell them what the best adaptation would be, participants reported that they were being told that they had to pay for the adaptation from their own resources and it was not clear to the older person why this was the case. One person reported that there was a good local **housing information and advice service** for home owners and it was agreed that this was an example of good practice.

Move or adapt home?

- All participants felt that despite having experienced difficulties managing in their own home they **did not want to move** due to the stress of upheaval and thought of moving to a new area.
- It was agreed unanimously that **Handyperson services** (which carry out small repairs and minor adaptations at low/modest cost/ link householders with approved contractors) were invaluable to help low income older home owners maintain their homes.

London wide perspective

- The discussions revealed inequalities in access to adaptation support dependent upon where people lived. There was inconsistent support for home adaptations across the different Boroughs and tenures.

Summary

There was an overriding agreement that home adaptations had a positive impact on older people's lives, enabling them to live with increased independence, well-being and a greater sense of dignity in a home of their choosing.

As well as major adaptations, central to being able to live in a home of their choice is access to a handyperson service to help with minor adaptations, maintenance and repairs in the home.

Participants felt that small changes in the home can have big impacts on everyday life, making it more manageable and retaining a sense of control.

The importance of knowing where to go for information and advice on specific home adaptations that would be suitable for individuals' different needs, as well support to install, was important to all participants. They felt there was an inconsistency - a 'postcode lottery' - around both access to information and the quality of information in differing boroughs. This inconsistency creates inequalities in access to and provision of home adaptations across London, with differences according to where people lived - dependent upon the borough, housing tenure and people's socio-economic background.

Going forward it was clear that the participants felt that good practice around adaptation delivery is achieved when health, social and housing providers work in an integrated way, have accessible, fast, responsive and transparent systems, including keeping the recipient well informed and ensuring a person-centred approach.

Key findings from the Hackney group

Some of the key messages around older people's experiences of home adaptations within the London Borough of Hackney were not dissimilar to the London wide group's conclusions.

Again, the positive impact of home adaptations, the importance and effect on independence and well-being was unanimously agreed by the focus group participants.

An important area for improvement was the need for better information about who to contact for home adaptations advice, about what help was available and the processes involved including funding, delivery and likely timeframes. Additionally, there was a clear recommendation from the group that there should be designated caseworkers responsible for delivering quality advice and support to specific individuals and that there should be consistency of provision.

Impact of home adaptations

- When in place, adaptations had a positive impact on all of the group members' ability to perform every tasks and activities with increased independence and safety. Examples were given of ramps outside the property, stair rails, lifts and bathrooms and kitchens that had been adapted to support individual needs all of which had made a great deal of difference to people's daily lives.
- It was agreed that the adaptations not only made life easier for the person who needed the adaptation, but also for the carer.
- Adaptations that are well specified to meet a person's needs can make all the difference between being independent or requiring a single or double-handed care call. This reduced the cost of social care.
- Some participants felt that adaptations had reduced the risk of them having a fall at home. Others said that they were waiting for adaptations and were concerned about falling in the interim period.

Experience of accessing home adaptations in Hackney

- **Lengthy waiting process** was reported, with long times between referral, to assessment to delivery. One example described concerned adaptations which were agreed for the participant's husband following a stroke; however by the time the work was eventually completed he had died. Another participant reported that it had taken 5 years for all the adaptations she required to be finally fitted. Giving people an indication of when the work was likely be completed was a recommended service improvement.
- Participants reported that minor **adaptations**, such as grab rails and equipment provided by a hospital OT (as a result of an admission to hospital) seem to **happen quickly to facilitate a discharge**, but adaptations provided through social services entailed a lengthy process.
- **Trust, clarity and transparency** - some participants described incidents when adaptation work which they understood was to be financially covered by the Council/ Housing Association was not reimbursed or compensated without long disputes.
- **One main contact point** for obtaining help with home adaptations was felt to be important. Participants reported that there was no well publicised, accessible contact point for finding help with

adaptations, and very often they did not know who to approach for advice and provision. They felt that being able to have a direct contact number or a face to face conversation with an adviser would be extremely beneficial. They also felt that GP surgeries would be a good place for this information to be shared.

Choice and control

- Lack of **housing information and advice** was a concern. Several participants reported that they did not know who to contact e.g. in Social Services about possible home adaptations. Self-funders did not know who to go to for advice and information about finding trustworthy contractors.
- Participants also felt a **lack of control** over the standard of work done and over who completed the work when they were being paid for by a grant/ organised by the council or landlord.

Move or adapt home?

- Five participants had considered moving home but all found it difficult to get a house transfer or swap (all were social housing tenants). Most wished to stay in Hackney but wanted to live in accommodation better suited to their needs. They reported that the Council had told them that they could not accommodate their requests.

5. Next Steps

Opportunities to influence future plans affecting home adaptations provision

National developments

The Mayor's office could take steps to influence national decisions about the future of the DFG following the Government's independent review and encourage implementation of many of the key recommendations, including those which accord with the views of the Focus groups.

The case for funding for DFG and home adaptations will also have to be made in the forthcoming, anticipated Government Spending Review. The Mayor's office could make representations for the value of home adaptations and the importance of allocating adequate funding.

London Wide

The Mayor could take a pro-active role in driving wider home adaptation and related service improvements (e.g. pan London impartial information, advice and advocacy, greater consistency of provision etc). This could include bringing together providers from different Boroughs, e.g. those responsible for local Better Care Fund planning (the mechanism through which national government funding for home adaptations is channelled), plus those involved in the integration of health and care in order to identify ways to integrate practical housing help into emerging new NHS and integrated care models.

Positive Ageing in London now plan to set up a working group to take forward Housing and Older People issues, including home adaptations as well as wider issues, such as creating accessible new homes and improving neighbourhoods to make them age friendly.

PAiL will also promote the findings of this report amongst their members across London, providing a resource for older people's groups and forums who want to improve adaptations provision in their local area, possibly replicating the focus groups model and documenting local findings.

Hackney

It is hoped that the Hackney focus group findings provide a useful starting point to review current home adaptations provision in the Borough, including assessment of the quality of the current systems and any required improvements.

The current work on developing the Hackney Older People's Housing Strategy provides an ideal opportunity to not only take up some of the suggestions about improving home adaptations, but to also engage with older residents and enable them to influence the other elements of the strategy.

Appendix 1: Overview of the Disabled Facilities Grant and other help with home adaptations

The Disabled Facilities Grant

The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), came into being in 1997 to provide targeted financial help with the cost of home adaptations for lower income disabled people (of all ages).

A DFG helps to pay for the essential home adaptations which can give disabled people:

- freedom to move into and around their homes,
- access to essential facilities within the home
- safe and suitable access to the garden and surrounding area.

The most common adaptations facilitate access to the bathroom, bedroom, living room and kitchen plus access into and out of the property. The grant is means tested for adults (not for adaptations to the homes of disabled children).

The DFG also pays for adaptations to make the home safer for the disabled occupant e.g. improved lighting, heating etc. The most common adaptations are to bathrooms and stair lifts, ramps, and step access.

Further details are available on the government website - <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants>

Funding

National government provides every housing authority (in the case of London that is every Borough) with a capital grant to help towards the costs of providing DFGs.

This money is now paid through the Better Care Fund; a pooled budget which aims to integrate health, social care and, to some extent e.g. through the DFG, housing services.

Each local housing authority sets its DFG budget based on a combination of the national grant, its own contribution plus any funding from social services and the health sector.

The annual DFG budget, now worth £0.5 billion, has increased substantially in recent years and enables thousands of vulnerable people to adapt their homes and live independently.

Despite the increased budget, the demand for adaptations is outstripping supply in many areas and this is set to continue as the population ages.

In 2019-20 the amounts paid by national government to London authorities is shown in the table below.

London Boroughs	2019/20 DFG Allocations
Barking And Dagenham	£1,636,536
Barnet	£2,542,210
Bexley	£2,613,112
Brent	£4,685,921
Bromley	£2,152,696
Camden	£922,516
City Of London	£32,689
Croydon	£2,637,527
Ealing	£3,282,472
Enfield	£3,292,570
Greenwich	£2,517,810
Hackney	£1,525,299
Hammersmith And Fulham	£1,318,109
Haringey	£2,360,942
Harrow	£1,517,250
Havering	£1,812,714
Hillingdon	£4,504,510
Hounslow	£2,643,609
Islington	£1,709,575
Kensington And Chelsea	£845,918
Kingston Upon Thames	£1,339,715
Lambeth	£1,479,227
Lewisham	£1,338,708
Merton	£1,279,883
Newham	£2,510,077
Redbridge	£2,140,914
Richmond Upon Thames	£1,697,204
Southwark	£1,486,043
Sutton	£1,593,249
Tower Hamlets	£2,045,288
Waltham Forest	£2,081,964
Wandsworth	£1,551,147
Westminster	£1,523,990

Government's DFG Review

In December 2018, an external review of Disabled Facilities Grant²¹ (DFG) was published to look at the current way the Disabled Facilities Grant is delivered and how it could be improved to reduce pressures on health and social care. The review found that the delivery of adaptations varies enormously from area to area and there is often a lack of integrated decision making and tracking of impact on those receiving grants.

Key recommendations for changes included:

- Creating a new Home Independence Transformation Fund, equivalent to one per cent of the DFG budget, to be set up to help areas develop more integrated services.
- Annual increases to the DFG upper limit, currently set at £30,000, in line with inflation
- Including DFG in personal budgets and making spending on adaptations part of the social care cap (if the cap is adopted)
- A further five-year funding programme for DFG before the current programme ends in 2020
- Health & Wellbeing Boards should report separately on DFG funding based on 'the number of people helped to remain independent at home'. They should also review and sign off a single adaptations policy based on local needs
- Renaming DFG as part of a national campaign to raise awareness of the support available
- Replacing the current “confusing mix of methodologies and historical allocations” with a fairer and more transparent funding formula based on local data around the number of people with a disability, income, tenure split and regional building costs
- Introducing a national accreditation scheme for builders and tradespeople carrying out adaptations
- Including a smart home starter kit as part of every DFG application

²¹ Mackintosh, S et al (2018), *Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Other Adaptations: External Review*, University of West England, Foundations, BRE and Ferret Information Systems. Accessed on 10/06/2019 via: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/762918/DFG_Review_2018_Summary.pdf

Appendix 2: Group discussions - detailed report

Characteristics of participants from Focus Group 1- London wide

Housing Tenure	
Owner Occupier	8
Social Rented	3

Ethnicity	
Asian or Asian British	3
Black or Black British	5
White or White British	3

Gender	
Female	7
Male	4

Age	
Ranged from 64- 87	

Type of adaptations received	
Stairlift	1
Level access shower/ bathing adaptation	3
Ramps	2
Rails	1
Plug sockets moved	1
Toilet frame	1

How were your adaptations funded?	
Local Council Grant	1
Self funded	1
Social Services	3

Rating of Importance Table

Borough	Rating of Importance (1= not important, 2 = quite important, 3 = very important)				
	<i>Being able to get impartial, independent information and advice about which adaptations would be best for me.</i>	<i>Practical help available to get my home adapted (e.g. financial/ help to organise building work, etc.)</i>	<i>Straight forward process - professionals listen to my priorities and clearly communicate with me about what is happening and when</i>	<i>Timely Delivery</i>	<i>Trustworthy system - a good value job done well by a reputable contractor at a reasonable price</i>
Brent	2	3	3	2	3
Westminster	3	3	3	3	3
Harrow	2	2	2	2	2
Lambeth	3	3	3	3	3
Redbridge	3	3	3	3	3
Haringey	2	3	3	3	3
Southwark	3	3	3	3	3
Barking and Dagenham	3	3	3	3	3
Westminster	3	3	3	3	3
Lewisham	2	1	2	3	3
Brent	3	3	3	3	3

Participant Questions and Answers

1) What difference have the adaptations made to your life?

- All those who had had adaptations reported that that they were happy with the result and that their lives had been improved.
- One lady reported that prior to having a wet room installed she had to have strip washes at the sink

2) What's been a particularly good result of having your home adapted? - Is there anything that is not so good? Anything you are not happy about/dislike?

- One person had a bath chair installed but a anti slip mat wasn't provided
- One person had a wet room installed and power points repositioned higher up which had been extremely useful
- A third who had not had adaptations relayed experiences of friends: one had a bath installed some time ago which has been useful and the process smooth. Another friend had a home adaptation more recently which had taken some time was costly. He attributes this to government cuts to the funding of local authorities.
-

3) What was your experience of the process of adaptations?

- One participant said that timeliness is crucial to avoid deterioration whilst waiting for adaptations to be provided – in some cases the person in need has died before receiving the adaptations
- It was unanimously felt crucial to speed up the process, which should be initiated by the hospital OT team.
- All agreed that the model used in Scotland where all services work as a team, should be adopted here – patient focussed.
- A participant told the group that a friend's experience had taken 'ages to sort out'
- It was said that there is less choice for those who cannot pay themselves for example only getting a shower where a walk-in bath would be preferable. However, it is harder to get adaptations if you are not a council tenant and improvements self-financed.
- The process is initiated with the Occupational Therapy Dept in hospital and then is taken up by Social Services
- One lady had had an OT assessment while in hospital post-surgery but social services had not yet - 18 months later - acted upon the referral. She had several falls in the meantime. This lady has contacted every relevant person she can think of, including 3 councillors. The participant was in tears when talking about it.
- The problems of being a home owner and needing adaptations were discussed – often, as with Barking & Dagenham, an assessment will be carried out, free of charge, but the adaptation costs must be paid by the home owner.
- One disabled participant who is exempt from care charges under the Care Act has been told by 4 different Cabinet Ministers that she doesn't have to pay for home care or adaptations. She is in social-housing but Westminster council (Adult Services) is insisting that she must self-finance adaptations.
-

4) Do you have any examples of good practice relating the adaptations in your Borough?

- It is usually more helpful where councils have an Adult Services Dept., and where services are integrated, as in Brent, and where local GP practices have a 'care navigator' to help patients through the process.
- One participant said that there is advice and support for owner occupiers via 'Elders Voice', a charity in Brent.
- 'My Care, My Way' is a new integrated care service set up in West London to give more active and tailored support. One participant has joined the scheme but as yet hasn't needed support.

5) What would be useful for your Borough to consider to improve your experience of adaptations?

- Group members said that a handyman service with approved contractors would be useful.
- Having a named person to contact about adaptations would be useful but not all group members would know how to identify that individual.

6) Did you ever think about moving instead of having your home adapted? – what influenced your decision?

- One lady said she had been forced to move out of her flat and is temporarily living with relatives. Her flat is located on the first floor and she cannot manage the stairs. The council have not rehoused her as yet.
- Participants who were facing difficulties in their accommodation and who had had, or were awaiting, adaptations said that this was discussed by friends, relatives etc.
- All participants said that in spite of the difficulties they had not considered moving as they could not cope with the stress and upheaval and wanted to stay in the area

7) What would you say to anyone facing similar issues who could be helped by home adaptations?

- It was agreed to tell them to first contact social services and ask to speak to the person concerned with adaptations. In some boroughs this contact can only be made online.
- Subscribe to 'Which' magazine which gives access to a helpline
- There should be an information helpline available for every borough where needs can be evaluated

8) Any other thoughts?

- Group members who had not had personal experiences of needing adaptations said they would help others get the help they needed.
- There are inequalities in access to help: One member, who is a council tenant, felt they are not taken any notice of.
- Huge discrepancies in assistance offered, depending on the borough.

Characteristics of participants from Focus Group 2- London Borough of Hackney

Housing Tenure	
Lease Hold	1
Social Rented	9

Ethnicity	
Black or Black British	8
White or White British	2

Gender	
Female	9
Male	1

Age	
Ranged from 65- 84	

Type of adaptations received	
Level access shower/ bathing adaptation	4 (2 people were declined support for bathing adaptations)
Ramps	2
Rails	4
Kitchen adaptations	1

How were your adaptations funded?	
Local Council Grant	2
Self-funded	2
Social landlord installed	4

Participant Questions and Answers

1) What difference have the adaptations made to your life?

- Any adaptations or changes, once they were in place, were unanimously considered a good thing and those that had had them said they had given them greater independence and made their lives easier.

What's been a particularly good result of having your home adapted? - Is there anything that is not so good? Anything you are not happy about/dislike?

- One person said that the council had agreed to fit a rail to the bath for her husband after he had suffered a stroke but that by the time it had been fitted, he had died. However, she is now using it and found it beneficial.
- A few participants had had improvements including a kitchen cupboard fitted at a convenient height which helped make life easier.
- One person said she had self-funded some items and others were provided by the council.
- One person reported having a new kitchen and bathroom to fit her needs
- Another participant had self-funded railings on the stairs, a ramp and a rail outside the house. She said the adaptations have made it much easier at home.
- One person who was a social housing tenant had had a new kitchen and bathroom installed, a new front door, the windows double glazed & window frames repaired. Although not adaptations in the true sense, these changes had made a huge difference to her quality of life.
- One person said she had a railing installed which has helped somewhat but in reality she still needs further rails in other locations around her home.
- One person reported that her adaptations had made life easier in a way but now that she was no longer able to look after herself she had to rely on a carer to wash and dress her etc. She said the adaptations do however make it easier for the carer to fulfil her tasks.
- Another person hasn't yet qualified for adaptations but is finding it difficult to get in and out of the bath. She would love to have a shower installed.
- One person was refused adaptations, says she has to crouch down to get in and out of the bath.
- All participants knew of people who need help but don't get it.
- No-one had any criticism about the adaptations they had had but they would like more as this would help them to feel more independent.
- Lifts have been installed in some of the buildings which helps.
- Most people live on the ground floor of a block- one in a maisonette
- One person lives on the 2nd floor without a lift and has difficulty climbing the stairs. She says she goes very slowly and is afraid of falling.
- A person living on the 3rd floor has a lift in their building.

2) What was your experience of the process of adaptations?

- One participant had waited 5 years. The adaptations were agreed by letter and a date given. She was subsequently notified that other work elsewhere needed to be done. Finally, 5 years later her adaptations were carried out.
- Another person had waited 2 years for window repairs (not adaptations)
- One person was referred for adaptations (whilst in hospital) by OT, and a bath seat, bath hand rail, toilet hand rail & settee were all installed the next day!
- One person had a higher settee and bed installed
- In all cases the individuals concerned did not have to finance the adaptations themselves.
- One person had to wait 2 years for a shower – the council said they had given the money to the Housing Association who then took a long time to act.
- Another participant waited 2 years to have their windows repairs. They thought the work was going to go ahead fairly quickly as the contractors had erected scaffolding – but then the council said they could not afford it and the scaffolding was taken away. The work was carried out 2 years later.
- One person, a leaseholder, was allocated a boarded up, practically derelict flat, which was not connected to gas or electricity. She went ahead and arranged for the repairs to be done and financed the work herself. Although receipts were submitted, she was not reimbursed.
- One person had her house flooded. When she asked for compensation so that she could re-carpet, this was refused. She pointed out that part of her rent included insurance against damage. She challenged the decision and eventually it was agreed to reimburse her for the cost of the carpet.

<p>3) Do you have any examples of good practice relating the adaptations in your Borough?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the participants agreed that good practice was when adaptations were delivered in a timely manner, when they were needed and when all aspects were clearly communicated.
<p>4) What would be useful for your Borough to consider to improve your experience of adaptations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having someone to talk to and trust Having someone to speak to and people that answer the phone and no lengthy delays in contacting back. Good quality work To say when the work can be done – have some transparency It should be much more publicised as to where to go for help and advice. The group all felt they were not getting answers to their questions, and that services were difficult to access. All participants would welcome clear, easily available information about how to apply for adaptations – preferably via their GP The group would like someone at the council giving advice that was easy to contact and speak directly with.
<p>5) Did you ever think about moving instead of having your home adapted? – what influenced your decision?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 participants had considered moving but found it difficult to get a transfer or property swap. Most people from the Hackney borough want to stay there but live in more suitable accommodation for their needs. However, the council say they can't accommodate them. One person was told that her flat was being refurbished and that she had to move out. She later found out that she had the right to return after the refurbishments had been completed, but the letter informing her of this came too late for her to take up that option. One person would love to move to Nottingham – family advised her to as they are there, but she hasn't enquired further about this yet.
<p>6) What would you say to anyone facing similar issues who could be helped by home adaptations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One person would advise others to try to get a bungalow and a level access shower. One person advised that others should go to CAB for advice but may have to wait.
<p>7) Any other thoughts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were many points raised generally around housing concerns, general repairs and maintenance. Overriding feeling was that people would like more information and advice around housing related issues and support in accessing services.

Organising a discussion group - practical ideas and reflections on what worked

The focus groups were a way of engaging older adults in open conversations of their experiences of adaptations, the impact of them on their lives and their recommendations on how to improve information and advice, the process and service delivery going forward. The relaxed nature of the groups made it comfortable for people to contribute honestly and openly.

Some of the practical suggestions to make such an approach work well include:

- Find a venue with acoustics that enable people to hear each other both in the full group and in smaller sub groups
- Keep the group to a manageable size in terms of facilitator resources and also in creating an atmosphere where all participants feel they can contribute.
- Set a relaxed, interactive and welcoming scene - create an informal atmosphere where people feel comfortable participating, as well as using it as an opportunity to socialise and relax

- Provide tea, coffee, biscuits etc on arrival and during the discussion, arrange the chairs and tables in circles/ clusters (not rows) to facilitate and encourage discussion
- Introduce people, and use a skilled facilitator/note-taker who can involve everyone, avoiding dominance of the group by more vocal individuals
- Make it possible for people who are not so confident speaking in a group to record their thoughts and ideas e.g. on postcards, post-it notes, comment cards (all anonymous) speaking to the note-taker/ facilitator to ask them to note down comments during breaks/ at the end
- Use the framework of open, guided questions with adequate time for everyone to say something. If possible send these out to participants in advance of the group meeting so that people have some time to think about what home means to them, their future housing situation, needs and aspirations etc.