

The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet Meeting: 19 November, 2018

Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Building Services

Storage of Mobility Scooters in Council Owned Housing

Purpose of the Report

1. To introduce a Policy in relation to the storage of mobility scooters in Council owned accommodation.

Recommendation

1. That Cabinet approve the new Storage of Mobility Scooters in Council Properties Policy attached at Appendix A to this report.

Reason for the Recommendation

1. To ensure that requests from tenants to store mobility scooters safely and securely in their homes or communal areas are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner and that Council tenants are not disadvantaged in accessing financial support for adaptations when compared to private tenants or owner occupiers, who are able to access Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) in order to create storage facilities for mobility scooters.

Background

2. Over recent years there has been an expansion in the use of motorised mobility scooters. The scooters assist people to live independently within the community, enabling them to visit shops, attend GP surgeries and stay in touch with friends.
3. In many instances mobility scooters can be stored safely inside tenant's homes and in several sheltered housing complexes, scooter storage facilities have been constructed to enable the tenants to store and charge them.
4. In a small but growing number of cases, tenants have purchased or leased mobility scooters without having permission in advance from the Council to store them in their council property. Some of these scooters have then been stored in communal areas of flats i.e. under stairs or at the end of passages. This poses a health and safety risk as the scooters could accelerate a fire or obstruct the means of escape for residents in the event of an emergency.

5. A Policy regarding storage of mobility scooters has therefore been developed to ensure that requests from tenants are dealt with in a fair and consistent way and is attached at Appendix A to the report.

Relevant Issues and Options

6. Mobility scooters can be purchased or leased from specialist suppliers. They are rarely prescribed by a medical professional and in most cases, tenants will contact a supplier directly. There is no requirement to undertake a medical assessment and the purchaser does not have to demonstrate how the vehicle will be stored.
7. Tenants are expected to gain permission from their landlord prior to purchase, however some are unaware of this and few requests are received by the Housing team.
8. There is therefore a need to highlight to tenants the requirement to contact the Council to request permission, prior to purchasing or leasing a mobility scooter. This will be undertaken by including the information in a tenants' newsletter and also emphasised by Housing staff when undertaking the monthly inspections of communal areas.
9. When the storage of mobility scooters is an issue, tenants can apply for adaptations to be made to their property or communal areas in blocks of flats. Examples of work previously carried out include automatic door opening/ closing for communal entrance doors, ramped access and the reconfiguration of internal cupboards within flats to provide storage space for scooters.
10. Where there is no scope to consider adaptations and the mobility scooter poses a health and safety risk, the tenant is requested to remove the scooter from the communal area.
11. As the use of mobility scooters increases, further pressure will be placed on the adaptations budget. A means of considering requests is therefore necessary to ensure the funding is used in an equitable way and prioritised for people in greatest need. There is also a requirement to ensure that Council tenants are not disadvantaged in accessing financial support for adaptations when compared to private tenants or owner occupiers (who are able to access Disabled Facilities Grants) in order to create storage facilities for mobility scooters.
12. To qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), the applicant must have an identifiable need for adaptation works and this is usually verified by an assessment completed by an Occupational Therapist (OT) or through the Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre (ALAC) at Rookwood Hospital. DFG's are means tested so many applicants will need to make a financial contribution towards the work. However, there is no means testing for applicants who require adaptations to their Council home.
13. To bridge the gap between Council house adaptations and DFG's, the 'Storage of Mobility Scooters in Council Properties' Policy proposes a similar process be adopted for dealing with requests from Council tenants, namely, tenants must complete an assessment at Rookwood Hospital (ALAC) or have an OT assessment. The assessment will consider the individual needs of each person, also taking into account any impact on the care they receive. For example, if someone has purchased a mobility scooter to assist with access to shops to do their shopping, it may reduce the need for a care call. Additionally, an assessment would also identify

whether it would be safe for the person to use the mobility scooter outside of the home.

14. In some instances, adaptation work to create scooter storage is unviable, this may be due to the size or layout of the accommodation i.e. the property is too small, has stepped access or because the cost is prohibitive. In these instances a transfer to a more suitable property may be a more appropriate solution for the tenant.
15. Where adaptation work has been carried out and the property becomes available for re-letting, priority will be given to applicants who require a mobility scooter and the storage space.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

16. The costs of carrying out works to enable storage of mobility scooters in Council properties will be borne from the existing Adaptations budget. Some of the capital costs incurred when carrying out work will be offset by revenue savings arising from the reduced re let costs (as tenants are able to continue living longer in their existing property).
17. Expenditure against the adaptations budget is monitored monthly to ensure identified works are progressed within budget.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

18. Investing in mobility scooter storage will ensure tenants are able to maintain their independence and live longer in their home. This will help minimise the costs associated with repairing and re-letting empty homes and may also reduce the cost of social care by minimising the need for care packages and more specialist accommodation.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

19. The Policy conforms to the Equality Act 2010 by ensuring tenants are able to maximise their independence using the most appropriate equipment available. The Policy also takes into account the Social Services and Well Being Act (2014).

Crime and Disorder Implications

20. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

21. The Policy and work undertaken to date are designed to ensure that all tenants have access to services. Requests will be considered from tenants with an identifiable need and an assessment will be carried out to determine the viability of potential work.

Corporate/Service Objectives

22. This Strategy is consistent with the overarching vision within the new Corporate Plan, namely 'Strong Communities with a Bright Future' as well as several of the Well Being Outcomes, including 'An inclusive and Safe Vale', ' An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale', 'An Active and Healthy Vale'.
23. It is also consistent with many of the core objectives (which support the Well Being outcomes), including: reducing poverty and social exclusion; decent homes and safe

communities; promoting regeneration; sustainable development and protecting the environment; and active and healthy lifestyles.

Policy Framework and Budget

24. This report is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

25. This report will affect all council tenants and therefore no individual ward member consultation has been undertaken.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

26. Homes and Safe Communities.

Background Papers

None.

Contact Officer

Nick Jones - Housing & Strategic Projects Team Leader.

Officers Consulted

Committee Reports
Operational Manager Finance
Operation Manager Housing

Responsible Officer:

Miles Punter - Director of Environment and Housing Services



Mobility Scooter Storage Policy

Mobility Scooter Storage Policy

1. Aims

- 1.1 The aim of the Mobility Scooter Storage Policy is to set out Vale Homes' approach to responding to a request from a tenant to store a mobility scooter within their home or in communal areas - to ensure requests are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner.

2. Background

- 2.1 The past few years have seen an expansion in the availability and use of motorised mobility scooters. Their popularity is now beginning to create issues in premises which were not designed to accommodate such vehicles.
- 2.2 Vale Homes recognises the benefits mobility scooters can provide and wishes to support our tenants and residents to retain their independence whenever possible. However, the health and safety of tenants, staff and visitors must remain a priority and mobility scooters cannot be kept in communal areas where they cause an obstruction or pose a health or safety risk.
- 2.3 In order to help tenants who require a motorised scooter, funding can be provided from the Council House Adaptations budget for small adaptations, enabling scooters to be stored within individual properties, communal and individual scooter stores, as well as improving access where required.
- 2.4 Everyone has the right to purchase a mobility scooter. Storage, however, can be problematic, especially where the owners of scooters live in properties which lead out into communal areas.

3. Legislation and Guidance

- 3.1 This policy conforms to the Equality Act 2010 legislation to ensure that tenants can maximise independent living and use the most appropriate equipment available.
- 3.2 This Policy has taken into consideration the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (2014).

4. Definition of Scooter

- 4.1 This policy defines mobility scooters as being electrically powered mobility vehicles. They can be broken down into two groups:
- Class 2 – with a top speed of 4mph and are either 3 or 4 wheeled
Class 3 – with four wheels and a top speed of 8mph
- 4.2 This policy does not apply to electric wheelchairs.

5. Policy Statement

- 5.1 All tenants are required to gain permission from the Council to store mobility scooters on Council property prior to purchasing or leasing a scooter.
- 5.2 The overall suitability of the property for the tenant, both in the present and the future, will be taken into account when an application to keep a mobility scooter is considered. In some instances, adaptation work will be unviable or inappropriate. On these occasions permission will not be granted and it may be necessary for the tenant to apply for a transfer to a more suitable property.
- 5.3 Storage for mobility scooters is provided in some sheltered housing complexes and is allocated on a first come first serve policy. If no spaces are available, a waiting list will be maintained by the Scheme Co-ordinator.
- 5.4 Any tenant who stores mobility scooters in communal areas which block access routes and / or present a fire risk will be asked to remove the scooter immediately.
- 5.5 In exceptional cases, enforcement action will be taken against inappropriate scooter storage, this may include gaining an injunction to remove the mobility scooter from the communal area, or if the risk is high, the scooter will be removed and stored safely after giving reasonable notice.
- 5.6 Where a suitable scooter store does not exist, tenants will be given assistance by a Neighbourhood Manager to apply to the adaptations budget for funding to provide individual or communal storage. This assistance should always be requested before a scooter is purchased or leased.
- 5.7 No alterations should be made to a tenant's home without written consent from Vale Homes. Where tenants are prepared to fund alterations themselves they should request permission to carry out any changes or improvements. Permission for any changes or improvements will not unreasonably be withheld.
- 5.8 Where modifications have been made to a property to enable storage of scooters or a scooter store has been built, this will be noted in the Homes4U advert when the property becomes vacant. Priority will then be given to applicants who require the use of a mobility scooter.

6. Process

- 6.1 In the first instance, tenants should seek permission from their Neighbourhood Manager in order to keep a mobility scooter in their own property or in communal areas.
- 6.2 Each tenant must then be assessed at the Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre (ALAC) at Rookwood Hospital, or by an Occupational Therapist or another medical professional as requiring a mobility scooter. The assessment will take into account the individuals needs and also the impact of any care they receive. For example, if a tenant purchased a mobility scooter and it enabled them to go to the local shops to do their shopping, it could reduce the need for a care call.

- 6.3 The assessment will also identify whether the person is actually safe enough to use a mobility scooter outside of the home. Once an identified need has been established, decisions about funding and priority will be subject to the Council Housing Adaptations Policy or the established means of assessing and prioritising applications for adaptations to Council homes that is in place at the time.
- 6.4 Tenants who bring scooters onto a scheme without first making arrangements for a suitable storage space may be asked to remove them from the premises.
- 6.5 Scooters may only be charged –
- In a tenants own home
 - In a designated area for storing and charging scooters
- 6.6 If a scooter is found charging in communal areas not designated for this purpose the owner of the mobility scooter will be asked to remove the scooter.

7. Appeals

- 7.1 Appeals made within twenty-eight days of a refusal to store a scooter will be considered where additional information is provided to support the applicants request to store a scooter. A different Officer will review the decision made taking into account any new supporting information provided by the applicant.
- 7.2 A new application can also be made and considered if there is a material change of circumstances.