



Habinteg Housing Association



Our Service To You

Habinteg Housing Association is the leading provider of inclusive housing for disabled and non-disabled people. Since 1970, we have provided integrated and accessible housing together with support to enable tenants to achieve and sustain independent living. We work with more than 40 local authorities (from Tyneside to Cornwall) and partners throughout England providing 2000 homes, including over 500 specifically designed for wheelchair users. The association has two main offices, a head office and southern regional office in London and a northern regional office in Bradford. Habinteg employs around 70 people.

Our philosophy is based on the social model of disability. That is, that “disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the mainstream life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers” (British Council of Disabled People 1991). This view stresses that people are disabled by their surroundings, by organisational arrangements and by negative social attitudes, rather than by their physical difference.





Our work aims to create and sustain integrated communities which enable independence, challenge attitudes and beliefs, and promote understanding. We do this by building homes which are accessible, affordable, adaptable and appropriate for people with impairments, as this is the essential prerequisite for independence. That is, we seek to “design out disability”. We also proactively and positively facilitate the provision of adaptations and equipment which are necessary to enable disabled tenants of the association to live independently within their own homes.

We have been developing accessible housing for thirty years. This has helped us develop skills and experience, which we use in developing our own homes and advising others. Our particular expertise has been in refining the wheelchair design standard for properties specifically designed for the needs of wheelchair users and in developing the Lifetime Homes standard which is of benefit to all.

Lifetime Homes applies to general needs housing for everyone and is being gradually adopted by local housing and planning authorities throughout the UK as the standard for accessible and adaptable housing for all new homes. Habinteg helped develop the initial concept with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. We continue to campaign for the adoption of this standard and also advise others about how to implement the standard in their new housing developments. Within Habinteg neighbourhoods, 25% of homes are specifically designed for wheelchair users,

integrated and interspersed with the other 75% general needs homes built to Lifetime Homes Standards. These are 16 design features that can be universally applied to housing design at minimal cost, together creating a flexible blue print for providing accessible and adaptable housing in any setting.

However, we are aware that people can be disabled in many ways, for example, through isolation, through lack of life choices, through low income. Our service aims to reduce social as well as physical barriers and we seek to deliver it in a way which does not create organisational barriers. For example, we seek to provide homes that are affordable to our tenants, including rent, services and cost in use.

Unique to Habinteg is our “community assistants service”; we regard the service as an essential part of our identity. Since Habinteg was established in 1970, we have always stressed the value of the local management, maintenance and support service provided by our scheme based staff. For Habinteg and our tenants, the provision of services through locally based staff is central to the high quality service we provide. We think the key to sustaining an inclusive and enabling environment is generic locally based staff supported by regional office staff who are specialists in housing and property management, equipment and adaptations, benefits and general advocacy.

Most of our estates have a small local office from where our scheme based Community Assistants



or Community Housing Assistants work during normal office hours. Many Community Assistants are also residents and on some estates their homes are linked through an emergency two way speech call system to all disabled and elderly tenants' homes.

Community Assistants and Community Housing Assistants are our local housing staff who are responsible for providing general support to all our tenants, as well as dealing with rent arrears, arranging repairs and sorting out nuisance problems. They are supported by Area Managers and a "lo-call" telephone advice and information service in the two regional offices.

The housing related support services provided by our staff aim to sustain independent living and include adapting homes to meet tenants' needs, advocating with others, making sure tenants are safe in their homes, dealing with repairs and maintenance, helping tenants to maximise their income and providing social support. There is a separate leaflet which lists the types of support services available. The type and degree of support is agreed with each individual tenant as identified in his or her support plan and may vary from time to time according to need.

Our staff have a wide experience and knowledge of the different options available to tenants to enable them to maintain independence. They have an understanding of

the problems faced by disabled people and can provide assistance with accessing a range of housing related support services. Tenants can make as much or as little use of the support services as they wish – the choice is theirs.

But the staff have a wider role, too. They act as the link between the community and other services, for example, Housing Benefit departments or Occupational Therapists. Together with Area Managers, they are responsible for promoting good community relations and changing neighbourhood attitudes to disability.

A quote from one Community Assistant describes the role succinctly:

'I provide a first port of call to tenants wanting help and information. Often I can help them myself, but if not, I help them to liaise with those who can, whether that is the association's management and maintenance staff or bodies such as the local council, DSS or Social Services department'.

The support services we provide are particularly around the housing aspects of supporting independence and are generally low intensity support services. We do not provide personal care, general social care or specialist counselling.



At present we also provide higher intensity support, either directly or using specialist managing agents, to specific tenants living in purpose designed accommodation and this is an area of our service that we may develop further in the future.

The association actively supports the involvement of tenants in a number of ways. Tenants are encouraged to express their views about their own estate by attending focus groups to discuss specific issues such as major repair programmes and in general at annual meetings where tenant representatives are elected. Each estate has a budget for tenant led improvements which tenants can use to make additional improvements to their estates, for example, landscaping and extra lighting. The tenant representatives attend quarterly tenant forums with other tenant representatives to feed back concerns and suggestions to Habinteg's staff. We also have a National Tenants' Forum which acts as the main consultative body for Habinteg's tenant representatives, and provides a residents' perspective to improve all aspects of the provision of the association's housing & support services.

Our service is intended for and available to all who need it and is generally accessed through local authority waiting lists or direct application to the association. Some of our properties are specifically designed for wheelchair users or have an emergency alarm system. When we interview applicants, we

agree with them what (if any) assistance they may need from us to help them live independently.

All Habinteg staff are charged with fostering inclusive attitudes towards disability and have a "preventative" role in the sense of challenging negative social stereotypes of disability.

In providing a service that aims to overcome the physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers that disable people with impairments, we enable our tenants to combine independence, and privacy within their own home, with the security of knowing that there is a local member of staff who is available to assist if and when they are needed.

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