

Inclusion London's Summary Briefing: Social Housing Allocations in London

Inclusion London is a pan-London disability equality organisation, run by and for Disabled people. We work to promote equality and inclusion of Deaf and Disabled people in the capital. We support over 70 Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) in London and through those organisations our reach extends to 70,000 Disabled people.

Between June and July 2025, we commissioned seven DDPOs to conduct focus groups with the Deaf and Disabled people they support. These DDPOs operate across different London boroughs and under varied housing allocation systems (choice-based lettings, direct offers, or a mixture). Inclusion London also held two focus groups with advice and casework staff to capture additional insights.

The focus groups explored experiences of applying for social housing in London, with a particular focus on accessibility. We found that Deaf and Disabled people face barriers at every stage of the social housing allocations process – from applying, to being assessed, to being allocated a suitable home. These barriers disadvantage Disabled people from being able to apply and secure housing that meets their needs. Navigating the social housing system has a serious negative effect on Disabled people's mental and physical health. The process was described as stressful, overwhelming, and exhausting, often leading to emotional distress and a reduced quality of life.

The findings summarised below are based on this research and highlight the key barriers uncovered.

Summary of key findings and recommendations

Barriers in the application process

Deaf and Disabled people face multiple accessibility barriers when trying to complete the forms necessary to apply for social housing, which are long, complex and full of technical language. This is a significant barrier for people who are neurodivergent or have learning difficulties. Many councils only provide online forms, creating barriers for people with visual impairments, and do not offer accessible alternatives of the forms such as easy-read or BSL versions or the option to record and upload responses in BSL. Without these formats, many people are unable to complete the process at all, leaving them excluded from accessing the housing they need.

"It's like a visual stress trigger. The way it's designed and the way they printed it and the boxes and stuff like that. If you have trouble with reading and visual processing, there's no access to get help."

Local authorities should provide all social housing application forms in multiple accessible formats, including audio, Easy Read, Braille and BSL video versions. They should keep these forms up to date and make them available both online and in paper format at council offices.

Lack of support from council staff for Disabled social housing applicants

Councils do not provide even basic support for Disabled social housing applicants. This includes requests for accessible formats, help with scanning documents, or simply having parts of the process explained. Council websites are often not compatible with screen readers or other devices of assistive technology that Disabled people need to access them. DDPOs said that local authorities act as “gatekeepers” of information rather than sources of support for applicants. Disabled people consistently reported unresponsiveness from housing teams, creating significant stress and uncertainty.

Local authorities should ensure any information about the housing application process is clear, consistent, and provided in a range of accessible formats (including Braille, large print, BSL, and Easy Read), compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers, and not restricted to being available online.

Local authorities should ensure Disabled applicants are kept up to date on the progress of their application by providing accessible online portals, alongside written updates and in-person support for those who need it.

DDPOs provide support for Disabled people but are underfunded

Disabled people have to rely on DDPOs for support with housing applications, as councils often did not provide this help directly. DDPOs explained that providing this kind of support takes up a substantial amount of their capacity. Despite DDPOs being underfunded and overstretched, some local authorities still signpost applicants to them without any formal referral pathways.

Local authorities should work with local DDPOs to establish formal referral pathways and provide funding to them to increase their capacity for advice and advocacy.

Barriers to the Assessment Process

Medical assessments are inadequate

Disabled applicants face significant barriers in the medical assessment process required for social housing, which is intended to prioritise housing need, and identify necessary accessibility requirements. Many struggle to provide the required medical evidence due to NHS delays and costs charged by GPs for supporting letters.

Overly medicalised assessments do not adequately consider applicants lived experiences, especially mental health needs. Disabled people reported that this often results in inappropriate or unsafe housing recommendations and being placed in the wrong priority category housing. Also, the process lacks transparency: applicants frequently do not know when they will receive the outcome, why decisions were made, or why they may have been refused higher priority, leaving many perceiving the system as unfair.

Local authorities should make the medical assessment process fairer and more transparent by:

- **Providing Occupational Therapist support to assess access needs and advise on housing decisions, including attending viewings.**
- **Covering the cost of GP letters or other medical evidence required.**
- **Publishing clear guidance on how assessments are carried out and the criteria used.**
- **Giving applicants a written explanation of the outcome and how the decision was reached.**
- **Ensuring assessments include a direct conversation with the applicant (in person, online, or by phone).**

Barriers to allocations of suitable homes

Long waiting times accessible housing

Even when Disabled people are assessed as having high priority need for housing many are unable to access appropriate housing, largely due to the lack of suitable homes in their areas.

"I'm in a higher band, but there's still not a suitable property. I haven't seen one come up that meets the housing needs I have."

Councils and other registered social housing providers should:

- Increase the supply of new build wheelchair accessible homes in the social rent sector.
- Retrofit existing homes and homes acquired through the GLA's council acquisitions programmes to the highest possible accessibility standards (M4(2) and M4(3)).

Disabled people receive unsuitable housing offers

Disabled people frequently receive housing offers that do not meet their accessibility needs. Issues include being offered properties with stairs despite requiring ground-floor access, being placed far from support networks and medical care, and being allocated homes in areas with inaccessible public transport.

Not enough information is provided about properties

Disabled people are often provided with insufficient information the accessibility of properties on bidding portals and through direct offers. DDPO staff reported that homes are often miscategorised as accessible, such as being labelled wheelchair accessible when they are not.

Local authorities should provide detailed accessibility information about properties, both when directly offered to applicants and on online bidding portals. The details should include:

- **Address and photographs;**
- **Accessibility features in bathrooms and kitchens;**
- **Accessibility features in other rooms (stairlifts, hoists, grab rails, wheelchair storage, flashing doorbells/ fire alarms);**
- **Internal access details (hallway widths, wide doorways, noise insulation, lighting);**
- **External access details (ramps, wide paths/gateways, parking, lifts);**
- **Proximity to wider infrastructure and services (accessible tube stations, bus stops and GP services).**

The lack of accessibility information provided to applicants reflects a wider systemic issue regarding the poor quality and reliability of data held by councils on their housing stock. Inclusion London's 2025 report, [Barriers at Home](#), found significant gaps in London councils' data on the accessibility levels of their housing stock.

Additionally, DDPOs report that in areas where councils retain nomination rights, but housing associations own most or all of the housing stock, each party blamed the other for missing or inaccurate property information. This results in confusion and a lack of accountability, particularly when it comes to accuracy of information about the accessibility of available housing.

Councils and registered social housing providers, in partnership with the GLA, should improve data on the accessibility of their housing stock and allocate accessible homes to those who need them.

Councils and other registered social housing providers should:

- Allocate homes adapted to M4(3) standards to wheelchair users.
- Collect data on the number of new build social rent homes in their local area that meet M4(2) accessible and adaptable standards, M4(3)a wheelchair adaptable and M4(3)b wheelchair accessible standards. This information should be included in local strategic housing market assessments, local development plans and local accessible housing registers.
- Clearly record the level of accessibility of existing homes within their housing stock, including homes acquired through the GLA's council acquisitions programmes. This information should be included in local accessible housing registers. Data should be regularly monitored and reviewed, and accessible housing registers should be updated accordingly.

The GLA should:

- Reintroduce and update the London Accessible Housing Register (LAHR), ensuring it is used by all boroughs and housing associations. The LAHR should provide housing providers with a consistent framework for collecting and recording property accessibility information, categorising accessible properties within their housing stock and using this data to allocate accessible and adaptable homes to those who need them.

Pressure to accept homes offered which are unsuitable

Disabled people reported being pressured to quickly accept social housing offers, often without enough information to know if the properties were suitable for them. Housing officers sometimes refused requests to view properties or provide basic details, and applicants were warned that rejecting unsuitable homes could result in downgraded priority or removal from the waiting list.

Local authorities should:

- **Provide Disabled applicants with a minimum amount of time to make a decision about a housing offer they have received.**
- **Guarantee that all Disabled applicants can view a property, in person or virtually, before accepting or rejecting it.**
- **Provide clear guidance on how to challenge unsuitable housing decisions.**

Failure to make reasonable adjustments

Deaf and Disabled people told us that councils frequently refuse to make the reasonable adjustments they request, as required under the Equality Act 2010. For instance, Deaf people, who explicitly request BSL interpreters at property viewings are refused and expected to rely on family members for interpretation or go entirely without communication support. This means they are unable to ask necessary questions about potential housing options.

Blind individuals also described having their reasonable adjustments refused: *"They didn't send me the documentation in a suitable format, like audio or braille. I asked, and they said they don't have that kind of facilities. Horrible, actually."*

All housing officers should receive mandatory on-boarding training on Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), with a particular focus on their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments.

DDPO staff highlighted that the burden of requesting adjustments often falls entirely on the individual, requiring proof of their impairment, which delays applications and discourages Disabled people from seeking the support they need.

Local authorities should make council websites fully compatible with screen readers and include embedded BSL video translations. They should proactively identify and offer communication support to all Deaf and Disabled applicants, including BSL interpreters and interpreters for non-English speakers at all appointments, including property viewings.

Discrimination and attitudinal barriers

Staff attitudes during the social housing application process

Disabled applicants frequently experience rudeness, hostility, and a lack of empathy from council housing staff, leaving them feeling dehumanised and treated like “just a number.” Housing officers and councils often lack understanding of the barriers Disabled people face in daily life when navigating inaccessible environments and processes.

“To them, you’re just a number.”

Council staff should receive training on:

- **Disability Equality as part of their onboarding. This training should be based on the Social Model of Disability and delivered by local DDPOs.**
- **Deaf awareness which includes practical instructions for how to engage with Deaf people and Deaf-led organisations.**

Cultural/ Language barriers

Councils often fail to accommodate or understand the specific needs of Disabled people with intersecting identities, such as migrants, refugees, or those from minority ethnic backgrounds. DDPO staff highlighted that assumptions about “standard” living arrangements and a discriminatory attitude towards minorities compounded accessibility barriers.

“He said to me: ‘Why do you need to translate[it]? You’ve been here for many years. Why didn’t you learn properly English?’”

Council staff should receive training on trauma-informed approaches to service delivery, active listening techniques and anti-racism.