

Accessible Homes Register – Guidance Document

What is the Herefordshire Council Accessible Homes Register?

The Accessible Home Register (AHR) is a register of people who need extra assistance in finding a suitable home due to a long term health condition or disability which impacts on them being able to access facilities within their home.

The register works in conjunction with the Herefordshire Council Choice Based Lettings Scheme for Social Housing known locally as Home Point. The register is called the Accessible Homes Register (AHR) and is managed by officers who determine, based on a written housing report from an Occupational Therapist (OT), what type of property will suit a client's identified needs. Typically an OT will assess the person and discuss all options available to meet a person's needs, including equipment, minor adaptations, strategies and/or home adaptations/modifications before deciding if a move is the more appropriate option.

There are two ways in which properties might be found via the AHR: Housing Solutions predominantly use and help people to negotiate the Choice based letting system called 'Home Point'. The properties advertised on Home Point are Registered Provider (RP) properties and it is hoped that use of this route will mean that a property is already adapted or accessible such as a ground floor /level property perhaps with an existing level access shower. (Currently there are no council owned properties).

Strategic Housing negotiate new build housing developments with RP's and private developers but this will only be for people who have more complex assessed needs- usually a person using a wheelchair all of the time, or there is a lack of solutions available via Home Point.

Why is an Accessible Homes Register needed?

In 2015, 1.2 million hospital bed days were lost due to 'delayed discharge' of people from acute hospitals, which had increased by 31% in two years. This is estimated to cost the NHS £820 million a year. In the following year, 46,199 days delay were caused by waits for community equipment and adaptations according to NHS England's delayed transfer of care statistics. Homes built to accessible and easily adaptable standards can help alleviate these pressures on health and social care services. The economic and social benefits are not confined to healthcare: disabled people living in inaccessible homes are four times more likely to be unemployed than those living in accessible accommodation. The cost of social care could be alleviated if people lived in housing suitable to their needs. There are currently around 1.8 million people with an accessible housing need in the UK, including around 300,000 disabled adults who have an unmet accessible housing need. The challenges presented by our ageing population are likely to significantly increase the need for accessible, adaptable homes.

As a Local Authority, we are committed to delivering inclusive homes and communities that meet a wide range of needs. Whether this is for families with young children, somebody returning home after a hospital stay, a young disabled person looking to move for employment and independence, or an older person with increasing mobility impairment, providing accessibility and flexibility in new homes. Finding suitable accommodation for clients with medical issues is vital in order to allow the client their independence, which will result in boosting their wellbeing and leads to an overall improvement in their mental health. It also lessens the need for the involvement of outside agencies such as Social Services and the NHS.

The AHR provides a solution where an adaptation to someone's existing home is not possible. The other reason a client may be added to this register is in extreme cases where they need to

move from one accessible property to another for reasons such as fleeing domestic abuse or for other safety reasons where the client is supported by multiple agencies.

The AHR can highlight a person in need of an accessible home so that the appropriate officer can nominate the client for suitable RP properties. Some RP's, when advertising their properties on Home Point, state that preference will be given to applicants on the AHR.

Housing Allocation Scheme

The Local Authority have a Housing Allocations scheme that attends to the general needs of those requesting housing within the County. However, clients who require adapted properties to suit their specific health problems and disabilities may require extra assistance with finding a suitable home. When an adaptation to a client's home is not feasible, the Local Authority can assist in helping the client to identify alternative housing options. This guidance is to be read in conjunction with the Housing Allocation Scheme and not to be considered as lone guidance

What is an Accessible Home?

Typical features of an accessible home could include level access to and around the property so that the client can access all areas. This may take the form of a bungalow, a ground floor flat or accommodation with lift access. Depending on the individual's needs, an accessible home may also include showering and kitchen facilities, access to their bedroom and other supporting adaptations throughout the home. The eligibility criteria for the AHR states that one or more people in the household, including children and young adults, must meet the mobility requirement.

Procedure for Applicants

When an applicant believes they would benefit from being added to the AHR, the procedure is:

- Telephone Assessment and Referral Team (ART) and ask for an assessment from an Occupational Therapist.
- The Occupational Therapist will make contact with the applicant
- If the Occupational Therapist finds it necessary to advise that the current accommodation is not suitable and cannot be adapted, they will complete a housing report and pass it to the relevant Housing Solution's Officer.
- The Housing Officer makes contact with the applicant and explains the procedure.

Procedure for Back Office

In order to add an applicant to the AHR, the following process must be followed:

- If the client is an adult with a disability, either the client or someone on their behalf must make a referral to the Assessment and Referral Team (ART) to ask for an OT to carry out an OT assessment
- If the client is a child, someone on behalf of the child makes a referral to the Children's OT Team to ask that an OT carries out an OT assessment
- The OT makes contact with the client and arranges to carry out their assessment, which usually takes the form of a home visit.
- If the OT finds that the current housing situation of the client cannot be adapted, or other interventions do not meet the need such as equipment, strategies or minor adaptations, they will complete a housing report and sends it to the appropriate officer/s

- The officer dealing with the AHR checks to make sure that the applicant is registered on Home Point. If they are not, they inform the client that they must apply and be accepted on to Home Point before they can move.
- The client, when added to Home Point, is given a band in accordance to the current Housing Allocations scheme.
- The officer adds the client to their respective waiting list, noting the particular requirements for the home and the location that the applicant would prefer to live, however, **please note the location is merely a request and cannot always be accommodated.**
- If the client has been added to the Housing Solutions AHR, the Hospital Discharge Officer will help and advise the client to find a property through Home Point and will also look for any nomination requests from RP's for hard to let properties that may be suitable.
- If the client has been added to the Strategic Housing AHR, the Development Officer will then look to negotiate a suitable new build on a new development. Note: this procedure is extremely lengthy and can take several years due to the lengthy planning process, potential delays on site, resources, availability of contractors to name a few reasons.
- In the case of the Housing Solutions AHR, once a property is found, the client is informed and will be expected to take any reasonable offer made- once the applicant has viewed the property. The offer does not have to be made in writing and must only be suitable for the assessed or identified needs of the client according to the OT report. It will also be in the approximate area of choice. Note – if the client requires level access, they can be offered any level access accommodation to include either a ground floor flat, other accommodation with a lift or a bungalow.
- In the case of the Strategic Housing AHR, a development site is identified in or near the location of choice. The applicant will be expected to accept the offer of this property. Failure to accept an identified property may result in removal from the AHR.
- If the applicant or RP requires the OT to view the property with the applicant, they must contact the Advice and Referral Team in Adult Social Care to arrange this.
- If the applicant is offered and refuses a suitable property in the approximate desired location, the officer in charge has the right to remove the applicant from the AHR or, will negotiate further with the applicant, but only in extenuating circumstances and at the officer's discretion. The applicant will be expected to provide the reasons for the refusal. This information is necessary to identify why the property was not acceptable, whether the refusal was therefore reasonable and to ensure that future offers are more likely to be accepted.
- To clarify, if the applicant requires Hereford City, south of the river and the only properties available are north of the river, this will be deemed an approximate desired location and is not grounds for refusing a property.

Contacts:

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 Children's Occupational Therapy Team - 01432 269584
 Home Point - 01432 260300
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Acronyms used:

AHR – Accessible Homes Register
 ART – Assessment and Referral Team
 OT – Occupational Therapist
 RP- Registered Provider