

Asset management and housing stock optimisation: Wiltshire Council

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Context

Wiltshire Council is a large unitary authority covering three hubs across the county. It employs approximately 100 occupational therapy staff, including assistants. The authority operates across a complex housing landscape, with one hub having substantial council housing stock whilst the other two areas are largely private rented and registered social landlord properties. The housing OT team has grown from a single practitioner to seven staff members including three qualified OTs, three assistants (one apprentice), and an Advanced Practitioner leading strategic development.

Helen Lateo joined as an Advanced Practitioner 18 months ago to provide strategic direction to a housing OT service that had been operating without dedicated leadership. She works primarily in the South hub where Wiltshire Council directly owns housing stock, enabling closer collaboration with internal lettings teams and housing departments.

The challenge

Property matching inefficiencies

- Properties were being allocated inappropriately without proper accessibility assessment
- Customers' expectations were being raised before suitability was confirmed
- Time was wasted on unsuitable property viewings and assessments
- Housing associations were making inappropriate matches due to lack of OT input

Limited housing stock information

- No systematic approach to categorising properties by adaptability potential
- Lack of strategic overview of void properties becoming available
- Missed opportunities to identify suitable properties before advertising
- Poor coordination between OT assessment and housing allocation processes

Strategic positioning issues

- Housing OT team sat within private sector housing rather than core housing allocation
- Limited influence over commissioning and property purchasing decisions
- Insufficient involvement in matching processes and shortlisting
- Long waiting times for people needing accessible housing

The Role

The role focuses on strategic asset management and property matching optimisation:

- Property assessment and banding - Visiting void properties as they become available and giving them initial banding based on adaptability (low, medium, high)
- Strategic property matching - Working directly with lettings teams to match customers to appropriate properties before raising expectations
- Stock categorisation system - Developing systematic approach to coding all council properties by accessibility levels

- Void management - Receiving notifications as soon as properties become void to assess adaptation potential
- Risk matrix development - Creating prioritisation systems to ensure equitable access based on need rather than timing
- Cross-tenure relationship building – Seeking to establish similar processes with housing associations
- Strategic influencing - Advocating for greater involvement at commissioning and purchasing levels

Benefits to the system

Housing benefits

- Improved property allocation efficiency through better matching
- Reduced void periods through proactive assessment
- Better utilisation of adapted housing stock
- Strategic insight into gaps in accessible housing provision

Health and social care benefits

- Reduced inappropriate referrals and assessments
- Better outcomes for residents through appropriate housing matches
- Earlier intervention preventing health deterioration due to unsuitable housing
- More strategic use of OT expertise

Financial impact

- £65,000 savings achieved from April-June 2025 through strategic interventions
- Reduced costs from avoided unsuitable allocations
- Better value from housing stock investment
- Prevention of costly re-housing and adaptation work

Benefits to individuals and families

- Improved matching of people to the right property, leading to significantly better health and wellbeing outcomes
- Faster access to suitable accommodation, reducing delays and uncertainty for residents.
- Better long-term housing outcomes due to accommodation appropriately meeting individuals' needs
- Reduced risk of tenancy breakdown due to fewer placements in unsuitable housing conditions
- Fairer access to housing through the use of a structured risk matrix based on assessed need, rather than the timing of property availability.
- Improved collaboration with housing associations could further increase access to appropriate homes across all housing tenures.

Developing the role: a practical guide

Setting up the role

- Position within core housing allocation team rather than private sector housing
- Establish direct communication channels with lettings teams for void notifications
- Develop systematic property assessment protocols and banding criteria
- Create databases or systems for recording property accessibility features

Building property intelligence systems

- Develop clear criteria for low/medium/high banding based on access and adaptability
- Create standardised assessment forms for void property evaluation

- Establish regular review cycles for updating property information
- Build relationships with repairs teams to understand adaptation potential

Essential skills and knowledge

- Understanding of housing allocation policies and choice-based lettings systems
- Knowledge of building regulations and accessibility standards
- Assessment skills for evaluating adaptation potential
- Strategic thinking and system development capabilities
- Relationship building across housing and health sectors

Overcoming challenges

- **Challenge:** Limited influence over housing association allocations
- **Solution:** Build relationships with housing association staff; develop shared protocols; seek strategic positioning in wider allocation processes

- **Challenge:** Positioning within private sector housing team
- **Solution:** Advocate for transfer to core housing allocation team; demonstrate value through performance data; build alliances with housing management

- **Challenge:** Staff understanding of housing systems
- **Solution:** Develop housing terminology guides; provide structured orientation; create customer journey mapping resources

- **Challenge:** Developing systematic property intelligence
- **Solution:** Start with manageable areas; use simple banding systems; build on successes; engage repairs and maintenance teams

Demonstrating impact

- Quantify financial savings from improved matching and reduced voids
- Track time savings from reduced inappropriate referrals and viewings
- Monitor customer satisfaction with property matches
- Measure reduction in re-housing requests due to unsuitable allocations
- Document prevented adaptations through better initial matching
- Calculate system efficiencies from strategic OT positioning

Top tips for managers

- Position housing OTs within core housing allocation teams rather than peripheral services
- Establish direct communication channels between OTs and lettings teams for void notifications
- Invest in systematic property assessment and banding protocols
- Use financial data to demonstrate value and secure strategic positioning
- Support relationship building across all housing tenures, not just council stock
- Create risk matrices and prioritisation systems to ensure equitable access
- Allow time for strategic development alongside operational casework
- Capture success stories to demonstrate value to senior management and other areas