

# Housing options specialist: Perth and Kinross Council

## Context

In Perth and Kinross Council, an Occupational Therapist (OT) is positioned within the Housing Options Team to support the assessment, allocation, and adaptation of properties for applicants with health conditions or disabilities. This strategic placement allows the OT to influence housing decisions from application through to allocation and adaptation.

## The challenge

People with health conditions or disabilities often struggle to navigate housing systems and may be allocated properties that don't meet their specific needs. Housing officers may lack the specialised knowledge to properly assess accessibility requirements or identify suitable properties. Without expert OT input early in the process, there's a risk of inappropriate allocations, delayed adaptations, and poor outcomes for tenants.

## The role

The Housing Options OT in Perth & Kinross focuses on:

- Conducting OT Housing Needs Assessments (OTHNA) to determine environmental requirements
- Supporting Housing Options Team with information to allocate appropriate properties
- Completing environmental assessments of potential properties for specific applicants
- Collaborating with existing OTs when clients already have OT involvement
- Conducting reviews post-move to ensure adaptations and equipment are appropriate
- Assessing void properties for their potential to meet the needs of disabled applicants
- Contributing to planning and design of new builds, particularly for wheelchair users
- Advising on potential 'buy back' properties (ex-council homes for purchase)
- Participating in Physical Disability Panel discussions for applicants with complex needs
- Acting as a link between OT and housing teams to enhance collaborative working

## Benefits to the system

### Housing benefits

- More appropriate allocation of properties based on detailed accessibility assessments
- Better utilisation of void properties through expert assessment of adaptation potential
- Improved information for housing officers making allocation decisions
- Enhanced assessment of 'buy back' properties for accessibility potential
- More effective planning for new build developments to meet identified needs

### Health and social care benefits

- Reduced need for crisis interventions due to unsuitable housing
- More efficient use of adaptation budgets through early OT involvement
- Better coordination between housing and health/social care services
- Decreased duplication of assessments through collaborative working
- Improved data collection on housing needs to inform future service planning

## Benefits to individuals and families

- Faster access to appropriate housing through expert assessment
- Better matching of individual needs to property features
- Smoother transition into new properties with necessary adaptations identified early
- Reduced need to move again due to inappropriate housing allocation
- More coordinated support through integrated assessment processes

## Developing the role: a practical guide

### Setting up the role

- Position OT within the Housing Options Team for maximum influence
- Establish clear assessment processes that align with housing allocation systems
- Create formal input mechanisms for void property assessment
- Develop technical capabilities through appropriate tools and training

### Building an effective service

- Implement standardised assessment frameworks for housing applications
- Create systematic approaches to void property evaluation
- Establish collaborative relationships with existing OT services
- Develop technical tools such as mobile apps for property assessment

### Overcoming challenges

- **Challenge:** Limited integration between housing and social care IT systems
- **Solution:** Pilot innovative approaches such as the Total Mobile app for field assessments
  
- **Challenge:** Coordinating with multiple OT teams across health and social care
- **Solution:** Establish clear protocols for collaborative working with existing OT involvement
  
- **Challenge:** Balancing individual needs with available housing stock
- **Solution:** Contribute to strategic planning for future housing development and acquisition

### Demonstrating impact

- Track successful housing allocations for applicants with health/disability needs
- Monitor reduction in rehousing requests due to inappropriate initial allocations
- Document case studies showing improved outcomes through early OT involvement
- Collect feedback from housing colleagues on the value of OT input to decision-making

## Top tips for managers

- Ensure OTs are positioned within Housing Options teams for maximum influence
- Invest in mobile technology to support efficient property assessment
- Create clear pathways for OT input to new build design and property acquisition
- Establish collaborative protocols with OT teams in health and social care
- Involve OTs in the assessment of void properties to identify adaptation potential
- Support development of technical knowledge through specialised training
- Create formal input mechanisms to strategic housing planning