



Evaluation of London Accessible Housing Register

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Executive Summary

Key findings

- While there are an estimated 30,000 Londoners with an unmet need for wheelchair accessible housing, only around 1,100-1,200 wheelchair standard homes are let annually by London's social landlords.
- Less than half of all London's housing association lettings involving accessible homes go to households containing a wheelchair user or other disabled person
- Property surveys by London Accessible Housing Register (LAHR) pilot boroughs (Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets) revealed that wheelchair accessible housing accounted for less than 1% of all social landlord dwellings in these localities. However, 'moderately accessible' homes made up 8-11% of dwellings.
- The pilot boroughs were highly successful in refining property survey methodology and associated software, effectively laying the ground work for substantially more rapid and cost-effective AHR implementation by boroughs and housing associations subsequently following the same track.
- Indicating the potential scope for practical gains from AHR operation, Kensington & Chelsea more than doubled the number of lettings involving disabled people appropriately rehoused from 5% to 12% of total council lets.
- Two thirds of London boroughs have committed to implementing the LAHR model.
- With the LAHR Project Co-ordinator having helped ten boroughs to enter the 'active implementation' phase by autumn 2010, the GLA's formal target on this policy has been met.
- The advice and support provided by the LAHR Project Co-ordinator has been found extremely beneficial by 'active implementer' boroughs and there are concerns that the forthcoming expiry of this post will prejudice the development of less advanced schemes.
- In retaining the momentum of the project to roll out the LAHR model across the whole of London there is a need to gain greater commitment at political and senior management levels, and especially within the housing association sector.

Background

Launched by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2004, the London Accessible Housing Register (LAHR) seeks to fully integrate the letting of accessible housing within the 'choice-based lettings' (CBL) systems widely established across London since the start of the decade. The terms 'LAHR project' and 'LAHR model' are used in this report partly to clarify that the initiative involves a specific *framework* to enable disabled people to identify and bid for accessible homes through choice based lettings schemes rather than a London-wide register as such.

The LAHR model was refined via pilot projects in Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets in 2007-08. From July 2009 a London-wide Project Co-ordinator has been in

post, tasked with rolling out the LAHR model across the whole of London. The current research was commissioned to evaluate this process, as well as to review the process and impacts of AHR implementation in the two pilot authorities.

The evaluation has involved a number of distinct strands including key actor interviews, a telephone survey of boroughs in the AHR implementation phase, secondary data analysis and in-depth interviews with accessible housing register service users.

Access to social housing in London for disabled people

Based on household survey evidence it is estimated that around 45,000 households in London may contain disabled people living in unsuitable housing. And while there are an estimated 30,000 disabled Londoners with an unmet need for wheelchair accessible housing, only around 1,100-1,200 wheelchair standard homes¹ are let annually by London Boroughs and housing associations operating in the Capital. Partly because they provide the vast majority of newly built social rented homes, housing associations contribute more than 60% of these lettings.

Less than a third of London's wheelchair standard housing association lettings, in fact, involve households including a wheelchair user. Even when other households including a disabled person are included, less than half of all 2009/10 wheelchair standard lets were recorded as involving households possibly requiring such property features. While awareness of the need to maximise the 'effective use' of wheelchair standard homes may have grown in recent years this has not been reflected by any increase in the proportion of wheelchair standard properties let to disabled people.

Across London there are very substantial variations in the 'effective use' of wheelchair standard homes. Focusing on housing association lets in 2008/09 and 2009/10, the proportion allocated to disabled people varied from over 80% in some boroughs to under 20 in others. In part, these differences may reflect the variable incidence of environmental factors such as local topography (e.g. hilly surroundings) or the adequacy of car parking provision.

In 2009/10 London's housing associations rehoused almost 1,000 households including disabled people², with just over a quarter of these involving wheelchair

¹ As defined in the CORE manual, the term 'wheelchair standard housing' relates to dwellings suitable for someone using a wheelchair and offering full use of all its rooms and facilities. Such accommodation is designed or converted to comply with standards set out in:

Thorpe, S. and Habinteg Housing Association (2006) Wheelchair Housing Design Guide; Watford: Building Research Establishment

² As from 2009/10, the CORE lettings log requires that social landlords record whether anyone in the new tenant's household has any special needs in relation to the following: (a) Requires fully wheelchair accessible housing, (b) Requires wheelchair access to essential rooms, (c) Requires level access housing, (d) Requires adaptations relating to a visual impairment, (e) Requires adaptations relating to a hearing impairment, (f) Other disability related requirements. In referring to 'households including a disabled person' in this report we are talking about households where any one of these conditions applies. Prior to 2009/10 the CORE log simply recorded whether anyone in the household used a wheelchair or (otherwise) considered themselves disabled.

users. While most of this latter group were rehoused in wheelchair standard homes, 27% accepted tenancies in homes not compliant with this status.

Pilot implementation of the LAHR model

Piloting survey fieldwork techniques

In both the pilot boroughs, prior to trialling the LAHR model, procedures for matching disabled housing applicants with suitable homes were somewhat ad hoc and inconsistent. Their labour-intensive nature detracted from the efficient use of specialist staff time. In both boroughs AHR implementation was taken forward via a comprehensive survey of the social housing stock by trained occupational therapists (OTs). The exploratory fieldwork undertaken in the course of the pilot projects was particularly useful in:

- Demonstrating how to restrict the cohort of homes needing to be surveyed internally to a very small proportion of the total housing stock (through processes of elimination and data cloning)
- Developing the digital pen technology which facilitates efficient and reliable rating of property accessibility and electronic enhancement of property records

Both pilot boroughs extended their accessibility rating surveys beyond council-owned stock. Only Kensington & Chelsea, however, had sufficient resources to complete the assessment of housing association stock owned by all major providers. Surveys confirmed the minimal provision of ‘fully accessible housing’ in the two boroughs, with wheelchair accessible homes accounting for well under 1% of all assessed dwellings. At the same time, however, surveys revealed that ‘moderately accessible’ properties were reasonably numerous – with ‘E standard’ (step-free) homes accounting for 11% of assessed properties in Kensington & Chelsea and 8% in Tower Hamlets.

While the costs of LAHR piloting in Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets were quite substantial, these encompassed extensive development work which will benefit those boroughs subsequently following the same path. Hence, pilot borough project managers are confident that setup costs for these latter boroughs should be relatively modest (see below).

Pilot AHR impacts

In Kensington & Chelsea, these have included:

- Increasing the number of homes known to be suitable for people with mobility limitations - that is, systematic classification of properties has identified as ‘accessible’ some homes which would previously have been let as general needs housing
- Broadening staff and applicant perceptions on what is ‘accessible housing’
- Boosting substantially the number of lettings involving people with mobility limitations, rehoused in ‘suitable’ homes – AHR implementation saw these more than doubled as a percentage of total lets (from 5% to 12%)

Reliable statistical information on accessible housing demand and supply has also enabled housing staff in both boroughs to input to land use planning policymaking.

Rolling out the LAHR model

Progress update

Two thirds of London boroughs have committed to implementing the LAHR model (i.e. 20 of the 31 yet to do so). In addition to the two pilot authorities, there were at the time of the research 10 ‘active implementer’ boroughs. At least three of these anticipated that their local AHRs would become fully operational during 2011.

Most of the ‘active implementer’ boroughs already advertised accessible homes within their CBL systems. A few already used the LAHR typology and most were planning to do so when their systems become fully operational. However, some concerns remained at what were seen as relatively fine distinctions incorporated within the LAHR model which, it is believed, detract from the framework’s comprehensibility to applicants.

Implementation approaches

A majority of the ‘active implementer’ boroughs included in our research were looking to classify their housing stock via a one-off survey (or, as in one case, had already done so). However, several authorities within this cohort planned an incremental approach via void property inspections.

Housing association involvement and project costs

As in the pilot authorities, housing association participation in LAHR implementation has been rather variable in ‘active implementer’ boroughs. While there have been significant exceptions, associations have tended to be relatively uninvolved in the process to date. Especially given that associations account for the lion’s share of accessible property lettings (see above) their fuller engagement is crucial if AHRs are to achieve their full potential.

The administrative split between local authorities and arms length management organisations (ALMOs) can also prove problematic, since AHR implementation can proceed only with the full commitment of both the ALMO and its sponsoring council.

Few ‘active implementer’ boroughs were able to specify anticipated AHR development costs. However, in two of these authorities (as in Tower Hamlets) such costs had been substantially underwritten by grants from external funders (see Sections 3.1 and 4.4).

Rating of LAHR Project Co-ordinator support

‘Active implementer’ boroughs gave a very high rating to the advice and support provided by the LAHR Project Co-ordinator. There was high praise for the guidance materials, the training provision and the support in response to ad hoc queries.

The Co-ordinator’s input was widely seen as critically important in energising local implementation and enabling local projects to gain momentum. A number of respondents expressed confidence that this impetus had taken them beyond the point at which project completion would be threatened by the termination of the London-

wide co-ordinator role. There were concerns that, in the absence of this support facility, less well-advanced schemes could be placed at risk. However, this was balanced by a perception that such boroughs could benefit from a 'snowball effect' resulting from the completion of AHR projects in several boroughs in 2011.

Conclusions

By comparison with needs, it is clear that London's supply of accessible housing remains extremely small and, as indicated by our lettings analysis, there is a continuing call for more active steps to maximise the effective use of this precious resource. While the establishment of a common form of accessible housing register across the Capital will not be the only solution to this problem it can certainly make a substantial contribution.

The project to roll out the LAHR model across London has presented formidable challenges. In particular, the Project Co-ordinator has needed to secure voluntary participation from both boroughs and housing associations in an initiative with significant set-up costs, at a time of public spending retrenchment. Nevertheless, the roll out project has achieved impressive success in driving the enterprise forward. Building on the innovative methods developed by the two pilot authorities, the Project Co-ordinator's support and encouragement has helped energise and guide ten more boroughs into the 'active implementation' phase. Encouragingly, as revealed by our research, there was confidence among these boroughs that the resulting impetus had taken them beyond the point at which AHR project completion would be threatened by the termination of the Co-ordinator role.

Based on the pilot boroughs' experience, and bearing in mind the streamlined implementation model developed as a result, it is estimated that for remaining boroughs average AHR setup costs (via the survey route) might total no more than £30-40K. There is a strong case that such investment can be justified purely in terms of 'effective use of housing/OT staff resources', let alone in relation to a range of wider economic and 'service quality' benefits potentially delivered by an effective AHR.

The governance structure and delivery framework of the roll-out project have proved somewhat problematic in the physical and organisational detachment of the Project Co-ordinator from the GLA as the project's main sponsor. There is more work to be done to secure commitment to the roll-out programme from senior industry figures whose backing could be useful in consolidating project momentum. There may be scope to make better use of the GLA's high level networks to this end.

In taking the project forward there is an urgent need to re-present the case for a standard AHR model as fitting with new official priorities following on from the 2010 change of government. In particular, there should be scope to highlight the relevance of the project to the key Ministerial priorities of tenant mobility, the older people's agenda and making more effective use of the social housing stock.

Summary of key recommendations

- (a) The GLA should continue to make use of its contacts with appropriate senior Central Government policymakers to raise awareness of the LAHR model on the basis that its fundamental aims of fairness to disadvantaged groups and improving the effective use of social housing coincide with Ministerial priorities.
- (b) To raise the profile of the roll-out project among social landlords, the GLA should invite senior industry figures to accept a 'project champion' role, entailing membership of the project board and its representation in London-wide forums (in particular, London Councils and G15).
- (c) Following the termination of the current Project Co-ordinator post, the GLA should consider looking to resource a one-day-per-week secondment of an experienced housing OT to carry forward limited aspects of the Project Co-ordinator role at the operational level.
- (d) The GLA should consider resourcing the continuation of the Forum for Health and Disability Assessors of Housing Applicants set up by the Project Co-ordinator.
- (e) The GLA should consider how it might build upon the AHR disability adviser's work of mobilising the disability advocacy movement at the local level such that both boroughs and housing associations can also be subjected to 'bottom up' lobbying in favour of AHR establishment. This might be achieved via liaison with London-wide or national disability rights bodies

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Nationally, over six million households contain one or more people with a serious medical condition or disability. In the social rented sector this is true of almost half of all households. It is estimated that some 1.4 million households contain members whose circumstances mean that specially adapted accommodation is required. Survey evidence suggests that, across England, over 300,000 households containing disabled people live in ‘unsuitable accommodation’³. On a simple pro rata basis, this would imply some 45,000 households in London. According to the London Plan 2009 there are 30,000 disabled Londoners with an unmet need for wheelchair accessible housing⁴.

Accessible Housing Registers (AHRs) involve the classification of housing applicants and social housing stock to identify people needing homes with specific physical features and the properties which contain such attributes. Such dwellings are termed ‘accessible housing’. AHRs aim to maximise the effectiveness of allocations systems in matching these two ‘people and property’ cohorts. Also sometimes known as Disabled Persons Housing Registers, AHRs have been in existence in some localities for many years. Deaf and disabled people’s organisations have called for local authorities to be placed under obligation to establish and operate an AHR⁵. While the LAHR project has focused explicitly on the classification of properties rather than people, assessment of housing applicants’ accessibility needs is clearly an essential component of social landlords’ rehousing systems.

The London Accessible Housing Register (LAHR) project aims to roll out a common framework to facilitate disabled people’s access to appropriate social housing across the Capital’s 33 boroughs. However, rather than aspiring to create a single, stand-alone London-wide listing, the objective is to encourage social landlords to adopt a common classification of their housing stock, where every home is rated in terms of its ‘accessibility’ features.

Launched by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2004⁶, the LAHR project seeks to fully integrate the letting of accessible housing within the ‘choice-based lettings’ (CBL) systems widely established across London since the start of the decade. Under CBL, people seeking to move into or within the social rented sector can view ‘available for let’ property adverts and place expressions of interest or ‘bids’ for what

³ Department for Communities & Local Government (2008) *Housing in England 2006/07*; London: DCLG <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/971061.pdf> Although DCLG has published results of more recent surveys in this series, the relevant reports have unfortunately not contained equivalent analyses.

⁴ Mayor of London (2009) *The London Plan: Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London*; London: GLA <http://www.london.gov.uk/shaping-london/london-plan/docs/london-plan.pdf>

⁵ RADAR – the Disability Network (2008) *Independent Living Strategy: Policy Briefing* <http://www.radar.org.uk/radarwebsite/RadarFiles/RADAR%20Independent%20Living%20Policy%20Briefing%20March%202008.pdf>

⁶ Greater London Authority (2004) *Accessible Living in London: A Feasibility Study for an Accessible Housing Register for London - London Plan Implementation Report*; London: GLA http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/housing/docs/accessible_living.pdf

are considered potentially suitable dwellings. Recently published guidance suggests that lettings involving accessible homes should be integrated within CBL systems⁷.

The specific aims of the LAHR project are:

- To make better use of accessible social housing stock
- To enhance choice for disabled people
- To help inform considerations around demand for accessible homes.

Table 1.1 – London Accessible Housing Register property classification

AHR categories			Property description
‘Accessible housing’	A	Wheelchair accessible	Designed to meet latest wheelchair accessible housing design standards - wide doors and corridors - and full access (wheelchair turning space) to all rooms and facilities. Includes wheelchair accessible housing built to Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards since 2000 (see also footnote 1).
	B	Partially wheelchair accessible	Designed to older wheelchair standards or significantly adapted to provide wheelchair access to at least the entrance level of the property.
	C	Lifetime Homes	Designed with 16 Lifetime Homes design standards that together create an accessible and adaptable home. Main features include a level approach / entrance and wider doorways.
	D	Easy access	Main features include level approach to the entrance, wider corridors and doorways than in general needs housing. Includes all new build houses, ground floor properties and properties above the ground floor with lift access built to Part M of Building Regulations.
	E	Step-free	General needs housing with a level approach/ entrance to the property and which happens to have limited potential for future adaptability of bathroom and stairs.
	E+	Minimal steps	Property with up to four external steps (six in K&C).
Other housing	F	General housing	Property non-compliant with grades A-E/E+
	G	Not assessed	

The LAHR’s key feature is its eight-fold classification of property features – see Table 1.1. This follows from the observation that ‘accessible housing’ is not a clear cut category: there are gradations⁸. In this respect, the LAHR is seen as more sophisticated than some longer-established AHR typologies which contain broader categories. In implementing the LAHR model, social landlords are encouraged to classify their accommodation portfolio via a comprehensive survey undertaken by trained staff – ideally with occupational therapy expertise on disabled persons housing needs. By enhancing existing housing stock records the dwelling accessibility data collected by such surveys inform ‘accessibility rating’ information

⁷ Lomax, D. & Pawson, H. (2011) *Choice-based lettings, potentially disadvantaged groups and accessible housing registers: a positive practice guide*; London: DCLG
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/1832202.pdf>

⁸ Greater London Authority (2004) *Accessible Living in London: A Feasibility Study for an Accessible Housing Register for London - London Plan Implementation Report*; London: GLA
http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/housing/docs/accessible_living.pdf

included within CBL property adverts. Hence, the property choices of housing applicants with constrained mobility can be better informed.

An alternative to the ‘one-off survey’ model is the incremental collection of dwelling accessibility data in the course of property inspections of existing homes when these fall vacant. LAHR good practice advice leaves open this possibility⁹. However, as shown by this research, the stock survey option has been preferred by most boroughs. This may be partly due to a recognition that the incremental (void inspections) approach places reliance on housing staff who may not have been trained to survey properties in terms of accessibility features or who may undertake such inspections only infrequently. This increases the risk of accessibility ratings being assigned inaccurately – an important consideration, since the rating reliability is important if gradings are to be useful. Another potential complication with this model arises for landlords which routinely advertise homes for let before the outgoing tenant’s departure making it difficult for internal inspection to take place before the property is advertised.

LAHR implementation was piloted in two boroughs – Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets – in the period 2007-2008. In parallel with this process the GLA was awarded a Government grant to underwrite the costs of a fulltime LAHR Co-ordinator tasked with rolling out the model across the whole of London. This post runs for 18 months until December 2010. Based at Kensington & Chelsea, the Co-ordinator’s main roles have been:

- To encourage a commitment to LAHR implementation among the other 31 boroughs and London housing associations, and
- To provide support and guidance to landlords on property classification and on prioritising disabled people for accessible properties

Training for operational staff has formed a key component of the support provided by the Project Co-ordinator to Boroughs and housing associations. In addition, the roll-out project also included information sharing events for disabled people facilitated by a specialist disability consultant.

With the help of the LAHR Project Co-ordinator, the GLA is committed to ‘implementing’ the model within 10 boroughs by the end of 2010.

While the Project Co-ordinator post was funded for an 18-month term from July 2009, much of the first nine months was taken up with developing a project plan, firming up the project governance structure and developing a good practice guidance document. In a sense, the ‘implementation phase’ only fully started in March 2010 with the guidance publication.

The ‘piloting’ work undertaken in Tower Hamlets and Kensington & Chelsea contributed to the refinement LAHR model. However, it should be acknowledged that

⁹ Mayor of London (2010) *London Accessible Housing Register: Good practice guide for social housing landlords*; London: Mayor of London
<http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2010.03.03%20LAHR%20Good%20practice%20guide%202010.pdf>

the two boroughs were operating independently of the GLA's London-wide project through which the LAHR Project Co-ordinator has been employed since 2009. The pilot boroughs have been included within this research mainly because of the need to probe project outcomes in terms of fully functioning AHRs configured on the LAHR format.

1.2 Evaluation objectives and methods

This research, commissioned by the LAHR Project Board in September 2010, has three main objectives:

- (a) To evaluate impacts and outcomes of the project
- (b) To evaluate the impact and success of the delivery method of the project
- (c) To inform and suggest policy recommendations about the potential wider impacts of the project, including possible ways of retaining momentum in the roll-out process in 2011 and beyond.

In addressing these goals, the research has included the following elements:

- (i). Contacts with key stakeholders and experts
- (ii). E-mail survey of boroughs not yet implementing LAHR model
- (iii). Interviews of lead officers in boroughs currently implementing LAHR model
- (iv). Meetings with key contacts in LAHR pilot boroughs
- (v). Interviews of disabled people recently rehoused via AHRs in pilot boroughs
- (vi). Analysis of statistical data relevant to LAHR impacts

2. Access to Social Housing in London for Disabled People

2.1 Chapter scope

To set the findings of this study in context, this section provides some statistical analysis of social landlord lettings in London involving wheelchair standard dwellings and/or households containing disabled persons. The narrow focus on wheelchair standard dwellings is necessitated by the limited availability of London-wide data on social landlord lettings. While the CORE lettings system provides a useful resource for such analysis, it identifies only wheelchair standard homes, rather than the entire range of properties potentially suitable for people with mobility limitations. Nevertheless, while involving only an element of the full picture, the main policy concern in this area remains focused on people with relatively high needs in this respect, and on properties suitable for this client group.

2.2 Volume of wheelchair standard lettings

Based on the CORE lettings monitoring system, it is estimated that the annual number of social landlord lettings involving wheelchair standard properties¹⁰ in London totals around 1,100-1,200. This figure (which excludes lettings involving supported housing) is based on detailed and, it is believed, largely comprehensive data for housing associations. It also factors in a more imprecise estimate for local authority tenancies (as further explained below). Estimation is necessitated here because local authority participation in the CORE monitoring system remains far from complete among London boroughs.

Table 2.1 Housing association lettings in London involving wheelchair standard homes, 2005/06-2009/10

Year	Lets of wheelchair standard homes			Households allocated wheelchair standard dwellings		
	No	% of all lets	% which are first lets of newly built homes	% including wheelchair users	% including other disabled person(s)	% including no disabled persons
2005/06	847	5.9	66	28	18	54
2006/07	679	4.8	63	28	22	50
2007/08	616	5.0	60	30	18	52
2008/09	773	5.1	63	32	16	52
2009/10	703	4.7	61	27	17	56

Source: CORE data

As shown in Table 2.1, London's housing associations let around 600-850 wheelchair accessible homes annually – around 5% of all lettings. Around two thirds of these are first lets of newly built homes (61% in 2009/10). Among the limited number of London boroughs participating in CORE in 2009/10, some 1.9% involved wheelchair standard homes. Given that all (or virtually all) of these lettings will be re-lets of existing homes, this rate is very similar to the comparable figure for housing associations. Scaling this up to represent all boroughs retaining a landlord role, the total London-wide figure would be around 460. Hence, the estimated total number of wheelchair accessible homes let by social landlords in London in 2009/10 will have

¹⁰ See footnote 1 for definition

been around 1,160. When set against the estimated 30,000 disabled Londoners with an unmet need for accessible housing, this figure is extremely small.

2.3 Effectiveness of allocations involving wheelchair standard homes

Table 2.1 also shows that over the past few years, less than a third of wheelchair standard housing association dwellings have been let to households where a wheelchair user is present. Even when other households including a disabled person are included¹¹, less than half of all wheelchair standard lets in most recent years have involved households who may require such property features.

The above figures need to be seen against the backdrop of a now widely accepted principle across social housing that disabled housing applicants should be prioritised for lettings involving accessible and adapted homes (in preference to other applicants with otherwise higher rehousing priority). On the face of it, therefore, these findings are surprising. However, they are not specific to London. CORE data shows that across England in 2009/10 only 16% of wheelchair standard homes let by housing associations were allocated to households containing a wheelchair user, while 63% were let to households containing no disabled members.

There are many possible reasons for instances where a wheelchair standard home is recorded as let to a household containing no wheelchair user or other disabled person. Firstly, there is the chance that the lettings monitoring data is deficient in that disabled household members are not always identified as such by the staff member completing the CORE return¹². However, given that a 'disabled household' being allocated a wheelchair accessible dwelling would have been assigned priority for such a home on that basis, it seems fairly unlikely that this would happen on any scale.

Secondly, there may be aspects of the dwelling's location (e.g. on steep hill) that wheelchair-using applicants may consider unsuitable. Thirdly, while the home itself might be ideal, there may be other aspects of the development which compromise its attractiveness from a disabled person's viewpoint. An important example concerns the availability of conveniently located car parking. Because many disabled people are highly dependent on their cars, this can be a crucial issue. Fourthly, while it may be formally defined as 'wheelchair standard', a (lift serviced) flat above the ground floor may be considered unattractive by disabled housing applicants.

Further CORE analysis reveals no clear explanations for the significant proportion of wheelchair standard dwellings let to people apparently not in need of such homes. For example, it could be the case that disabled people are reluctant to bid for tenancies involving flats rather than houses. In practice, the vast majority of wheelchair standard lettings by London housing associations are flats (81% in 2009/10) and the CORE records provide no evidence for the hypothesis that the significant share of wheelchair standard dwellings let to non-disabled household is because flats tend to be shunned by people needing accessible homes.

¹¹ See footnote 2

¹² Although this might possibly result from a reluctance to disclose their correct status on the part of new tenants.

Unfortunately, the CORE dataset is not sufficiently detailed to inform a more detailed analysis of these issues. Only via more in-depth research focusing on a small cohort of wheelchair standard lettings would it be possible to reach a more definitive conclusion on why it is that – as it would appear – less than half of all dwellings built to such standards are let to households in need of such homes. Particularly given current concerns about the need to maximise the effective use of scarce resources, there would seem to be a good case for such a study.

Table 2.2 – Housing association lettings in London involving wheelchair standard homes, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Borough – property location	Disability status of new tenant (%)			Total	<i>Total wheelchair standard lets (no)</i>
	Wheelchair user	Other disabled	None		
Enfield	64	21	14	100	14
Waltham Forest	53	29	18	100	49
Wandsworth	43	36	21	100	14
Barking & Dagenham	50	28	22	100	18
Newham	55	17	29	100	42
Bexley	38	31	31	100	42
Kingston-upon-Thames	67	0	33	100	9
Greenwich	37	27	36	100	125
Barnet	19	44	38	100	16
Brent	46	15	40	100	48
Southwark	53	7	40	100	58
Camden	41	18	41	100	22
Islington	40	19	41	100	58
Havering	33	22	44	100	9
Harrow	32	23	45	100	22
Hammersmith & Fulham	41	11	48	100	44
Merton	24	29	48	100	42
Kensington & Chelsea	45	5	50	100	20
Richmond-upon-Thames	31	19	50	100	16
Hounslow	30	18	52	100	33
Lewisham	31	17	52	100	52
Tower Hamlets	28	19	53	100	75
Haringey	36	10	55	100	42
Westminster	25	20	55	100	51
Hillingdon	22	22	56	100	36
Bromley	24	14	63	100	51
Ealing	18	16	66	100	38
Sutton	11	22	67	100	36
Redbridge	24	9	68	100	34
Hackney	13	6	81	100	215
Lambeth	8	9	83	100	66
Croydon	10	5	85	100	79
Total	30	16	54	100	1,476

Source: CORE data

The variable incidence of the factors outlined above may help to explain the very substantial variations seen across London as regards the proportion of wheelchair accessible homes let to households with a disabled person. As shown in Table 2.2, this percentage ranges from over 80 in some boroughs to under 20 in others. In interpreting these figures it should be borne in mind that the numbers of homes involved are relatively small in some authorities (even with the combination of data for two financial years, as in this table).

2.4 Lettings to disabled applicants

Rather than focusing on lettings involving wheelchair standard homes, Table 2.3 analyses the CORE records in relation to the disability status of those rehoused by housing associations in 2009/10. This was the first year that the CORE log incorporated the relatively fine-grained classification of applicant household needs as set out in the table. According to this data associations rehoused only just over 500 households including a wheelchair user or otherwise requiring a ‘level access’ dwelling – 3% of all lettings. While the majority of ‘wheelchair user’ households were rehoused in a wheelchair standard home, over a quarter chose to accept offers of non-compliant properties.

Possible reasons for such outcomes could include an applicant’s very specific locational preferences, the extreme urgency of their needs, or the applicant’s expectation that their mobility might be regained in time (e.g. following rehabilitation after an accidental injury).

Table 2.3 Housing association lettings in London, 2009/10 – Applicant household disability status by accessibility status of property let

Applicant status/needs	Wheelchair standard property?					
	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Wheelchair user – full/partial	188	73	71	27	259	100
Level access	65	25	196	75	261	100
Adaptations visual	1	5	19	95	20	100
Adaptations audio	2	8	23	92	25	100
Other disability issues	50	12	352	88	402	100
No disability issues	287	2	11,417	98	11,704	100
Not known	110	5	2,080	95	2,190	100
Total	703	5	14,158	95	14,861	100

Source: CORE data

2.5 Integration of wheelchair standard lets

To what extent is the allocation of accessible homes administered alongside the letting of ‘mainstream’ properties? This question relates to one of the aims of the LAHR – namely, the integration of accessible housing within choice-based lettings schemes. Historically, in some local authorities, accessible homes have been allocated through separate systems. However, CORE records for 2009/10 provide no hint that accessible dwellings are administratively segregated in London. The proportion of housing association wheelchair standard homes recorded as let via CBL in 2009/10 in London (68%) was almost the same as the comparable figure for all homes let in that year (70%).

2.6 Wheelchair standard lets and relet times

If special efforts are made to ensure that wheelchair standard homes are let to housing applicants requiring such features, this could entail a willingness to hold properties vacant while a suitable tenant is identified. In 2009/10, however, the average relet interval for lettings involving wheelchair standard homes in London (43 days) was only marginally higher than the figure for other lettings (40 days).

3. Pilot Implementation of the LAHR Model

3.1 Chapter scope

Implementation of the LAHR model was piloted by two boroughs – Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets. The term ‘implementation’ here refers to the establishment of a framework for letting accessible housing owned by social landlords. Essentially, this involved classification of the social housing stock and the electronic recording of accessibility attributes for each individual property. In both boroughs, this involved an intense period of investigation, experimentation, and system development over a period of 18-24 months between 2007 and 2009. In Tower Hamlets this process was facilitated partly via a grant from the government’s Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. In Kensington & Chelsea, pilot project costs were met by the council itself.

Drawing on the experiences of occupational therapy (OT) and housing staff involved in these projects, this chapter discusses some of the lessons learned in the process and key impacts arising.

3.2 Letting accessible homes – pre-LAHR systems

In both boroughs, active efforts to maximise the effective use of the very limited numbers of accessible homes available locally are longstanding. However, prior to the introduction of the new systems in 2008/09, activity was rather ad hoc in nature.

While there were procedures to identify accessible homes becoming available for let, and to match these with suitable applicants, these processes were considered time-consuming because of the need for OTs to visit and assess the accessibility features of individual void properties when prompted to do so by housing staff. Procedures were unreliable because of the lack of consistently operated ground-rules for triggering such inspections and also partial because flats above the ground floor were routinely discounted, irrespective of lift access.

Although both boroughs had adopted choice-based lettings by 2004, in neither was the letting of accessible homes satisfactorily integrated within the system. In Kensington & Chelsea, accessible homes were excluded from advertising and allocated by direct let.

In Tower Hamlets, accessible properties were included within the CBL advertising system but without a consistent procedure for labelling them as such. Hence, while a degree of choice had been introduced for most applicants, the absence of relevant information in property adverts left disabled people reliant on advice from OTs or lettings staff as to which properties might suit their needs. Given the lack of appropriate systems and procedures there was little chance of maximising the effective use of accessible homes.

3.3 AHR project implementation

Development of surveying procedures

Both the pilot boroughs chose to implement the LAHR model via a comprehensive survey approach conducted by trained occupational therapy staff. OT background and skills were valuable not only because it meant surveyors fully understood the purpose

of the exercise but in addition, thanks to OT selection and training, surveyors had the skills to develop the rapport with tenants necessary to gain entry to homes for surveying purposes. In practice, for internal survey work it was found best to work in pairs so that one partner could focus on measurements while the other engaged the tenant.

However, in both boroughs exploratory fieldwork revealed the scope for classification of large numbers of homes without the need for detailed internal surveying. Firstly, a substantial proportion of the stock could be straightforwardly F-rated (no accessibility features) on account of having more than six steps to the front door or above the ground floor in flatted blocks with no lift access¹³. In Kensington and Chelsea, therefore, it was estimated that two thirds of all homes could be classified without the need to gain access. Detailed survey work, therefore, focused on houses, ground floor flats and flats in lifted blocks (other than those with more than six external steps).

Secondly, borough staff developed an appreciation of the scope for data cloning. It was recognised as useful and time-saving to make contact with people knowledgeable on the interior design of a lot of properties, such as local housing staff, caretakers and tenants' associations. Advised by such contacts, project workers could identify the homes on each estate which were identical in their dimensions such that a single set of measurements could populate many records in the database. Archive files relating to Right to Buy sales were also found useful as a basis for cloning, since these included detailed survey data on internal dimensions.

It was also found that, in informing tenants that the team would be visiting their estate, it worked best to circulate a leaflet asking tenants to contact the team for an appointment, rather than to warn of a possible unannounced visit seeking to gain entry. It turned out to be a more effective use of time to focus surveying resources on properties where appointments had been made rather than through door-knocking 'on spec'. An important risk management procedure incorporated into the fieldwork was the collation of a list of properties to be avoided on account of tenants with a record of violent or aggressive behaviour.

Technological development

Development of surveying technology was a crucial aspect of the pilot process. Development of the digital pen technology for collecting and uploading data on internal property features was a highly beneficial by-product of the LAHR pilot work undertaken in Tower Hamlets and K&C. While this absorbed a considerable proportion of pilot funding, this was considered a well-targeted investment in facilitating consistent, reliable and efficient property data collection. The digital pen technology was preferred over the personal digital assistant (PDA) platform because the former is more portable, requires less training and is less vulnerable to theft.

The digital pen writes like a standard ballpoint pen but incorporates a camera, battery and memory. Digital paper is used to print forms or can be used in notebook format.

¹³ It should be noted that the E+ category was established in the course of the Kensington & Chelsea pilot and was not applied in Tower Hamlets. Also, subsequent to the pilot work, and for the purposes of the London-wide roll-out project, it was decided to amend this Standard to refer to four rather than six steps – see Table 1.1.

The grid pattern printed on the paper enables the pen's camera to record pen strokes. As seen by staff directly involved in the piloting work, the most important benefits of the digital pen technology relate to assurance on accurate and consistent assignment of accessibility ratings.

Not only does the digital pen technology automatically classify the accessibility rating of the home (drawing on measurements) but it can specify what factors prevent the home from being graded in a higher category. This is potentially valuable in informing judgements on a property's 'adaptability'. However, assessments of the scope for other major adaptations such as combining bathroom and WC or installation of a through-floor lift are really feasible only with the input of a trained building surveyor.

Choosing to classify the housing stock via a comprehensive survey rather than by accumulating data through void inspections was influenced by the fact that, wherever possible, Tower Hamlets advertises homes as soon as a termination notice is submitted, rather than waiting until the property has been vacated and inspected. Hence, although it would be possible to visit and classify the dwelling immediately after the termination notice (i.e. while still tenanted), this would be an additional visit rather than a function integrated within the standard void inspection (works specification) visit.

The former Tower Hamlets AHR project co-ordinator is also convinced that collection of data by a trained team of experienced OT assistants focusing solely on the task helped to maximise data quality and facilitated an efficient operation, albeit one where the survey represented an identifiable up-front cost. The feasibility of integrating AHR assessment with standard void inspection is also possibly dependent on a landlord's operating model in terms of division of labour. Where inspection is a surveyor activity this should be unproblematic. But where such inspections are the responsibility of generic housing officers the reliability of AHR assessments may be more questionable.

Securing housing association participation

While both pilot boroughs focused initially on council stock, they also aspired to incorporate housing association properties within their stock classification projects. In Kensington & Chelsea this meant incorporating housing association dwellings within the Borough-led property classification programme. Associations, themselves, were only expected to provide listings of properties needing to be inspected and to publicise the survey work with tenants. In seeking collaboration, the Borough emphasized the spin-off benefit which would accrue to associations through the ability to upload accessibility data to the TSA's National Register for Social Housing (NRoSH) database.

To maximise the effective use of staff time, attention was focused mainly on landlords with a larger local presence. Partly reflecting the long heritage of partnership working, most of these associations engaged effectively with the process and it was completed with no serious difficulties. The outcome of this process is that 85% of housing association properties in Kensington & Chelsea have an AHR classification, as compared with 99% of council properties – see Table 3.1 (a).

In Tower Hamlets, as indicated in Table 3.1(b), the inclusion of housing association property in the Borough's AHR is less complete. It was always recognised that the Borough's stock classification project was not sufficiently resourced to facilitate full coverage of the entire social rented sector. The Council, nevertheless, offered to extend its property surveying programme to include a certain amount of housing association stock and this offer was taken up by some local providers. Beyond this, the Council hoped to help associations complete the property classification task mainly by providing staff training in property surveying using digital pen technology.

Table 3.1 – Social rented housing in LAHR pilot boroughs – breakdown by accessibility rating

(a) Kensington & Chelsea

AHR category	LA	HA	Total	%
A - Wheelchair accessible throughout	0	0	0	0.0
B - Wheelchair accessible - essential rooms	0	2	2	0.0
C - Lifetime homes	23	128	151	0.9
D - Easy access (level approach, wide doorways etc)	3	263	266	1.6
E - Step-free	1,006	707	1,713	10.2
E+ - Minimal steps (max 6 steps to front door)	1,873	1,318	3,191	18.9
F - General needs	3,745	6,193	9,938	58.9
G - Not assessed	70	1,544	1,614	9.6
Total	6,720	10,155	16,875	100.0

(b) Tower Hamlets

AHR category	LA	HA	Total	%
A - Wheelchair accessible throughout	0	69	69	0.2
B - Wheelchair accessible - essential rooms	25	107	132	0.3
C - Lifetime homes	9	251	260	0.6
D - Easy access (level approach, wide doorways etc)	300	2,555	2,855	6.4
E - Step-free	1,624	591	2,215	5.0
E+ - Minimal steps (max 6 steps to front door)	-	-	-	
F - General needs	10,577	12,654	23,231	52.1
G - Not assessed	306	15,548	15,854	35.5
Total	12,841	31,775	44,616	100.0

Some associations completed a desk top survey to identify all 'definitely Category F' properties (above the ground floor without a lift, or with steps to access the property). However, take-up of Council surveying training and support has been variable. Challenges in rolling out the property classification process across associations' stock are seen as having included:

- The high level of housing officer staff turnover which fairly quickly erodes the value of digital pen survey training
- Digital pen technology not interfacing with HAs' own software systems

- The attempt to integrate accessibility rating within the void property inspection process – especially where this function is assigned to generic housing officers. This is problematic because staff undertake such inspections only infrequently and are consequently, at greater risk of making mistakes in the process. These result in the property being classed by the software as ‘not assessed’.
- Reliance on housing officers to undertake digital pen surveying when these staff report to senior housing managers rather than the lettings managers who have a direct interest in the existence and accuracy of data on dwelling accessibility.

That half of the local housing association stock in Tower Hamlets has been classified (see Table 3.1(b)) is partly a consequence of recent stock transfers involving homes already included in the Borough’s 2007-2008 stock survey. It also reflects survey activity by associations themselves – particularly on the part of common housing register partner landlords. However, it is believed that extending AHR coverage across the remaining unclassified housing association stock is no longer ongoing in any serious way.

As shown in Table 3.1, homes rated as accessible in any way account for only a small minority in either of the two boroughs. Particularly striking is the very small proportion of homes classed as wheelchair accessible. However, the substantial difference between the numbers categorised as such in the two boroughs might raise some questions about the implementation of identical classification standards. Also, whereas Kensington & Chelsea’s property survey recorded only two properties as (partially) wheelchair accessible, CORE records show that housing associations let 20 ‘wheelchair standard’ homes in 2008/09 and 2009/10 (see Table 2.2). These comparisons suggest that the application of a ‘wheelchair standard’ definition may be inconsistent.

3.4 AHR implementation impacts

Known volume of accessible housing

Stock classification cannot, of course, add to the stock of homes equipped with accessibility features. However, in both boroughs AHR implementation has increased the number of homes *known to be suitable* for people with mobility limitations. This has come about as a result of (a) ensuring that all suitable ground floor access dwellings are identified as such, and (b) identifying significant numbers of flats above the ground floor as having accessibility features. In Kensington & Chelsea, for example, whereas only 77 council lettings in 2007/08 involved homes classed as ‘accessible’, the number of 2009/10 council lets involving dwellings with some accessibility features was 207. Even if ‘E+’ homes are discounted, the 2009/10 total was 111 – an increase of over 40% on the 2007/08 figure (see Table 3.2).

The AHR project is also seen as having changed staff and applicant perceptions on what is ‘accessible housing’. Above-ground floor flats in level access blocks would not previously have been considered ‘accessible’, even if served by two lifts. As classified within the AHR framework, most housing association properties built in the modern era rate as accessible at some level. Previously, landlords generally failed to perceive this.

However, particularly within the context of choice-based lettings systems, there are questions about the utility of the ‘partially accessible’ categories E and E+ which are numerically much larger than A-D (see Table 3.1). To fulfil their potential, choice-based lettings systems require that service users understand the terminology used in property adverts. It is not certain that the relatively fine distinctions between categories C and D are fully understood by housing applicants with mobility limitations. Also, most of the policy focus remains on applicants in categories A or B and on the use of homes classed as such – see below.

Maximising the effective use of accessible housing stock

In seeking to maximise the proportion of accessible homes let to people in need of such accommodation, both boroughs seek to achieve ‘best use’ of such dwellings. In Tower Hamlets, if there are no A/B category eligible bidders willing to accept an offer on an A/B vacancy, the housing officer will look to offer the tenancy to a C or D category bidder or to A/B applicants who did not bid for the home concerned. In some instances, neighbouring boroughs are contacted in search of an applicant needing a wheelchair accessible home and possibly willing to consider the relevant area. In Kensington & Chelsea, for lettings involving properties graded A-D, bidders with such awards are prioritised ahead of other bidders.

Both pilot boroughs are confident that the procedures outlined above have enabled them to be more efficient than under pre-AHR arrangements. In practice, however, it is not always easy to find category A/B applicants willing to accept offers of A/B homes. This may be because of:

- The widely held preference for houses and frequently strong reluctance to consider flats above the ground floor (irrespective of lift access)
- Environmental factors – in particular, car parking provision. Newly built ‘car-free’ developments are often problematic.

Where the initial advert of a category A/B council property fails to evoke a suitable A/B graded applicant (and none can immediately be found via other measures – see above), some landlords may hold vacant such properties until the next advertising cycle in the hope of attracting additional disabled bidders. However, the general view in the pilot boroughs is that, given the pressure on accommodation supply in inner London, this could never be justified. Hence, landlords faced with these circumstances and unable to find a suitable C-E banded bidder, usually offer the tenancy to the ‘first round’ bidder who is highest-ranked purely on housing needs criteria (and has no mobility limitation).

Table 3.2 presents a ‘before and after’ comparison of council lettings in Kensington & Chelsea. A simplified version of this comparison is shown in Figure 3.1. Post-AHR implementation, the proportion of lettings identified as having accessibility features of some kind is much increased. Provided that the categories are comprehensible to applicants, this should be helpful in informing the large numbers of consumers who will have moderate accessibility requirements.

The improved ability to identify vacancies with accessibility features is probably part of the explanation for the Council’s success in increasing the number of people with accessibility requirements rehoused. This rose from 50 in 2007/08 to 82 in 2009/10

(and from 12% to 14% of all lettings). Of the 50 disabled households rehoused in 2007/08, 20 (40%) were allocated accessible homes whereas of the 82 disabled households rehoused in 2009/10 83% were accommodated in homes with accessibility features. Hence, the number of disabled people housed in suitable homes more than trebled – from 20 to 68 (or from 5% of all lets in 2007/08 to 12% of lets in 2009/10).

Table 3.2 – RB Kensington & Chelsea lettings before and after AHR introduction

(a) 2007/08

Accessibility category of property let	New tenant accessibility category		Total lets in category
	Needed accessible dwelling	Other applicant	
Accessible	20	57	77
Not accessible	30	307	337
Total lets	50	364	414

(b) 2009/10

AHR category of property let	New tenant AHR award							Total lets
	A	B	C	D	E	E+	F/no award	
A - Wheelchair accessible throughout	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B - Wheelchair accessible - partial	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
C - Lifetime homes	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	6
D - Easy access (level approach etc)	5	0	3	0	0	3	17	28
E - Step-free	0	0	5	0	6	12	52	75
E+ - Minimal steps	0	0	3	0	2	24	67	96
F - General needs	0	0	1	0	1	6	255	263
G - Not assessed	0	0	0	0	2	4	111	117
Total lets	6	3	13	0	11	49	505	587

Source: RB Kensington & Chelsea

While the proportion of accessible properties let to applicants without any mobility limitations remained quite high in 2009/10, the percentage of lets involving homes graded A-E+ and which went to such households was slightly reduced at 67% compared with 74% in the pre-AHR year.

Figure 3.1 – RB Kensington & Chelsea lettings involving ‘accessible homes’: breakdown by applicant household disability status

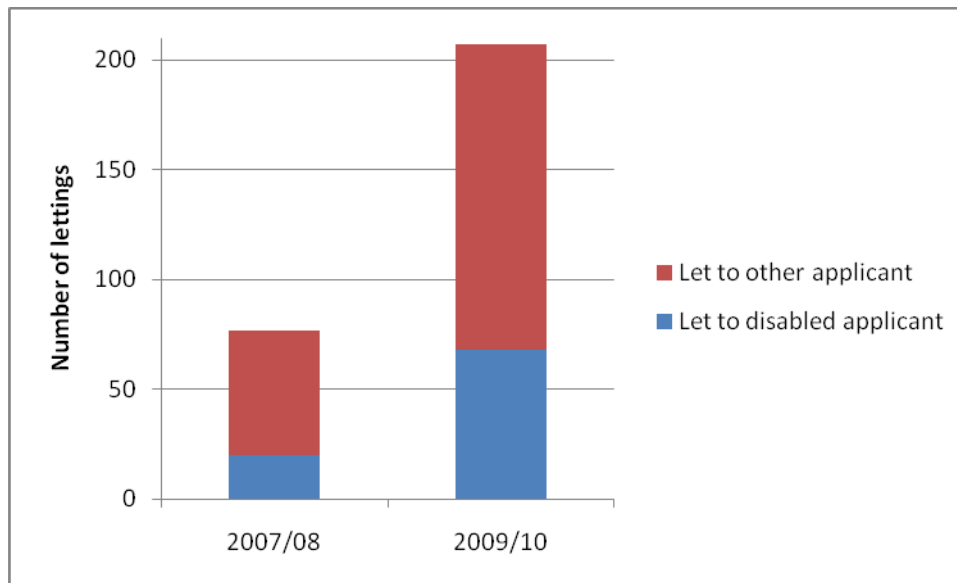


Table 3.3 presents a breakdown of Tower Hamlets lettings in 2009/10, showing the proportion of these which involved disabled people and/or properties with accessibility features. On this basis, in terms of matching disabled people with suitable properties, AHR arrangements in Tower Hamlets appear to be less effective than in Kensington & Chelsea. While the 2,608 homes let in the year included 740 with an accessibility rating in the range A-E, only 36 households (5%) accommodated in these homes were rated as meriting A-E disability priority. If we include all households who were assessed in respect of disability but not awarded a rating, the number of ‘disabled households’ accommodated in properties rated A-E totalled 76 – some 10% of all lettings involving such homes. Even among lettings involving wheelchair standard homes (categories A and B), only a small minority (5 of 28) are recorded as having been allocated to people with appropriate disability ratings. Tower Hamlets Council advises that this largely reflects the fact that new build housing association ‘wheelchair standard’ properties are frequently incorporated within schemes found unattractive by disabled applicants (e.g. due to location or absence of appropriate car parking facilities – see above).

Table 3.3 – Social landlord lets in Tower Hamlets 2009/10

AHR category of property let	New tenant AHR award					No award given	No award sought	Total lets in category
	A	B	C	D	E			
A	3						7	10
B	2					1	15	18
C				1	1	4	75	81
D	1	3	1	3	11	25	525	569
E		1	1	2	6	10	42	62
F	1	2	2	5	17	52	805	884
G	1	1	1	5	3	19	954	984
Total lets – all categories	8	7	5	16	38	111	2,423	2,608

Source: LB Tower Hamlets

Analysing Table 3.3 in terms of disabled priority households rehoused in 2009/10, these numbered only 74. Of these, just under half (36) were accommodated in homes with an accessibility rating A-E.

Unfortunately, a 'before and after' comparison to highlight the impact of LAHR introduction is not possible because Tower Hamlets is unable to produce benchmark figures of the kind supplied by Kensington & Chelsea (see Table 3.2(a)). Hence, we cannot discount the possibility that the pre-AHR allocations system was even less effective in matching disabled people and accessible homes. The figures set out in Table 3.3 nonetheless appear somewhat disappointing and perhaps raise questions regarding the reliability of monitoring systems (particularly bearing in mind the apparent lack of consistency with housing association lettings statistics set out in Table 2.2).

Strategic action to meet disabled people's housing needs

For both Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets, AHR establishment has provided a clearer measure of the balance between demand for, and supply of, specialist housing.

In both boroughs the ability to demonstrate the highly unfavourable balance between demand and supply for accessible housing is being used to inform Planning Department decisions on housing development policies and targets. Also, recognising the range of environmental and situational factors with a bearing on disabled people's accommodation preferences, there is an increasing awareness among lettings staff and OTs that influence needs to be exerted at the planning stage of new housing developments. Particularly important here are ensuring the provision of adequate car parking and flatted block access via two lifts to facilitate AHR 'A' grading (despite the fact that some A/B graded applicants are reluctant to consider flats).

In Tower Hamlets, the clear and reliable information about the relative scale of supply and demand on accessible housing provided by the AHR framework has stimulated a forward planning initiative in relation to the 110 waiting list applicants needing wheelchair standard homes. Many of these families have been registered on the waiting list for many years while continuing to occupy very unsuitable accommodation. By researching each family's needs and preferences in detail, it is intended to influence the local housing association construction pipeline such that a home is built specifically for each of these families¹⁴. In this way, it is hoped that it will be possible to clear this backlog of cases within 2-3 years.

Service user perspectives

This section of the report draws on interviews with six disabled people recently rehoused in Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets. Potentially suitable interviewees were identified by the two local authorities, with letters inviting participation sent to them by council staff. Contact details of responding tenants were passed to the research team who conducted the interviews in tenants' own homes.

For two of the participants, requirements for an accessible home were dictated by the needs of a severely disabled child and need to carry their child up and down steps to

¹⁴ Although, unless purchased by the sitting tenant, the expectation would be that these homes will become available for other households at some point in the future.

access the home presented extreme difficulties for the parents. One single parent family lived in overcrowded circumstances where the mother needed to carry her child up 70 steps – a situation endured for seven years. In both these instances, the need for a three-bedroom home further limited the chances of success.

The other three applicants were single older people, two wheelchair bound and the other partially sighted. Prior to their recent moves, all were living in very unsuitable homes.

The respondents varied in terms of the specificity of their accommodation preferences. In two cases the requirement to live in a specific location was crucial – in one case to continue to receive care from a relative, and in the other to be near a disabled child's special school. In general, the respondents recognised that wheelchair standard homes were extremely scarce and accepted that it would be wise to consider less highly-rated accessible homes.

Four of the five respondents were aware of choice-based lettings and at least two of them had been active users of the system. However, only one had clearly been rehoused via bidding undertaken largely under their own steam. It appeared that at least one other tenancy had been obtained via proxy bidding undertaken by a housing OT on the applicant's behalf. Three of the five respondents had been helped to access a tenancy by Housing OTs (and, in one case, a hospital OT). This appeared to have been decisive in securing the final tenancy offer in each case. Hence, without such direct assistance it is possible that none of these three applicants would have been rehoused.

Crucially, two of the five respondents commented favourably on the LAHR property typology – this had been understood and had informed bidding behaviour. The partially sighted applicant was more critical of the classification because it was not seen as particularly appropriate or helpful in her case. Because neither of the other two respondents appeared to have engaged fully with CBL they had no opinion on the utility or comprehensibility of the LAHR framework.

Unfortunately, this aspect of the research has not proven very conclusive. Only through a study conducted on a much larger scale would it be possible to derive definitive findings on the consumer perspective on AHRs.

3.5 Pilot AHR setup costs

Establishing the Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets AHRs incurred appreciable set-up costs. These totalled £126K and £150K, respectively. A breakdown of these costs is set out in Table 3.4. In both instances, however, it is clear that a substantial proportion of project resources was expended on testing out and refining systems and procedures. Hence, while the Kensington & Chelsea project took 18 months to complete, the Project Co-ordinator estimates that application of the lessons learned from this process could reduce this to four months in a comparable borough.

Given the size of the Kensington & Chelsea social housing stock, the considerations outlined above could suggest staff costs of possibly £1.5K per thousand homes for boroughs subsequently adopting the implementation model and technology developed by the pilot authorities. It should, however, be borne in mind that actual costs will be

influenced by local factors. Particularly important is the configuration of a landlord's dwelling stock in terms of the scope for data cloning. It is possible that, as organisations managing relatively large numbers of homes in large blocks, both the pilot boroughs enjoyed something of an advantage in this respect.

Without the need to develop new data capture technology, IT costs – like staff costs – should be considerably lower in 'roll-out boroughs' than in the pilot authorities. For example, the LAHR Project Co-ordinator estimates that elements of necessary IT work which cost £9-12K for Kensington & Chelsea should cost less than £2K for 'later adopters'.

Table 3.4 – AHR pilot setup costs (£000s)

Cost item	Kensington & Chelsea	Tower Hamlets
Staffing – OT salary costs	100	
IT	25	
Other	1	
Total	126	150
Homes classified (no)	15,261	27,605

Since OT staff time has always been required to assess the housing needs of disabled applicants, an AHR imposes no additional 'running costs' as such. Rather, it facilitates the more efficient use of OT staff time because it cuts out the need for OT property visits to check a dwelling's accessibility status. In the pilot boroughs prior to AHR establishment many OT vacant property visits represented wasted resources where the homes concerned were found unsuitable.

There is also a 'business efficiency' argument for a system which maximises the effective use of accessible housing because this should minimise future costs arising from disabled people being inappropriately rehoused in mainstream housing – notably (a) installation of adaptations, or (b) rehousing into an accessible property. In Kensington & Chelsea it has also been found that in facilitating the effective integration of accessible dwelling lets within the CBL scheme, the AHR has reduced typical void relet times (and, hence, void rent losses). Cost-effectiveness considerations are further discussed in Section 5.4.

3.6 Lessons to inform further LAHR rollout

In both pilot Boroughs staff involved in this process believed that designation of a project co-ordinator with managerial authority had been essential to project success. While such a resource might be seen elsewhere as an unaffordable luxury, it is unrealistic to imagine that such an undertaking could be achieved by simply adding it to the existing workload of a senior OT. Rather, some mechanism needs to be established to create some 'protected time' for the project co-ordinator to focus exclusively on AHR implementation. Another necessary condition for progress is that senior housing managers 'own the project', recognise its importance and provide necessary support.

Following on from the end of the current London-wide LAHR implementation project, it will be essential to foster continuing inter-borough information exchange to avoid the need for reinventing the wheel. A cross-borough forum of senior housing OTs could provide a useful mutual support network for project co-ordinators in different authorities.

4. Rolling out the LAHR Model

4.1 Chapter scope

Following on from the piloting work undertaken in Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets, it was decided that the model should be rolled out across London – as reflected in the targets incorporated in the Mayor’s London Housing Strategy 2010. To push this process forward, an 18-month implementation project headed by a full-time Co-ordinator was launched in July 2009. The Co-ordinator’s role was to raise awareness among social landlords of the benefits of a fully comprehensive AHR, integrated with choice-based lettings, and to promote and support the local adoption and development of the LAHR framework throughout the Capital. This chapter of the report details the way this project has been delivered and assesses its impacts.

4.2 Progress overview

As shown in Table 4.1, the Project Co-ordinator’s work has resulted in two thirds of London Boroughs having elected, at least in principle, to implement the LAHR model. These include the two pilot authorities where systems have been fully operational since 2009. As shown in greater detail in Table A1.1, of the four boroughs which have declined to adopt the framework, two do not operate choice-based lettings, while one already runs what it considers an effective system where accessible homes are advertised as such – albeit using a locally-defined classification framework.

Table 4.1 – LAHR roll-out progress summary, October 2010

Borough commitment to implement LAHR model?	No of boroughs
Already implemented	2
Yes	18
Yes - in principle	3
Undecided/unknown	6
No	4
Total	33

Source: LAHR Project Co-ordinator

The Project has focused mainly on the Boroughs, as the social services and strategic housing authorities for each locality and – usually – the largest social landlord. The local authority emphasis also logically follows from the fact that it is the Boroughs which usually operate CBL schemes and which hold nomination rights to housing association vacancies. On this basis, the initial objective would be to assist boroughs in setting up their own processes for collecting, storing and advertising accessibility data before engaging with their housing association partners. Nevertheless, the Project Co-ordinator has made direct contacts with more than 20 housing associations, of which seven have completed desk-top assessments of managed stock to identify which homes need to be assessed via internal inspections. This work has been undertaken in collaboration with the East London Lettings Company, Home Connections and Locata – the three major CBL scheme providers which service local CBL systems across London.

In practice, of the 20 boroughs stating a commitment to adopting the LAHR model (taking account of the fact that the system is already fully operational in Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets), the Co-ordinator has identified 10 boroughs where the implementation process is considered 'actively ongoing'. Partly to gauge implementation progress and partly to seek feedback on Co-ordinator activity, these 'actively implementing' authorities were included in a telephone survey, backed up by face to face interviews in two instances. Of the ten boroughs, eight participated in this process. However, before detailing their responses, we look first at findings from an e-mail questionnaire survey of other boroughs which have made an in-principle decision to adopt the LAHR (see Table A1.1) but which are considered by the LAHR Project Co-ordinator as not yet having reached the stage of active implementation. These are termed below 'prospective implementers'.

4.3 Prospective implementer perspectives

This short section relates to the five 'prospective implementer' boroughs which participated in our survey (Barking & Dagenham, Bromley, City of London, Harrow and Islington).

While three of the five boroughs usually advertised accessible properties under their CBL system, direct lets were the normal method in the other two. In one case, the LAHR classification was already in use.

Encouragingly, three of the five boroughs were planning to commence implementation of the LAHR model by April 2011. In the other two authorities implementation timetables had yet to be set.

In all three boroughs that currently advertised accessible properties via CBL current practice was to indicate on adverts that disabled home seekers will be 'preferred' over other applicants

Respondents were asked about their policy where adverts for an accessible property fails to attract bids from relevant applicants. One of three boroughs using CBL to allocate accessible properties stated that where there are no eligible bidders with a disability an accessible property will be let to the highest-ranked general needs household. For the other two boroughs the course of action depended on a property's precise accessibility rating. Properties with limited accessibility features would be let to a general needs household while a fully wheelchair accessible property would be re-advertised or offered to a bidder with other medical needs.

4.4 Active implementer perspectives

This section draws on contacts with nine of the ten boroughs which have committed to LAHR implementation and identified by the Project Co-ordinator as actively implementing the framework (Barnet, Bexley, Camden, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hackney, Hounslow, Newham, Sutton and Waltham Forest). Seven of these contacts were made via telephone interviews, while two involved face-to-face meetings with relevant staff. Most of the boroughs confirmed their intention to implement the LAHR approach, with three of them (Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow and Newham) anticipating that this would become fully operational during 2011.

Integration of accessible home lets within CBL

In all but two of the nine boroughs it was already normal practice for most accessible homes to be integrated within the choice-based lettings system for mainstream properties. In one instance, however, wheelchair standard lettings were routinely treated as an exception and allocated via direct lets and in another this was true for some new build lets.

Where accessible homes are advertised via CBL, the advert usually indicates that disabled people will be prioritised. In the absence of a disabled bidder for a non-wheelchair standard home, the usual approach was to make an offer to the highest-ranked non-disabled applicant. In most instances, the approach to lettings involving wheelchair standard homes was described as being more directive, with the advert stating that the home will be let only to a person requiring such accommodation. As implied by this, the Borough will generally go to greater lengths in an attempt to ensure this outcome. In the absence of a disabled bidder willing to accept a tenancy offer, there would be efforts to identify and interest another disabled applicant by sifting disabled applicants registered for a move but not having made a bid for the home concerned. If successful, this would lead to a 'direct let'. Assisted bidding is another means of achieving the same outcome.

Use of LAHR classification

In three of the nine boroughs the LAHR classification was already in use for property adverts, while in another full implementation was constrained by membership of a CBL consortium (Locata) which currently utilises a different framework. Other boroughs tended to use less detailed typologies. In at least one case (Bexley) this reflected a considered policy choice based on a belief that the relatively fine distinctions between some LAHR categories could be confusing to applicants.

Most of the 'active implementer' boroughs (seven of nine) were intending to use the LAHR classification when their systems became fully operational. The only slight qualifications to this commitment related to the planned omission of the E+ category (one borough) and the interpretation of 'adaptable' as 'rampable' (one borough).

Approach to stock classification

In some boroughs there appeared to be continuing uncertainty about the approach to be adopted on stock classification. In one case (Hammersmith & Fulham), a survey of the Borough's own stock had already been completed. In four others (Bexley, Hackney, Hounslow, Newham) it was expected that a survey would be undertaken – although in the Bexley case only one of the two main stock transfer landlords had so far committed to this.

While Hammersmith & Fulham's survey had been undertaken by OTs, other boroughs were using (or were planning to use) estate management or other housing staff. In one instance, this was to be administered via staff overtime. One respondent expressed concern about the quality of data generated by this type of approach; a problem compounded by high staff turnover which eroded the positive impact of training.

There were substantial variations in expected timescales for planned surveys. Two boroughs (Hackney and Hounslow) anticipated being able to complete this task

within four months. Others (presumably planning a lower intensity exercise) expected that it could take up to 18 months.

Three of the nine boroughs (Camden, Sutton and Waltham Forest) stated that it was likely that classification would be taken forward incrementally via void property inspections. However, in Camden the Council is also able to draw on existing records accumulated from 10 years of void inspections and which enable the identification of E+ rated homes.

Housing association involvement

Housing association involvement in LAHR development appears to have been highly variable. At one end of the spectrum, under Hammersmith & Fulham's approach to LAHR implementation, housing associations had been fully incorporated. This was thanks to the Borough's offer to replicate the Kensington & Chelsea model where the local authority stock survey also encompassed all housing association dwellings.

In Bexley, which is a post-stock transfer borough, close joint working on LAHR implementation had been ongoing for some time between the council and the main social housing providers. In another borough (Hackney) at least one association with a major local presence (Sanctuary) was already operating the LAHR model. In some other boroughs discussions with local associations on LAHR implementation had also taken place. In most boroughs it was seen as appropriate for initial implementation activity to focus on council stock, and associations appeared to have been relatively uninvolved in the process as yet.

Although it wasn't specifically raised with respondents, two mentioned that complexities can emerge from the administrative split between local authorities and arms length management organisations (ALMOs). In these instances it was stressed that progressing the project across 'council housing' required achieving ALMO 'buy-in' – e.g. in opting to purchase digital pen technology.

ICT issues encountered

Most of the 'active implementer' boroughs were already using – or planned to use – the digital pen technology developed via the pilot implementation projects in Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets. Two boroughs reported having encountered some technical problems in installing the software.

Implementation costs and funding

As anticipated, few of the respondents were able to provide such information in the course of a telephone interview. Only one respondent was able to cite an estimate of 'total project cost' In this instance, for an outer London borough with some 14,000 homes, it was expected that the figure would amount to £50-80K, with around 80% of this figure relating to survey costs.

Two other authorities cited useful information about the sources of funding underpinning LAHR development. In one case over £276K had been provided by the local primary care trust. In another, costs had been underwritten from the CLG Housing Options Trailblazer Fund.

Rating of LAHR Project Co-ordinator support

Respondents were asked to rate the help they had received from the LAHR Project Co-ordinator under three headings: (a) utility of guidance materials, (b) the appropriateness of training provision, and (c) quality of support in response to ad hoc queries and requests. On all three counts, respondent feedback was highly positive. Comments included:

‘It [the local project] wouldn’t have happened without Claire’

‘Training was brilliant – impressed; getting out on site was good, did measurements, good discussion about differences in categories’

‘Very prompt, informative, detailed feedback; even been to see our RSLs’

‘Claire has been vital – otherwise it would be ad hoc’

‘Excellent, quick responses’

‘Had she not been there we wouldn’t have the RSLs on board’

‘Definitely been helpful having an external independent driving agent and contact/advice point’

‘Very helpful resource, will be missed’

The only comment suggesting that the Project Co-ordinator’s additional input could have been helpful to local system implementation related to a negotiation between a borough and the digital pen software provider. However, while it was felt that the Co-ordinator could usefully have been involved in the relevant meetings the borough had not, in fact, requested this in advance.

Respondents were aware that the LAHR Project Co-ordinator role was scheduled to end in December 2010. Asked about the likely impacts of this development, several believed that the Co-ordinator’s support had helped them progress to a point at which they could be reasonably confident that implementation could be carried forward by existing momentum. However, many respondents were aware that there remain a substantial number of boroughs where AHR development work has barely begun. With the ending of the London-wide support resource, it was widely felt that the prospects for AHR establishment in these boroughs could be placed seriously at risk. On the other hand, there was a sense that boroughs currently less far advanced in AHR development could benefit from a ‘snowball’ effect, whereby support and encouragement is provided by neighbouring authorities where an AHR is already in place.

5. Project context, project management and project effectiveness

5.1 Chapter scope

This short chapter draws on key actor interviews which involved the GLA, the National Housing Federation and Home Connections, as well as the LAHR Project Co-ordinator.

5.2 Challenges faced by the project

In seeking to roll out the LAHR model across the Capital, securing senior managerial commitment from social landlord organisations has, not surprisingly, proved a major challenge. This was never going to be easy, not only because of the absence of statutory requirements or central funding for AHRs, but also because many landlords believe that their long-established policies and procedures already address this issue. At the same time, in supporting individual boroughs and housing associations to push forward the development of local AHRs on the London-wide model, the establishment of strong relationships with local housing managers and OTs is also essential.

The recognition that AHR development involves up-front costs inevitably presents a hurdle to be overcome in gaining landlord commitment although, (as further explored in section 6.2), there are strong cost-effectiveness arguments in favour of AHRs.

Compounding the above challenges, the timing of the roll-out project has been politically unfortunate, given its co-incidence with the inevitable policy turbulence preceding and subsequent to the change of government in May 2010. This has made it more difficult to frame the project's objectives to align with Ministerial priorities – particularly the current government's underlying scepticism towards centrally-imposed requirements and standards. Quite apart from this, the prospect of deep cuts in public spending from 2011/12 has inevitably created circumstances unfavourable to the promotion of new service delivery initiatives calling for up-front investment.

5.3 Project management and governance

While the LAHR model has been developed and promoted over a long period by the GLA, it was decided that the Project Co-ordinator should be employed by a different host organisation and it was agreed that this would be the borough of Kensington and Chelsea. A Project Board was established to oversee the initiative.

Especially because these arrangements detached the Project Co-ordinator from the GLA, they have not been ideal. In particular, being based at City Hall might have been beneficial in integrating the Co-ordinator more effectively within London-wide networks involving senior personnel in the boroughs and elsewhere. Also, while it has been essential for the Co-ordinator to liaise closely with GLA staff on the project plan, on publications and on publicity matters, remote location has complicated such interaction. This may, for example, have contributed to the time taken in securing authorisation for the project initiation document and the good practice guide.

While the Project Board was established partly to facilitate accountability to DCLG (principal funder of the roll-out project), it could possibly have contributed more added value to the scheme. It might have served as a useful vehicle for linking into

the social landlord milieu via the inclusion of senior local authority and housing association personnel as board members, or by the formal representation of London Councils and the National Housing Federation. (While the direct involvement of London Councils was explicitly considered, it was decided that the organisation could be more appropriately involved in other ways).

5.4 Project effectiveness

The main target for the roll-out project as set by the GLA was to have implemented the LAHR model in 10 boroughs by December 2010. Given that at least 10 boroughs can be fairly defined as ‘active implementers’, it is reasonable to state that this has been achieved.

Where less impact has been made since 2009 is in securing strong commitment to LAHR implementation among the sector’s senior players. Tapping into the strategic housing agenda would, most obviously, have utilised the forums of London Councils – in particular, the Housing Directors meetings and the LC Homelessness and Housing Needs Group. Unfortunately, however, efforts to do so have been influenced, in part, by the understandable domination of the London Councils agenda by the radical housing policy and benefits reforms proposed by the Coalition Government and also coincided with a slimming down and a focussing of London Councils as an organisation.

Securing high level managerial commitment has also been problematic in relation to housing associations. As a standardised model, the LAHR template should be particularly attractive to the many associations which operate across borough boundaries and which therefore find it problematic to adapt to contrasting administrative systems operated by different authorities. Also, because they own significant amounts of housing in many boroughs, gaining the active commitment of G15-member and other large associations could make a substantial contribution to the momentum of the entire roll-out project. At the same time, however, given that many of these organisations operate across large parts of London, their commitment is less likely to be secured by approaches purely at the local level – i.e. on the part of individual boroughs.

As industry representative bodies, the National Housing Federation and G15 group could play a key role in endorsing the LAHR roll-out project and encouraging their members to engage with it. However, while contacts were made with both organisations by the Project Co-ordinator, these did not evoke active responses. Only through more recent contacts initiated by the GLA itself has it been possible to secure the interest of senior players in these groupings. Possibly, as the ‘project sponsor’ organisation and having strong links to London-wide and national stakeholder bodies, the GLA could have played a stronger early role in facilitating such contacts to popularise the LAHR roll-out message.

5.5 AHR cost effectiveness arguments

In securing commitment to ongoing LAHR rollout from both government and social landlords it will, of course, be essential to present a convincing case that the setup costs can be justified by the returns. This research was tasked with evaluating the resource impact of LAHR implementation from a landlord viewpoint. In practice, however, hard evidence here remains very limited – even in relation to setup costs, let alone as regards potentially quantifiable benefits.

Part of the problem here is the continuing ambiguity about the appropriate property classification method. The definable setup costs incurred by landlords opting for the ‘void inspection’ route should be confined mainly to IT development and, hence, fairly minimal.

The real cost-effectiveness question relates to the upfront outlay involved in AHR implementation via the comprehensive survey model and whether this can be justified by the consequential benefits. Unfortunately, only two authorities have as yet completed the implementation process and it remains too early for others to specify the associated costs. Nevertheless, for reasons explained in Chapter 3, there seems every prospect of ‘second generation’ AHR implementers completing surveys at costs much lower than those incurred by the pilot boroughs. Assuming this could be achieved at £1.5K per thousand homes (see Section 3.5) the average cost per stock-holding borough would be about £15K (council-owned homes only). Since this estimate is derived on the basis of pilot borough costs it should be acknowledged that actual costs for some roll-out boroughs could be considerably higher where large blocks form a smaller proportion of total stock. Nevertheless, even taking this into account and allowing for additional IT costs it does not seem unreasonable to speculate that setup costs (via the survey route) might total no more than £30-40K for the average borough.

While there are sometimes references to ‘AHR running costs’, our research would suggest that one of the strongest arguments for AHRs is that by facilitating access to reliable property attributes data they contribute to the more efficient subsequent use of staff time. Freed from the time-intensive need to routinely inspect individual void properties, housing OTs should be able to focus on assessing and assisting housing applicants – a more productive use of this valuable resource. Hence, it is more a matter of ‘*running savings*’ than ‘*running costs*’. Unfortunately, there has as yet been no effort to set up data collection procedures (staff activity recording) to facilitate accurate measurement of such impacts. However, while the setup costs are incurred only once, the ‘savings’ continue to accrue year after year. If reference to AHR property attributes data enabled a single housing OT to ‘save’ one day per week, this would amount to 20% of salary. Also taking on-costs into account it would probably take little more than five years to accumulate ‘savings’ in excess of an average borough’s setup costs as estimated above.

The above argument suggests that, especially given the relatively modest upfront costs involved (even via the survey route), investing in AHRs can be fairly easily justified simply in terms of the ‘efficient deployment of staff resources’. However, there are other potential benefits. The Kensington & Chelsea evidence appears to confirm that AHRs can substantially enhance the efficient use of the housing stock. Following AHR implementation the number of disabled people rehoused in suitable homes more than trebled – from 20 to 68 (or from 5% of all lets in 2007/08 to 12% of lets in 2009/10). In addition, while we cannot quantify them, savings would be expected to arise from the reduced number of disabled people being rehoused in non-accessible properties. This would be beneficial because of reducing the numbers of such households:

- liable to require subsequent rehousing or the installation of adaptations
- incurring support costs directly related to their occupancy of inappropriate homes.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

By comparison with needs, it is clear that London's supply of accessible housing remains extremely small and, as indicated by our lettings analysis, there is a continuing call for more active steps to maximise the effective use of this precious resource. While the establishment of a common form of accessible housing register across the Capital will not be the only solution to this problem it can certainly make a substantial contribution.

Particularly given the challenging policy climate in which it has been undertaken, the 2009-10 LAHR roll-out project has achieved impressive success in driving the enterprise forward. Critically, the support and encouragement provided by the Project Co-ordinator has helped energise and guide ten boroughs into the 'active implementation' phase. Encouragingly, in a number of boroughs there was confidence that the impetus provided by LAHR Co-ordinator support had taken them beyond the point at which project completion would be threatened by the termination of this role.

Beyond the active implementer group, there were another eight boroughs which had received (or requested) implementation training by the end of 2010. Also taking account of the two authorities where compliant systems are already in operation, there is hard evidence of commitment to the LAHR model across two thirds of London.

Although not formally planned as pilot schemes, the substantial development work undertaken by Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets proved an effective means of refining the survey methods and technologies. 'Roll-out boroughs' (particularly those opting for the stock survey route) are benefiting from this through the deployment of cost-effective processes. And, as particularly exemplified by our analysis of Kensington & Chelsea rehousing data, it can now be demonstrated more clearly that AHR establishment can bring significant tangible benefits from the perspective of both social landlords and disabled housing applicants.

Complementing recently published government research¹⁵ this study has also helped to further explore the cost-effectiveness case for AHRs. While the scale of the current evaluation did not permit a detailed investigation of this issue, the considerations discussed in Chapter 5 make it highly likely that investing in an AHR can be easily justified simply in terms of the 'efficient deployment of staff resources'. This is quite apart from the financially beneficial impacts of increasing the proportion of disabled people suitably rehoused as demonstrated in Kensington & Chelsea (see above).

¹⁵ Jones, C. & Lordon, M. (2011) *Costs and effectiveness of accessible housing registers in a choice-based lettings context*; London: DCLG
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/1832185.pdf>

6.2 Recommendations on taking the project forward

Highlighting project fit with new official policy priorities

Given the change of government in 2010 there is an urgent need to re-present the case for a standard AHR model illustrating the fit with new official priorities. In particular, the recently published consultation paper on social housing reform emphasizes Ministerial commitment to both (a) fairness to disadvantaged groups, and (b) maximising the effective use of the social housing stock. Given the relevance of AHRs to both these priorities, Ministers might possibly recognise the LAHR roll-out project as worthy of explicit support, in spite of its possible association with the former administration's fondness for centrally-promoted frameworks. Even if only in the form of 'moral support', ministerial backing could be useful in encouraging more boroughs to commit to AHR implementation on the LAHR model.

The above arguments could be explored in meetings with senior Government officials and Ministers within DCLG and possibly in other Departments (e.g. the Department for Work and Pensions in which the Minister for Disabled People is based).

Another possible angle could be to promote the LAHR model as integral to the 'older persons policy agenda'. Given that older people comprise a large – and growing – proportion of the electorate, this could help to 'majoritise' the issue. However, this could be misleading. The demographic profile of housing applicants with disability priority is not known. However, in a proportion of such households the disabled member is a child or younger adult. Indeed, an analysis of 2009/10 CORE records of London housing association lettings involving wheelchair standard homes shows that only a quarter of such lets were to households including persons over pension age. An almost equal number involved family households.

Raising the project's profile among social landlords

To raise the profile of the roll-out project among social landlord organisations, the GLA should also consider the designation of senior figures in the local authority and housing association sectors as Project Champions. Ideally, these would be individuals with personal involvement in sector-wide bodies such as London Councils and G15. The LAHR Project Board could usefully be re-constituted to incorporate these Project Champion individuals.

In securing Borough commitment to LAHR implementation there may be a useful opportunity to re-state the Mayor's priorities in the context of the new 'delegated delivery' framework starting in April 2011.

Mobilising advocacy groups

As well as looking to find ways of encouraging AHR implementation via 'top-down' channels, one key stakeholder interviewee argued that the GLA look to mobilise the disability advocacy movement at the local level such that boroughs can also be subjected to 'bottom up' lobbying. While it could be very labour intensive to initiate and maintain such links with local groups from the centre, it is possible that the same effect could be achieved via more intensive liaison with London-wide or national disability rights bodies. This would build on the consultation and promotion work already undertaken by the disability adviser commissioned by the GLA to assist with the LAHR project (see Section 1.1)

Maintaining roll-out momentum

The forthcoming termination of the 2009-2010 Project Co-ordinator post will, of course, present a challenge to maintaining roll-out momentum. In seeking to maximise the potential for 'snowballing' the process, the GLA should look to resourcing the continuation of the Forum for Health and Disability Assessors of Housing Applicants set up by the Project Co-ordinator. To retain a driving force for the process consideration should also be given to resourcing a one-day per week secondment of an experienced housing OT to carry forward (on a limited basis) 'operational liaison' aspects of the Project Co-ordinator role. This would complement the role of the reformed Project Board and Project Champion(s) in advocating for the venture at the political level and among senior managers within the social housing sector.

It is also recommended that, in promoting AHR implementation, boroughs are strongly encouraged to collect pre-AHR baseline data on lettings outcomes involving accessible dwellings and/or disabled households to provide a benchmark against which project impacts can be subsequently assessed (although for boroughs already participating in the CORE system this would not call for additional systems).

Annex Table A1 – LAHR Implementation progress update, October 2010

Borough	CBL scheme	Council dwellings	Housing assoc dwellings	Commitment to LAHR implementation?	Stock data collection method	LAHR categories incorporated within property adverts?	Comments
Barking & Dagenham	ELLC	19,419	3,076	Yes			Included in service improvement plan for housing allocations
Barnet	Home Connections	11,051	6,641	Yes			Have received training
Bexley	Bexley Homechoice	0	12,616	Yes	Voids then stock survey		Using LAHR principles but not (as yet) categories
Brent	Locata	9,421	15,814	Unknown			Training date requested
Bromley	Home Connections	0	18,349	Yes			
Camden	Home Connections	23,706	11,400	Yes	Stock survey	Nov-10	Property survey under way
City of London	Home Connections	429	249	Yes	Stock survey		Property survey under way
Croydon	None	14,010	9,992	Yes			Surveys to be included in energy rating surveys by external contractors.
Ealing	Locata	13,352	11,921	Yes			
Enfield	Home Connections	11,355	7,318	Unknown			
Greenwich	Greenwich Homes	24,431	10,395	In principle			Training date requested
Hackney	ELLC	23,155	22,511	Yes	Stock survey	Mar-11	Stock survey planning work completed.
Hammersmith & Fulham	Locata	13,111	12,889	Yes	Stock survey		
Haringey	Home Connections	15,808	11,823	Yes			Stock survey planning work completed.
Harrow	Locata	5,066	3,710	Yes			Stock survey planning work completed.
Havering	ELLC	10,311	3,133	Undecided			
Hillingdon	Locata	10,456	6,405	Unknown	Voids		
Hounslow	Locata	13,557	7,504	Yes	Stock survey		Stock survey to commence

November 2011							
Islington	Home Connections	26,097	12,135	Yes			
Kingston upon Thames	Home Connections	4,852	2,412	No			
Lambeth	Home Connections	27,296	20,155	Unknown			
Lewisham	Lewisham Homesearch	19,810	15,488	Yes			
Merton	Home Connections	6,352	4,566	Unknown			
Newham	ELLC	17,812	13,572	Yes	Stock survey		Stock survey commenced
Redbridge	ELLC	4,696	5,313	In principle			Training date requested
Richmond upon Thames	No CBL	0	9,437	No			
Kensington & Chelsea	Home Connections	6,921	12,088	Yes	Stock survey	Mar-09	Completed
Southwark	ELLC	40,485	14,569	In principle			
Sutton	Sutton Homechoice	6,636	5,742	Yes			
Tower Hamlets	Homeseekers	13,085	27,302	Yes	Stock survey		Completed (for LA stock)
Waltham Forest	ELLC	10,271	10,740	Yes	Voids	Jul-10	
Wandsworth	No CBL	17,145	9,807	No			No CBL.
Westminster	Home Connections	12,310	12,985	No			AHR integrated with CBL already in place (locally-defined classification)