

Supporting people with sensory loss

Best-practice guide for housing providers

 **ACTION ON HEARING LOSS**

CYMRU

A national charity since 1911



RNIB
Cymru

Yn cefnogi pobl
â cholled golwg
Supporting people
with sight loss

Action on Hearing Loss Cymru
and RNIB Cymru

Formerly
RNID •)))

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Definitions

The term 'people with sensory loss' refers to:

- people who are Deaf, deafened or have a hearing loss;
- people who are blind or partially sighted;
- people who are deafblind: those whose combined sight loss and hearing loss causes difficulties with communication, access to information and mobility.

This guide has been produced in association with



1. Introduction

Sensory loss is a significant issue affecting one in five people in Wales.

Housing plays a fundamental role in everyone's life. Our homes and the communities in which they are located directly influence our access to services such as employment, health and education, as well as our ability to participate in the local community.

The purpose of this document is to ensure housing services meet the needs of people with sensory loss. It has been produced following consultation with focus groups of people with sensory loss who currently live in social housing. Their stories have been drawn from personal experiences and an awareness of the common problems faced by people with sensory loss.

The recommendations in this guide complement the Regulatory Framework for Housing Associations Registered in Wales, which is in place to ensure that housing associations provide good-quality homes and services to tenants and others who use their services.

To read the regulatory framework, visit <http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/publications/regframeworkhousingassoc/?lang=en>

The framework states that housing associations must:

- communicate information and advice in an appropriate, timely effective manner, which is readily understood by the community they serve
- ensure activities and services reflect the diversity of the communities where they operate, are free from discrimination and promote equality of opportunity
- build good-quality housing that is sustainable and meets the long-term needs of existing and intended residents.

In addition to this, the Welsh Housing Quality Standard requires all social landlords to improve their housing stock to an acceptable level. The standard will ensure that dwellings are of good quality and suitable for the needs of existing and future residents.

To read the Housing Quality Standard, visit <http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/housing-quality/welsh-standard/?lang=en>

The standard states:

- Housing should, as far as possible, suit the specific requirements of the household.
- Where existing dwellings are intended for residents with specific needs, they should, wherever possible, be improved so that the layout of the dwelling reflects current good practice.
- All necessary aids and adaptations to meet the specific requirements of any residents, including those with disabilities, should be provided.
- All necessary physical aids required by the resident should be provided.
- The dwellings should have the necessary physical adaptations to suit the professionally assessed requirements of the residents.

2. Staff training

All housing providers should:

- provide awareness training on sensory loss to all staff, as part of an induction process
- ensure that people with sensory loss deliver this training
- regularly update the training given to staff.

In addition, all frontline staff should be given specific tailored training, to include:

- recognising that someone may have a sensory loss
- a document containing simple tips for communicating with people with sensory loss, which should be kept in reception areas (see Appendix one)
- training in the operation and maintenance of the hearing loop system, with a specific role created that is responsible for maintaining the system
- awareness of the needs of people with sensory loss in the event of a fire alarm or other emergency

- training in how to book communication support such as sign language interpreters
- training in using alternative telephone services such as textphone, Next Generation Text Service or Skype.

“When talking to staff, they sometimes turn away or put their hand in front of their face. This makes it difficult for me when trying to understand what they are saying.”

“When I said, ‘I can’t hear you,’ the reply was, ‘Are you deaf?’”

3. Access and physical environment

Recommendations for housing providers:

- Assess all reception and public areas as to their suitability for persons with sensory loss. This assessment should be carried out in partnership with people with sensory loss and reflecting best practice (see Appendix two).
- Signage and colour contrast should fall within the RNIB guidelines (see Appendix two).
- Adequate lighting should be installed (see Appendix two).
- Steps, stairs and possible obstacles should be clearly visible, contrasting with their surroundings (see Appendix two).
- Consideration should be given to the issue of background noise – for example, a quiet room where people could converse on a one-to-one basis would be advisable.
- Hearing loops should be installed at all reception desks and in public areas used for tenant activities.

- Hearing loops must be regularly maintained, with clear signage to show a loop is available.
- Hearing loops should be available in all sheltered and extra care accommodation.

The 'Good Practice Guide for Hearing Loops' by Tai Pawb should be followed. Leaflet available from Tai Pawb: telephone 029 2053 7630 or email info@taipawb.org

- If an appointment system is in place, the needs of people with sensory loss should be considered. For example, through the use of both visual and audio displays.
- Doors with remote access systems should have both buzzers and lights, and lift buttons should be accessible for people with sight loss.
- Fire and other emergency alarms should activate a flashing light as well as emitting sound, and procedures for people with sensory loss during a fire alarm or other emergency should be in place and staff made aware.

4. Communication

When communicating with people with sensory loss, using the appropriate communication method for the individual is essential.

- Tenant profiling / recording of customer needs should be carried out with each tenant and regularly updated.
- All communication should be in the format requested.
- Appointments should be easily accessible using phone alternatives such as email, SMS, Next Generation Text Service and the website.
- Communication support (such as sign language interpreters) should be available and staff should be trained in how to work with communication professionals.
- Access to services should be considered for people with sensory loss, such as: use of SMS, Next Generation Text Service and access via the website or email.
- Staff who can use British Sign Language should be easily identifiable through advertising on the premises.

“I find it difficult attending functions in the communal room because of the lack of a loop system. I'm sure people stay away because of it.”

“When I asked for something written in Braille, the reply was, ‘We can't do that.’”

If you would like to consider accessing accreditation for delivering good services for people with sensory loss, both Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and RNIB Cymru currently run accreditation schemes:

- Action on Hearing Loss – Louder Than Words www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/louderthanwords
- RNIB – Visibly Better www.rnib.org.uk/wales-cymru-how-we-can-help/designing-accessible-housing-and-buildings

This best-practice guide was produced by Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and RNIB Cymru, thanks to funding from the Welsh Government's Equality and Inclusion Grant.

April 2015

Appendix one

How to communicate with someone with a hearing loss:

- Always ask: even if someone's wearing a hearing aid, ask if they need to lipread you.
- Make sure you have the person's attention before you start speaking.
- Find a place to talk that has good lighting, away from noise and distractions.
- Always face the person you're talking to.
- Speak clearly, not too slowly, and use normal lip movements, facial expressions and gestures. A person who lipreads understands people best when they speak normally.
- Check that what you're saying is being understood, and if someone doesn't understand what you've said, try saying it in a different way.
- Keep your voice down: it's uncomfortable for a hearing aid user if you shout, and it appears aggressive.
- Get to the point: use plain language and don't waffle.

How to communicate with someone with a sight loss:

- Use a normal tone and talk directly to the person with sight loss. If they are with someone else, do not talk through them.
- Use descriptive language when talking to a person with sight loss, enabling them to understand more clearly the information you are giving them. For example, 'The door is in front of you and to the left'
- Introduce yourself by name and the nature of your work. For example, 'My name is Sarah and I am the receptionist'.
- Don't be afraid to use words such as 'look' or 'see'. Use these words naturally within a sentence as you normally would.
- A person with sight loss will not necessarily see where you are when you call their name. Do not move until they have located you. Let them know if you are moving away and returning.
- Always inform a person with sight loss if there is another person approaching or leaving them.

Appendix two

Guidance for adequate physical environment:

Signage

- Signs should be embossed and not engraved.
- The characters should be raised from the surrounding surface as outlined in best-practice design.
- A sign should contrast with the background it is on – for example, the wall or door.
- Letters on signs should contrast well against the background colour of the sign.
- Sans-serif typefaces, such as Arial, are recommended.

Colour and tonal contrast

People with sight loss make use of colour and tonal contrast to identify features and navigate around buildings, making the environment safer and easier to use. Colour and tonal contrast should fall within the RNIB guidelines. For example:

- Large surfaces, such as floors, walls and ceilings, should be differentiated by colour from each other.
- Colours for trims should maintain or enhance the contrast between the different larger surfaces. For example, skirting boards should be the same colour as either the walls or floors, or highlight the contrast more.
- Shiny and glazed surfaces, polished chrome and shiny gloss finishes should be avoided wherever possible.
- Matt and mid-sheen finishes may be used for painted surfaces.
- Designs that use highly contrasting colours in irregular or striped patterns should be avoided.
- Doors should be readily identifiable and clearly differentiated from the surrounding wall surfaces. The architrave should be the same colour as either the door or wall, or highlight the doorway by further contrast.

- Door handles should be readily identifiable and different in colour from the door.
- Handrails should be readily identifiable and differentiated from the supporting wall colour, and from the surface of steps and ramps if freestanding.
- Features such as light switches and lift control buttons should contrast strongly with the surrounding surface.

Lighting

- Lighting should illuminate the way – without glare, confusing reflections or shadows – for people entering, using and leaving a building.
- Be aware that strong directional daylight from windows and roof-lights may cause changing patterns of light and shadow across interior surfaces, and moving sunlight can cause unacceptable glare. Mitigate this change in the design of building and lighting.
- Artificial lighting should be provided internally and externally where use of the building will extend into the hours of dusk or darkness.
- The lighting should not distort colours too greatly – for example, fluorescent lamps may cause glare when the tubes are exposed, and the flickering of older tubes can adversely affect people with epilepsy.
- The level and source of lighting is important to people who need to lipread. Counters and reception desks should be correctly positioned, so that a window or bright light source is not behind either person speaking.
- Steps and stairs
- The edge of individual steps and stairs should be highlighted in a single colour that contrasts with the adjacent surfaces.
- Any internal ramp or change in floor gradient should be indicated by a change in colour to make this more visible.

Obstacles

- Free-standing obstacles, such as tables and chairs, should be clearly visible and contrast sufficiently with the surrounding floor and wall furnishings against which they are seen.
- Pillars and similar obstacles should be avoided in the design of new buildings. Existing pillars should be clearly distinguishable from their surroundings.

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) is the largest UK charity helping people who are confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss.

We give support and care, develop technology and treatments, and campaign for equality. We rely on donations to continue our vital work.

To find out more, visit **actiononhearingloss.org.uk**

Questions about deafness, tinnitus or hearing loss?

Contact our free, confidential Information Line:

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Textphone 0808 808 9000

SMS 0780 000 0360
(standard text message rates apply)

Email information@hearingloss.org.uk

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First published: **January 2016**. Updated: **January 2017**. Next review date: **January 2018**.

Action on Hearing Loss is the trading name of The Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

A registered charity in England and Wales (207720) and Scotland (SC038926). A1006/1017